THE NEW ENGLAND LUSOPHONE ARCHIPELAGO:
A NEW READING OF AZOREAN-, CAPE VERDEAN- AND PORTUGUESE-
AMERICAN LITERATURE

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in English

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Washington, DC
May 1, 2015
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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a new conceptual framework for reading the cultural production of Portuguese-and Kriolu-speaking communities in the urban areas of southeastern New England: the New England Lusophone Archipelago. Combining insights from working-class studies, ethnic studies, and hip hop studies, it argues for the importance of developing a more intersectional approach to the cultural production of the region’s urban Lusophone communities. It applies this argument to two sets of contemporary life narratives from the Archipelago, one set written (memoirs) and the other musical (hip hop). By reading working-class Azorean-American and Cape Verdean-American life narratives in tandem, rather than as separate categories as has often been done, this thesis reveals shared formal/structural, generic, and experiential concerns rooted in the common challenges of representing specific urban place; exploring the linkages between work, place, and family; and adapting existing forms to express specific urban, working-class, Lusophone experiences that have previously been marginalized.

To accomplish this, this thesis explores memoirs by Joseph Conforti (2013), Charles Reis Felix (2004) and Belmira Nunes Lopes (1982) as well as songs and music videos by Chachi Carvalho and Sandro G. In exploring two very different forms of what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call the “life narrative,” this archive allows for a more complete reading of the complex, intersectional experiences of the Archipelago.
This thesis is too brief of a project to warrant something like an acknowledgements section where I tearfully thank a lot of people. I'm going to write one anyway, though. This project has grown not just from the knowledge I’ve been blessed to pick up along the scholarly way, at Brown and at Georgetown, from all of the brilliant people who walk the halls of those institutions and make them what they are, and whose influences I could not begin to sort out or catalog (all the same, special thanks to my advisor, Sherry Linkon, for her patience, invaluable suggestions, and wide, wide perspective; my second reader, Ricardo Ortiz, for always asking the right question; and to my undergrad advisor, Anani Dzidzienyo, for making academic work feel warm and meaningful), but also from the people and places I come from before all of that. For what it’s worth, then, this project wouldn’t have been possible without all the beautiful Azoreans, Azorean-Americans, Cape Verdeans and Cape Verdean-Americans I have lived with, learned with, fought with, and above all grown up with, in East Providence, Pawtucket, and Providence. It wouldn’t have been possible without the support from my wonderful partner, Stephanie Lim (사랑해), and my friends and housemates, Joe Muller and Hunter Jones. It most certainly wouldn’t have been possible without the Aguiars, the Furtados, the Smiths, and the rest of my family. And even putting words to paper wouldn’t have been possible without my grandfather, Arthur Medeiros Aguiar (como tu disse, o que não mata engorda; mas nós sentiremos a tua falta), and my mother, JoAnne Louise Aguiar, to whom words could never express my thanks or love.

If the words that follow mean anything, it is thanks to them; if they don’t, that’s on me.
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I. Whispers from the Archipelago: Reading Luso-American Literature in New England


- Onésimo T. Almeida, 1975

In southeastern New England, there is a series of islands undetectable to the untrained eye. They form an archipelago stretching from Cape Cod Bay in the east to Narragansett Bay in the west, with rocky outcroppings as far north as Massachusetts Bay. Or, to put it a different way, they stretch from just off the northwest coast of Africa through the middle of the Atlantic to the ragged coastline of southern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. To imagine this archipelago in still another way, it stretches from the roots of the Portuguese colonial project in the Azores and Cape Verde islands to the remnants of the American industrial revolution. These islands are not made of volcanic leftovers like their Atlantic cousins: they are made of wooden three-family houses, brick factory buildings, and chain link fences. They have names like Somerville, Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford, Providence, Pawtucket, and Warren. In these former mill towns, Azoreans and Cape Verdeans have built communities since the early years of the nineteenth century. Joined by a smattering of Madeirans, continental Portuguese, Brazilians, and Angolans, they form what I call the New England Lusophone Archipelago, an archipelago that might be thought of as paralleling, in diaspora, the original Azorean and Cape Verdean archipelagoes, the “homeland.”


2 “Lusophone” designates the people and cultures of the Portuguese-speaking world, much as Francophone and Anglophone designate global French- and English-speaking communities. “Luso-American,” derived from the Portuguese lusoamericano, designates specifically Portuguese-American; however, here I am expanding it to
These communities share more than their roots in the long Portuguese empire. Beyond the tangle of island accents, dialects and creoles, they share a common experience at the economic margins of New England. The struggle to thrive in the urban spaces of New England during its industrialization and subsequent deindustrialization has created a common basis of economic, ethnic, linguistic and in some cases racial otherness. In dialogue with dominant American culture, with Portuguese colonial practices, with the economic conditions of urban New England, and with the diverse people they share cities with, this archipelago has formed its own unique (sub)culture. While each of these Lusophone cultures retains the distinctness of its origins in places like São Miguel and São Nicolau, they have entered into dialogue with the cultures, people, and geography of southern New England to produce a distinct, though never monolithic, cultural commentary on their experiences.

In this thesis, I explore one crucial element of this cultural commentary: the life narrative. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson use the term “life narrative” to refer to “acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producers’ life as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, filmic, or digital” (4). By exploring a handful of life narratives created by first- and second-generation Azorean-, Cape Verdean-, and Portuguese-American writers and hip hop artists, I outline several important elements of contemporary culture within the Archipelago. While writers and artists from the diaspora use a variety of forms to tell their stories, life narratives produced in written form through memoir and orally/aurally through hip hop are particularly salient. These fields are crucial sites of cultural production for urban working- and poverty-class cultures in the contemporary United States, of which the Archipelago is a strong

include all speakers of Portuguese and its creoles in the United States. This is to avoid having to use an awkward word like “Lusophone-Americans,” which even then would still carry the suggestion of being an exclusively Portuguese-speaking population rather than a linguistically and culturally bilingual one. It’s imperfect, then, but I’m going with it.
example. I focus on three contemporary written memoirs, Charles Reis Felix's *Through a Portagee Gate* (2004) and Joseph Conforti’s *Another City Upon a Hill* (2013), and Maria Luisa Nunes’ and Belmira Nunes Lopes’ *A Portuguese Colonial in America* (1982). I also explore a range of recent songs and music videos by hip hop artists Chachi Carvalho and Sandro G. By exploring contemporary texts in these two important fields of production, I hope to place the cultural work of the Archipelago in dialogue with other contemporary working-class and ethnic cultures. I do this in order to articulate a place within scholarly discussion for a New England Lusophone community that does not halt at racial difference, but instead emphasizes intersectional identities grounded in urban space, labor, and culture. This is inherent both in the use of multiple critical perspectives not previously employed in the study of Luso-American literature (namely working-class and hip hop studies) and the use of the metaphor of the Archipelago. The Archipelago both emphasizes the spaces of the New England Lusophone diaspora, but also offers a way to link the tradition of thinking of the diaspora as the tenth or eleventh island in Azorean and Cape Verdean thought. I’ll say more on this later.

In order to do this, I pay particular attention to the ways hip hop and autobiography, as forms, allow their practitioners to challenge existing discourses. I argue that a common focus on memory, on stories about work, and on the importance of claiming particular urban spaces brings these texts together. Smith and Watson’s approach to the life narrative is useful here as it demands we pay attention to the life-writer as both subject and object of their discourse, creating space for a reading of the rich intersections of place, class, ethnicity and race inherent to the Archipelago. This approach contrasts with existing work in the field, which tends to separate

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3 For more on hip hop’s prominence in working-class communities, see especially Tricia Rose, Imani Perry, and Murray Forman. For more on the use of autobiography by working-class authors, see especially Renny Christoper, Claire Lynch, and Elizabeth Bidinger.

4 This text is the recorded and transcribed oral narrative of Belmira Nunes Lopes, as recorded by her niece Maria Luisa Nunes.
Azorean- and Cape Verdean-American works and to read the all-important dash not as designating a new space—the Archipelago—but instead as a point of connection between discrete experiences. I argue that we must read Cape Verdean-, Azorean-, and Portuguese-American life writing as connected, and that we should read them through the theoretical lenses of hip hop studies, working-class studies, and ethnic studies, which offer insights into the intersectional identities of the Archipelago that a discussion that ignores them cannot. Doing so not only brings the insights of these academic fields into the field of Luso-American studies, but also highlights the place of Luso-American cultural producers in these fields. This thesis does nothing so big as suggest a new field; rather, it suggests that this field has existed since Cape Verdeans, Azoreans, and continental Portuguese first lived and worked together in New Bedford, and that it is time we begin to explore it in an academic context. In the sections that follow, I first offer a brief history of the diaspora; I then offer a brief history of the field of Luso-American Studies; and finally, I suggest the intervention this thesis aims to make in that field.

Atlantic Crossings: A brief history of the Archipelago

If Azorean legend is right, there has been movement between the Azores and the coast of New England since at least 1487, five years before Columbus’s famed “discovery.” The same seaward gaze that led Portuguese
settlers to the Azores in 1427 led members of the island colonies further west to the shores of present-day New England and Newfoundland in 1472, 1487, or 1492, depending on the source. While these stories are dismissed by contemporary historians as unverifiable, they are an important jumping-off point for the brief history of the Lusophone Archipelago I hope to provide here. Even if unfounded and apocryphal, these narratives suggest long-standing links between Portugal’s Atlantic colonial projects in the Azores, and later in Cape Verde, and the northeastern coast of the United States. They establish a starting date for the trans-Atlantic movements that would take place between these points over the ensuing five centuries. These movements would align the Azores so closely with its North American diaspora as to provoke a liberation movement that seriously threatened secession from Portugal to become part of the United States. They would spark such widespread emigration from Cape Verde that today the population of Cape Verdeans in the States matches that in the islands. For Cape Verdeans and Azoreans, movements across the Atlantic to North America and back have been important aspects of life for centuries.

While the first Portuguese settlers in the United States were Sephardic Jews escaping the religious persecution of seventeenth-century Iberia, the first Azoreans and Cape Verdeans were young men escaping, by choice or by force, the isolated farming and fishing economy of the islands. The booming whaling trade in the North Atlantic relied on the Atlantic islands—the Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde and the Canaries—as a source for fresh water, fresh supplies, and fresh sailors. While many of these sailors returned to the islands after a voyage, others chose to remain in the United States. The 1870 U.S. census notes 4,434 immigrants from the Atlantic Islands in the United States, the majority of them in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut.

and New York.\(^6\) Azorean and Cape Verdean immigrants built strong, if small, communities in the whaling towns of southern New England throughout the century, with significant concentrations in the ports of New Bedford, Boston, Gloucester, and Provincetown, Massachusetts. This first major wave of migration—the genesis of the Lusophone Archipelago in New England—emerged squarely from the labor economics of the North Atlantic. Unable to recruit enough willing seamen at home, New England whaling captains recruited or coerced Azorean and Cape Verdean men to join their voyages. This experience has created a closeness between the experiences of these otherwise distinct national groups, and has further distinguished them from prototypical white-ethnic migration narratives, on the one hand, and from the African-American experience, broadly conceived, on the other.

The second major wave of immigration from the islands followed a trajectory that was similar to contemporary migrations from Europe. However, the pre-existence of small communities in New England created something akin to a chain migration, with new arrivals from the islands generally joining these existing communities. The Lusophone migration was also much smaller, too small in fact to register on the same national scale as Italian, Jewish, Chinese, Mexican, or other large migrations. In the early decades of the twentieth century, tens of thousands of Azoreans and Cape Verdeans left the islands to work in the textile mills of southern New England. The opening of steamship lines from Ponta Delgada to Boston in 1902 and from Ponta Delgada, Angra do Heroismo, and Horta to Providence in 1911 drove a significant wave of immigration from the Azores. As Pap explains, “the haphazard migration of Portuguese males as whalers was quickly replaced by the large and frequent immigration of

\(^6\) Pap notes that these figures are likely too low because of confusion between the Portuguese Atlantic Islands, continental Portugal, the Spanish-occupied Canary Islands, and the islands of Cape Verde. See Pap, *The Portuguese-Americans*: 32-34.
individuals as well as whole families as paying passengers in steerage” (40). Once in New England, Azoreans expanded existing communities in New Bedford and Boston (Cambridge) and established new communities in Fall River, Brockton, Taunton, Pawtucket, Warren, and Providence. They worked primarily in the textile mills, though some also worked in agriculture, and helped drive tremendous growth in the New England textile industry in the early decades of the twentieth century. 

