"Honduran memories": identity, race, place and memory in New Orleans, Louisiana

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“HONDURAN MEMORIES”: IDENTITY, RACE, PLACE AND MEMORY IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by

Samantha Euraque
B.S., Louisiana State University, 2000
May 2004
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Honduran and greater Hispanic communities of New Orleans, especially Pilar and Mando, for their generosity, time, honesty, and openness. I would also like to thank my mother, Elida, my brother, Pedro, and countless other family members, friends, and fellow graduate students for their support and encouragement. Of course, I could never have done this without the continuous support, advice, and guidance of Dr. Helen Regis, Dr. Jill Brody, Dr. Peter Sutherland and my advisor, Dr. Miles Richardson.
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Abstract

During the decade preceding the height of the civil rights movement, a small population of Hondurans established residence in the New Orleans area. This Honduran migration was largely due to the trade relationship that existed between Honduras and New Orleans. Honduras was also experiencing political unrest and economic instability due to military coups, fruit company strikes and floods during the late 1950s. In response, the advent of the 1960s brought with it the first wave of Hondurans. According to the 2000 Census there were 64,340 people of Hispanic origin in the four parishes included in the New Orleans metropolitan area, of which 24% were Honduran (United States Census 2000).

This first wave of immigrants settled into the lower Garden District of Orleans Parish, allowing them to be centrally located with access to both the bus and streetcar route into the central business district. As the population grew and the community prospered, an out-migration to the suburbs occurred establishing a stronger and more permanent presence.

In order to gain a better understanding of this Honduran community, its identity and the way in which it establishes place and represents itself, I chose to construct two life histories that I believe offer a glimpse of the Honduran experience. One is of Pilar* who migrated in the late 1950s when she was just five years old. The other is of Mando who migrated as a twenty-six year old bachelor prepared to take on the world. They both engage in symbolic practices shared across New Orleans. These practices help define
who they are as individuals and also play a part in creating a Honduran history within a New Orleans context.
Chapter 1: The History of Hondurans in New Orleans 1950s to Present

Introduction

“Yo no creo que hay un lugar [New Orleans] donde la gente se sienta tan bienvenida.”
Mando

During the decade preceding the height of the civil rights movement, a small population of Hondurans established residence in the New Orleans area. This Honduran migration was largely due to the trade relationship that existed between Honduras and New Orleans. Honduras was also experiencing political unrest and economic instability due to military coups, fruit company strikes and floods during the late 1950s. In response, the advent of the 1960s brought with it the first wave of Hondurans. According to the 2000 Census there were 64,340 people of Hispanic origin in the four parishes included in the New Orleans metropolitan area, of which 24% were Honduran (United States Census 2000).

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who migrated as a twenty-six year old bachelor prepared to take on the world. They both engage in symbolic practices shared across New Orleans. These practices help define who they are as individuals and also play a part in creating a Honduran history within a New Orleans context.

**The Fruit Connection**

The Standard Fruit and United Fruit Companies have been influential in the development of Honduras, where Standard Fruit was able to prosper despite the control United exerted throughout Latin America. The Vaccaro family migrated from Sicily to New Orleans during the mid-nineteenth century. The family along with another Sicilian migrant, Salvador D’Antoni, began transporting orange crops to a stall in the French Market of New Orleans. Subsequently D’Antoni would become a permanent part of the Vaccaro family when he married his partner Joseph Vacarro’s daughter, Mary Vacarro. In 1899, the newly integrated Vaccaro family business was ruined with the coldest winter the South had experienced in years. The destruction of the orange crop caused the family to venture into another fruit trade. They settled on Honduras, initiating a relationship that would unite the two areas. Although initially the Vaccaro family focused its endeavors on the coconut trade, they soon realized bananas would prove more profitable. Within a decade the Standard Fruit Company expanded and the Vacarro brothers moved their headquarters to the north coast city of La Ceiba, Honduras, while maintaining offices in New Orleans (Karnes 1978).

In 1912 the company was able to branch out into related businesses in Honduras. La Ceiba benefited from the medical services the family began providing first to themselves but which later became available to their employees and the city’s residents.
Those services would evolve into *El Hospital Vicente D’Antoni*, which today serves the general public.

![Map of Honduras (CIA Maps)](image)

**Figure 1:** Map of Honduras (CIA Maps)

In 1913, the company opened the second bank of issue in the country, *Banco Atlántida* in La Ceiba. Throughout the early twentieth century the company, expanded the water supply, provided electric services, a firehouse and opened a brewery. Although the family concentrated their efforts on creating the infrastructure for the city of La Ceiba, they were also building a reputation in New Orleans as the company acquired recognition and wealth. New Orleans vacillated in its acceptance of the family, as their Italian migrant status made them prone to accusations that the family was connected to the mob. Nonetheless, the company was able to expand its production (Karnes 1978:65-93).

During the 1920s, the company decided to open their stocks to the public by establishing the Standard Fruit and Steamship Company of Delaware. As the company branched out, “the heart of the corporation” remained in La Ceiba. Standard Fruit and Steamship began to outgrow the family, and in 1964 Mary Vaccarro began to gradually
sell Standard Fruit to the Castle and Cook Corporation, with the last transaction occurring in 1968. Its board of directors included the vice-president of the Dole Corporation, whose label it continues to use today (Karnes 1978:291-293).

The United Fruit Company was also influential in both Honduras and New Orleans. It too used the port of New Orleans for the distribution of fruit to the United States, but its inception was very different from that of Standard Fruit’s. The product of the 1899 merging of the Boston Fruit Company and the Tropical Trading and Transport Company, United became a force to counter for other trading companies throughout Latin America. Other banana sellers in Honduras, including Standard, loosely associated themselves as “The Anti-Trust Company” in order to combat the monopoly United or “the trust,” as it was dubbed, maintained throughout Latin America (Karnes 1978:4-5). United became known as el pulpo, or the octopus because of the authority with which it entered various Latin American countries, effectively destroying its competition. Many in Honduras were concerned with the power United exerted in Tela, La Lima, Puerto Cortes and Progresso. United contrasted with Standard in two ways; one, that it was not a primarily Honduran company, and secondly that it sought to expand into any area that could profit the corporation (MacCameron 1983:12).

Disparaging labels and practices notwithstanding, United Fruit did develop the cities it inhabited. It provided irrigation, electricity and jobs previously absent from the Honduran landscape (MacCameron 1983:12-13). Although United would continue to prosper during the 1940s and 1950s, the political and social unrest in Central America caused many stockholders to question its future stability. At the same time United Fruit also began experiencing constant confrontations with laborers and governments no longer
willing to simply concede to its demands. In 1961 United responded by withdrawing from direct production, purchasing instead from the Ecuadorian open market (Buchelli 2003:90-94). In 1970 United merged with AMK, creating the United Brands Company, which also produced processed foods and meat packaging. This reorganization altered its previous reputation as *el pulpo*, and allowed it to continue to thrive in the banana market as well as in other ventures (Buchelli 2003:96-97).

The Standard and the United Fruit Companies differed in many respects. The Standard Fruit Company was grounded in both La Ceiba and New Orleans, while United Fruit operated in many countries and avoided close local affiliations. While Standard branched out, it has remained an important institution for La Ceiba. From its bilingual school, *La Mazapán*, to its production of dairy products, to its hospital, Standard’s influence on La Ceiba’s landscape is inescapable. To a lesser extent, La Lima, Progresso, Puerto Cortes and Tela have retained many of the structures that reflect the authority United asserted (Sanchez 1994). The companies and the country were directly influenced by each other, as the trials and tribulations experienced by one would directly affect the other. This reality altered the landscapes of both New Orleans and Honduras.

The difficulties both Standard and United experienced and the political transformations that took place during the mid 1950s made the end of the decade and advent of the 1960s made Honduras vulnerable to migration. Juan Manuel Gálvez became president when Tiburcio Carias relinquished his seat in 1949. Gálvez was the first to pass laws regulating labor conditions, which was surprising considering his former position as lawyer for the United Fruit Company. Laws were implemented to assure an eight-hour workday, designate paid holidays, assume company responsibility
for injuries sustained on the job, and prohibit child labor. This created an atmosphere in which the laborer felt justified in seeking better working conditions (MacCameron 1983:18-19).

In May of 1954, Honduras experienced a general strike that cost the fruit companies and the government millions of dollars. The lack of government support to both fruit companies and other national and international businesses, forced them to make concessions. The strikes remained peaceful throughout their duration; Standard’s strike lasted only two weeks, while United’s saga would not end until mid-July. Standard Fruit was more amenable in its dealings with the laborers than United, but both companies made only mild concessions. The workers asked for a 50% increase in wage; the companies offered an increase on a graduated scale from 5% to 10%. Despite the mild concessions, the laborers’ small victory was due in large part to the government’s lack of involvement (MacCameron 1983:40-53).

The losses to both the companies and the country were in the millions. United suffered a flood on the north coast during the strike that further aggravated its predicament (MacCameron 1983:48). As Standard Fruit was beginning to re-establish itself, Hurricane Hattie in 1959 hit the north coast, severely affecting production (Karnes 1978:287). Both companies were compelled to reassess their financial situation, leading to layoffs throughout the ranks of the company.\(^1\) The social and economic turmoil made many Hondurans seek opportunities unavailable to them in Honduras. New Orleans in particular offered an appealing environment in which to provide for their families.

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\(^1\) The layoffs were not documented in published material, but were discussed in informal interviews with Honduran migrants. I did find in the agreement between the laborers and Standard Fruit, that it was agreed that Standard Fruit would not be held accountable if subsequent layoffs were necessary.
The similarities between the north coast of Honduras and New Orleans presented them with a familiar and comfortable setting. The north coast of Honduras has a humid tropical climate that is similar to that of New Orleans. Although the adjustment to a new climate was minor, the migrants would be forced to endure winters much colder than those in Honduras. The Catholic religion that is engrained in both areas warmed their hearts. They could exercise their religious beliefs in an environment that welcomed Catholics, allowing them to feel the comfort that helps a migrant community flourish.

The tumultuous political and economic atmosphere in Honduras was conducive to an out-migration. The turmoil in Honduras was the impetus, and the established connection with New Orleans provided the destination for the first wave of Hondurans to settle in New Orleans (Elliot and Ionescu 2002:4). Prior to the late 1950s, Hondurans had only trickled in slowly. With this large movement, Hondurans would begin to represent themselves in New Orleans’ public spaces.

Figure 2: Southern United States and Honduras (CIA Map 2000)
Honduran Migration to New Orleans in the 1950s

In the 1950s, it does not seem that Hondurans were settling in New Orleans as much as they were visiting and exploiting the Catholic education New Orleans could offer them and their children. By the 1950s, Standard Fruit had established La Mazapán School, which provided a bilingual education for the children of Standard’s employees. The school, as so many of Standard’s investments, was located in La Ceiba. Conversely, United Fruit employees chose to send their children to the United States rather than developing their own schools. Employees from both companies faced the challenge of educating their children in a foreign environment.

As mentioned before, Standard invested in La Mazapán School, which currently has open enrollment and reaches grade level 12. SACS, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, recognizes La Mazapán, allowing its graduates to attend Colleges and Universities within the United States. In the fifties, these opportunities were not available to Standard employee’s children, as La Mazapán only taught up to grade six. Therefore, many Standard employees sent their children to boarding schools in the New Orleans area, leading many schools to cater to Latin American students. Again, the connection, ease of travel and networks that had been forming for years made New Orleans the most likely candidate for migration (Bracken 1992:41).

It seems that Hispanic visitors were also catered to by businesses. Tourist’s maps of the 1950s featured local hotspots in the New Orleans area that were printed in both English and Spanish (Figure 1). This map differs from Esso (later known as Exxon) maps or Automobile Association of America maps, in that the local publisher used local knowledge to target Hispanic visitors of New Orleans.
Figure 3: Tourist Attractions found in a 1956 New Orleans Tourist Map Printed in New Orleans (“Where to find it in New Orleans” 1956)

TACA-Transportes Aéreos de Centro América (Airline Transports of Central America or “Take a Chance Airline” as it is affectionately referred to by much of the Hispanic community)-made New Orleans accessible to Hispanics wanting to travel to the United States. TACA was visible and prosperous during this time, using New Orleans to host events such as the Independence celebration of five Central American countries (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica) (Times Picayune 9/16/52: sec 3:9).

The banana trade networks that were being established in New Orleans during the early 1950s and earlier made New Orleans ripe for the picking. Hondurans were no longer merely visiting or sending their children to school. Instead, the late fifties would see an influx of Honduran migrants. The flow would increase into New Orleans in the 1960s, as Honduras experienced greater political turmoil with the military coup of
Honduran Migration to New Orleans in the 1960s and Early 1970s

As the Honduran population that settled in New Orleans swelled, they began to establish a community that would be referred to as “El Barrio Lempira.” Lempira was the Lenca Indian cacique or chieftain who the Spaniards killed in battle during the 1530s. He was elevated to hero status in 1926, when the national currency was renamed in his honor (Euraque 2003:229). Despite the exaltation of Lempira throughout the nation, Honduras is no exception to the general participation in a color continuum that places lighter complexions at its apex and darker complexions at its base (Harrison 1995: 55). Taking this into account, it is ironic that Hondurans chose to name the new neighborhood El Barrio Lempira. Although ironic, this label allowed them to effectively differentiate themselves from the highly race conscious New Orleanian population. They could define themselves in terms of an other; this discourse presented them as different from and not a part of the population that surrounded them. El Barrio Lempira was located in the lower Garden District of the Uptown area in New Orleans. The lower Garden District encompasses the area between Jackson Avenue and Howard Avenue with many of the Hondurans converging on St. Andrew as shown in map 3.

Honduran Areas of Concentration in New Orleans

During the Sixties, the Honduran community began to blossom. This time would usher in the creation of many Honduran places. Both Pilar and Mando lived in the Upper Garden District, which lies east of Jackson Avenue. Mando’s apartment was centrally located on Constance and Louisiana, which placed him one block away from Magazine
St. a commercial street central to the Hispanic community that KGLA, a New Orleanian Latin American radio station, dubbed it *Magazine La Calle del Swing*.

**Figure 4:** Lower Garden District and a Section of the Upper Garden District of Uptown New Orleans (“New Orleans and Louisiana Gulf Coast” 1960)

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**Uptown & Downtown**

St. Theresa’s Catholic Church, located on Erato St., became a staple in the life of many Hispanics, including Pilar and her family, as it offered a Spanish Language Mass. Following the Spanish mass at St. Theresa’s the family would head to the Happy Hour Theatre, located on Magazine St. between St. Mary and St. Andrew. The corner of St.
Charles and Third St. also holds a special place in Pilar’s heart, as her father would take the younger children to see rabbits displayed in a store window during Easter.

Figure 5: St. Theresa of Avila Church on Erato St.in Uptown New Orleans

Mando remembers the history of the Honduran nightlife in a series of articles he wrote for *El Vocero News*, a Spanish/English bilingual newspaper founded in 2003 by The Mendez Group, LLC, entitled “Recordando New Orleans” (Remembering New Orleans). El Chez Lounge, or “The Lounge” as the community referred to it, was located between Milan and Marengo on St. Charles (El Vocero News 2/28-3/14 2003:22). *La Luna*, located on Constance between Marengo and Constantinople, a mere block away from Magazine was also a popular nightspot. *La Boquita* was extremely popular and was
located on Magazine and Louisiana. The Lion’s Club, which hosted Honduran dances, was also located on Magazine St. before Nashville (El Vocero News 3/28-4/11 2003:32).

Figure 6: Downtown area of New Orleans ("New Orleans Street & Vicinity Map" 1971)

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Canal St., only a bus ride away from Magazine St., was also littered with Honduran hotspots. At Jefferson Davis and Canal, The Mocambo Lounge held a place of prestige that Mando describes as being due to its "buena pista de baile, un bar muy
“completo y buena comida” (superior dance floor, very complete bar and good food) (Vocero News 2/28-3/14 2003:22). Also located on Canal, between Rampart St. and Claiborne Avenue, was La Ronda, which Mando considered less prestigious, because on one of the many festive Saturdays La Ronda was so heavy with bodies that the floor collapsed beneath their weight. Across the street from La Ronda was El Café Ole, which, fortunately for Hondurans, had a larger capacity (Vocero News 3/28-4/14 2003:32). In order to arrive at their nightlife destinations, would gather at the Walgreen’s located on Canal and Baronne. Before arriving at Walgreen’s, many friends met along the way as they arrived at the bus stop on Canal and Camp in front of a pharmacy/restaurant (Vocero News 2/28-3/14 2003:22). (Map 4)

Other businesses owned by Hispanics that were important to Hondurans included a mechanic shop named Uptown Auto Parts on Magazine and Washington, a Mobil gas station on Louisiana and Magazine, and El Restaurante Lempira (The Lempira Restaurant) between Washington and Sixth on Magazine. A few other business found between St. Mary and Napoleon included: El Bar Honduras Maya, El Latin American, El Bar Pájaro Loco (The Crazy Bird Bar), El Rió Lindo (The Pretty River) and The Street Car. Also on Napoleon was a restaurant named “Tipicos” which was famous for its Sopa de Mondongo (tripe soup) (Map 4). Also during this time, small Latin Supermarkets were beginning to open around the area. El Latin Supermarket on Elysian Fields was the first, followed by La Union Supermarket on Ursuline. Subsequently La Unión closed its doors on Ursuline to reopen on Carrollton and Tulane Avenue, where it has remained to date (Vocero News 2/28-3/14 2003:22).
Figure 7: La Union Supermarket, Carrollton and Tulane Ave.

One way the Honduran community began to make its presence known was through the Hispanic owned businesses that catered to them. The Honduran Consul was also becoming more visible as it began publicizing some of its functions in New Orleans’ States Item newspaper (States Item 8/23/1961:39). In 1962, the Honduran Consul requested United States aid for Hondurans, particularly for those in the banana sector, following a storm that decimated Honduras (Times Picayune 10/15/1962:sec3: 4). This appeal to the community of New Orleans demonstrates the increasing comfort and growth the community was experiencing.

As early as 1962, the Hondurans were gaining recognition as New Orleans’ largest Hispanic population. A 1962 article in the States Item titled “Largest United States Colony of Hondurans Here” touted New Orleans as the Nacatamal – a typically Honduran dish made of meat, potatoes, olives and peas encased in a banana leaf – Capitol of the United States. The author Bill Stuckey from information provided by the consulate also went on to claim the community was comprised of white consular workers and professionals, later stating that many sailors and dockworkers had also settled in New
Orleans (States Item 2/1/1962:15-16). From my own research with the community, it seems that the immigrant population was comprised of a small group out of the middle to upper class that existed in Honduras, but the newspaper’s assertion that they were “white” and “mostly professionals” seems somewhat skewed as they include dockworkers and sailors who are dismissed even as they are acknowledged. I believe statements such as these arose from Honduras’ own discriminatory practices against those of a darker complexion. Also, the consul might have been trying to abate discrimination Hondurans were experiencing by distancing them from New Orleans’ Black population. Further studies would have to be carried out in order to determine the reasons for the differences in their claims and my perceptions.

In 1964, Sasha Airlines (Servicio Aéreo de Honduras (Airline Service of Honduras) or “Stay at Home Stay Alive Airline”—also an affectionate pet name) requested a route from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to New Orleans—which constituted another link facilitating the Honduran migration into New Orleans (States Item 7/23/1964:13). This company increased the ease of transportation, and, once the airline proved a lucrative venture, it would bring its Honduran employees with it. In the early Seventies, Sasha opened an office on Gravier in Downtown New Orleans. In 1974, that office was moved to Canal St. where it would remain until Sasha’s closing in 1994. During this time the community would experience more movement and growth.

From Uptown to the Suburbs

As many Hondurans began settling into their new environment, an out-migration occurred from the Uptown area to suburban developments in the cities of Kenner, Gretna and Terrytown (maps 5 & 7). The 1971 and 1977 maps of the area between Canal No. 11
and Canal No. 12 in Kenner shows the development that took place in four years. As the community grew and matured, they took advantage of the affordable housing available in this development (Map 5 & Map 6). A large concentration of Hondurans continues to live in this and other areas of Kenner. For example, the area between the Duncan Canal and Williams Blvd. North of Canal No. 2 has been further developed and is also home to many Hispanics (Map 6 & 7).

**Figure 8**: City of Kenner in 1971 located West of New Orleans in Jefferson Parish (“New Orleans Street & Vicinity Map” 1971)

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The 1980s and 1990s

The population shift to the suburbs produced networks that facilitated the movement of other migrants. As a result, new migrants settled into Redwood Apartments, a large apartment complex located on the Southside of West Esplanade between Williams and Roosevelt Avenue Bobbie Village town-homes also house many Hondurans, it is located directly behind the Redwood apartments and both are owned by Derbes Management. Directly behind Bobbie Village town-homes on 33rd St. is St. Jerome’s Catholic Church, which continues to offer a Spanish Mass Sundays at 12:30 (Map 7).
Figure 10: City of Kenner in 1984 ("New Orleans World’s Fair Edition" 1984)

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<td><strong>Area of Honduran Settlement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Red Lines</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Area of Honduran Settlement</strong></td>
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This suburban growth prompted many Hispanic businesses to open on Williams Blvd: Another *Unión* supermarket opened on the corner of 38<sup>th</sup> St. and Williams Blvd; followed by *Los Latinos* Supermarket, also located on Williams Blvd. between 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> St.; Ana’s Beauty Salon opened in the same small shopping mall as *Los Latinos*. 
Figure 11: Redwood Apts., West Esplanade Ave.

Figure 12: Bobbie Village Town Homes, Taffy Dr. and 34th St.

Figure 13: St. Jerome Catholic Church, 33rd St.
This suburban growth prompted many Hispanic businesses to open on Williams Blvd: Another Unión supermarket opened on the corner of 38th St. and Williams Blvd; followed by Los Latinos Supermarket, also located on Williams Blvd. between 35th and 36th St.; Ana’s Beauty Salon opened in the same small shopping mall as Los Latinos. In the late 1990s, that small shopping mall was demolished, forcing these businesses to find another locale. Both relocated to Florida St., directly behind Williams Blvd. and their previous location between 35th and 36th St.. Although the move was a small one, it proved to be important to the community (Map 7).

The two-building shopping mall they currently occupy has a sign atop one of the buildings that reads “Los Latinos Plaza.” The structures, each two-stories, face each other. Los Latinos is located on the first floor of the south structure, while the north building contains Ana’s Beauty Salon and a Latin Music Store on the ground floor. The complex also includes an attorney’s office that caters to Hispanics, on the second floor of this building (Map 7).

While the previous location was a linear one-story structure with a parking lot in front of it, the new location’s parking lot is between the two structures, creating an intimacy that was lacking in its previous location. Members of the community can shuffle between the buildings greeting friends or darting into the supermarket for the ingredients for their favorite dish. Many of the women who frequent the beauty salon are enticed by the restaurant within the supermarket, and it is not uncommon to find Ana’s patrons dining on their favorite Honduran dish while being primped by her expert hands. This new space has helped the Hispanic community grow, as it allows for more interaction and movement between community members. Kenner supermarket, positioned less than a
mile away, is also a center of activity with a *Gigante Express*, Central America’s Western Union, and a soccer shop located within the same building (Map 7).

**Figure 14**: Los Latinos Plaza, Florida Ave.

**Figure 15**: Los Latinos, South Building, 33rd St.

**Figure 16**: Los Latinos, North Building, Florida Ave.
Kenner supermarket, positioned less than a mile away, is also a center of activity with a *Gigante Express*, Central America’s Western Union, and a soccer shop located within the same building (Map 7). Many Hispanics have also clustered in the city of Metairie, between Division St. and Severn Ave., a few miles east of the area discussed above (Map 6). Many migrants entering in the 1980s moved into the many apartment buildings located on these streets. A Los Caribe Grocery store is located on Division St. (Map 8).

**Figure 17**: Kenner Supermarket and Gigante Express **Figure 18**: Sign, Williams Blvd. **Figure 19**: Caribe Grocery Store, Division St.
The city of Terrytown located on the West bank of the Mississippi, also provided affordable housing to many Hispanics in the late 1970s south of Lapalco Blvd.; see the area outlined on map 7 and aerial photographs 1 and 2. The area surrounding Terry Parkway between Carol Sue Ave. and the West Bank Expressway was occupied as well. Networks from this migration, like those that facilitated the move to Redwood, produced another cluster of migrants in an apartment complex on Whitney St. located south of the Oakwood Mall. Redwood Apartments continues to house many Hondurans, but the complex on Whitney does not.
Figure 21: Cities of Gretna and Terrytown in 1984 located on the West bank of the Mississippi River in Jefferson Parish (”New Orleans World’s Fair Edition” 1984)

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<tr>
<td>Purple Dots</td>
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<td>Blue Lines</td>
<td>Area of Honduran Settlement</td>
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The dispersal and subsequent clustering signifies a growth in both population and housing development. Despite the geographic distance between the different communities, they remain united under one identity. They have found strength in numbers, as they display the manifestations of their Honduran identity throughout the city, both collectively and independently of each other.
Figure 24: Union Supermarket and Barreda Restaurant Mexican and Central American Food, Stumpf Blvd.

Figure 25: Latinos American Supermarket

Figure 26: Sign, Lapalco Blvd.

Figure 27: Pupuseria Dvino Corazón

Figure 28: Sign, Belle Chase Highway
Thesis Outline

In order to gain a better understanding of this Honduran identity and the way in which it establishes place and represents itself, I chose to construct two life histories that I believe offer a glimpse of the Honduran experience in New Orleans. They engage in symbolic practices together throughout New Orleans, defining who they are and creating a Honduran history within a New Orleanian context.

Chapter Two details Pilar’s life experiences as a Honduran migrant. Pilar and I chose this pseudonym that signifies a pillar, as she has been a pillar of strength throughout her life. She persevered in spite of the discrimination she faced in her youth, and she insisted on defining her own identity despite what others dictated. She also took on the role of caretaker to her father, and continues to tend to her mother’s affairs. Throughout the chapter, Pilar’s story and identity develop through her own words.

Chapter Three delves into the life of Mando, another migrant in the Honduran community. His story is also told in his own words as much as possible. The concept of identity transforms through the representations of people like Pilar and Mando. Although they differ in many respects, they have both been a part of the Honduran community in New Orleans for many years. Mando’s story chronicles the struggles and joys of traveling across cultures while attempting to maintain the identity with which he arrived. Mando and Pilar exemplify the changes that occur to both Honduran and New Orleanian culture. Chapter Three also examines the complexities of Honduran identity.

Chapters Two and Three inherently carry within them differences between Pilar and Mando. Pilar’s interviews were done in English, and Mando’s interviews were done in Spanish. Although Pilar speaks Spanish, she felt more comfortable speaking with me.
in English, but the opposite was true for Mando. The juxtaposition of the two people and languages illustrates the important role language plays in defining identity, while also demonstrating that language use and preference is but one of many factors in defining identity.

Place and memory bring Mando and Pilar together in Chapter Four. The concept of place is developed and understood via shared memory. Subsequently, the importance of place and memory to the Honduran community is illustrated through the places Mando and Pilar have experienced. Chapter Five concludes my thesis and presents the community as I see it today. I will also discuss the future of the community within a larger Hispanic context. In the final chapter, I also address my own involvement in, and my experiences as a researcher within the Honduran community. My desire to study this community and its identity stems from questioning my own identity as part of the Honduran community in New Orleans. What identity do I adhere to and what experiences led me there? Through questions like this one, I hope to discover my own memories and the places that have helped me define who I am.

**Hispanic Identity**

Although I focus on Hondurans and the identity they develop within a specific community, I believe that the larger Hispanic or Latino identity is important to the Honduran identity in the United States. Hondurans often access this identity to place themselves within the larger context of the United States. Just as the definition of Honduran identity may be disagreed upon, so too is the definition of Hispanic identity within the United States.
Despite disagreements, common objectives cause immigrants to adopt an identity; these include gaining rights as a citizen of the United State, which is important for a migrant community to prosper. The Hispanic population has chosen neither to assimilate nor to maintain a completely separate identity. As a result, Hispanics are forced to fight for rights as migrants, and as different but equal American citizens (Rosaldo1997: 10-12).