By 1930, there were over 60,000 Portuguese-born residents of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, primarily Azoreans, and over 80,000 second-generation Portuguese-Americans (83).

Meanwhile, Cape Verdean-owned steamship service from Fogo beginning in the 1910s drove immigration during the early decades of the century, bringing tens of thousands of Cape Verdeans to New England and New York by 1921. It is difficult, however, to pinpoint the exact number of migrants from Cape Verde during this period due to U.S. record-keeping practices. Because Cape Verde was a Portuguese colony until 1975, early U.S. census data lists Cape Verdeans alongside Azoreans, Madeirans, continental Africans (Angolans, Guineans, etc.) and continental Portuguese, all residents of the Portuguese empire. The structuring ideology of the Portuguese Empire, the ultramar, claimed African and Asian colonies not as colonies, but rather as “overseas provinces” of the Portuguese nation. The Estado Novo would claim that Mozambique was as much a part of Portugal as Trás-os-Montes, and that Luandinos were as Portuguese as Lisboetas. The application of the American racial binary further obscured data, as Marilyn Halter notes. U.S. immigration officials attached racial tags to Cape Verdean immigrants based on their phenotypical appearance: “those seeming to resemble the ‘white’

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7 An interesting exception to this trend of urban industrial work is the recruitment of significant numbers of Cape Verdean migrant to the cranberry fields of southeastern New England. See Halter, Between Race and Ethnicity: 18-19.
European type were classified as Portuguese, while the remainder were grouped under the categories of ‘black Portuguese’ or ‘African Portuguese’” (35). This misnaming of data highlights an important point of difference within the Archipelago. Cape Verdeans are, as Halter suggests, one of the only African ethnic groups to willingly migrate to the United States in significant numbers during the nineteenth century. American racial codes, unable to accommodate them as a distinct multiracial ethnic group, instead folded them into an ethnic category that would become white (“Portuguese”) or, more often, marked them solely as raced subjects, “black.”

From the passage of the quota law in 1921 until the Immigration Rights Act of 1965, immigration to the United States from the Azores and Cape Verde practically stopped. During the same period, a series of failed strikes, price fluctuations in the cotton market, and the availability of cheaper labor in the southern states destroyed the New England textile industry. When the next significant wave of immigration occurred after the repeal of the quota law, migrants would arrive in the same cities but experience fundamentally different conditions in the United States. The Azores and Cape Verde, meanwhile, suffered from the increasingly neglectful governance of the corporatist Estado Novo in Portugal, which did little to contribute to the economic or social development of the archipelagoes. Thus immigrants continued to come from the archipelagoes, fleeing forced service in Portugal’s colonial wars, high unemployment, volcanic eruptions in the case of some Azorean islands, and widespread drought in Cape Verde. Yet by then the relatively well-paid work of textile production in the mills of Providence,

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8 The confusion provoked by the inability of American racial categories to accommodate the people of the Portuguese empire is striking: depending on phenotypical appearance, an Azorean immigrant might be classified as “Portuguese,” as an “Atlantic Islander” (a category which included the Spanish Canary Islands), as an “Azorean,” or perhaps as a “Brava” (a Cape Verdean from the island of Brava); a Cape Verdean might fall into any of these categories except, perhaps, “Portuguese,” in addition to those cited by Halter above.

9 For more on the history of ethnic and racial identity in New England’s Lusophone communities, see Matthew Moniz.
Pawtucket, Fall River and New Bedford was slowly being replaced by poorly-paid garment production or service work. While Lamphere, Silva and Sousa note that, in the late 1960s, the industry experienced a short-lived revival, by the mid-1970s it entered a steep decline. By 1993, the unemployment rate in the Providence-Fall River-Warwick RI-MA metropolitan statistical area was 11%; in 2013 it would reach 13%. In urban core areas like Providence, Pawtucket, and Fall River, the rate has reached double that in recent years (Bureau of Labor Statistics). The once-thriving industrial centers that formed the bedrock of the Archipelago have fallen into the familiar pattern of deindustrialization, with low employment, high crime and low educational success rates. In a region of relatively high employment, the urban centers of southern New England consistently rank highest in unemployment and lowest in educational attainment.

“Instead of tossing burned-out mill residue into the tumbling [Quequechan R]iver’s foam, as I had for years,” Joseph Conforti writes, “Fall River youth now fell back on another local rite of passage: defiantly hurling stones at the windows of abandoned and half-empty mills” (29). As went Fall River, so went New Bedford, Brockton, Providence, Pawtucket, Taunton and the other mill cities of the Archipelago.

In these diasporic communities, Azoreans and Cape Verdeans have tended to live in close proximity, if not together. But while in nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts they are often treated interchangeably (thus, perhaps, the U.S. government’s confusion in designating census terms), as the century moved on things began to shift. Simply put, many people who claim descent from continental Portugal or the Azores do not consider themselves linked in any very strong way with people of Cape Verdelan descent; and many people of Cape Verdean

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descent do not consider themselves particularly linked with people of Azorean or Portuguese descent. This dis-identification has come about in the diaspora and in the post-colonial period, and represents, most likely, a break with how Azoreans and Cape Verdeans thought of each other in centuries past. Belmira Nunes Lopes, in her wisdom, describes the process like this:

My father used to say that whenever the Cape Verdean sailors arrived in any of the Azorian [sic] Islands and landed, they were received with great enthusiasm by the people of the Island. There was never any trace of rejection, there was never any trace of prejudice against Cape Verdeans. When they came to this country [the United States], they discovered that race was quite an issue here, and that darkness of skin was a terrific handicap in this country. Most Azorians have not as much African blood as we have….Consequently, when the Azorian thought that he might be identified as a Cape Verdean…the Azorian did not want to be considered as one of them or from the same origin as Cape Verdeans (204).

For Nunes Lopes, the project of Cape Verdeans becoming not-Portuguese has been as much a product of the American racial binary as of the decolonization process. For Cape Verdean-Americans, she suggests, their rejection by the more numerous, and more readily “white” Azoreans constituted a break. “From that rejection of us by the Azorians,” she says, “Cape Verdeans in large measure then began to feel that if the Azorians did not want to believe we were the same people, we did not need them” (204).

In this project, I suggest that we push this racial binary aside, for a moment, and explore the ways cultural production from Azoreans and Cape Verdeans in the Archipelago intersect rather than pull apart. I do so knowing that it doesn’t work 100% of the time, and that it sidesteps important discussions about what the imposed racial binary of the U.S. has done to the way
Atlantic Islanders interact with each other in diaspora. Still, I think it is important to do so: for all the power this binary has had to divide, it has not been able to separate Azoreans and Cape Verdeans, white and black, so neatly as it would claim to.

This brief historical survey offers a glimpse into the history of migration, labor, ethnic, racial and economic marginalization that is critical to an understanding of the Archipelago’s cultural production. It is particularly important that readers not familiar with the diaspora’s contours, in New England or in the Atlantic, keep such crucial information in mind while reading. The complex patterns of trans-Atlantic migration that characterize the Azorean- and Cape Verdean-American experience, while they share much in common with the typical narrative of American immigration, differ in significant ways. Due to the continuous nature of migration from the Atlantic Islands, narratives of “white” ethnicity that rely on an implicit pattern of halted migration and assimilation simply do not work for Azorean- or Cape Verdean-Americans. Communities like New Bedford and Fall River have been home to successive waves of migrants from the islands for the past one hundred and fifty years.

Figure 2. The Lusophone Archipelago, courtesy Google Maps
years and continue to welcome large numbers of immigrants from the Azores and Cape Verde as well as, in more recent years, Brazil. This process has created large, multi-generational Lusophone and Luso-descendant communities throughout the region, communities whose experiences—“rife with ambiguities, disagreements, and contradictions,” as Matthew Moniz has suggested—are best viewed through a kaleidoscopic, rather than a narrowly prescriptive, lens (411).

An archipelago, a tenth island, or a L(USA)land?: writing Lusophone New England

The field of Portuguese-American studies has been categorized by its most important scholar, Onésimo T. Almeida, as being rather like an M.C. Escher drawing. This metaphor is apt because it highlights both the complexity of elements within the field and the way, from a distance, it tends to look more unitary than it actually is. This is not the only useful metaphor Almeida offers, though. In his influential L(USA)lândia: a décima ilha, Almeida applies the longstanding metaphor/myth of the “tenth island” to structure his reading of Portuguese-American literature. Almeida argues that the existence in North America of primarily Azorean-American enclave cities creates a sense of cultural commonality and security among immigrants. His “L(USA)lândia” refers to a specific grouping of urban spaces, primarily in the northeast of the United States, as well as to the culture produced in these spaces by Azorean immigrants and their offspring. He refers specifically to three New England cities—East Providence, Fall River, and New Bedford—as centers of the cultural constellation.\textsuperscript{11} Almeida emphasizes the networks

\textsuperscript{11} Almeida notes also the existence of other Azorean-American communities throughout New England and the provinces of Ontario and Quebec in Canada, as well as in California and Hawaii; of Portuguese-American (continental) communities in New York and New Jersey; and of Cape Verdean-American communities in
of contact that run through and link these communities and that make it possible to “live in L(USA)lândia entirely in Portuguese,” working at a factory with a Portuguese foreman, shopping at a Portuguese market, watching Portuguese and Brazilian television, reading Portuguese local newspapers, and buying Portuguese books and magazines at a Portuguese bookstore (21). Almeida conceives of L(USA)lândia as a largely inward-focused diaspora. It is a place—and it is crucial to emphasize this, that L(USA)lândia is a place that exists in specific cities and suburbs—where Azorean immigrants can live surrounded by other Azorean immigrants and by Lusophone culture. L(USA)lândia is thus primarily an articulation of an Azorean diaspora very much like other American diasporas.

Yet, as Nancy Baden argues, these communities are also constantly engaged with the communities that surround them. Almeida’s focus, Baden suggests, is primarily on Azoreans and their diasporic kin rather than on a broader American public: as she suggests, “he is not trying to articulate the needs, aspirations, and frustrations [of the community] to the broader American public” but rather to speak to Portuguese-speaking (and -reading) publics in North America, Azores and continental Portugal (21). For Baden, then, the defining aspect of Almeida’s imagined community is its parentheses: the United States is a note, a parenthetical location for diaspora but not a primary site for cultural engagement. Indeed, a key tension running through the small field of Portuguese-American studies since its inception has been the divide between Portuguese-focused and American-focused criticism. The former has tended to dominate. Reinaldo Silva, for example, explores representations of Portuguese people in American

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12 Almeida writes: “Assim, é possível viver-se no mundo da L(USA)lândia completamente em português: trabalhar numa fábrica com chefes portugueses…seguir na televisão a telenovela brasileira ou a portuguesa; ler jornais portugueses locais…ir a uma livraria portuguesa comprar livros e jornais portugueses…” See L(USA)lândia: a décima ilha: (21-2).
literature in an extensive book-length study without consistently employing an American-focused comparative framework. His invaluable catalogue of stereotypes applied to people of Portuguese descent—“They are depicted as tight-fisted, miserly people who would rather pinch pennies than spend their money on decent clothes and living conditions…[they have] a propensity to alcoholism and squandering money on cheap liquor, or they are associated with criminal activity…”—is thus denied the kind of contextualizing that would place it in dialogue with similar ethnic stereotypes being produced at the same time (*Representations* 5).

Those critics who have situated their analysis within an explicitly American framework have still tended to work with troublingly dyadic, either-or constructions. The opposition of immigrant to first-generation, for example, has been a common underlying principle. By reading the work of Lusophone diasporic communities as if they could easily be divided into that which takes place “over there” and that which takes place “over here,” such criticism ignores the complexity of multi-generational migrant communities. It lends itself to the kind of criticism that reduces ethnic life narratives to reportage or ethnography. Drawing on Boelhower, Carmen Ramos Villar has suggested that this pattern helps turn works into “entries into a ‘list’ which are ranked and categorized as either mainstream or ethnic, thereby perpetuating the debate about where to draw the line between the distinction of universal and particular, ethnic and American” (“Writing the Home” 203). The attempt to read the diverse cultures of the Archipelago through an oversimplified binary reproduces the same distortion and compression that the American racial binary has inflicted on these cultures. It cannot be tolerated.

Steps have been taken, however, to address this deficiency. Kimberley DaCosta Holton and Andrea Klimt’s edited volume *Community, Culture and the Makings of Identity: Portuguese-Americans along the Eastern Seaboard* (2009), as its title suggests, offers both a
region-specific and a multi-disciplinary approach to the field. Holton and Klimt’s volume seeks a scope focused enough for “documenting the complex and varied histories of communities along the Northeastern seaboard” but also wide enough to “include intersections with the communities of Brazilians, Cape Verdeans, and African retornados that co-populate the region” (11). Their work, and the work of the authors collected in this crucial volume, suggests the necessity of re-framing Portuguese-American studies in much the same way scholars have re-framed the very notion of the Portuguese nation. While attempts to reframe Portugal itself as “multinational” are complicated by the still very much living ghosts of the Empire, it is undeniable that “communities of people from both the Portuguese metropole and a myriad of one-time Portuguese colonies have settled alongside one another in the U.S.” (Holton and Klimt 10). 13 If Anglo-American ideas of nation are not adequate to account for the complexity of post-colonial Portugal, neither are Anglo-American ideas of discrete ethnic and racial identity entirely up to the task of exploring the Luso-American world.

Zooming in further from DaCosta Holton and Klimt’s global framing to my own intensely local focus on New England does not make the field any less complex. It is marked by conflicting and intersecting nationalities, ethnicities, languages and citizenship statuses that are not easily reducible. Almeida, who could never be accused of being a simplistic thinker, writes:

Thus, various sets of realities slowly transform themselves into something else.

They start as a branch of Portuguese literature with a particular shade that makes its mark as Azorean literature which, through an American connection, allows

13 One of the key features of Portugal’s corporatist Estado Novo was its insistence that colonies like Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Macau, and others were not colonies but rather part of “o ultramar,” the overseas, constitutive (though not contiguous) parts of the nation of Portugal. This, when combined with the distinct racial and ethnic categories (the same that would produce the idea of “lusotropicalismo”), challenges Anglo-American and French notions of a clear, hard distinction between the metropolitan state and the colony, at least in conceptual terms, if not always in practice
osmotic penetration of American culture. This intersection slowly dissolves into American writing with a Portuguese (Azorean) flavor, a mimetic repetition of precisely what happened to the Portuguese who ventured out to the islands and far beyond to North American shores (“Portuguese-American Literature,” 734).

Even here, though, Almeida still deals only with Azorean-American literature, treating Cape Verdean-American literature as a distinct and separate, though related, field. Nor does he approach the cross-cutting differences in class, region, and phenotypical appearance that further complicate understandings of “Portuguese” as a singular identity. As Ramos Villar has noted, the use of the term Portuguese “goes beyond…describing people who emigrated from mainland Portugal to include people from the former Portuguese colonies, with very different experiences and perceptions of the world” (203). Distilling all of this complexity into a workable project of cultural criticism is not an easy task. I hope, however, by focusing in on a relatively small area and on a specific set of working-class experiences, to contribute to this larger project.

While it is still not agreed upon whether there is such a thing as Portuguese-American literature—never mind the particular concept of a Lusophone Archipelago I offer here—the nascent field offers wonderful opportunities for exploration and expansion. This is particularly the case when Lusophone American writers are placed in conversation with other contemporary “ethnic” American writers, and with the rich theoretical frameworks offered by working-class studies, ethnic studies, and hip hop studies. By reading the works I explore here within these theoretical frameworks, I hope to leave the dominant trend, noted by Ramos Villar, of focusing on the “Portuguese immigrant author” and his (it is, most often, his) “narrative experience” and

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instead focus on the experience of Luso-American communities (“Janus and the Portuguese Immigrant” 233). I hope, in other words, to take a body of critical work that primarily faces out across the Atlantic or in on itself and suggest that it instead face the American continent. By insisting on situating this body of work within the specific urban environments of southern New England, I hope to underscore the importance of this localness to understanding the works produced in the Archipelago. At the same time, I am well aware that the handful of cultural texts I explore here are, like the islands themselves, just the uppermost tips that have pushed themselves up out of the water. More work than this brief thesis will be necessary to understand the complex intersectional experiences expressed in the cultural work of the Archipelago.

**Cinco pontos: Tracing a path through the Archipelago**

It is important when writing about working-class people and cultures that academics write in accessible ways. I want to state here, then, in the clearest terms possible, the way my argument will be developed and what its most important aspects are. In order to make clear the underlying basis of my claim that such a thing as a New England Lusophone Archipelago exists, I make a series of five arguments, each feeding into the next and coming to what I feel is a climax with the fifth and final point. These five arguments are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather are meant to suggest places for further growth in the still-growing field of Luso-American literary studies. By the same token, these characteristics are not meant to be exclusive to the works studied here. Indeed, as each point suggests in its own way, these themes are present

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15 Carmen Ramos Villar, Francisco Cota Fagundes and José I. Suárez have all made important contributions to our understanding of the Portuguese *immigrant* autobiography, as such, in both English and Portuguese. While I too am interested in the experience of immigrants, not solely their American-born offspring, I hope to focus on how their texts engage with the “American.”
throughout a range of works by working-class, Latin@, African-American, and white ethnic writers. Their prevalence strengthens the case for reading the works considered here through the constellation of the Archipelago. It is by working through analytic insights from hip hop studies, working-class studies, and ethnic studies—fields that have been given limited attention by students of Luso-American literature to date—that I hope to make my intervention. With this in mind, I suggest the following key arguments.

First, (i.) life narratives from the Archipelago reflect a critical engagement with the experiences of labor and, increasingly, its absence. This engagement places these texts squarely within the tradition of working-class cultural production. While the communities of the Archipelago are not exclusively working class, all of the texts examined here reflect the kind of deep engagement with labor, economic marginalization, and urban deindustrialization typical of contemporary working-class narratives. Life narrators from the Archipelago are continuously engaged in the process of thinking about and remembering labor, their own and that of their communities. They carry what Janet Zandy terms the “hump of labor” into their literary works in order to work through the implications of physical labor, their own and others’, past and present (39). Nor do these authors simply bring workers or work into their texts: because the workers in these texts are the writers themselves, their parents, and their friends, the worker is subject rather

16 As my friend Joe Muller pointed out, using white ethnic here reinstates, to some degree, the dynamic I’m trying to avoid. I have to admit, though, that short of saying “European, North African, and Middle Eastern—descent people who are still not quite white enough for America,” I’m not sure how to offer a general category that would encompass Luso-Americans, Jewish-Americans, Syrian-American, etc. So for lack of a more accurate shorthand, I’m going to have to keep using white ethnic.

17 I choose not to work within a specific definition of working-class culture here in order to avoid fraught and unproductive discussions of who/what can and cannot claim working-class identities. Rather, I consider these forms of labor—urban, industrial and post-industrial, concerned primarily with work and survival—self-evidently working-class. This is a risky choice in some ways, but I think it’s preferable to spending an extended period engaging with the existing debate over who, exactly, might be considered working class. As Linkon and Russo note, “defining who is or is not working class is a slippery, complex task, and class as a concept carries multiple, contradictory, and complimentary meanings” (Russo and Linkon 11).
than object of discourse.\textsuperscript{18} Whether through Joseph Conforti’s memories of industrial Fall River or the post-industrial crime work of Sandro G, each of these authors foregrounds labor as a critical element of their works. These texts thus offer crucial insights into New England working-class experience more broadly, not simply commentaries on a particular “ethnic” experience.

Because of this focus on physical labor, each of these narratives is (ii.) \textit{deeply embedded in the particular working-class spaces of urban New England}, and particularly within its small, postindustrial mill cities. As acts of memory and creation, these narratives engage deeply with the material conditions that make their production possible. They are, following Smith and Watson, “implicated in the materiality [of their context], whether it be the materiality of sound, stone, text, garment, integrated circuits and circuit boards, or the materiality of [their] very bodies” (27). Cities like Fall River, New Bedford, Pawtucket and Somerville serve not as industrial-chic backdrops or framing devices but rather as the spaces that give birth to these narratives. This attentiveness to local is typical of working-class post-industrial culture broadly, and working- and poverty-class urban cultures specifically. As Russo and Linkon suggest, these cultures tend to be “closely tied to place, because the forms and structures of work, the way class intersects with ethnicity and race, and the language of class are shaped by the industries that tend to dominate particular places” (13). First establishing and then exploring the link between people, place and labor is a critical mission of each of the texts we explore here. These links, however, do not function in the same way across time and space. As the Archipelago has encountered the economic and social shifts of deindustrialization over the course of the twentieth century, its cultural producers have been forced to respond in new ways. Part of the project at

\textsuperscript{18} For an extensive discussion of the foregrounding of the worker-subject in working-class texts, see especially Janet Zandy, “In the Skin of a Worker, or, What Makes a Text Working Class,” \textit{Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).
hand, then, is to trace the way the function of place changes in these narratives, from the earliest ones, which come from as far back as the 1880s, to the most contemporary. The metaphor of the Archipelago helps not only to capture links to the Atlantic islands, but also to underscore the degree to which the culture, while it remains engaged with its own discrete spaces, also engages and works through change. Thinking of these communities as belonging to an Archipelago marks not just spatial difference, but perhaps also difference in time.

This rootedness in the local (iii.) allows these narratives to challenge common misconceptions of the urban, ethnic, working and poverty class experience as it applied to the people of the Archipelago. Authors challenge the universalization of the working-class subject—the creation of generalized “workers” and “classes” rather than particular people—by emphasizing their position as individuals marked by class, race, ethnicity and, crucially, space. Asserting their individuality through discrete economic and cultural practices, they challenge their own objectification. Chachi Carvalho’s representation of the specific urban spaces of Pawtucket and Providence allow him to mount a powerful challenge to the universalizing “iconic ghetto” that equates hip hop with a particular form of abject blackness. Carvalho doesn’t limit himself to the iconic American ghetto, though: he speaks to us from Cape Verde as well, visually and aurally emphasizing his free movement between spaces. Carvalho, Sandro G and other artists insist that we read their work in a specific spatial, racial and cultural context, but also that we acknowledge their freedom to move outward from this and to lay claim to spaces beyond the city. While I am hesitant to emphasize this third point, as it forms the backbone of arguments

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19 I use the notion of the “iconic ghetto” as developed in several works by Elijah Anderson. I discuss this at some length in the section on hip hop.

20 While many authors have explored the strange dyad of domestication and universalization that is so often applied to the poor/working class and people of color, I draw this conception specifically from Richard Iton’s In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics & Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
that see “ethnic” life writing as primarily a matter of testimony, reportage, or ethnography, it still has some critical use left in it.

It also helps me move to the fourth point I would like to make. The life narratives explored here mount these challenges primarily by (iv.) engaging with established generic modes of self-presentation. Conforti, Reis Felix, and their older, second-generation contemporaries revise and extend the ethnic assimilation narratives prominent in American ethnic autobiography for much of the twentieth century. These narratives, as Laura Browder argues, are primarily concerned with stating “a case for citizenship and for the value of the ethnic self,” a project full of cross-cutting purposes (4). By engaging in acts of remembering their immigrant parents and the Lusophone communities of their childhood, these authors bring forward a prematurely foreclosed discourse about “white” ethnicity in the United States. They ask us to look again at their moment of “becoming white,” and point out both its complexity and its incompleteness. They ask us to take a step back in time to a previous generation of ethnic autobiography in order to reflect more critically on our present moment. Carvalho and Sandro G, meanwhile, engage explicitly with conversations about working-class criminality, racial othering, and urban poverty that have become central to contemporary hip hop. Their engagement with generic conventions should further remind us that these texts are literary, and that we can never rest easily on the assumption that a given character is “a mouthpiece” for a particular political or cultural project.  