Hispanic migrants of various origins in the United States have been subjected to many of the same discriminations and misunderstandings. For example, in Changing Race: Latinos the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States 2000, Clara Rodriquez discusses the glorification of white features and the discontentment shown towards black or Indian features. Rodriquez documents the story of, Victoria, a Mexican-American woman who struggled with the acceptance of her own brown skin color. Like Pilar, she also had lighter complected siblings, whom Victoria believed received differential treatment. Again like Pilar, Victoria did not feel this evaluation affected her relationship with her siblings. Nevertheless, Victoria was aware of the disparities of treatment and, as a result, felt the need to compensate for her darkness. Victoria believed these identity struggles formed the independently strong Hispanic woman she had become (Rodriquez 2000:59-60). Although Pilar and Victoria do not share a common national identity, they have experienced very similar emotions about their Hispanic identity. Sharing identity crises of affiliation creates a sense of solidarity that can be used to mobilize a much larger group of people.

Hispanics have recently become much more visible in the United States’ white mainstream media. The general Hispanic visibility has prompted the Honduran community to attempt to establish a visible presence. This is not to say that Hondurans do
not want to retain their autonomy among other Hispanics, but rather, that they want to acknowledge shared struggles in order to present a united front, to provide all Hispanics with greater opportunities.
Chapter 2: Hippie-Honduran

You were different so you’d get teased a lot. You weren’t… I mean you were darker skinned. You’d say things different ‘cause you’d sometimes throw in your Spanish accent. There was definitely times, ya know, where I resented being Spanish or being Central American, because you weren’t accepted, by some group of people. It was tough. I don’t care what anybody says it was tough. Some of those kids were really rough.

Pilar was born in Honduras in 1953; she migrated to New Orleans at the tender age of five with her mother and four of her five siblings. Her father, who was laid off from Standard Fruit, migrated a few months before his family and settled only a few blocks away from the largely Honduran settlement called El Barrio Lempira. Somewhat isolated from the developing Honduran community, Pilar’s parents struggled to maintain and inculcate their Honduran culture to their children. Both the disjuncture from the community and the binary black/white division of Louisiana made the formation of Pilar’s cultural identity problematic. Pilar was able to construct and negotiate her Hippie-Honduran identity in the midst of a 1960’s racially charged New Orleans, apart from the Honduran community.

Race in New Orleans and the Honduran Arrival

In the 1960’s, New Orleans insisted on maintaining a racially bifurcated society. The white/black dichotomy constituted a problem for the segregationist city. The white elites recognized the difficulty in distinguishing whites and blacks. The response they chose was to institute the “one drop rule” of race classification, whereby any amount of “African blood” branded an individual with a black identity (Bracken 1992:26-40). However, prior to the Civil Rights movement white elites conferred Creoles of color a higher status than darker-skinned African Americans in New Orleans. The reality of racial ambiguity, a result of years of miscegenation, led the elite whites to make clear
distinctions in order to guard their own white identity from the imminent black “infiltration” that they believed the civil rights movement was advocating (Smith 2003:121-123).

The amenable yet fickle attitude of the white elites towards Hispanic shifted to a more hostile attitude when the Civil Rights movement’s cry for equality threatened the elite. The dark skin color many Hispanics exhibited contributed to the growing resentment of white New Orleanians. As their population grew, Hispanics became more visible, yet less willing to assimilate quickly. The Asociacion Hondureña de Nueva Orleans, founded by Dr. Victor Herrera in 1959, marked the official introduction of a Honduran identity to New Orleans (Bracken 1992:57).

Despite the discrimination, as stated earlier, the color continuum extant in both New Orleans and Latin America that places whites at its apex and blacks at its base, continued to allow many light-skinned Hispanics to maintain pleasant relationships with some elite whites (Harrison 1995: 55). This is reflected in my own research as many immigrant Hondurans’ deny that white Americans alienate them. In 1949 Norman Painter also found that Latin Americans felt they were not discriminated against. According to Painter’s survey of sixty-seven Hispanics in New Orleans, all considered themselves, to be both white and assimilated. The diverse racial features extant in New Orleans allowed mestizo Latin Americans to intermingle with the white elite (Painter 1949).

During the 1950s and 1960s the denial of alienation is also due in part to the Honduran community’s own exclusivity. Hondurans were becoming the majority within the Hispanic immigrant population in New Orleans, allowing them to form an intimate
Pilar

“I’d get called nigger and I was like, what is these people’s problem. Sometimes it was the same Latinos from Cuba you know Puerto Ricans saying Hondurans were trash.”

Pilar was among the first wave of migrants entering New Orleans. Like many families, her father’s decision to migrate to New Orleans involved reliance on the small networks already established in the area, and his familiarity with New Orleans due to his previous employment with the Standard Fruit Company. Her mother and father exemplified the exclusivity that characterized the Honduran community. Despite her parent’s loyalty to recreating in New Orleans the home they had left behind, the few blocks that separated Pilar from her Honduran counterparts compelled her to form bonds with the white Americans in her neighborhood. As a result, the adherence to Honduran culture her family enforced inside the home was not reinforced outside of the home. While her American neighborhood peers accepted her, her schoolmates were not as welcoming. At school she was regularly bombarded with racial epithets. The private Catholic School she attended, for Pilar, exemplified the racialized New Orleans she would encounter outside the confines of the Honduran community and her neighborhood.

Her dark physical features, which others in New Orleans associated with blackness or difference, but which she associated with Honduraness, embarrassed her. The embarrassment of her physical darkness eventually translated into an embarrassment with an identity she had embraced in the comfort of her home and Honduran community. Pilar was also aware of the color continuum that existed within her own home. Her
siblings ranged in skin tone from dark to light. Pilar was aware that her lighter skinned sister was not subject to the harassment of her peers. Despite the differential treatment, Pilar’s sister remained her loyal defender, which helped Pilar draw strength from the adversity she faced.

Her father was a strict and loving disciplinarian who wanted his children to know the language. “You learn English out there, here you speak Spanish,” was a phrase that came to represent her father’s commitment to his culture, a culture that Pilar would later come to question. As a small child, Pilar relished in the Honduran parties her parents frequented in nearby Barrio Lempira. She remembers the parties being filled with music and dancing, while she and the other Honduran children partook of their own festivities.

When her parents were not dancing the night away in someone’s home, they were enjoying Magazine Street or Magazine La Calle del Swing (The Swing Street). Astute entrepreneurs, both American and Hispanic, began inserting restaurants, grocery stores and movie theatres near the Barrio Lempira area on Magazine Street that catered to Hispanics. Pilar remembers visiting Magazine St. often, either with her parents or alone on her bicycle as she explored the neighborhood.

The Happy Hour Theatre, which was located on Magazine Street, became a staple in the lives of many Hondurans. In response to the growing Honduran and other Hispanic population, the Happy Hour theatre began weekend showings of movies in Spanish. Pilar remembers family trips to the movies, where their parents would congregate with their friends within the theatre to become enveloped in a Honduran experience of familiar language and faces. Every weekend her parents could be transported to a place in which they recognized the cultural currency. For young Pilar,
the encounters did not hold the same weight it did for her parents; instead, it was simply one more aspect of her family’s cultural history. While her parents enjoyed the Honduran exchange, she would again become a member of a mischievous troop of Honduran children. However these childhood bonds did not cross the divide between El Barrio Lempira and her neighborhood. Instead, the divide would increase as she grew into adolescence.

**Hippie Identity**

“The hippie dippy crowd. That’s what I’ve always been. You know, the crowd that would rather go to a concert than go to a football game.”

As she matured and began exercising her budding independence, much to her parent’s chagrin, she opted not to attend her parent’s parties, and began making her own. Pilar also opted not to participate in what she believed to be sexist practices. A product of her the Sixties, Pilar felt that ironing and folding her brother’s clothes did not coincide with her feminist sensibilities.

“I was never a raving beauty. I didn’t care. I was never trying to hang out with the popular crowd. I was always with the outcast type. I liked those people better anyway. They were more real”.

The “outcasts” were a part of the hippie counterculture that Pilar was drawn to. Gloria, her mother, was not happy with this development. She felt her daughter was denying her roots and becoming a “dirty hippie.” Gloria attributed her daughter’s behavior to the American culture that surrounded her daughter, although she felt she had shielded Pilar. Her behavior did not correspond with the clean cut and proper fashion that her mother thought appropriate. The struggle was tenacious, as both women are stubborn and strong-willed.
“My mother hated my patched up jeans. She would find them and throw them away. When I would realize they were gone I would search for them and dig them out of the trash can. This happened all the time.”

Scholars have argued that identities are shaped by history and the past, while the construction of the present continually changes the meaning of that past. As a result, the ceaselessly changing past possesses a flexible and unstable identity (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:13). Individuals construct their own identities in order to reconcile the continual amalgamation of an assortment of identities. As individuals align themselves with an identity, they engage in a symbolic discourse. In order to construct an identity, one must engage in an active representation of that identity (Hinzten 1999:4). The individual struggles to shape her or his identity through representations and performances that constitute a collective cultural identity. Pilar continually engaged in struggles to define her cultural identity.

Pilar’s struggle to keep her patched-up jeans represented the struggle to distance herself from her mother’s Honduran culture, and her mother’s constant desire for her daughter to internalize that Honduran culture. Her mother also struggled to keep her near to God, but again Pilar resisted. “I went to church everyday. I went to a private school, so I went to church everyday for school and on Sunday at home.”

Pilar resisted her parent’s desires when she decided not to attend mass on Sunday. Her mother’s response was, “El Diablo esta en esta casa (the devil is in this house).” Despite her mother’s warning, Pilar did not relent. She remained steadfast in her convictions, despite her close relationship with her parents. However this zone of resistance was not foreign territory for Pilar, as she was continually compelled to defend
herself against the constant derision of her schoolmates and teachers. These struggles
would propel her into the identity shifts that would continue throughout her life.

Figure 29: Mass for Suyapa- the Patron Mary of Honduras

A cultural identity as defined by Stuart Hall (1990) is one that is shared by a
collective, and is rooted in the “common historical experiences and shared cultural
codes...which provides us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous
frames of reference and meaning (Hall 1990:223).” However, Hall also believes that
cultural identity recognizes that through an altered history, cultural identities may
“undergo constant transformation (Hall 1990:223-225).” A common history allows
individuals to share a common cultural identity, based on past experiences that maintain a
sense of cohesiveness despite the different discourses that exist. The collectives’ cultural
identity continues to reconstitute itself through the reinterpretation of the past. The past
adjusts to fit the needs of the present. Hondurans migrating to New Orleans changed
their Honduran identity by adjusting to life in the United States, forcing them to redefine
Honduran identity. Honduran identity is no longer reserved for those born on Honduran
soil. The Honduran migrants and their progeny, through performance and discourse in
New Orleans, force the community to rethink the Honduran condition, and what makes that condition Honduran. Pilar was compelled to contemplate her own Honduran condition within New Orleans, making her and others like her instrumental to the transformation of the Honduran cultural identity.

**Hippie Honduran Identity and Coming Home**

Even the nuns, some of the nuns were racist. They would make it a point to pick on you. I had one in particular when I was in grade school. When I was in like eighth grade. She just didn’t like me and one time in class she kept saying that I had cheated and I said, ‘No I didn’t cheat’. ‘They were handing that paper back there”, I said,’ I had nothing to do with it.’ She called me up to her desk and she kept insisting that I was cheating. Knowing that she knew who was really cheating. So then she clawed my arms. I mean I had claw marks. She clawed both of my arms in front of class! And she kept insisting, ‘You are a cheater, you are a cheater.’ You know, just like a little kid. And I just turned around and slapped her. And of course I got sent out of the classroom and I got suspended. Hell, I get home and my dad saw my arms and he blew up. I told him they were saying I was cheating and I was not cheating. He walked me over there to the school and he just let them have it. He went to the school board. They didn’t suspend me because she shouldn’t have did that to me. She never bothered me again after that. My dad taught me to stand up for myself. There was always somebody who didn’t like who you were.

Pilar later related the story of another event that took place at the end of her high school career. Both instances caused Pilar to question the identity that others were ascribing her and the identity she wanted to embrace.

When I was a senior in high school. You know how they send you to a counselor. I went into the counselor’s office, and you know I made a little above average grades. I mean I wasn’t like a B student or an A student and he looked at my grades and everything and he said, ‘Well I don’t think I’d recommend college for you.’ He said, ‘You know they have some really good opportunities in the city for like working in the hotels.’ I looked at him and I said, ‘You know what, you’re wrong’, I said, ‘I am going to go on to college.’ I said, ‘Why are you telling me this?’ ‘I said is it because I am Hispanic?’ ‘I said that’s not my ambition, and I will prove you wrong, and I walked out of his office.’ That was such an insult to me.
Hall along with other scholars have re-conceptualized identity from the immutable identity that one acquires at birth to the fluid identities negotiated in today’s hybrid societies. Hybrid societies are composed of fusions of cultural identities (Hall 1992). The perpetual migration of late modernity has forced an amalgamation of cultural identities that create hybrid cultures. Migrants are hesitant to relinquish their identities by assimilating; instead they are choosing to negotiate their identity on their terms, adopting or rejecting cultural practices that suit their needs without denying their cultural traditions and histories (Hall 1992:629-630).

Rutherford explains the cultural politics of difference as the recognition of the differences that exist among individuals and the attempted resolution of the conflict arising from such differences. Difference implies an other which has a connection to the self. The self is only created through its relationship with an other. The threat posed by the other to the self produces the bitterness of non-resolution that is misdirected at the other (Rutherford 1990:11-27). Despite the inherent power held by the privileged majority, both the other and the self experience the threat of the non-self. Identity is formed through the attacks of the other and active negotiation of the individual in opposition to that other. Honduran migrants in New Orleans illustrate the continual struggle that is inherent to hybrid identities.