By focusing on labor, these texts foreground place; by foregrounding place, they challenge notions of urban working-class life based in devaluations of the “ghetto” or

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21 Ramos Villar’s reading of Through a Portagee Gate in her article “Writing the Home” is particularly insightful in the way it pushes aside such readings of the character Joe Felix as “a mouthpiece through which we learn about how and why the immigrant sees the world around him the way he does” (200). More on that later.
neighborhood; in challenging these notions, artists from the Archipelago engage with a range of established generic modes of self-presentation. From this last emerges the fifth, final, and I believe most important argument I make here: (v) while engaging with the autobiographical “self” that defines much American life-narrating, the artists of the Archipelago insist on always connecting that self to the larger community. If emphasizing labor and place allows these artists to emphasize community, then emphasizing community in turn allows them to shift the narrating voice from the single, exceptional narrator to one empowered to speak for a community. Yet these characters do not speak as a representative “we” either. Their voice is simultaneously their own, that of their parents, that of their community, and that of their city. It is, again, a voice that is not unique to the Archipelago, but one that is present in a range of working-class cultural constellations.

Collectively, these pieces of life writing create a nuanced and deeply intersectional vision of the New England Lusophone Archipelago and the experiences of space, class, language, race, and ethnicity that cross-hatch it. Each of these five points draws on the one before it and connects with the one after it, mirroring the kind of intersections that make up the Archipelago. It is impossible to read any single aspect of the Archipelago in isolation, so I try to avoid the pitfall of taking any of these points in isolation. To this end, the following section explores two written memoirs of urban working-class New England at mid-century, Charles Reis Felix’s *Through a Portagee Gate* and Joseph Conforti’s *Another City Upon a Hill*. In richly layered accounts, both authors explore the work-lives of their fathers and the way that work was situated within working-class communities. These texts, which engage in similar processes of remembering place and labor in gendered, classed ways, will be complicated by a reading of Maria Luisa Nunes’ recorded transcription of her aunt’s autobiography, *A Portuguese Colonial in America*. In
order to provide a sufficiently narrow focus, I have chosen to exclude non-New England memoirs, as well as memoirs written in Portuguese rather than English and one recent collection of linked short stories, Brian Sousa’s *Almost Gone*. The section immediately following focuses on the hip hop of Chachi Carvalho and Sandro G in order to explore the possibilities of labor, place and memory in the contemporary moment. Here too I have chosen to narrow my focus by exploring only the two most prolific New England-based Lusophone emcees, excluding other artists such as Hex, Elji, Petcha, and others. Both chapters will focus on the way life writers engage with and challenge the generic conventions of their chosen medium. Finally, I will conclude this thesis with a moment of reflection, a more personal counterpoint as it were to the theoretical, scholarly framing that this first section provides.
II. Paying Dues in LUSAlândia: Reworking Memory, Reworking Place

“He is gone now,” Charles Reis Felix begins his memoir. “His shop is gone. Weld Square is gone. His life has been wiped clean off the board. But I wake in the night and I see his face and I hear his voice” (xv). Felix’s father, like the other residents and workers of New Bedford’s Weld Square, has been erased. An urban development project has severed the square from the working-class Luso-American neighborhood it was once the core of. The shops are gone. The people Felix remembers in his memoir have left too, and most of the buildings have been abandoned, burned or demolished. With these changes to people and space, the area has become unrecognizable. “The whole block had disappeared,” Felix writes, “but I knew exactly where his shop had been…His shop was right there, at a right angle from me” (471). First signed over to the city for tax relief and then burned down, his father’s shop has disappeared and taken with it every trace of the man and his work, except those which Felix can call back through memory. The physical work of the father has been erased, and the only thing that can restore it is the memory-work of the son.

Reis Felix’s project of remembering his father through his father’s work is representative of much of the cultural work within the Archipelago, particularly that of the older generation of memoirs I examine in this chapter. Felix, Joseph Conforti, Belmira Nunes Lopes, Chachi Carvalho and Sandro G all take the absence of work, and the related project of remembering it, as a central aspect of their own work. They do this work not solely by remembering lost work and lost workers directly, but also by remembering the spaces (and the places) work and workers used to occupy. They evoke industries, neighborhoods and communities that have experienced tremendous social change in recent decades in order to create complex, nuanced commentaries
on life in the Archipelago. For the memoirists in particular, the memory of work as embodied in
life narrative allows them to perform the crucial work of memory and recall needed to link the
“self” they construct in their life narratives with the selves of their parents, their community, and
their city. In this way memory links them back to the places of the Archipelago and allows them
to re-imagine and re-engage it, in written form, from a position where writing and analysis is
possible. This process, one of evocation as opposed to presentation or visualization, necessarily
relies on memory to recreate. In this way, as well as through the different generic conventions
(and constraints) that emerge from the form of the written life narrative, the work of memoir
performs a different kind of memory-work. At the same time, the need to evoke rather than
simply present requires the artist to re-create place in a way that may make it more accessible to
outsiders. While the conventions of hip-hop as a form and the visuality of the music video allow
artists to present place directly—to literally capture spaces on film—writers attempting to
present the past, in writing, have no such luxury. They must recreate context and experience, not
just visual presence.

In this section, I explore three contemporary works of Luso-American autobiography
from the Archipelago: Charles Reis Felix’s New Bedford-based *Through a Portagee Gate*
(2004), Joseph Conforti’s *Another City On a Hill* (2013), set in Fall River, and Maria Luisa
I have chosen these texts because they represent the most contemporary first-person, written life
narratives currently available. I have also chosen them because they are set primarily in New
England (there is at least one other contemporary life narrative set in California). As I’ve already
noted, working with life narratives affords a unique opportunity for comparison to hip-hop that
would not be possible were I to work with the few novels or collections of short stories also
available. Finally, I have chosen to work exclusively with English-language texts as part of the “turn” towards American working-class and ethnic studies that I hope to perform in this thesis. This has meant excluding for now a few contemporary memoirs written in Portuguese, though they might prove fruitful for future comparative work. Each of these life narratives engages in the complex process of remembering the work of parents and the communities that surrounded that work. Each links labor, forms of working-class space, and the specific generic conventions of the memoir in order to produce not just a vision of the Archipelago, but a version of the authorial self. This allows each text to challenge common (mis)conceptions about urban, working-class, Lusophone communities, though each text, of course, approaches a slightly different set of misconceptions.

**Beyond Janus: Facing the American Dream**

In creating a theoretical frame for reading these texts, I want to explore the complementary approaches that autobiography studies and working-class studies can offer. The first approach, which I draw directly from Renny Christopher, is that of the “unhappy narrative of upward mobility.” Christopher writes:

The paradigm of this subgenre is the recounting not only of the struggles of a protagonist who originates in the working class to follow the myth of the ‘American Dream’ along the line of upward mobility, but the ultimate homelessness with which the protagonist who discovers the lie built into the dream, is left, and the writer’s refusal to endorse the protagonists’ arrival in the middle class as an unquestionably positive outcome (80).
Christopher sets such works in contrast to the dominant narratives of upward mobility, both fictional and autobiographical, that, to some degree, characterize American life writing. These characteristic narratives follow the Horatio Alger arc, moving constantly “forward” and “upward” to a position of social and economic privilege. This makes Christopher’s approach the perfect ferry by which to connect such class-focused approaches to those focused on ethnicity.\textsuperscript{22} Laura Browder suggests that ethnic autobiography in general functions in large part by reproducing these larger life-writing conventions in order to challenge them. By participating in the narrative by which they \textit{should} be able to “dissolve themselves and be reborn into the center of American life,” but are not, such works both participate in and reject the mythology of upward mobility (164).

Scholars studying working-class and ethnic life-writing have also underscored the way memory takes center stage in such works. As both Strangleman and Claire Lynch have found in their work with nineteenth and early-twentieth century British working-class memoirs, the act of writing about a working life must almost always happen after the “work” of that life has been completed. While it is not unusual for people working in the professions or in middle-class occupations to write memoirs early in life, for working-class writers “writing and working are considered mutually exclusive activities” (Lynch 190). Working-class life writers seem much less likely to be full-time writers than their economically privileged peers. Because of this, memory becomes important in working-class writing in a way it may not be in other forms. Constructing their life narratives almost always at the end of a working life and rarely during one, these writers must lean heavily on memory. Remembering Watson and Smith’s definition of life narratives as “acts of self-presentation…that take the producer’s life as their subject,” it is

\textsuperscript{22} It’s worth noting that, while Christopher doesn’t choose to emphasize ethnicity, three of the four texts she examines are written by “ethnic” Americans: Anzia Yezierska, Richard Rodriguez, and Lucha Corpi.
clear that not all forms of life narrative engage with memory in the same way, but all do engage with memory (4). For working-class life writers, memory may serve both as the means by which to recover past work experiences (from a position of retirement or unemployment) and as a way to remember forms of work and places of work that no longer exist. The fleeting nature of work in the era of deindustrialization further highlights the importance of memory in these texts. By the time Joe Conforti comes to remember the bustling mid-century mill town of Fall River, the textile industry has all but disappeared.

It is useful here to remember Raymond Williams’ linking of class, form and medium in this context. For Williams, the autobiography, with its links to memory-based forms of often oral popular “confession,” offers the most readily accessible form for working-class writers. “[T]he form coming down through religious tradition,” he writes, “was of the witness confessing the story of his life, or there was the defense speech at the trial when a man tells the judge who he is and what he has done, or of course other kinds of speech. These oral forms were more accessible, forms centered on the ‘I’, on the single person” (25). The prominence of oral narratives in working-class cultures, combined with the injunction to tell one’s story directly, in the first person, has made life-writing readily adaptable to the needs of working-class writers. Life writing also, crucially, enables the writer to “state a case for citizenship” in a manner accessible to both working and middle class audiences (Browder 4). By making a personal claim rooted in lived experience, the working-class writer, Williams suggests, does not have to stray far from comfortable forms of oral communication. Religious confession, official testimony, and family or personal story, all established and common modes of working-class self-presentation, follow the shared conventions of first-person, experiential, remembered narratives. Life writing is
accessible then both in terms of its generic conventions—the way it presents itself—and in its capabilities—the way it allows the writer to present him- or herself.