Pilar is characteristic of the hybrid society in which we live. Upon arrival she was ascribed the identity of her natal land. As a child, she associated with the Honduran community her parents were attempting to form. She was strategically positioned within a family that exuded Honduran culture in its food, language, and gender relations.
Although she was representing a Honduran identity, the influence of her American friends was changing the identity her parents espoused. Despite their many efforts, she was becoming Americanized right under their noses. She would not realize how her identity was changing until faced with the racism she endured in pre-adolescence. The Honduran identity that had once created such comfort was now a burden. The training ground was her American schooling and association in the neighborhood, which provided her with the American socialization skills that allowed her to act in a manner culturally appropriate to the United States. This caused her to somewhat distance herself from Honduran culture and adopt American culture.

Although she began to feel American, the “real Americans” were vocal about her inability to look the part. Her white American schoolmates and teachers made it clear to her that her identity was not her decision; rather it was theirs. They gave her a black identity that she could not understand, as she had not been a part of the black community. She could not change her appearance, which meant that her ascribed identity would remain with her for years to come. Pilar’s dismissal of the Honduran culture was a way to protect herself from racial epithets. If she could not change her appearance, she would change the culture that was associated with it. Intensifying her confusion was the geographical division that existed between her and the Honduran community. Pilar believes that the absence of the Barrio Lempira’s culturally constructed bonds and constant cultural performances caused her to seek out an identity that would embrace and shield her from the increasing attacks on her Honduran identity.

Amidst her confusion and the city’s racial bifurcation, the hippie counterculture was emerging as the answer to a frustrated generation of apathetic youths. She and a
group of her outcast friends immediately felt a connection as she was not only insulted for being “African American” but also experienced prejudice because of an illness that struck her as a sophomore in high school.

I was in band and I had gotten real good with the clarinet. And then I had just been playing on the flute. I was sixteen and I was in band class. I went to put my instrument in my mouth and I couldn’t put it in, I wasn’t getting an opening in my mouth. Then I freaked out and what I got was bells palsy. I had an ear infection. I had like a tumor building in there. Eventually they had to operate on me [for Bell’s Palsy] and that built up with the tumor on top of it. And so when they went to do surgery on me they cut me open and the tumor exploded cause it was just so big. The surgery was supposed to take two hours and it took ten. That was like one of the worse times of my life. I was out of school for three months. The pain is so excruciating. I remember my friends from school were around me when I woke up. Then I had to go back to school, shaved head, black patch. Oh it was horrifying. I went back immediately like the freak of the school. My parents were really strong. That made me stand up for myself forever.

She found acceptance with the hippie counterculture and embraced it throughout her high school career. The peace and love motto of the hippie culture was how she wanted to live. The physical changes caused by Bells Palsy, which is the sudden onset of facial paralysis that results in a distortion of the face, only confounded the issue (Dorland’s 1994). This provided an even greater impetus for defining herself apart from the racist majority. Meanwhile, she could not find herself in the world of gender inequality and proper feminine dress she felt her natal culture espoused. Creating her identity in opposition to the mainstream “popular crowd” helped her become secure in her new hippie identity, which suppressed the Honduran identity that caused her such difficulty. She was able to share her newfound culture with her hippie friends. This was the bond she was lacking when her Honduran identity was attacked. The affirmation she
experienced further compelled her to find an identity that would oppose the “popular crowd”.

“That stuff [racism] used to really annoy me but once you get older. Especially in high school and stuff, I used to be so angry but as I got older it’s like it was made for me to experience it. That’s just how life is”.

Once Pilar graduated she was without the constant scrutiny the intimate atmosphere of high school involved. Pilar was now able to construct her identity in a less hostile environment. She continued to identify herself as a hippie, but she gradually became more comfortable with the Honduran identity she had suppressed. In her late twenties, Pilar was compelled to help her mother care for her ailing father. The distance from her past and the proximity with her parents made Pilar more receptive to Honduran culture. She was again enveloped by the language, food and religion. Despite the constant interaction with her parents’ and their friends, Pilar would need something more to re-embrace her Honduran identity. After her father’s passing, she decided it was time to make a change. She left her mother in the care of her siblings and moved to San Francisco, California.

San Francisco would prove enlightening. The distance and her association with non-Hispanics caused her to experience a sense of longing for her Honduran culture. Despite the conflict she had experienced, the Honduran culture remained with her. It had comforted her as a child and as an adult she was becoming aware of the influence and joy it brought her. The Mexican people and culture visible in the streets of San Francisco triggered her own Hispanic experiences. The happiness these memories produced caused the tension between her Honduran identity and the derision of others to relax, freeing her to explore her Hispanic identity.
As a result Pilar sought out the local, largely Mexican Hispanic culture as a context in which she could reconnect with her Honduran culture. She saw it in the ubiquitous murals that vividly depicted the struggle of Hispanic migrants in a colorful and truthful way that appealed to her artistic sensibilities. She was participating in Hispanic cultural identity via Mexican culture. She soon realized she would no longer be ostracized for embracing a Honduran identity that lay dormant inside her.
Figure 32: Mural in San Francisco

“I felt like in those days there was a lot of racism moving around here. I know for a fact that New Orleans has made great advances. I’ve seen it I’ve experienced it, it’s been a part of my life.”

Pilar is now fifty, and has returned to New Orleans, where she continually tries to surround herself with the cultural traditions that surrounded her as a child. She has also found her voice as an artist who concentrates her efforts on Hispanic culture. She has participated in various openings that focus on Hispanic culture. Although Pilar accepts that others are more accepting of her Hondruanness, she is now secure in her ability to choose. Her identity continues to change, and she can redefine her identity in a more fluid and less interrupted manner than that of her teenage experience. Although her story differs from that of many others within the Honduran community, she continues to share the collective history of the Honduran migrant trying to negotiate their identity within the United States.

Throughout her continual changes she has maintained the hippie identity that she feels exemplified acceptance and diversity. She considers herself an American Hippie, embracing the acceptance of the hippie counterculture that allowed her to adopt her own
identity. She has not gone against her feminist sensibilities and believes she is still very much “out the box”.

Pilar is a product of the hybrid society in which we live and she exemplifies the transformations of identity. She has embraced or rejected identities in order to fulfill her search for her own place. She has also been forced to struggle and ultimately adopt another identity, in order to survive within the racially charged atmosphere of New Orleans. As an adult she became more involved with the Honduran community, it provided her with a security she had not known as an adolescent.

The Honduran community continues to grow and unite to celebrate the Honduran culture. Pilar feels the more amenable attitude toward Hispanics has allows her and others to represent and perform their cultural identity outside that cultural community without the fear or embarrassment that years of racism instilled in her. She has now come to terms with her shifting identities and relishes the comfort she enjoys as she engages in her diverse cultural traditions.
Chapter 3: Honduran at Heart/American in Mind

In these assumptions authentic social existence is, or should be, centered in circumscribed places—like the gardens where the word “culture” derived its European meanings. Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes (Clifford 1997:3).

Carlos Armando Flores or Mando as he is called, defines his identity in terms of his roots, placing “roots before routes”. He maintains his Honduran garden by traveling to Honduras regularly. This came to light during our first meeting when Mando used metaphor to describe his relationship with Honduras and the relationship he believed Pilar had with Honduras, during our first interview, in which I first introduced my research. Although Mando has resided in New Orleans for most of his life, he is confident about his roots and the identity that grows from them.

“Yo tengo un jardín y ella [Pilar] tiene una planta en Honduras.”

“I have a garden and she [Pilar] has a plant in Honduras”

Mando is entrenched in the Honduran community in New Orleans as a renaissance man. He is a writer, painter, musician, mechanic, and holds an associate’s degree in electrical engineering. Some of his accomplishments include authoring series in the Vocero News called Recordando New Orleans (Remembering New Orleans) and a manuscript titled El Tratado de la Teoría de la Esencia del Ser (A Treatise of the Theory of the Essence of Being). He has acted as secretary of the New Orleans Soccer League, the Honduran Association of New Orleans, and the Association of United Hondurans of New Orleans. Mando was also founder and president of CAFA-Cultura Americana Flores y Asociados (American Culture Flores and Associates). He is currently president and founder of AHUNO-Artistas e Hispanos Unidos de New Orleans (Hispanics and
Artists of New Orleans United). Mando hopes to unite the community by using his many

talents to create arenas for Hispanic discourse and performance in New Orleans.

**Entering Miami**

“En el año 1961, si no me equivo co, émigré para acá, para Estados

Unidos, fui a Miami. Miami fue la experiencia mas dura que he tenido en

mi vida. Estaba solo y no tenía apoyo.”

“In 1961, if I am correct, I migrated here, to the United States, to Miami. Miami was the most difficult experience of my life. I was alone and had

no support.”

His first route beyond Honduras was Miami. There he felt alone and restricted by

the racism that was being directed at the many Cubans arriving in Miami during the

1960s. Many non-Cuban groups in Miami resented Cubans for the federal aid they

received and their unwillingness to assimilate (Stepick et. al. 2003). As a result, Mando

was subject to the same discriminations because non-Cuban groups did not differentiate

between the different groups of Latin America. He was forced to suffer the discrimination

without a support network of compatriots. His own Honduran identity was not being

represented, making him feel out of place. He could identify what he was not, but as an

individual without a community, he was unable to share the meaning of his Honduran

culture.

Talvez iba en un bus, y hablando Español con otro amigo mío, y de

repente venia un Americano y me decia, ‘Speak English goddamn it you in

American country...” “Para ellos cualquiera que hablara español era

Cuban. Ellos no podían distinguir la diferencia entre yo y un Cubano. Yo

soy Hondureño yo no soy Cubano. Entonces cualquiera que hablara

Español según ellos era Cubano. Entonces ya era suficiente para

nombrarnos un goddamn spic, porque así nos decían a nosotros. Entonces

a mi esas cosas me desmoralizaron.

Maybe I was on a bus, speaking Spanish with another friend, and all of a

sudden an American would come and say, ‘Speak English goddamn it you

in American country...” “To them anyone who spoke Spanish was Cuban.
They could not distinguish me from a Cuban. I am Honduran, I am not Cuban. So to them anyone who spoke Spanish was Cuban. So that was enough to label us a goddamn spic, because that is what they would call us. So those were the things that demoralized me.

There was no circle of friends to protect him from the racial epithets he was bombarded with. There were no friends or family to create a place to celebrate what was familiar, which made him realize how important his roots were for the route his was taking. These events were compounded by the fact that he came to the United States because of what had become an austere financial situation for his family in Honduras.

**Honduras to Miami to New Orleans**

Mando was born in San Pedro Sula on November 30, 1942; he was the third of six children. His mother was a teacher and his father an attorney who worked for the government, making him subject to the whim of the politicians in office. As a result, Mando’s father moved to Tegucigalpa with his family in order to better position himself as a government official. With a change in administration, came a change in salary for Mando’s father and his family; his practice was unable to prosper due to the intimate relationship between the courts and the government. During this difficult time, most of his siblings migrated to the United States in search of better opportunities. Mando followed his sisters once he graduated high school and entered a world of discrimination he had not known before.

He had left Honduras in search of opportunity without the tools to handle such derision. When he was unable to capitalize on his family’s previous position and his own talents, he became disheartened and disillusioned. Although he slowly learned English, he was unable to improve his standing in a community that did not see him as a member. He was not American and he was not Cuban. How could he maintain a cultural identity
without a community to share it with? He felt disoriented and immobile, which led to a
drug dependency that would fortunately lead him back to Honduras.

He had fired me for no reason. The same man that paid me 1.15 an hour, the same man that stole my overtime, the same man that stole my work hours, that same man, one time because of an illness I was unable to go to work and he fired me. So I went to claim unemployment compensation. During that time, that was when I fell into the claws of drugs, because I didn’t have a job and I was demoralized, I was very depressed because I thought what he had done, that he had fired me, was very unjust…

Mando spent three difficult years in Miami that ended with an opium overdose. Soon after he recovered from the overdose, the unemployment checks from a claim he had placed when he was fired arrived. The lump sum of eight hundred presented him with the opportunity to return to Honduras to begin a new life without drugs.

Mando’s time in Miami represents a lonely period where his identity was muted. Culture is shared meaning and the representations of those meanings (Hall 1997:1). The Honduran cultural identity he brought with him was unable to voice itself, instead it became a burden he carried alone. Without a community to share in his Honduranness, he felt like a life without a connection and a present without a past. The common past that a national identity presupposes provides a feeling of protection and unity in which a community can develop and prosper. Mando found that sense of community in New Orleans.
New Orleans Sweet New Orleans

Yo andaba buscando alguien que me quisiera y así fue que me vine acá. Y cuando vine aquí pues el medioambiente, las amistades, las muchachas, y el haber encontrado trabajo. Todos estos factores poniendo los juntos hicieron de Nuevo Orleans el lugar propicio para que yo eh eh madurara, para que yo empezara a madurar. Y cuando lo hice con la...objetivado ya I’m not going to be a failure. La verdad es que cuando vine a Nueva Orleans me sentí mas en casa.

I was looking for someone that would love me and that is how I came here. And when I came here, well, the environment, the friends, the girls, and the fact that I had found work. All these factors, putting them together made New Orleans the most appropriate place for me to eh, eh mature, so I could start to mature. And when I did it…with an objective like, I’m not going to be a failure. The truth is when I came to New Orleans I felt at home.

Figure 33: Mando and friends in the French Quarter

Throughout our conversation, Mando’s New Orleans roots began to show as he sprinkled his stories with English words. This use of code-switching or nonce borrowing is common among Hispanics in the United States (Meyers-Scotten 2000; Muysken 1993 & Poplack 1982). Mando learned English in postadolescence, making him more apt to borrow English words rather than mix the two languages with fluidity (Poplack 1982). Mando code-switched throughout our interviews. The comfort he exhibits when code-
switching exemplifies the vicissitude of identity. Mando emphasizes the importance of language to the Honduran identity; it would follow that the same would be true for an American identity. He is melding the two identities and in the process transforming both. Rather than simply assimilating, Mando has internalized what he deemed important to his survival in New Orleans while reconstituting his Honduran identity through the practices he engages in.