In reading work from the Archipelago—an ethnic, working-class constellation of spaces—it is critical that we consider work and memory-work as linked activities. Along with this, I want to emphasize the importance place has in making this linkage possible. The work coming out of the diaspora is intensely intersectional, reflecting engagement with space, race, class, ethnicity, gender, language and the politics that cross-hatch each of these identity structures. Treating identities as discrete things that can be separated out and treated individually—as Browder does, for example, by treating different “types” of ethnic identities separately—belaies the connectedness of these identities in the Archipelago.23 Similarly, all three scholarly works dealing with Luso-American autobiography have tended to emphasize single identity categories or, at best, dyadic readings of ethnicity and class. Both Francisco Cota Fagundes and José I. Suárez frame their readings in terms of social documentation and ethnic identity-creation, largely eschewing engagement with the racial, spatial, and economic factors that influence the texts.24 Carmen Ramos Villar provides a significantly more intersectional reading of these texts, using the metaphorical duality of the Roman god Janus to structure her readings of Luso-American autobiography. She suggests that while first-generation narratives may be primarily structured in terms of ethnic and linguistic assimilation, second-generation narratives engage, through memory, with ideas of ethnicity, nationality, and class status. Thus the diasporic community—the Archipelago, in my phrasing—“emerges as the site where a

23 See Browder, 4.
24 See Cota Fagundes, “Portuguese Immigrant Experience in America” and José I. Suárez.
performance of self-representation takes place” in dialogue not just with the culture of the Azores or Cape Verde but with that of the United States (“Janus” 234).25

If the immigrant narratives Ramos Villar explores are Janus-faced, the first-generation narratives I explore here are multi-faceted. There is, first, the sort of class liminality that is so common to working-class life narrators.26 The texts I explore here are not written by “workers” in the sense Strangleman or Lynch use, but rather by the children of such workers. Felix, Conforti, and Nunes Lopes include memories of their parents’ physical work prominently in their own life writing, but they themselves have mostly performed the kind of work that does not preclude simultaneously working and writing. For them as teachers, writing is a regular requirement of their work rather than something that must be put off until work is done. Each of these authors has some degree of financial security, as well. Yet, as Elizabeth Bidinger suggests, this does not place the authors beyond working-class identities or communities; many chroniclers of working-class experience in fact occupy liminal positions “beyond” their class origins (7). Far from being distant or disengaged from working-class cultures, the intellectual work of these authors parallels that of previous working-class life writers. Kelly J. Mays suggests that working-class autobiography has often been concerned with demonstrating the fundamental humanity of its subjects through narratives that emphasize self-control, hard work, and the quest for literacy. Literacy in particular has been a crucial proving ground: “…reading is a key means to demonstrate to themselves and others that workers are not merely ‘hands,’ but human beings”

25 It’s worth noting, though it’s a bit tangential, that until quite recently both Azorean and Cape Verdean “identity” occurred mainly at the level of the island. Thus Jerry R. Williams notes that Azoreans rarely knew (or seemed to care) much about the “Portugal” of which they were citizens until the armed forces began to force them into service in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Marilyn Halter describes a similar process in Cape Verde.

26 The idea that writers and others from a working-class background who have come to work in traditionally middle-class spheres have an experience that might be called “liminal” has been suggested by a few writers. I draw much of my sense of the term and the topic from Robyn Russo’s unpublished master’s thesis.
worthy of respect and rights (344). In this way, working-class autobiographers have put the form of self-life-writing to its fullest use in defense of their own individuality.

Writing as “both the observing subject and the object of investigation,” the working-class autobiographer is able to enter into and revise existing narratives about working-class subjects (Smith and Watson 1). By claiming the right to tell and interpret their own stories, writers from marginalized communities resist dominant narratives that reduce them to incommunicative objects. While Luso-American communities in New England are marked as spatially, linguistically, economically, and often racially distinct from larger society, they are also practically invisible at the national level. For this reason, M. Estelle Smith has called Portuguese-Americans an “invisible minority” as far back as 1973; for this same reason, recent scholars have continued to apply the term to groups within the Luso-American world.27 Small in population and geographic distribution, but tremendously varied in national origin and phenotypic appearance, Luso-American communities have not been able to attain anything like a recognizable common identity within U.S. identity politics. This has meant that Azoreans and Cape Verdeans (as well as Portuguese, Brazilians, and Lusophone Africans) have had to find ways to make their experience communicable to a wider audience that knows little to nothing about their culture, language, or history in order to make their full subjectivity clear. It is exactly this project of claiming full subjectivity that Felix, Nunes Lopes, and Conforti are engaged in. It’s just that they aren’t making these claims only for themselves, but also for their families.

“Pa:” Father, son, and the spirit of work

His own Algeresque narrative of respectful upward mobility is never entirely absent for Charles Reis Felix, but it is pushed to the background in favor of stories about his father’s work. At the heart of *Through A Portagee Gate* is not the author’s own story of class mobility, but rather the stories of work, workplace, and work-life his father recounts. As all scholars who have written on the text have noted, the narrative is characterized by complex layering and what Fagundes has called “interrelated subjectivities” (“Lives Parceled out in Stories” 151). The main narrator, Charles, narrates from a wide range of positions, characterized by Fagundes as “autobiographer, biographer of significant aspects of his father’s immigrant experience, mediator and facilitator of his father’s self-story-in-stories, and historian of New Bedford” (152). Ramos Villar notes that Charles serves as both “ethnic autobiographer when he tells his own story and the ghost writer of an immigrant when he tells his father’s story [emphasis in original]” (“Writing the Home” 188). There is no better place to start, then, than with an exploration of the various layers or levels of narrative story-telling that characterize *Through a Portagee Gate*.

The text is divided into three large sections: the first concerns the adult experiences of the autobiographical narrator, Charles, mainly in California; the third is similarly narrated by an adult (or at least young adult) Charles, but takes place primarily in New Bedford; while the second takes place during Charles’ childhood and features prominently the work stories of Charles’ father, Joe/José. This section, entitled “Pa,” generally offers these stories as direct (remembered) quotations from the father with minimal framing from the author. In this manner,

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28 Felix’s memoir is by far the most well-explored text I examine here. Carmen Ramos Villar, Francisco Cota Fagundes, and Reinaldo Silva have all approached the text at some length in their critical work; none of the other works have received more than a quick mention.

29 I’ll be using these two names interchangeably here, not to confuse the reader but because English and Portuguese names coexist in the Archipelago and in the text, so that a José will always be a Joe at some point.
Felix creates the sense that his father is offering the reader these stories of work directly rather than through the words of his grown-up, educated son:

He picked up a pair of shoes that were on the narrow shelf above the sander, where he kept the slow-moving shoes. He inspected the shoes reflectively. There was a thick coat of dust on them.

“I’m going to sell these shoes,” he said in sudden decision. “Yes, I am going to sell them. They have been here for more than six months now. I fixed them and the son of a whore who brought them in never came back. That’s long enough. I’m going to sell them. I can get a dollar for them. Get my money back anyway. I’m not going to lose anything, don’t worry” (136).

With this minimal framing—just enough to locate the action in his father’s shop and describe the dustiness of the shoe—Felix centers his father’s words, work, and work-life. Part of a longer chapter, “In the Shop,” vignettes like the one above function both to describe the long hours and hard physical labor José Felix performs in his shop and to position him as the controller of his own stories. In this way, Felix minimizes the role he plays as author and autobiographical narrator in shaping the narrative and focuses the reader instead on his father’s labor.

Memory, then, becomes crucial to the narrative’s construction. As I have suggested above, the necessity of telling one’s work story only after the work has been completed tends to place issues of memory near the center of discussions of working-class life narratives. In Felix’s memoir, there are actually several layers of remembering going on simultaneously. Each layer does something for the text, but two layers alter its meaning in a fundamental way. The first act of remembering, which occurs in the prologue, frames the text and provides the justification for
its existence: “He is gone now. His shop is gone. Weld Square is gone. His life has been wiped clean off the board. But I wake in the night and I see his face and I hear his voice” (xv). Here the author makes two crucial claims about memory: first, that memory is connected to space; and second, that his own act of remembering can somehow re-animate his father. Felix links his father’s absence not solely or even primarily to his death—there is no clear statement here that the man is dead, only that he is “gone”—but rather with the destruction/disappearance of his place of work. Felix is gone because his shop is gone and because Weld Square is gone. Beginning with this clear link between place, work, and life, Felix is able to suggest that his own act of remembering can make it possible to “see his face and...hear his voice” again. If he can re-create these spaces through memory, he can in some sense restore his father to life.

Nested within this first, generative act of remembering which Felix performs by writing his own neighborhood into existence is a second act of remembering that the reader is meant to attribute to the elder Felix. While Felix directly narrates his own experience of his neighborhood, family, and work, he does not directly narrate his father’s work-life. That is left to his father. Sitting at the kitchen table, Joe Felix does his own remembering. The autobiographical narrator describes this repeated practice like this:

The favorite time for his stories came after the Sunday noontime chicken dinner when we all sat around the table, heavy in our chairs. Most of these stories involved skirmishes in his never-ending battle with his customers. The rabble, as he termed them with royal disdain, often had the intent to defraud him of just payment. How they planned to do so and whether or not they succeeded formed the basis of his stories. He never forgot anything and so he related the stories in a
Seamless narrative where time did not matter, only the deed. Twenty years ago or yesterday, it was the same to him (81).

José Felix’s work narratives function within the larger text in a very similar way to Reis Felix’s overall narrative. If Felix’s memoir serves, as I have suggested, as a way to call back into existence a world that no longer exists for the author and to challenge the images of poverty, ignorance, and squalor that have been affixed to the city and its people, Joe/ José Felix’s stories lay down critical credentials that make that larger narrative possible. José Felix uses his work stories to present himself to his family as hard-working, skilled, and most importantly, as quick-witted. As a series of customers ranging from other poor, Portuguese, Polish, and Cape Verdean neighbors to Irish- and Anglo-American businessmen enter Felix’s shop and attempt to cheat him, he outsmarts them again and again. These narratives position Joe as wise, hard-working father rather than dumb, brute worker.

By positioning the autobiographical narrator as secondary, in some sense, to the father-narrator, Felix places the relationship between the two in a critical rhetorical position. Were he to focus mainly on his own movement into the middle class, Felix would construct a fairly typical narrative of working-class ethnic social mobility. Yet by focusing instead on the relationship with his father, his father’s work, and his community, the author underscores the importance of these relationships in constructing his own identity. As already noted, Ramos Villar sees this tension as a critical element of the text; Felix’s dual role as ethnic autobiographer and immigrant ghostwriter “neatly collaps[es] the formal distinction between ethnic and immigrant autobiography” (“Writing the Home” 188). I want to suggest that what happens in this text is not just the collapsing of distinctions between two formal possibilities, but rather the offering of another distinct voice, post-collapse. If, as Bidinger suggests, “[working-class writers’]
autobiographical selves are delineated in part by their re-creation of their familial relationships,” then Felix has chosen to foreground this process and make it part of the formal dynamics of the text (3).

This offers a unique solution to the problem of using the “I” voice that characterizes self-life-writing—the generic convention Williams suggests is so useful for working-class writers—to communicate experiences that are not easily contained within the “I.” One of the problems Williams’ genealogy of the form runs up against is just this tension: while writing “I” is more in keeping with the kinds of self-presentation working-class subjects might be used to, it also foregrounds the self in a way working-class cultures don’t tend to. By keeping the first-person perspective dictated by generic conventions but shifting many of the actual acts of narration to the third-person voice of his father, Felix is able to present himself as individual while not effacing his family or community. This is a difficult and at times problematic balance: the technique marginalizes Felix’s mother, for example, who is often reduced to a sort of dramatic chorus before and after her husband’s stories. However, it offers an approach to the conventions of life writing that navigates with some success the tension between the individual and the collective in working-class Lusophone communities.

**Spindle City: moving up, moving out**

Felix’s decision to make his father the central character of his own memoir is not, of course, the only possible choice. Joseph Conforti, too, places his father in a conspicuous position within his text, relying on retelling his father’s work history in order to reconfigure prevailing narratives of “the despised Portuguese” of Fall River (37). However, Conforti does
not at any point cede control of his narrative to anyone else, not even to a remembered, third-
person father. A scholar trained in American studies, Conforti chooses to speak for his father
more overtly and more frequently than Felix. He also provides a much more extensive analytic
framing:

Until recently I had no idea of the sacrifice he made to establish his [barber shop]
during an unsettled era in a city still reeling from a decade of seismic economic
upheaval. For the first time I read the only remaining records of the shop: his
account book for the first five years, 1936-1941. The fourth-grade arithmetic and
occasional simple declarative sentence reveal a story that humbles me. I wish I
had known while he was still alive, while I was growing up. He avoided Fall
River’s sweat shops only to put in more hours each week than mill workers, and
to forego not only vacations but single days off during the first years… (43).

With the scholar’s knack for microhistory, Conforti uses his father’s account book as a way to let
him present himself more directly. The account book helps create the same sense of hard work
and sacrifice as Joe Felix’s stories. Conforti’s analysis places his father’s hard work within the
context of the early stages of deindustrialization in Fall River. It suggests the limited possibilities
available to his father as well as the significance of his choice to stay out of the mills and work
instead as a barber, and how this put his family in a unique position socially and economically.
But of equal importance here is what it does for the narrator: it “humbles” him and establishes
his class credentials.