Upon returning to Honduras, Mando found his family’s economic situation had improved. He was able to steer clear of drugs, relish in the cultural comfort of being with his compatriots, and obtain employment with the municipality through a family friend. After being in Honduras for about five years he met a young lady in Honduras. When the young lady and her family migrated to New Orleans Mando also migrated in pursuit of this young lady, whom he believed he could start a life with. Oddly enough, his rendezvous to find a girlfriend would place him in America for forty years.

“Y aquí encontré mis amigos, encontré apoyo moral, apoyo espiritual, tenía donde quedarme. Aquí estaba mi hermana, estaban un montón de amistades mías muy queridas que eran muy íntimas.”

“And here I found my friends, I found moral support, spiritual support, I had a place to stay. My sister was here, there were a bunch of intimate and loving friends here [New Orleans].”

Figure 34: Friends of Mando at a Honduran party
Mando was astonished at the number of Hondurans who had settled in New Orleans and more importantly at the many Hondurans he knew personally. He had come upon an established Honduran community into which he was accepted right away. He felt comfortable surrounded by people that were supportive and understanding. He was able to seek opportunities in the United States without having to mute his Honduran identity. He could now share his culture and represent it freely by reshaping and reinforcing the Honduran identity that was being transformed. Mando was soon able to find a job but his most memorable moments were the nights out on the town and the soccer matches against other Latin American teams in the area, as Hondurans were not the only representatives of Hispanic culture in New Orleans.

Roots always precede routes. But what would happen, I began to ask, if travel were untethered, seen as a complex pervasive spectrum of human experiences? Practices of displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension (Clifford 1997:3).

Mando became a member of the Honduran community that had migrated from Honduras in New Orleans, but did that suggest that he and his cohorts were merely transferring roots or simply extending them? Although Mando felt New Orleanians were accepting of Hispanics, he and others were hesitant to display their Hondurannes brazenly. Mando was aware that the community was limited by the covert discrimination that was present in the city. Nevertheless he did not encounter the direct conflict that occurred regularly in Miami.

No existía eso, esa manifestación nacionalista que existe ahora, ahora sí, ahora hay montones que traen la bandera y la ponen en su cuarto. Pero yo creo que nosotros no nos atrevíamos hacer eso, porque todavía teníamos esa desconfianza que nos podían ver mal, nos cohibíamos un poquito, nos limitábamos en manifestar nuestra nacionalidad.
Those manifestations of nationalism that exist today did not exist, now yes, now there are a bunch of people who hang the flag in the room. I think we did not dare do that, because we had that mistrust that they could look at us wrong, we inhibited ourselves a bit, we limited ourselves in manifesting our nationality.

White New Orleanians were less concerned with the introduction of a new language, cuisine, and music, than they were with the continuing darkening. His light complexion allotted him the comforts that many of his compatriots did not enjoy. Mando was also a product of a more subdued atmosphere. The turmoil of the sixties had eased the tensions that had existed previously. While Mando arrival to Miami was inopportune, in 1968 his entrance into New Orleans was auspicious.

“Ya estaba una liga [fútbol] establecida, ya había Asociación Hondureña, ya había una comunidad integrada.”

“There was already an established league, there was already a Honduran Association, there was already an integrated community.”

Mando entered a Honduran community that was beginning to represent itself in opposition to the white American other. It knew what it was not and acted accordingly. The community was flourishing with the advent of a Honduran Association of which Mando was secretary. The soccer league was receiving recognition from Mayor Moon Landrieu, who inaugurated the Pan American soccer field in City Park. Indeed, the community was integrated, and Mando wanted to integrate himself into this translated community. What he did not know was that he would be rooting himself to the area and the community.

“Todos nos conocíamos, y si llegaba una persona nueva, al ratito ya era bien conocida y estaba identificado.”

“We all knew each other, and if a new person arrived, we made them very well known very quickly and they were identified.”
The community identified its own and welcomed them into New Orleans. The community wanted to grow and in order to foster such development, they embraced any newcomers, reinforcing a Honduran community identity. Their identity is understood to differentiate them from the New Orleanians (Rutherford 1990: 11-27). Mando believes that Hondurans claimed this identity based on a common language, music and foods. The other did not speak Spanish, listen or dance to merengue, salsa, punta, and cumbias or ate tortillas de maíz y frijoles con queso (corn tortillas and beans with cheese), sopa de mondongo (tripe soup) or plátanos fritos (fried plantains). Although Mando differentiated between himself and them he was open to other Latin Americans that arrived. A common language allowed other Hispanics to join the community, but Hondurans predominated.

_Era emotivo. Pero era la casa de cualquier Hondureño que quería llegar, ahí llegaba todo el mundo, ahí venían todos los estudiantes de LSU, ahí iban a caer cuando venían para Mardi Gras para la Semana Santa, para cualquier feriado que hubiera._

It was emotive. But the apartment was every Honduran’s home, the whole world would go there, all the students from LSU would go there, they would fall there when they would come for Mardi Gras and for Spring Break, for any holiday there was.

This was a special time for Mando. He and two other Hondurans rented an apartment in the Uptown area; they were young, unattached, and living among Hondurans yet without the societal norms Honduras imposed upon them. Here migrants of his generation, who migrated without their families, were free to move about New Orleans without the scrutiny of their parents. Although the community was concentrated in a small area, it seemed larger than their Honduran cities and provided them some anonymity. Mando enjoyed his freedom and the camaraderie that existed among the Hondurans in New Orleans. This was a stark contradiction to his life in Miami. In New
Orleans Mando, was insulated by the community that surrounded him. He felt supported and at home. He enjoyed the nightlife with his compatriots, frequenting the nightclubs that offered bands that played merengue, salsa and cumbias. After dancing the night away, he would return home to find his apartment replete with Hondurans.

En línea dormíamos en el suelo, en línea, hasta que pegaba en la otra pared. Ay veces, ay veces llenábamos el cuarto solo de bodies. Si querías pasar tenías que saltar por encima de todos los bodies, porque no había pasada.

We would sleep in a row on the floor, in a row, until we hit the other wall. Sometimes, sometimes we would fill the room with just bodies. If you wanted to pass you had jump over all of the bodies, because there was no path.

Our meetings make Mando nostalgic for that place and time. This era was so special that one of his roommates continued to rent the apartment on Constance St. despite his subsequent migration into the suburbs of Kenner. Mando himself has moved away from the Uptown area that defined his youth. He currently resides in Metairie with his wife.

Where are Mando’s Roots?

“Yo no tengo mis raíces aquí (New Orleans), yo tengo mis raíces en Honduras.”

“My roots are not here (New Orleans), my roots are in Honduras.”

Mando feels that his roots have always been and will always be in Honduras. He has simply branched out. Mando does admit he cannot return to Honduras permanently. His two daughters live in New Orleans and are raising their own families here. His attachment to them keeps him from returning in Honduras. Despite this admission, he believes his garden is in Honduras. His national identity is the immutable identity of modernity that Hall discusses in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (1997). It seems that Mando’s Honduran identity is immutable to his heart but
mutable to his head, as he does verbalize the importance of the life he has fostered in New Orleans but does not seem conscious of the way in which the community is reconstructing Honduraness in New Orleans.

Roots provide support and are firmly established. Mando’s own experience in New Orleans satisfies both descriptions. Mando and others established their roots here, creating a supportive network of Hondurans in order to prosper in a different space. Mando and others like him have not simply transferred their roots; they galvanized the reconstitutive nature of Honduran identity by planting their seeds and establishing roots and gardens in a place beyond the nation-state. They have redefined Honduran identity through their own symbolic discourse and representation. Their progeny will also continue to reshape the Honduran identity through the narratives of their parent’s lives in Honduras and in New Orleans. They too have their own stories to tell that will further influence and transform the Honduran identity.

![Figure 35: Mando and Sylvia at the Chez Lounge](image)

Although Mando has not struggled to maintain his Honduran identity, he has been forced to renegotiate what being Honduran means for both himself and his family. A
Honduran native, Mando’s wife migrated from Honduras to New Orleans at the young age of twelve. Victor met his wife Sylvia in New Orleans when he was enjoying his bachelor’s playground. She has been able to tame him for more than thirty years. He believes that Sylvia also only had a plant in Honduras but he has helped her cultivate her relationships in order for them to proliferate. Although has attempted to cultivate these relationships for his daughters it has been to no avail. Together his daughters illustrate the debate over what determines Honduran identity. This came to light when Mando recounted his move back to Honduras.

Mando traveled back to Honduras in the late Seventies with the intention to stay. He had become disillusioned with his life in New Orleans and wanted to prove that he could make it in Honduras. His wife and daughter accompanied him, and although their stay was short lived their second daughter was born in Honduras during this period. After only three years, Mando did not do as well as he had hoped, and they returned to New Orleans. As he related this story to me, he realized that making a clear distinction as to which of his daughters he considered more Honduran was complicated. Was the eldest Honduran? He initially was secure in his response to deny her claim to a Honduran identity as her birthplace is New Orleans; he would soon realize that not only had she maintained the language, but she had also managed to plant seeds of her own in the duration of their stay. Was the youngest Honduran? His initial response was affirmative because she was the memento of their years in Honduras. Again, he called his response into question as he contemplated her inability to speak Spanish and the tender age that prevented her from creating her own garden. The narrative that just occurred reconstituted what he defines as Honduran.
Why Not Miami?

How was New Orleans’ soil fertile enough to cultivate his garden, while Miami’s land proved arid? Juxtaposing these two narratives bares such a question.

“A mi me toco ser un Hondureño que llego a Miami en el momento menos apropiado, porque cuando yo llegue a Miami ya existía esa tirria contra los Cubanos.”

“My luck was such that, as a Honduran, I arrived in Miami at the most inopportune time, because when I arrived in Miami there already existed an aversion to Cubans.”

During the Sixties, Miami’s Cuban population grew exponentially, creating a climate of fear and mistrust among Miami residents. The Cuban consciousness that existed among the locals produced a tense atmosphere for anyone of Hispanic background. The discrimination Mando endured without the guidance or support of a network of friends and family with common concerns became too much for him to bear.

When Mando arrived in New Orleans, much of the upheaval of the Sixties had subsided. Also, preponderance of racist contempt in New Orleans was directed at the Black population. The Black and White dichotomy that had caused Pilar so much pain shielded Mando from the racial epithets he suffered in Miami.

“Aquí el problema no era contra el Hispano, aquí el problema era contra el Negro.”

“Here the problem was not against Hispanics, here the problem was against blacks.”

Mando is of a light-olive complexion with Caucasian features. His physical appearance caused others to believe he was white. Even if he did not fit a white American standard, the turmoil and tension that existed between whites and blacks distracted the white majority from focusing on the lighter complexioned Hispanics. This
allowed the community to develop with fewer direct confrontations. The warm welcome from the established Honduran community that existed when he arrived allowed him to foster relationships and grow with the community.

No porque hablas Español vas a dejar de ser negro para ellos, porque yo tuve un primo hermano mío que es trigueño, no es Negro, pero trigueñito y le hicieron la vida imposible, porque no lo aceptaron ni los negros ni lo aceptaban los blancos, porque estaba en medio.

Speaking Spanish does not mean you cannot be black for them, because I had a first cousin that was a of a dark olive complexion, he isn’t black, but he is a darker, and they made his life impossible, because neither the blacks nor the whites accepted him, because he was in between.

The way Mando spoke of the discrimination he experienced in Miami and the less overt discrimination he experienced in New Orleans resulted from a differing migratory histories of the cities. Miami’s discrimination was very apparently directed at Hispanics and their language, while New Orleans directs discrimination against the black population. The resident populations in both Miami and New Orleans were afraid of an infiltration and destruction of their way of life (Smith 2003). The Honduran arrival also distinguishes itself from the Cuban arrival in that it was not documented and not visible in the media. Cubans were given amnesty making their migration a more condensed and perceptible one. New Orleans on the other hand had maintained a friendly relationship with Honduras due to the constant trade that occurred. The Americans in New Orleans were introduced gradually to the community that would soon create the hybridity of identities that exist today.

His Honduran New Orleans

“La influencia Hondureña a aportado bastante a la cultura de Nueva Orleans. Indiscutiblemente el fútbol es una de las mas claras evidencias de la influencia no solamente Hondureña pero Hispana.”
“The Honduran influence has contributed greatly to New Orleans culture. Indisputably soccer is one of the clear examples of not only the Honduran but Hispanic influence.”

Mando emphasizes the influence Hondurans have had on New Orleans, but he does not make the inverse observation. Again, it seems his mind and his heart are in disagreement. His mind is aware of the influence his life in New Orleans has had on his identity, but his heart remains loyal to Honduras. As we are limited in the national labels we adhere to, I would describe Mando as a Honduran with American tendencies. It would be impossible to explain Mando’s identity so simply. His relationship with both cultures has transformed cultural identities.

Mando did not simply transfer his roots. He replanted his Honduran seeds cultivating a new garden whose roots have provided him with the support necessary to establish his position in both the Honduran and New Orleanian community. He has been successful in his pursuit to root the community by supporting and founding organizations that foster growth and development within the community. He has presented his artwork in Honduras and New Orleans, and he continues to lend his time and talent in order to give a voice to the Hispanic population that has continued to transform the many national identities that exist within it.

**What is Honduranness?**

What makes Mando and Pilar Honduran, and what constitutes Honduranness? The answers to these questions live in the people who create such categories. These identities will remain contested and problematized for as long as they remain part of our lexicon. I have come to understand that the public usually considers national and cultural identities as one and the same (Hall 1990:225). The reality is that individuals and
communities negotiate and renegotiate their identities in order to adjust them to their social order including their goals and situation. Despite the synonymous usage of the terms national and cultural, they differ significantly. Nationality is believed to be innate or inborn. One is assigned one’s national identity by simply being born within the boundaries of a nation (Anderson 2003:5). Conversely, cultural identity is acquired through social interactions and the representation and performance of cultural practices. National identity is static and immutable while cultural identity is dynamic. This disparity does not preclude the public from using them interchangeably, and transnational communities may be forcing a change in the current discourse that exists within “stories, which are told about it [national identity], memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it” (Hall 1992:119). Individuals create national and cultural identity through narrative and representation. The changes that occur throughout one’s life transform narrative and representation, assuring their contestation and mutability.