In sharp contrast to Felix, Conforti’s “New England Memoir” is marked by a sense of
distance between the author and the subjects he portrays. Conforti’s ethnically-mixed heritage—
his mother is Azorean and his father Sicilian—positions him in such a way that he is of the Luso-American community without necessarily being an insider. While the narrator recalls with bitterness being called a “black Portagee,” he also recalls his parents’ efforts to keep him from becoming too much a part of Fall River’s Azorean community. “There was a Catholic school in the Flint [neighborhood], Espirito Santo,” Conforti writes, “where I would begin my teaching career. It proved too Portagee for my parents’ taste” (88).\textsuperscript{30} By sending their children instead to a school full of “‘respectable,’ assimilated, middle-class Irish,” the Confortis hope for a bit of upward mobility. The Flint, marked by the predominance of crowded three-decker tenement houses and recent Azorean immigrants, is off limits to the young Conforti.\textsuperscript{31}

This sense of pending class mobility pervades Conforti’s text, especially when he turns his attention to family artifacts. Examining a studio portrait of his mother’s family, all mill workers, dressed in their best clothing, Conforti suggests there is a deep vein of upward mobility visible. The portrait “speaks to me of the Bentos’ social and perhaps racial aspirations, their stake in respectability, even refinement, and their confidence that they would regain in Fall River the class standing they once claimed on St. Michael” (39). Working in Fall River’s crowded textile mills, denigrated by Americans as brutish, ignorant, and superstitious, his mother’s family, Conforti suggests, began to engage in an aggressive policy of respectability, strictly managing where they lived, what parish they worshipped at, and where their children went to school. Conforti is able to make such claims because he is speaking here not as a life-writer recounting his childhood—he never claims his grandparents \textit{actually said} anything about

\textsuperscript{30} When Conforti returned to Fall River, degree in hand, he started his teaching career at Espirito Santo; his parents efforts, then, succeeded to some degree, but perhaps not to the degree they hoped.

\textsuperscript{31} The three-decker is a critical aspect of the built environment of New England. While Worcester has the largest number of these three-story, three-family wooden apartment buildings, in every city of the Archipelago they are the predominant form of urban home. For more, see McEttrick and Schneider.
respectability or mobility—but as a historian. It is not his relatives who have spoken to him, but rather their portrait that “speaks to” the historian.

Conforti’s writing exemplifies both the centrality and the complexity of the link between self and city. Conforti places the city of Fall River at the center of his narrative in a variety of ways, from the title, Another City Upon a Hill; to the first chapter, “Spindle City,” which provides an extensive history of the city; to the final chapter, which claims the city, “warts and all,” as the author’s “New England hometown” (192). Yet this identification with the city and the working-class neighborhoods where Conforti was raised does not always mean an identification with the city’s working-class people or its Luso-American community. While he frequently praises the tough mill workers of his neighborhood, his own experiences with manual labor are more fleeting. He writes of a job he took after finishing high school working construction on the city’s Brayton Point power plant, using the experience to highlight his sense of being out of place: “It took me a while to get with the manly program: sauntering out on twelve inch wide steel beams with nothing beneath me. If panic seized me, I heard whispers of ‘chicken boy’ (12). Here, as when his parents decide to send him to a different parish for his education, a sense of inevitable mobility lurks. By performing manual labor to pay for college, the autobiographical narrator takes on the generic conventions of ethnic working-class autobiography; but by setting himself apart from his neighbors, his peers, and his parents, he is working firmly within the tradition of social-mobility narratives.

All of this does not mean that Conforti’s narrative avoids the productive engagement with family and community that grounds Portagee Gate. Another City Upon A Hill uses a different approach to a similar project. Conforti’s academic distancing and frequent recourse to historical documents represents a different ethical approach to the dilemma of “representing” one’s family
from the privileged position of posterity. If we again recall Biderger’s notion of autobiography as an “ethical act” of remembering the self through “portrayals of family members and significant others,” it becomes possible to read Conforti’s strategy as a blending of the academic and the autobiographical. Unwilling to claim the right to speak for an entire city, much less his own family, Conforti instead chooses to speak only for himself and to couch other judgments in the terms of academic analysis. Where Felix creates the illusion of his father’s presence through third-person ventriloquizing, Conforti blends his own memories of his father with microhistorical attempts to “recall” his experiences. When he can tell the reader directly of his experiences in the Flint, Conforti does; when he cannot, he relies instead on a historicizing and contextualizing approach. For both authors, though, the message is clear: father, work and city are inseparable from self and must be brought into dialogue.

As Charles Reis Felix, for example, embarks on his journey out of New Bedford he shares an unexpected moment of intimacy with his father. While the family has remained together in New Bedford, Joe Felix’s primary acts of love come in the form of stories. His advice is all related to work. As his son leaves New Bedford for Michigan, though, there is a shift:

I thought he would shake hands with me but to my surprise he embraced me. He held me tight. He kissed me on the cheek. When he pulled away, I was dumbfounded to see tears rolling down his cheeks. I had never seen him cry before. He had cried at his father’s death but I hadn’t seen that. He loves me, I thought. He was saying good-bye to me, to our life together, but I was too dumb to know it. I thought nothing would change (397).
At the moment when the narrator Charles leaves New Bedford and brings the narrative with him, Joe Felix stops telling him stories. There are no more direct stories from the father in the text. Narrator Charles will think of his father and New Bedford often, but the city will become for him “a hopeless industrial slag-heap of dismal lives” that “thr[ows him] into the blackest depression within five minutes of stepping off the bus” and he will rarely return to it (408). He will abandon both his father and his community, though the narrator Charles does not quite know this at this moment in the text.

In this way the text offers us insight into the special way memory functions in these life narratives. Charles the narrator, whose relationship with his father is built on stories of work and place, recalls those stories in order to recall his father. Ironically, though, he has come to be in a position to recall those stories in writing for a general audience only by leaving behind his father, his community, and the city of New Bedford. This is the inherent irony in many (but not necessarily all) working-class life narratives: to be in a position to write about working-class experience, the author has to leave those experiences behind. For Conforti, too, the relationship between self and city of origin becomes uneasy. He recalls telling a nun at Espirito Santo, the parochial schools his parents had kept him out of, that their students were the only ones in the city who “can look out the window and see where they are going to work when they grow up” (155). For all that bile, though, those same factories are the places where his aunts and uncles went to work for decades. While young Conforti as narrated here pities his students and their limited horizon, Conforti the narrator feels differently. Conforti the author has dedicated an entire piece of life writing—his memoir—to the city and the community he shares with these boys, with his father, with his family.
“This was more like it:” remembering place in urban New England

In each of these memoirs, place is something to be carefully reconstructed. From the home to the neighborhood to the city at large, these authors working to reconstruct the communities of their childhood build them up slowly, as it were, piece by piece. The way they construct place, though, depends on the way each author chooses to engage with the process of memory in general. In the early parts of his memoir, Felix meditates more often on two internal spaces, the family home and his father's shop, than he does on the city at large. This helps preserve the sense that he is recreating the world of his childhood rather than just remembering it. It suggests that he does not bring his retrospective adult knowledge to the city. He can only offer his readers a sense of the scope of the city when he is about to leave it as a young man. As a child narrator, he offers instead scenes of his home and his father’s shop, places he would have had regular access to as a young boy. “When you opened the front door to our tenement,” he writes, “you were face to face with the kitchen counter and the only sink in the house....It could get crowded. When all six of us were at the table, you had to walk sideways to move around and you couldn't open the door to the built-in pantry all the way without hitting somebody's chair” (229). Through scenes like this, Felix recreates his North End neighborhood the way he would have first come to know it as a child: piece by piece, starting with the spaces his family regularly used, then moving on to the streets when he was old enough. Later, as an adult, he offers a more critical, contextualized appraisal of New Bedford:

A few days later I was walking along a street in New Bedford. The people walking past were shabbily-dressed, scowling, pasty-faced, grossly fat, limping, with tics, cross-eyed. There was dirty snow on the sidewalk. There was frozen
dog shit everywhere. I picked my way carefully around these droppings. At the end of the street was an empty mill. Now this was more like it (422).

This kind of description would not have been possible for a child narrator. For one, it would have shifted the narrator away from his father, who is if nothing else quite attached to the city. For another, what would a working-class boy who rarely ventures beyond his neighborhood, never mind his city, have to say about the city as a whole? To what would he compare it?

Not particularly interested in seeming to literally reproduce the past, Conforti is content to remember his city as a fully-formed, fully-grasped social and physical entity throughout the entirety of his text. Compare Conforti’s references to the city's ubiquitous mills to Felix’s: “I grew up with the mills in my backyard, yet I didn't know as I passed the signposts from grade schools to grad school that Fall River's granite industrial architecture reinforced its distinctiveness as a New England industrial city” (15). While Felix embeds his description of place within the narrative of his guilt-ridden return trips to see his parents and his increasingly-depressing take on his hometown, Conforti uses the language of the academy. He introduces the mills with reference to his own childhood memories, but then invokes “grad school” before embarking on a lengthy description of how other New England mill towns were built of red brick, a discussion I have not included here. This allows the author to create extensive context for readers not familiar with the city. It offers a comparative framework that places Fall River alongside other mill cities like Pawtucket, Lawrence, and New Bedford. At other moments, Conforti engages more directly with his own memories of place while still retaining the contexts of adulthood:

The Bowler Street of my childhood was mostly a tired, tattered nook of Fall River's West End. The street had less than a hundred yards of pavement before it
tapered into a dirt lane, rutted and gullied by rainstorms for its remaining five hundred feet or so. Many roads in our neighborhood—Doyle, Crane, and St. Germain, to name a few—were dirt lanes or only partially paved. The city was always strapped for money, and our ward had neither the clout nor the connections downtown to bring about improvements (55).

In places like this, Conforti engages in a street-level recreation of the city. He draws on specific street names—and sometimes even street numbers—in order to make his passages differently meaningful for those familiar with the city. While it is paved today, Bowler Street remains much as Conforti describes it, a strangely sparse street in the shadow of several huge mill buildings, populated by scattered small houses on one end and large, closely-built three-decker tenement houses on the other.

Unable to visually show the built environment of the city, as hip hop artists can in their music videos, Conforti and Reis must find other means to evoke their urban environment. Reis gives a smattering of details, preferring to build up the impression of New Bedford over the course of his text without ever getting down to street-level particulars. This makes the text more accessible to readers not familiar with the city but less capable of offering readers specific, local images. Conforti, on the other hand, pursues something of the technique of local history, citing specific buildings, streets, businesses, and churches. For the reader familiar with Fall River, this kind of presentation calls visuals instantly to mind. Readers who don't already know the capital city of the Archipelago, though, aren't likely to learn much about it. This is in part because, while early-twentieth century commonplaces like the crowded Lower East Side tenements may once have provided clear generic conventions for representing space, such conventions do not seem to
hold much sway. Certainly literary representations of working-class urban New England have been too limited to generate the kind of “iconic” images I discuss in the next chapter.

In a memoir recorded and edited by her niece, *A Portuguese Colonial in America*, Belmira Nunes Lopes takes an approach markedly different from that of Felix or Conforti. In *A Portuguese Colonial*, place occupies a much less conspicuous position, in large part because her narrative is a series of spatial moves. She describes, quickly, her childhood home and the general contours of the Cape Cod countryside, but does not seem to want to evoke any particularly strong sense of place connected with Wareham. Nor does she seek to document—or even sketch out in passing—the built environment of Boston, Cambridge, Washington, D.C., Staten Island, Harlem, or East Providence. Puerto Rico, which strikes her as being so much like her mother's descriptions of Cape Verde that she “f[eels] as if [she] had been there all the time,” is the only place Nunes Lopes seems very interested in remembering in detail (93). Even there, she is much more concerned with remembering people and actions than she is with developing a sense of the towns, the buildings, the streets or the neighborhoods.