So what constitutes national and cultural identity, and who defines it? They are both defined and redefined by the people who live them. The people themselves are many times unaware of the active negotiation they engage in as they represent and share stories. As a result, many respond without hesitation to the question of identity, but they are also quick to re-evaluate such strict definitions when questioned. Many first generation migrants or migrants who have spent their formative years in their parent’s natal land may be hesitant to accept a more problematized view of national and cultural identity. I found this to be true in the case of Pilar and Mando. Although both are first generation migrants, Pilar spent her adolescence in New Orleans, where she was forced to question
her identity; Mando, on the other hand, did not feel the need to question who he was because he had established an identity that had not been questioned by others. Although we define who we are, how others define us is crucial to the development on one’s identity. For Pilar the racial and intergenerational antagonism she endured made her redefine what she believed to be Honduran, while Mando considered his own Honduran identity to be axiomatic. Although Mando continues to place importance on nationality as birthplace, he accepts the amalgamations that are occurring as a result of migrations like his.

Despite the difficulty that exists in defining national and cultural identity, individuals are compelled to identify themselves as separate from an other. Establishing a national identity allows people to reposition themselves and define what they are not. Both Mando and Pilar have come to terms with who they are and what they are. They define it, and it is their discourse within the community that determines how they define themselves.

**Honduran American Identities**

Pilar is a Hippie-Honduran because she actively defines her identity through her own stories and representations.

“The open mindedness of the hippie movement is what attracted me to it. I wasn’t drawn in by the drugs, it was the tolerant, freethinking sentiment that I could identify with. I still feel this way.”

Pilar could not escape the culture her parents valued. She knows she is Honduran because of the food she eats, the music she listens and dances to, the memories of the Honduran festivities, the values that her parents instilled in her and the vitality that Honduras brings to her artwork. These are the things that she represents and defines as Honduran.
Mando also believes he is Honduran because of the food he eats, the music he listens and dances to, the fútbol he plays and the machismo he says he exudes. Although Mando has lived most of his life in New Orleans he sees only a very small part of Americanness in himself. He is Honduran “porque nadie me puede quitar el hablado (because no one can take away the way I speak)”. He admits that New Orleans does live within him but it breathes differently for him than it does for Pilar. New Orleans represented a place in which he could compete economically amongst other translated migrants. He believes that “al lugar que fueres has lo que vieres (To the place that you go, do what you see).” Contrary to the adage, Mando has not assimilated into the mainstream culture completely. His places, friends and passions all manage to tie themselves to Honduras. Rather than assimilating, I assert Mando has negotiated his identity in order to succeed, but he remains an integral part of the perpetuation and strength of the Honduran community.

“Ser Hondureño no es en la sangre es en la cultura..”

“Being Honduran is not in the blood; it is in the culture.”

Although for most people national and cultural identity are one, when asked to define these terms they begin to see the difficulty and reality that many cultures live in one nation and vice versa. Nonetheless, these terms are important as they continue to be part of the community’s shared discourse and representation. The shared aspect of culture is what makes it so; but this does not imply an unproblematic definition (Hall 1997:1). As both Pilar and Mando illustrate, the members of a community may differ greatly yet continue to define themselves as part of one Honduran community, because their discourse and representations constitute their cultural and national identity.
Chapter 4: Honduran Memories of Place

Era de fiesta en fiesta. Vieras que, que, que lindo que dias mas alegres. Es que, es que eramos un monton de amigos que nos habiamos concentrado fuera de nuestro pais sabes, en un pais extraño, vieras que. Era un sueño. Quedò como un éxtasis todo en la memoria de nosotros. Yo creo que todos los que nos acordamos de esos tiempos...cuando se recuerdan deben de sentir cierta nostalgia, porque era como un sueño. Todos nos conociamos y ibamos al nighclub...

It was from party to party. You should have seen how, how, how beautiful, how happy those days were. It was because, it was because there were so many friends that had concentrated themselves outside of our country, you know, in a strange country, you should have seen. It was a dream. Everything settled like an ecstasy in our memories. I believe that all of us who remember those times… when they remember they must feel a certain nostalgia, because it was like a dream. We all new each other and we all went to the nightclubs… Mando Flores

The Honduran immigrant community formed their identity by creating social places in New Orleans to perform their Honduranness. A social place is produced within a space within which both the area and its objects can be experienced. The social place is experienced and remembered as such. Space on the other hand defines distance and allows movement (Tuan 1977: 12). The physical and spatial referent allows human experience, emotion and memory to establish space as place. Space and place maintain a dialectical relationship through the interactions individuals engage in within the spaces that create place (Sheldrake 2001:7).

Place also involves connotations of commitment and attachment by those present in it or absent from it. This does not imply a static and universal “place”, rather a place experienced by humans in a varied and personal manner. Although place can be remembered by an individual, it is the sharing of those memories within the collective that was significant for the formation of Honduran places in New Orleans. As a
community, they remember bestowing meaning to place within a physical space. Personal and collective are not mutually exclusive terms; rather they coexist within a community through the community’s attachment to that place. Despite individually different experiences, the Honduran community interacts with its space producing a Honduran place. The community reinforces the Honduran places, as its members continually perform their Honduraness within these places, and experience them as distinctively Honduran places positioned in opposition to a larger New Orleanian place.

Both the New Orleanians and Hondurans give meaning to and are thereby committed to their places. This attachment politicizes place. As a result these communities fervently guard their places as theirs. Conflict arises as they attempt to include or exclude others. The establishment of place informs the “other” of his or her own place within a community. The Honduran community actualizes its own identity in opposition to the white hegemony through the production and experience of place. The influential white community on the other hand determines who and what places it will recognize and accept. Despite the influence of the majority, the Honduran community continues to exert its presence, challenging the notion that multiple cultural places cannot exist within one physical space (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:34). People do not exist without a physical space, forcing them to produce physical manifestations of the mental constructions of identity (Fernandez 1984). Setha Low has termed social production the physical expression of “social, economic, ideological, and technological factors” (Low 2000:20). Social construction on the other hand is the transformation of those places through meaning and interaction of the people who inhabit them (Low 2000).
Tim Cresswell has defined place as a spatial referent but he also defines it as a social phenomena in which humans exist in and out of its social bounds. Cresswell asserts that ideology determines the “good, just, appropriate, and so on” (Cresswell 1996:18). Ideology in turn determines the appropriateness of inclusion or exclusion, generating the terms by which others will be accepted or rejected. These decisions are established by the “dominant” social groups. Being “in and out of place” is to support or challenge the dominant ideology. The dominant exerts its power over those it deems not appropriate, positioning themselves in opposition to the other (Cresswell 1996:18-20). Both parties exclude and include creating continual conflict between them.

Cresswell focuses on the importance of transgression - an unconscious resistance – to the “in place/out of place” dichotomy. Transgressions are made by both the dominant and the dominated. Cresswell concentrates on the power that is exerted by the dominant and the conflict that ensues. Despite the importance he places on its conflictual nature, he stresses that confrontation is not a necessary evil of being “out of place” (Cresswell 1996:22-23). Rather than struggle with each other, members of both the dominant and the dominated may choose to avoid each other. Although a transgression occurs, the dominated may choose to avoid the dominant and create its own place in which the dominated is “in place”. Their place can also effectively exclude and establish rules that determine locally proper behavior. In spite of this, the dominant excludes on a larger scale, effectively denying the dominated a position in the historical record and the mainstream media.

Discovering the contestations of place and offering the voiceless the opportunity to celebrate a place as their own can be achieved through narrative (Basso 1996:57).
Narrative has allowed the Honduran community to establish the history of Honduran places in New Orleans. Sharing the importance and meaning of these places through stories about the past and the present, gives others an understanding of the Honduran experience in New Orleans (Alonso 1988). Within New Orleans, the historical records generated by the white elite ignore the Hondurans and their places. As a result, Hondurans have created places that exhibit multivocality (Rodman 1992). Spaces exist as different places within and among the individuals that create them, making it possible for many places to exist within one space. Space is transformed through the stories and experiences of the individuals who produce them. Although priority is given to some stories, all are important and should be heard. The narratives that exist within a community often differ and are in disagreement. This reality does not prevent the community from addressing shared concerns. Without narrative, the state historical documents determine the history of the structures and people of New Orleans making it difficult to see the many Honduran faces that coexisted within its history.

In order to create an identity and survive repression, the dominated creates places in which they are not “out of place”. The Honduran community in New Orleans was “out of place”, and they responded by creating Honduran places that effectively excluded the “other”. As the community grew it continued to create places in which they have deemed themselves appropriate through the memory of the past and the narrative or stories of the present. The Honduran community demonstrates the marginality that many communities experience in the mainstream media and historical records. For example, the Times Picayune discusses the Honduran population a handful of times during the 1950s and ‘60s, despite a 1962 article declaring New Orleans the *Nacatamal* capitol of the United
States. Such an admission did not preclude the mainstream media from granting them a larger space within it.

Creating Honduran Places through Memory

Maurice Halbwach was the first to introduce the term collective memory. Halbwach asserted that memory was collective because it developed within a collective identity (Halbwach 1980). In Social Memory (1992), James Fentress and Chris Wickham argue that the extreme emphasis placed on the collective denies the agency of the individual. The authors differentiate between collective memory and social memory by defining the latter as their attempt to bridge the collective memory and the individual as active participant. Therefore social memory emerges through the active sharing of memory (Fentress & Wickham 1992).

In Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering (1997), Marita Sturken made the decision to use cultural identity to discuss memory that is “imbued with culture” (Sturken 1997:5). Sturken asserts that memory explains the identity, values, and power relationship within and between cultures. She distinguishes cultural from collective memory stating that cultural is a ‘self-conscious’ process of cultural attachment. Sturken also asserts that in order to remember one must forget, to allow a narrative to form without becoming overwhelmed by detail. ‘Technologies’ of memories are those objects that we have selected to trigger and help produce memory. The objects become involved in the production of memory, which tends to attach itself to places and sites (Sturken 1997:10).

Paul Connerton also emphasizes the influence the past has on the present. He believes that we experience the present through whatever past we associate with it, which
in turn validates our current social order. Performance reaffirms the past’s position in the present allowing the extension and persistence of social memory. He distinguishes between historical reconstruction and social memory by maintaining that historians make determinations based on evidence in order to establish a valid history whereas history’s participants create and determine social memory (Connerton 1991).

The term social memory connotes an active participation. The social aspect is what continually reinforces the memory and the participants that formed those memories. Inevitably memory is linked to place, because one shares the memory of places with others in order to establish it as such. The social interactions that people engage in within place followed by the narrative based on the memory of experiences past, strengthens place in the past and reinforces place in the present. Place allows the community to establish a tangible memory of their past that includes the “social past” making memory critical to the formation and the creation of Honduran places in New Orleans. Memory continually absorbs the past that results in the creation of the present. Despite the importance of the past individuals discriminate between that which is notable and that which is not. Forgotten memories have important implications for the identity of the community. They convey what the community deems important or memorable. In the context of New Orleans the formation of places that the community accepts as Honduran is fundamental for migrants entering an area that lacks the cultural practices and resources found in their homeland. Through the movement and on-going reconstitution of Honduran places and the memory of those that existed in the past, the strength of the community is reaffirmed through shared memory. In the following sections I will illustrate the way in which the community created Honduran place through memory and
I will use Pilar and Mando’s experiences to discuss the dynamic of the collective Honduran, place to ascertain what makes them Honduran and the varying stories that define Honduraness.

**Pilar’s Honduras**

Pilar’s life has been and continues to be saturated with cultural juxtapositions. She has traveled through many identities. As a child Pilar’s family lived in the upper garden district of Orleans parish, effectively distancing themselves spatially from the Honduran community that lived in *El Barrio Lempira*, a few blocks away. As a result Pilar was continually moving in and out of cultural performances. Within her home her mother and father tried to instill the proper feminine etiquette espoused in Honduras, but as she stepped out of her door into her American neighborhood, she encountered a different world in which such behavior were not the norm. Although Pilar was forced to blend in with her American neighbors alone, with her family she would enjoy the Honduras that began to bloom in New Orleans during the late 1950s and early 1960s. For Pilar, an ephemeral Honduras existed in Central America but the Honduras she would come to know and lived in was New Orleans.

...Cause a lot of them used to live on St. Andrew, um, so we’d walk over there, and they would have parties, and the kids would play out front and they’d be inside dancing...people would have parties at each other’s house, and I have many memories of um, my parents putting some of the furniture out on the porch, because it was just so many people and they would all be doing the *cumbia* and ya know tango and they’d all be dancing. We’d be under the tables watching ‘em. They used to party. And they used to sit and reminisce about Honduras all the time, ya know, and dancing.

Pilar knew a New Orleans that had and continues to have Honduran undertones. Familial obligations created a Honduran world that existed apart from her American life.
Pilar and her family lived near *Barrio Lempira* and a mere block from *Magazine La Calle del Swing* Street. She remembers adult parties the children attended with their parents in *El Barrio Lempira*. The family also frequented the Happy Hour Theatre where they would go after attending mass at St. Theresa’s to watch Spanish cinema. These were the Honduran places Pilar’s memory and heart formed.

Although not a part of *el Barrio Lempira*, Pilar participated in the festivities that took place there. She remembers the music, the dancing and the mischief. Her own participation was limited to child’s play, while her parents and their friends temporarily moved furniture from the home in order to create a makeshift dance floor. Sounds of *merengue* filled the house, moving the adults to dance the night away while drinking rum. Pilar remembers standing in awe as she watched her strict responsible parents transform into gregarious dancing beings. The host home not only provided a dance floor but also a stage on which to perform Honduran cultural practices. They could speak Spanish, reminisce about Honduras and dance *merengue* in their Honduran barrio without fear of reprisal.

The Honduran festive nature did not preclude their devout Catholicism. After Pilar’s family settled into the area, St. Theresa of Avila Catholic church began offering a Spanish mass, with the first official Spanish mass taking place in July of 1968. Religion was central in both the Honduran community and in Pilar’s family. Providing a mass in Spanish was comforting to the community, because they could practice their faith together in their native tongue. St. Theresa’s church became their religious sanctuary and another place to perform their culture. The church provided the community a public arena in which to present their culture, making Honduran cultural practices no longer confined...
to private residences. The community was beginning to find a voice by establishing places that fit their needs. They would also force businesses to become aware of their presence and appreciate them as consumers giving them the opportunity to celebrate their culture in a public domain.

It was in this manner that the Happy Hour Theatre would come to gain importance for both Pilar and others within the Honduran community. The Happy Hour Theatre opened its doors at the turn of the century at 2015 Magazine Street. In its early days as a live theatre it was owned by Bertrand Kiern and featured both plays and vaudeville acts. During the 1920s, the theatre made the transition from live theatre to film. It retained its name but changed owners during the 1960s. Its new owner, Davis Richarme, would change the history of the theatre (Times Picayune 1959:24-25).

**Figure 36**: Happy Hour Theatre During the Early 1900s
Richarme who lived in the Upper Garden District of New Orleans was aware of the growing Hispanic population and decided to capitalize on their presence by featuring weekend films in Spanish for both adults and children. The weekend showings were a success, as many in the community jumped at the opportunity to enjoy a Spanish language movie with their family or on a date. This provided the community an environment in which to socialize as Hondurans under one roof and one language. The movie genre ranged from dramas to slapstick. Many movies featured were and continue to be part of Hispanic popular culture, such as movies starring Mario Moreno as Cantinflas. Cantinflas was best known for his physical comedy and slapstick humor and has been called the Charlie Chaplin of Mexican film. He was a street-wise transient whose blunders and confusion were covertly satirical and eternally humorous for both adults and children (Stavans 1998:39-40).

**Figure 37:** Happy Hour Theatre During the Mid 1900s
Although comedies were all inclusive, many of the dramas were not intended for children. Similarly *La Lucha Libre* or entertainment wrestling matches were not intended for adults. Nonetheless, children were taken to the theatre for the day to watch a movie or explore the theatre. As this was the first theatre in New Orleans that featured Spanish language films, there were times when children were subjected to movies that were of little interest to them.
A cousin of mine, who attended the Happy Hour Theatre as a child during the early eighties, related a story to me. At the tender age of ten, my cousin was taken to see *La Hija de Nadie*, a film about an orphan who as an adult enters into a relationship with a man whom she later learns is her brother; upon this discovery the woman commits suicide. Needless to say my cousin did not enjoy the movie. This experience illustrated for both of us that Honduran activities were limited, leaving the Happy Hour Theatre to be the catch all for many Honduran families.

The Happy Hour Theatre holds many memories for both Hondurans and other Hispanics that lived in New Orleans. Sadly, the Happy Hour Theatre closed it doors in the early eighties soon after my cousin’s foray into the dramatic world of cinema. It has since been a Latin dance club, a used furniture store and it is currently the *Talebloo Antique Gallery*. Despite the subdued atmosphere *Talebloo* attempts to demonstrate, its lively past remains in the memories of the community, making it the subject of and setting for an array of stories.
Figure 43: Talebloo Antique Gallery, Magazine St.

Figure 44: Talebloo Antique Gallery Entrance

Figure 45: Talebloo Antique Gallery Original Happy Hour Theatre Frame
I remember that they would all get together and go to uh, the Happy Hour which is now an antique store. And uh, their friends [her parents] would meet there on Sundays and we’d run up and down the aisles, and they’d watch all the old Latin movies…and it was just like a real place for the Latinos to meet, was that Hispanic theatre. And um which I’ve never seen here again.

The Happy Hour Theatre remains an important part of Pilar’s past. She remembers the comedies and *La Lucha Libre* and the joy they brought her and her young friends. These moments were enjoyed in Spanish with her family and their Honduran friends. Her memories are vivid and full of emotion that is written on her face during our interviews. Despite its current altered appearance, the structure retains much of the past through the present community interactions that occur with the items of the past. These interactions illustrate how individuals use “technologies”, which were discussed earlier in this chapter, to reconstruct the past (Sturken 1997:10). I experienced how much of its past continues to live in Pilar’s mind when we toured the *Talebloo Gallery*, where she was able to describe her experiences within the Happy Hour Theatre.

Pilar and I traveled through *Talebloo* gallery, which is full of oriental rugs and antique furniture that has a past separate from the building itself. Although the collection of antiques is impressive, these artifacts are ignored by Pilar. On route to *Talebloo*, Pilar becomes increasingly nostalgic, which facilitates our journey into the past. When we enter *Talebloo* antiques I approach an employee named Vanik, who instantly becomes a gracious tour guide. We follow Vanik into the elevator that did not exist, to the second floor that did not exist, where he informs us of the stairs and the projection room that did exist. The absence of the projection room immediately strikes Pilar. Pilar interjects exclaims, “I remember the stairs…” but our affable host is unaware of her excitement, forcing Pilar to keep her enthusiasm within her. Soon I find the opportunity Pilar is
waiting for, “So you remember the projection room.” This allows Pilar to express the happiness that is written on her face.

We [the kids] used to run up and down the aisles then we would go up the stairs to the projection room and poke our heads in, then the guy would say ‘come here, come here’ and he would let us in and show us the projection room. He was nice.

Figure 46: Back of Talebloo Antique Gallery- Single Vestige of the Projection Room

Pilar’s expression during her story conveys the distance that she is experiencing from the present. The room was transformed by Pilar’s memory and narrative. This is done inadvertently, but later she is active in her desire to recreate the theatre for my benefit. In the course of relating her narrative, Pilar is not present; in the present rather she is in the past. I attempt to support her recollection by asking her if she and the other children were ever reprimanded for being rambunctious. Pilar politely responds by saying, “Sometimes there were a few ushers and they didn’t say much.” Her brief response successfully shields her from the shadow that such a question casts on her blissful memories. Pilar’s interaction with the physical artifacts of the Happy Hour
Theatre elicit responses that are not easily influenced by my presence but they help her recreate her past for me.

The Happy Hour Theatre provided Pilar and the Honduran community a space in which they could form a sense of community. The theatre’s space surrounded the community with a familiar language and friends, allowing them to be in place. The language barrier effectively excluded the white majority giving Hondurans the power to make the white New Orleanian majority out of place.

The importance the theatre holds for the community is ignored in New Orleans history. Despite its cultural history the building itself has been deemed irrelevant to historical New Orleans architecture, as it is not featured in the *New Orleans Architecture Vol. 1: The Lower Garden District*. As a result, the building’s recorded history is brief. I encountered only one newspaper article that praised Bertrand Kiern and the Happy Hour Theatre for the live theatre and film that many New Orleanians enjoyed. There was no mention of the Hispanic patrons or the Spanish language films (Times Picayune 1959:24-25). The importance of the theatre to the history of the Honduran community would be lost were it not for the narratives of individuals like Pilar; although Pilar’s memories are her own she shares them with her family, her community and now with me. Pilar, like her parents is now reminiscing about her Honduran experience while others listen and share in her Honduran memories.

**Mando’s Honduras**

Mando built a new Honduras that resembled the home he left behind. This was not the simple transfer of ideas, but the creation of a distinct place that combined the many influences his routes had helped him absorb. His experiences in Miami made him
understand the difficulties of being deemed “out of place”. He also recognized the attachment that develops from feeling “in place”.

*Cuando ya venía el fin de semana, era una ansiedad horrible mano, que ya parecía que no iba llegar el Viernes, pero ya solo llegaba el Viernes y ya uno andaba volando ya para ver que es lo que iba hacer, donde íbamos ir a bailar, y allá se encontraba uno con todo el mundo. Eran unos nightclubs de comunidad, se podría decir, eran unos nightclubs únicos y exclusivos para nosotros.*

When the weekend was approaching, we were horribly anxious man, it almost seemed like Friday would never come, but as soon as Friday came we were flying to see what we were going to do, where were we going to go dancing, and there you would find everyone. They were nightclubs that were for the community, you could say, they were nightclubs solely and exclusively for us.

During the Seventies, Mando’s places were filled with music and dancing. He remembers the wonderful nights he spent dancing with his friends in places like *La Ronda, El Café Ole, El Mocambo, Los Gringos, La Boquita* and *El Chez Lounge*. They were the emotive places that made New Orleans his new home. When Mando arrived, he found his friends involved in the active negotiations of place making. He settled in and began negotiating his own places.


We would meet at Walgreens on Canal. If we were going to meet somewhere, it was going to be there. All you had to do was say, ‘Walgreens’ and everyone knew were it was. We would make our plans there.

Walgreens was prominent on Canal Street, ensuring that anyone invited was sure to arrive. Once everyone had congregated, they began discussions about the night’s festivities. They would decide between *La Ronda* and *El Café Ole* as they both played the musical chairs of nightclubs. One would fall out of favor only to have another replace it.
La Ronda featured Los Catracho Boys while El Café Ole featured Los Maya. According to Mando, Los Maya raised the bar for subsequent bands. Los Maya consisted of ten musicians and included a wind section, whereas previous bands had not been as advanced. Both nightclubs were located on Canal St. across the street from each other. Canal St. was not the only place offering Latin American nightlife. Magazine La Calle del Swing and Constance Street was also a force to be reckoned with. It was home to La Luna and La Carreta. The apartment Mando shared with his two roommates was located on Constance, a mere one block from Magazine St., placing Mando and his friends in the midst of the action. They could take a quick jaunt over to La Luna to see if they were interested in the atmosphere, and if it was not to their liking, they would jump on the streetcar and head to the downtown clubs like La Ronda, El Café Ole and Los Gringos on Bourbon St.

I think that the only time that I participated of a program that can be considered North American, was when we took a boat, the one that goes around the Mississippi, that leaves at 8:00 at night and returns at about 1 or 2 in the morning and there is a band playing and you eat and you eat dinner there and the boat goes and there is a dance floor and everything. But even with all of that and everything that it was a party, like an American party, with all of that Chobeto Moreida was playing there, a Honduran that was playing with the band, the band that played there at that dance was playing with a Honduran musician. So there was always a touch of Hispanic. I think that was why we went, to see Chobeto.
Mando’s places had to be saturated with Honduran symbols in order to be considered Hispanic. Despite the fact that he began his story believing he went to what he considered an American event, he soon realized that was not his intention. The Honduran singer made an “American” place comfortable and enjoyable for Mando. Although he believed New Orleanians were amiable, Mando took pleasure in the familiar. The people, the music and the dancing combined made him feel at home. His American places were consumed with business and not play. The things he truly enjoyed had that touch of Honduras that he could relish in. That is not to say that his experiences with New Orleanians were negative, but rather that they were inconsequential to his New Orleanian memories. He effectively marginalized them from the New Orleans that he created.

His American relationships were by-products of his migration. The community that he and other Hondurans formed was achieved through the interactions of the community. They actively participated in the symbols and practices that made places in which they could feel “in place”. They produce them, enjoy them, and reproduce them in narrative, in order to prosper and reinforce the identity that they have assumed and constructed. Mando understood the importance of producing such places because he was acutely aware of the personal destruction that feeling out of place could cause.

Como tres meses de haber venido, dos o tres meses, tenía diecinueve años, y mi mama estaba en Miami, y mis hermanas como estaban teenagers ellas iban a bailar a un lugar que se llamaba El Municipal Auditorium en Hialeah, y ya eran las diez de la noche, y entonces mi mama me dijo que fuera a traerlas, me mando a traerlas, que fuera al Municipal Auditorium, entonces yo fui al Municipal Auditorio a traerlas. Pero allí hay que pagar para entrar, entonces como no podía entrar a buscarlas para decirles que mi mama quería que se fueran ya para la casa me quede en la puerta y la puerta es de vidrio, viendo para dentro. Entonces llegó un policía y me dijo moo, moo. Como yo no sabía hablar inglés, para mi moo solo las vacas moo, las vacas va. Y yo no le entendí lo que me dijo entonces eh, y yo que no le podía explicar que yo ando buscando a mis hermanas para
que, para llevarlas para la casa, tampoco le podía explicar eso. Y no le entendí que es lo que me quiso decir con moo. Y quede allí, entonces vino y me agarro del pelo aquí, así. Era un policía como de seis cuatro grandísimo y fuerte. Me agarro de aquí me levanto me llevo y fue a tirar a la calle. A mi eso me dolió mucho, me dolió mucho mucho. Y digo yo puta y que fue lo que yo hice para que este policía se tomara la libertad de tratarme de esa manera. Yo no soy un perro soy un ser humano.

I had been here about three months, two or three months, I was nineteen, and my mother was in Miami, and my sisters since they were teenagers, they would go dance at a place called the Municipal Auditorium in Hialeah, and it was already ten at night, so my mom told me to go get my sisters and bring them home, she sent me to get them, to go the Municipal Auditorium, so I went to the Municipal Auditorium to get them. But you have to pay to get in, so since I couldn’t go in to look for them and tell them that my mom wanted them to go home. I stayed at the door and the door was made of glass, to look inside. So a police officer came and told me moo, moo. Since I didn’t know how to speak English, for me moo only the cows moo, the cows right. And I didn’t understand what he told me eh, and I couldn’t explain to him that I was looking for my sisters so that, to take them home, I also couldn’t explain that to him. I didn’t understand what he was telling me with moo. And I stayed there, so he came and grabbed me by the hair here, like this. He was a police officer that was about six four y was huge and strong. He grabbed me here and picked me up and he threw me in the street. That hurt me a lot that hurt me very very much. I say damn, what did I do for this police officer to take the liberty of treating me this way. I am not a dog I am a human being.

As Mando related this story to me I feel a greater understanding of Cresswell’s “in place/out of place” dichotomy. Mando became deeply aware of how out of place he was. This was not only a foreign land that Mando was trying to successfully maneuver through; rather, it became a place in which he was forced to stumble about. The police officer made it painfully clear to Mando that he was not worthy of this place. The officer’s own struggle to maintain his social order disrupted Mando’s struggle to maintain his own. Mando felt helpless and unworthy. His mind could not grasp the hatred being directed at him. How could a lack of understanding turn into such a demeaning episode? As a young man Mando was unable to deal with these injustices, which led to his
deteriorating sense of self. Fortunately, Mando was able to return to Honduras after only a few short years. Although he would continue to carry these painful memories, they would allow him to appreciate his experiences in New Orleans.