Belmira Nunes Lopes’ memoir, chronologically the earliest considered here, presents a distinct approach to the problem of remembering family, work and place. In part, this might be a reflection of the positions held by each of the women. Belmira Nunes Lopes was a pioneer in education, the first person of Cape Verdean descent to graduate from her high school on Cape Cod and among the first women of color to attend Boston University and to graduate from Radcliffe. Her niece, Maria Luisa Nunes, is a Harvard-educated sociologist and an early scholar of the Cape Verdean diaspora. Both women seem conscious of their position as exceptions, individuals with experiences distinct from those of most of the New England Cape Verdean community. In this sense, their work—I refer to Maria Luisa Nunes’ prologue and notes as well
as to her aunt’s oral narrative—is very much in line with the two memoirs we’ve already explored. It is distinct in its form: recorded narratives do not provide the same opportunity to edit, reword, and recast that written forms do. Nunes notes, though, that her aunt was in the process of writing her own (as yet unpublished) memoirs at the time they sat down to record. It’s not clear to what degree Nunes Lopes drew on what she had written in offering her oral narrative, nor is it clear if she came to see the version recorded by her niece as final and so decided not to publish her own writing. Nunes Lopes’ narrative has one further crucial distinction: she did not grow up in one of southeastern New England’s large Azorean or Cape Verdean communities. Thus, rather than concerning herself with representing neighborhood, community, or city, the author tends to focus instead on representing herself. This leads Nunes Lopes to tell a more typically individualistic narrative of social mobility that nonetheless reflects consistently on the connections between place, self, and community.

It is a “different vision” of a typical Lusophone New England childhood that Nunes Lopes offers her readers. While her vision is not marked by the dense ethnic communities that inform Felix and Conforti’s experience, it is marked by dense difference. Nunes Lopes’ family members are the only immigrants, the only Catholics, the only Portuguese speakers, and the only people of color in their town. When Nunes Lopes arrives at Radcliffe, she finds that while she is no longer the only person of color, she is the only Portuguese speaker (apart from a professor of Romance languages) and one of only a few black Catholics or children of immigrants (she notes there are a few Haitian and Afro-Caribbean-American students around). Nunes Lopes experience as “an exception” is one that is paradoxically marked by lack of community and by the constant presence of community. In segregated Washington, D.C., speaking Portuguese and telling white people that she is a “foreigner” is her ticket past the barriers of segregation, while in New York
she survives by identifying with Puerto Ricans communities that feel “so much like my own people” (189). Thus while the urban spaces so central to Felix and Conforti are largely absent in Nunes Lopes’ work, the communities of the Archipelago are not. At the risk of veering off into theoretical language, it is clear that they are present in their absence.

Nunes Lopes begins her narrative with a chapter-long description of her parents’ life in the Cape Verde islands. She neither re-creates her parents’ words nor claims to imagine them, but simply gives an account of their life as if she herself witnessed it. Her mother, from Brava, and her father, from Fogo, meet in Providence at the dances and social events characteristic of the city’s Cape Verdean community. From there, her father, apparently a jealous man, insists that they move with their young children to Cape Cod. A move designed to isolate the family, it succeeds:

Life, however, for mother was anything but gay in East Wareham. They were halfway between the two communities where Cape Verdeans had already settled in colonies of their own, Providence, Rhode Island and Harwich on the Cape. Social intercourse, then, was scant. Language was a barrier when it came to communication with the neighbors. Mother and father were Catholics in a Protestant stronghold…Except for the few letters she received from her own family in Brava, she had a hard time getting news from home (33).

To the linguistic, racial and religious difference that marked early immigration from the Atlantic Islands to New England, the family has the additional barrier of being isolated from other immigrants. Nor is it simply a matter of being isolated from other Portuguese-speaking
immigrants: there are, by Nunes Lopes’ recollection, no other people but “Anglo-Americans” in the village.

In this isolated place, it becomes doubly important that her parents hang on to what sense of community they have. Nunes Lopes recalls frequent trips to distant Cape Verdean neighbors for shared meals, dances, and visits. A Cape Verdean community does exist, then; it just isn’t of the size or density of those in Providence, New Bedford, or Harwich. If these cities, and their mainly-Azorean counterparts in Fall River and Somerville, constitute the large islands of Archipelago, rural farming communities like East Wareham might constitute the tiny, barely-settled islands that rarely merit naming except collectively. From this already marginal position within the Lusophone community, Nunes Lopes is careful to underscore her parents’ difference in terms of background, education, and skin color. To her father she attributes “a decidedly superior vocabulary” and a position of leadership among the scattered Cape Verdean households in their part of the Cape (31). Her mother, meanwhile, comes from a family of distinction in Brava: “[o]ftentimes we thought that she had regal bearing because she had always felt so proud of her ancestry” (28). Such assessments of her parents distinction, though, are often followed by reminders of the broadly Cape Verdean culture they share with thousands of others. “At other times, I wondered if her carrying herself so straight and in such a queenly manner was not because, when she was in Brava, she used to get water from remote areas...[t]hey used to carry these buckets of water on their heads through the hilly roads of Brava for miles without spilling a drop” (28). While Nunes Lopes is careful to note the ways her experience differs from those of other Cape Verdean-Americans, she is also careful to build an early context for her own Cape Verdeanness. She will claim to be an exception, but she will never claim to be outside of the community.
Throughout her narrative, Nunes Lopes plays this careful balancing act. On the one hand, she considers herself very much the product of the distinct cultural constellation that is the Cape Verdean diaspora in New England. Nunes Lopes opens her narrative with an explanation of Cape Verdean history and culture designed to enlighten an audience she must have felt would know little about her culture. Nunes Lopes views this culture as distinct in its blend of African and Portuguese cultures, though she is especially proud of what she calls the “Portuguese way of life” and notes that her parents “always said they were Portuguese” (20). Her entire family works in the cranberry bogs of the Cape, a common occupation for Cape Verdeans outside of the city at the time. On the other hand—and this other hand may not be unrelated to Nunes Lopes’ assurance that her parents “never would have thought of themselves as Africans”—the author is careful to point out the ways in which she and her family are distinct from other Cape Verdeans. Her mother’s family is part of the multiracial elite of Brava and her father, while hesitant to tell her much about his own family, says that he is the descendant of one of the first Portuguese settlers of Fogo. Both of them are marked by beauty and intelligence, as are their children. Indeed, as Maria Luisa Nunes notes in her introduction, it is not unfair that the author considers herself “an exception among Cape Verdean women” (16). In terms of educational attainment and social mobility, she certainly is.

While some of the exceptional characteristics Nunes Lopes, Conforti and Felix attribute to their parents are no doubt filial charity, it is worth noting here that all of these writers cast their parents as exceptional people. This offers an intriguing moment of complexity. If remembering the work-lives of their parents, primarily their fathers, helps these authors to recover something of the working-class community that they never fully experienced, living in it as children rather than as workers, and leaving it as they reached adulthood, the impulse to paint
their parents as exceptional seems odd. It suggests that their parents, in being exceptional, were themselves set apart from the community. There are two possible responses, I think. On the one hand, remembering one’s parents as always having been a bit different helps these authors account for their own mobility and smooth the bumpy project of remembering place, community and family. This is especially important if their parents and family are the primary means for recuperating that community. On the other hand, if we step back from the dynamics of memory and consider that the authors are reporting something like “truth,” perhaps we see just how limited social mobility in the Archipelago is. Nunes Lopes was able to rise to Harvard and beyond not because such things are generally possible, but because she had a beautiful, graceful and refined mother and a father who was linguistically brilliant and a community leader.

For each of these authors, the process of remembering their life is deeply tied to the process of remembering their parents, their work, and their links with the Archipelago. In fact, it is through the process of remembering parents, place, and work that each of these authors is able to re-assert important ties to these communities. The experiences chronicled in these texts are incredibly diverse, but they each conclude with a return “home” to the communities of the Archipelago. For Felix, returning to New Bedford is both an experience of loss and one of repositioning. His father’s shop is gone, and with it every trace of his life, but at the end of the text Reis Felix has stopped visiting the site of absence. “I have been back to New Bedford since,” he writes, “but I have never returned to the shop” (476). He visits instead the memories he has of the city, its people, its work. Having once “traveled three thousand miles across the country, trying to outrun that word [Portagee],” he has found that, in California as in New Bedford, it is always “waiting for [him].” Moving to a new place does not erase the often
burdensome memories of a different and difficult childhood in working-class, Lusophone New Bedford.

Nunes Lopes too reflects on the impossibility of erasing or moving beyond, though she does so in terms that do not so strongly emphasize the link with place. After a career teaching in Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C., and New York City, she returns to the Archipelago to finish her life and career in the Cape Verdist community in East Providence. While social mobility has caused her to live far away from the working-class Cape Verdean-American communities of the Archipelago, she considers herself still fundamentally a part of them:

I have felt that I have more in common, oftentimes, with people of other ethnic groups…because of the positions I have held, because of the contacts I have made, because I was in a better economic class, possibly. Yet, I believe that my greatest happiness has come from working and living with people of my own ethnic background, even though I have felt oftentimes that I enjoyed pleasures that most of my fellow-Cape Verdeans did not enjoy (206).

Despite her exceptional mobility, her frequent travel, and her impressive career in education—or perhaps because of it—Nunes Lopes wants to emphasize above all the importance of being with fellow Cape Verdeans. This means a return to the Archipelago; she makes that return to conclude both her life and her narrative.

In the next chapter, I will explore the work of two contemporary hip hop artists to suggest some important ways memory and representation function in their work. The same dialogic engagement with family, work and city that characterize these three works of an older generation
of artists from the Archipelago remain present in the work of these contemporary emcees. However, the intention and ultimate outcome of this engagement has, I suggest, shifted to meet the requirement of a different genre and a shifting discourse about urban spaces.
III. Life in the Islands: Race, Place and Movement in Luso-American Hip Hop

“And I dedicate this to my whole hood/thousands of miles away, in Rhode Island/ rep the culture we’re from we say, Eleventh Island/and I ain’t never been there yet, but I hold Cabo Verde in my heart/and I rep, ‘til death do us part.” - Chachi Carvalho, “Sabim”

Hip hop, perhaps more than any other musical form, is inextricably linked to place. While it has been possible to discuss ethnic autobiography as a genre in the previous chapter without first theorizing its link to place—possible, in part, because extensive theoretical work on the links between life-writing and place does not exist—this just isn’t possible with hip hop. Hip hop, and the academic field of hip hop studies, has from the very beginning been a genre where race, place, ethnicity and class take their rightful place at the front. Tricia Rose, in her thorough and succinct evaluation of the form’s aesthetic values, claims that hip hop works to “capture the regional specificity of spatial, ethnic, temperate and psychological facets of black marginality” within the built urban environments out of which the form has emerged (11). Her definition is important here for two reasons. It allows me to frame the readings I perform in this chapter in terms of hip hop’s multiple layers of meaning. Hip hop must be read as both a local event that occurs within the particular boundaries of space, race, ethnicity and culture and as a far-reaching discourse that has helped create these very boundaries. In addition, Rose’s demand that we pay attention to these layers mirrors the kind of intervention the idea of the Archipelago makes possible. The cultures of the Archipelago must also be read as layered and complex in much the same way.

In this chapter, I quickly survey some of the attempts that have been made, following Rose, to explore and theorize the spatial contours of hip hop culture. This is a necessarily brief
overview of a fairly wide field of literature; to keep it so, I’ve moved more extensive discussion and references to the footnotes. I then offer close readings of the spatial dynamics Cape Verdean-American emcee Chachi Carvalho and the Azorean-born emcee Sandro G create in their lyrics and music videos. I invert the order of the previous section by moving from a consideration of content to one of form, looking at the way language and space are conveyed through the use of similar conventions across both Carvalho and Azorean-American emcee Sandro G’s visual oeuvre. I have chosen to focus on these two emcees in part because they are the most recognizable New England-based Lusophone hip hop artists, and in part because they are the only such artists to have produced a significant body of work. While, as with the memoirs, additional comparative examples from Portuguese, Cape Verdean, or even Brazilian, Angolan, or Mozambican emcees might offer productive insights for this project, I don’t choose to explore them here. Carvalho’s work centers the built environments of Providence, Pawtucket and Son Visent in an especially rich and fluid way that emphasizes movement across place and between languages. In this way, I use the layered meanings characteristic of hip hop to perform a layered reading of hip hop from the Archipelago.