La verdad es que la gente de Nueva Orleans era en ese entonces era mucho mas abierta que el Americano, que Anglosajón, que vivía en Miami. Aquí en Nueva Orleans, aquí en Nueva Orleans la verdad es que cuando vine a Nueva Orleans me sentí mas en casa. Esa es la palabra mas correcta. Me sentí mas en casa.

The truth is that the people of New Orleans were in that time, they were much more open than the American, then the Anglo-Saxon, that lived in Miami. Here in New Orleans, here in New Orleans the truth is that when I came to New Orleans I felt at home. That is the most appropriate word. I felt at home.

New Orleans did become home to Mando. He was able to create a place through the interactions he engaged in with his community. This is a place he has helped make comfortable for himself and others. As a result he has not considered himself an outsider. Although Mando attributes this to the less hostile attitude of New Orleanians, I believe that the support the Honduran community generated and his light complexion, served to diminish the effects of any discriminations he might have experienced. I believe that for Mando it is difficult to judge the home in which he has been successful as intolerant. It was the many nights he spent dancing merengue, eating frijoles fritos con tortillas (refried beans and tortillas) and speaking Spanish without drawing contempt that produced the New Orleanian Honduras that he felt at home in.

Mando and Pilar have created a home with the Honduran community. They have managed to negotiate a New Orleans that is theirs. The comfort their places provide them allows them to now feel in place in some New Orleans. Creating these places in New Orleans has been a process that was accomplished only through the efforts of the
community. Having places in which they feel “in place” has allowed them to integrate themselves without losing their identity.
Chapter 5: The Identity Complex

The time that I spent with both Mando and Pilar exemplifies that identities are not simple; they are fluid and complicated. They are continually represented and placed actively. Identities are also only discovered and defined through shared stories. Narrative allows people to establish who and what played a role in shaping identity. People talk about their past and present discussing the elements that bring them together and also that which is disagreed upon. The agreed and disagreed upon rules allow them to maintain a visible Honduran presence. The people who tell stories, reminisce, dance and engage in other practices that define that culture define what is Honduran. This also has effectively allowed them to realize that Honduran and American are not mutually exclusive identities.

Pilar’s identity underwent many transformations and she has now become comfortable with the identities she has chosen and defined. She continues to redefine both her Honduran and her American identities through her artwork and interactions. She is now secure within the culture that protected her as a child, by embracing the community that embraces her. Her ability to remain appreciative of her parents’ commitment to teaching her their culture speaks to Pilar’s own commitment to fostering the community.

She also believes that in order for the community to mature, the Honduran community should join with the larger Hispanic community, and come together to gain the recognition they deserve. She tries to remain visible with her artwork, and by participating in projects she believes will not only be beneficial to her but to the community. She never forgot the impact the Mexican graffiti murals had on her. She also
hopes to inspire others both artistically and culturally, through her own photographs. Pilar believes that providing the places in which Hispanics can perform their Hispanic and Honduran identities is essential to maintaining both the Honduran and Hispanic cultures and making them visible throughout the United States.

Mando is also trying to keep the community in public view. He continues to write, paint and create places for himself and others that represent Hondurans. Mando believes that it is important to embrace the Hispanic identity in order to propel them. *La Asociacion de Hispanos Unidos de New Orleans* is an example of Mando’s own attempt to bridge the gap.

He has seen the community develop and he relishes in the opportunities he and others have to display their culture. Mando also wants to ensure the well being of the community, which is why he offers members of AHUNO the opportunity to benefit from the affordable health insurance the association offers. He would like to see the community support each other, and he hopes his association will set this example.

They are part of the future. Together, and alone, they will forge the way for future Hondurans living in the United States. For example, Pilar continually gives her nieces and nephews advice on the discrimination they may experience and the art that can help them through it. Mando counsels his children and grandchildren on their Honduran culture and its negotiations. He makes his family a part of his endeavors, effectively keeping them near to the community.

Both Pilar and Mando believe the community is being revitalized by a new generation. Pilar sees her nieces and nephews lament their own inability to speak Spanish. As a result, they are making a commitment to their children that the culture will
not stop with them. Mando’s grandchildren are also appreciating their involvement in the community. As his daughters grow older they too appreciate what they have learned from their Honduran culture. Mando has also seen his own identity transform itself and transform his community. He is a Honduran American whose heart is attached to the former but whose mind accepts the latter. He is also aware of the importance of the Hispanic identity and the benefits it affords his artistic endeavors.

**Honduran and Hispanic Arenas Today**

The community represents itself throughout New Orleans and is being recognized within the New Orleanian community for its contributions. A Latin American food festival is one such event that began in 1981. Padre Pedro Nuñez motivated many Hispanics in the area to attend St. Jerome church and to attend the festival. Padre Pedro, along with its largest sponsor Mensaje (message), which is the Hispanic office of the Communications Agency of the Archdiocese, founded the Mensaje Festival. Mensaje as it is referred to throughout the Hispanic community, has grown in size and magnitude. It has traveled from the Jefferson Downs racetrack to St. Jude Hospital’s parking lot to the stadium parking lot of New Orleans’ baseball team the Zephyrs. The festival features many internationally recognized Hispanic artists and local bands such as Los Sagitarios and Los Babies del Merengue. Booths representing various Latin American countries sell typical foods. The Hispanic community’s growth is reflected in the festival’s growth as it is now held for two weekends rather than one weekend a year since the mid-Ninties.

Two other forces that keep the community linked and informed today are KGLA Radio Mil, now Tropical Caliente and 830 La Fabulosa radio stations and Channel 10’s (the public access channel) De Todo Un Poco (A Bit of Everything) directed by Julio
Guichard. This television program features local artists and community celebrations occurring in the city. They have sponsored many Latin American events over the years. KGLA was particularly influential in the promotion of the Honduran artist Moises Canelas in New Orleans. The Hispanic population in New Orleans was essential to Moises Canelas’ career, and in return the community created more Honduran places during his concerts. The radio stations continue to sponsor various music festivals in both Latin nightclubs and parks. The radio stations along with the Hispanic newspaper *El Vocero News* keep the community informed about the important issues facing New Orleans and countries throughout Latin American, while also providing music and information on the latest Hispanic hot spots.

Latin nightclubs have played an integral role in the development of the community. The nightclubs Mando frequented as a young man and the nightclubs that many Hondurans enjoy today provide an arena in which they can engage in cultural practices. Some nightclubs cater solely to a Hispanic clientele while others feature “Latin Nights” once a week or a couple of times a month. *Salvatore’s Restaurant* and *Twi-Ropa* have now usurped clubs such as *El Silver Palace* and the *House of Blues*. Hondurans are not lacking the festive nightlife that allows them to enjoy the rhythms of their culture.

In conjunction with their festive nature, the community also exhibits their commitment to religion. This is exemplified by the connection between the *Mensaje* festival, which celebrates Hispanic popular culture, and the Catholic Church. Both St. Theresa of Avila and St. Jerome were instrumental in providing a place for worship and for uniting the Hispanic community. Despite the many revolving door of clergy members, both churches have continued to offer a Spanish language Mass and St. Theresa’s has a
yearly mass for La Virgen de Suyapa, Honduras’ Virgin Mary. Although this gesture may seem trivial, to many Hondurans and Hispanics it has been essential to their development. As my mother said, “Yo ya no iba a misa, pero volvi cuando daban la misa en Español. No me hallo en la misa en Inglés. (I no longer went to mass, but I returned when the mass was given in Spanish. I don’t feel comfortable at a mass in English.)” Although her religion never faltered, her ability to participate in rituals that were important to her faith were hindered. The church has helped and continues to help create networks that support the community. The Catholic religion is not the only one to reach out to Hispanics: Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Evangelical religions have also embraced and supported the community.

The Honduran Consulate is another a unifying force in the community. It has continually attempted to raise funds to aid Honduras in their time of need. Currently the Consulate hopes to raise money for Hondurans in New Orleans through various events throughout the area. It is also supporting its artists by exhibiting the artwork of various Honduran artists residing in both New Orleans and Honduras.

The Honduran community is energized by the general Hispanic culture as a whole. Hispanic culture is important in that their efforts afford others the same rights as the majority. The visibility that Hispanics have worked for and are enjoying is helping to ensure that future generations will not feel the pressure to assimilate. Although Hispanics are still discriminated against, they now have a voice to challenge such prejudices. They are being heard throughout the United States and their presence will continue to grow. Although many in the Honduran community want to be a part of the wider Hispanic community they want to retain the autonomy and the cultural practices specific to the
Honduran identity. The community determines whether or not this is possible through the constant reconstitution of their own identity.

The community seems to be thriving due to their own efforts. They have established a community that has actively buried their roots in New Orleans. They believed the route they were taking would lead them away from their roots in Honduras, instead they replanted themselves creating the support and history that has branched off from Honduras and connected them to New Orleans.
Chapter 6: Where Does This Lead Me or Leave Me?

Throughout the years I have questioned my own identity as a Honduran American or an American Honduran. Which am I, or am I only one of these identities? Do I have the right to choose, or do others choose my identity for me? And have I come closer to an understanding through this journey? I differ from both Pilar and Mando in that I was born in New Orleans and my Honduraness came only from what my parents have instilled in me, until I began establishing my own routes to and roots in Honduras. Does this make me less Honduran? I do not know the answer to this question.

What I do know is the trajectory of my life. I was born in Lakeside Hospital on November 1, 1978. My birth placed me in Metairie but we later moved to Kenner, where my parents’ Honduran friends were and everything that was Honduran surrounded me. I attended the Spanish Mass at St. Jerome church as early as I can remember. By the time I was born much of the community’s dispersal had already occurred, causing us to venture into the various cities surrounding New Orleans to seek out family and friends my mother and father befriended during their time in uptown New Orleans. Both my parents worked for Sasha and maintained close ties to the community. My own involvement was not necessarily of my own volition. These were the areas I knew because they took me there. This is not to say that I did not enjoy them. Rather, because of my young age I was unable to be active in seeking the Honduran culture out. This life replete with Hispanics was juxtaposed with a Private Catholic education that surrounded me with primarily white Americans.

Feeling in and out of place in both arenas was a common occurrence. I negotiated my way through these interactions in order to find my place in them. This was
confounded when my parents decided that I should visit my family in Honduras for the summer. At the age of eight I could not understand the importance their culture held to them. To me, it was who they were and not something they were trying to maintain and impart to me.

My response to my first foray into Honduran territory was not to my mother’s liking. I did not want to return, but my retorts fell on deaf ears. Fortunately, or unfortunately as I felt at the time, my mother happily planned my next summer trip. I would visit family in La Ceiba, San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, but this trip would cause my mother more problems than my insolence. For the next twelve years I pestered my mother incessantly wondering when my plane ticket would be booked and how long I would be allowed to stay in Honduras. Although pleased by my interest, this would compel her to send me every summer an expense not easily afforded. Much to my delight and appreciation my mother managed to send me every summer.

Did this mean I felt in place in Honduras and out of place in New Orleans? Not exactly. Being in Honduras three months out of the year only challenged the notions I had of my identity. I was and continue to be “la gringa” to my family in Honduras and surprisingly this label carried over to my Honduran family in New Orleans. I have come to terms with the fact that I will never shake this nickname. Although this nickname was created to pester me, I prefer to believe it is now used as a term of endearment. Upon my return to school, my New Orleanian schoolmates knew me as the “Honduran girl”. My brown hair, olive skin, brown eyes and curvaceous figure associated with Hispanic women in the United States, precluded me from ever being mistaken as “white”.
As a result, I felt in place and out of place in Honduras the country, in the Honduras I had fashioned for myself in New Orleans and in the American New Orleans that I participated in at school. I belonged everywhere and nowhere. So what am I? I have decided that I am both. I am not one more than the other or equal parts of both. I negotiate them and practice them based on the places in which I interact with others. I speak Spanish fluently, dance merengue and salsa, cook and eat arroz con pollo and tortillas con frijoles; but I also speak English and listen to rock music.

My cultural identity is fluid; I transform it. It is no longer bounded by space. Instead it is created with place. Its transformations and creation are a part of the community in New Orleans. These productions and representations have been most palpable in the weddings that I have attended. The Mass and receptions are a melding of cultures that represent bride and groom. I realized this as I was dancing at my friend’s wedding reception held at Pat O’Briens in the Jax Brewery on the Mississippi River in downtown New Orleans. The union of a Honduran American woman and a Georgian American man, it allowed me and others to create a Honduran American place through my memory and story of it.

My Honduran Place

Pat O’ Briens on the River is located on the third floor of the Jax Brewery. It is a large room that can comfortably fit 200 people. The doors open to the center of the room; this entrance divides the room and the cultures currently within it. Both sides had a buffet table and a full service bar. Los Sagitarios, a local merengue band, is on one side of the room, where the bride’s party is placed near the band.
This setting provides a stage in which to play out the cultures that fill the room. As soon as the music starts the dance floor becomes a jumble of moving bodies. Many Hondurans dance the afternoon away. Some American bodies are interspersed within the many Hondurans that are thoroughly enjoying the merengue and salsa rhythms the band so expertly produce. Although some Americans partake in the dancing many choose to enjoy the more subdued atmosphere away from the dancing.

The band is aware that they are playing to a Honduran audience, as they call out to the Hondurans, “Para todos los Hondureños (For all the Hondurans).” As the singer yells this, the Honduran dancers reply with enthusiastic shouting. This response demonstrates the elation of the many Hondurans at the reception, but they would not be the only ones to display their culture. The grand finale presents a New Orleanian tradition and also marks the end of the reception. The band plays the music that begins a second line procession behind the bride and groom.

That afternoon I witnessed and was a part of the creation of this Honduran American place. This place personified the redefining of identities. Their marriage united more than two people. It united the many cultural and national identities that interacted within it. I have come to understand that I too create these places and redefine identity for myself and with others.

Through these experiences and my own confusion, I have come to understand that I choose my identity in conjunction with others. We may not always agree but it is through the agreements and disagreements that we create a cultural identity. I am comfortable with being “la gringa” to some and the “Honduran girl” to others. The time I
spent with Pilar and Mando helped me understand that we are all continually negotiating our identities despite the labels we adopt.
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Vita

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