“Vamos sempre p’ra frente”: a brief step into the realm of hip hop studies

In order to understand hip hop’s complex spatial layering, we must first move beyond readings of it as essentially local and, in the words of Paul Gilroy, “Americocentric” (“It’s a Family Affair” 1). Though hip hop’s most distinct feature is its rootedness in the local, hip hop is

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32 It is worth noting, though, that Brazilian hip hop groups like Afro Reggae and Racionais MCs have achieved fame throughout the Lusophone world, while Portuguese practitioners of “hip hop tuga,” as well as Lusophone African artists, have also produced significant bodies. It’s also worth noting that there is a body of work by African immigrant emcees in continental Portugal.
not a form that can be contained within the space of a city or a country. While Rose, Gilroy, Imani Perry, Robin D.G. Kelley, Raquel Z. Rivera and others have done well to explore the role first- and second-generation Puerto Rican and Jamaican DJs, breakers, graffiti artists and emcees played in the genesis of hip hop culture, their analysis does not move significantly beyond these New York-based Afro-diasporic groups.³³ By recalling the formative moments of hip hop in the South Bronx, scholars are able to engage with the ethno-racial, spatial and economic conditions that gave shape to the form. Doing so establishes without doubt the generative link between poor, marginalized, urban black communities and hip hop, providing both an important barrier against expropriation by wealthier white communities and a necessary recognition of hip hop’s fundamental ties to African-American cultures.³⁴ However, as Rivera notes, this framing also requires “facile and questionable panethnic connections…which may actually serve to erase other, more concrete, historically-based, tranethnic connections” (236).³⁵ In other words, the attempt to read hip hop culture primarily within the racial binaries of the United States erases real, typically local, trans-ethnic connections. This is particularly troubling for ethnic identities that this binary tends to erase, such as Cape Verdean.

Reading hip hop beyond the borders of the (generalized, essentialized) African-American working-class experience is not, then, an unprecedented move.³⁶ In addition to work by Gilroy, Rose and others cited above, scholars have also approached hip hop as an exportable cultural

³³ See Gilroy 1; Rivera 236-240, Perry 9-20; Washington and Dixon Shaver; and Rose, among others.
³⁴ For more on this, see especially Kitwana 96.
³⁵ Rivera is particularly concerned with the erasure of important historical linkages between African-American and Puerto Rican communities in New York that fits neatly with neither the black/white racial binary nor the California-centric notion of “Latin Rap.” For a related discussion, see Hess 297.
³⁶ It is so well-precedented, in fact, that Imani Perry warns against confusing “multiracial” with “not-black,” something I hope I have avoided doing here: “The accuracy of the assertion that hip hop has multiracial and multicultural origins does not suggest that it is not black. Only a worldview that subjugates blackness marks the phrase ‘it’s just black’ as an offensive designation” (10). Perry devotes a significant portion of her first chapter to showing that “black” can, does, and must accommodate the multicultural and multiethnic.
product and as a genre that has been appropriated and modified in international contexts.\textsuperscript{37} Both of these approaches suggest that hip hop as a form is not, and never has been, strictly American. Yet, while the literature of international hip hop is rich and varied, it tends to focus either on national hip hop cultures outside of the United States or the production of sub-national or “ethnic” hip hop within these national cultures. It is the export of hip hop culture broadly, not the work of individual artists, that grounds these works. This suggests that hip hop culture tends to be seen as more or less contained within the national borders of the States and its urban working- and poverty-class communities. The possibility of American hip hop artists and consumers occupying multiple local spaces, including diasporic spaces that go beyond the strictly American, is largely ignored by such a framing.

By exploring Pawtucket’s Chachi Carvalho and his multi-lingual work in this context, this chapter offers some insights into the way the local operates in hip hop. Drawing on Elijah Anderson’s notion of the “iconic ghetto,” it suggests that the visual and lyrical movements between a particular local neighborhood and the imagined, universalized “ghetto” which are typical of hip hop are extended by emcees from the Archipelago. Carvalho and fellow emcee Sandro G frequently move between the spaces of urban New England and the spaces of Son Visent and São Miguel, respectively, in order to challenge the notion that their bodies and work can be limited to strictly American spaces. In their New England-based videos, they emphasize the Archipelago through a series of common maneuvers: the presence of Azorean and Cape Verdean flags; the use of Azorean Portuguese and Cape Verdean Kriolu in their lyrics; references to food and drink consumed both in the homeland and in the diaspora; and, especially in the case of Sandro G, references to communal activities like the festa that define Azorean

\textsuperscript{37} Marina Terkourafi offers an insightful, if brief, outline of some of the major threads in international hip hop studies in the introduction to her volume \textit{Languages of Global Hip Hop} (London: Continuum Books), 2010.
social life. In their complex approach to representing urban space, family and social context, they explore some of the same points of intersection between work, city and memory as Conforti, Nunes Lopes, and Reis Felix. They do so, however, with much less emphasis on memory and recall and much more on the representation of current, contemporary places and experiences.

Claiming the neighborhood: hip hop on the Eleventh Island

Chachi Carvalho’s music video “Freedom Rings” opens with a shot of the emcee, wool cap pulled tight over his head, silhouetted against the Providence skyline by a rising sun. The sky is that particular color of pink that seems to only exist in New England. In this way the opening shot of the video foregrounds, literally, the relationship between the emcee and his city. Chachi is both in and of his city, in front of its buildings, among its people, thrown into contrast by its sky. Here and in other videos, director J. DePina emphasizes this dynamic by directing the viewer’s gaze first to Carvalho and then to the “ghetto” spaces of Providence and Pawtucket behind him. This movement visually represents the cultural work of the emcee. Claiming simultaneously to be part of a particular community and to speak for it, to represent it, the emcee puts himself in the front by keeping his city constantly over his shoulder.

The frames that follow these opening silhouettes continue to emphasize this movement. They focus alternately on the inside of a corner store, where Carvalho acknowledges the clerk with a pound before pushing his way through the door, and a game of catch played out on a street lined with three-decker tenement houses. Each of these images telescopes the distance between

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38 I had initially thought this was a phenomenon specific to Pawtucket, something to do with all the chemicals in the air, and had ignored it, but Caetlin Benson-Allott suggested that it is in fact something that occurs all over New England, linking us all together.
the broadly American iconic space of the ghetto and the more specifically local spaces of Rhode Island. While a game of catch in the street is representative of any American urban space, the inclusion of rows of three-decker apartment houses in the backgrounds establishes a specific spatial setting. While corner stores exist in every city, this particular corner store, and this particular clerk, exist only in Rhode Island. These visual cues instruct the viewer—at least, the viewer from within the Archipelago - to read this not just as a “city” but as Providence. The video’s visual remixing of Providence-specific landmarks with universally-recognized images of hip hop culture, such as breakdancers on the floor of city hall, helps mark the space as both local and national. This demarcation places Carvalho firmly within what Murray Forman calls the “alternative cartography” of hip hop, where race, space, and class are placed in the forefront rather than at the margins (66). It simultaneously places him within the alternative cartography of the Archipelago, marked by the same emphasis on intersectionality.

Through the corner store, the triple deckers, and the empty mill buildings, the video presents its viewer with a specific, classed urban space. The specificity of this space is visible, though, only to those who are actually familiar with the space. Just as the references to specific street names in Joseph Conforti’s memoir would be largely lost on the reader unfamiliar with Fall River, Carvalho and DePina’s visual references to specific streets in Providence and Pawtucket are lost on viewers who don’t know the cities. While they may not manage to successfully evoke these specific places to all viewers, these images do place the video squarely within the urban post-industrial environment that Rose shows to be the spatial birthplace of hip hop.39 This space, typically shorthanded as the “ghetto,” is not (at least, not anymore) an undifferentiated space of African-American segregation but rather a clumping-together of

39 See Rose’s *Black Noise* for the most extensive description of these material circumstances and their impact on the ideological, rhetorical, and technical innovations of the genre.
different urban spaces, each bearing its own unique history. This is not to deny the long history of the use of the term ghetto to denote spaces of forced segregation, but rather to suggest that that ghetto is more imagined than real. That ghetto—which Elijah Anderson terms the “iconic ghetto”—has become synonymous with hip hop in the American mind. It has also, as Anderson points out, “come to be associated with black people, powerfully referring to the areas in which black people have become concentrated over time” (“Toward Knowing the Iconic Ghetto,” 67).

Yet actual urban working- and poverty-class neighborhoods are more than this. They are racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse places where people live, work, and play. They are complex urban spaces where a broad range of cultures and cultural activities co-exist.

Yet, because this “iconic ghetto” has become the de facto frame for reading black urban communities—as well as for urban working- and poverty-class communities more broadly—and the hip hop cultures they produce, its vision has to be challenged to create new space. In “Freedom Rings” and other videos, Carvalho and DePina place their work in conversation with the “iconic ghetto” in order to do just that. By including shots of the urban built environment of Providence and Pawtucket in almost every frame, they emphasize the particularity of the work. “Freedom Rings” is set simultaneously (perhaps unavoidably) in the iconic ghetto of the popular imagination and in the specific spaces of urban Rhode Island. Dozens of images of “iconic Providence,” from the State House to Prospect Terrace, flash across the screen in order reassure the doubtful viewer. Yet, the use of images central to the iconic ghetto, in particular the corner store/bodega, underscores that Carvalho is, indeed, talking about the ghetto.

40 Loïc Wacquant, for example, claims that “ghetto” has come to refer exclusively to spaces of forced segregation of African-Americans, and that the idea of a white ethnic or Latino ghetto is thus impossible. See Wacquant, 3-12.

41 I expand upon Elijah Anderson’s term “iconic ghetto” as a simultaneously real and imagined space, a neighborhood as well as an idea. See Anderson, “Toward Knowing the Iconic Ghetto,” 68, and Anderson, “The Iconic Ghetto,” 8-24.
This is particularly clear in the video for “Last Dollar,” which again opens with a shot of the corner store. The camera follows the video’s protagonist as he walks the streets of Pawtucket clutching his last dollar. As the camera guides us past scarred cement walls, the rusted chain-link fence of a highway overpass, and the faded facades of three-decker houses, the emcee provides a lyrical narrative of the postindustrial:

Faded pictures in a broken frame,
Empty wallet and a pocket full of change,
Feeling like nobody knows my name,
Friends all abandoned me, forgot about my family
Staring in the mirror like I’m tryna find my sanity

The faded pictures, the empty wallet, and the feeling of abandonment all emphasize what Cornel West calls black nihilism, the “meaninglessness, hopelessness, and…lovelessness” that have become the fundamental elements of our iconic ghetto (40). Claiming these images for the iconic ghetto or the urban African-American experience, though, oversimplifies them. They are all responses to the crumbling economies and infrastructures of the post-industrial city and the conditions of the American working class in its broadest sense. What makes Carvalho’s combined visual and lyrical appeal so effective is its ability to present this wide range of experience within a specific spatial framing. Pawtucket, in this video, becomes both a stand in for the post-industrial city and the site for a very specific vision of the post-industrial. The actor—not the emcee, who is absent from this video—becomes a stand-in for the post-industrial working-class person. Yet, by dint of being placed amidst such spatial cues, he is not turned into something universal.

Carvalho’s work suggests the degree to which black cultures, broadly speaking, are “generated in a complex pattern of antagonistic relationships with the supra-national and
imperial world,” not just the neighborhood (Gilroy, “from The Black Atlantic,” 2566). Yet while Carvalho’s work is in conversation with Afro-diasporic cultures, it is also in conversation with the working-class Luso-American cultures of the Archipelago. The ghetto represented in Carvalho’s videos is not a universal, self-creating space, but rather a local manifestation of national and international economic conditions. The poverty, unemployment, social unrest and criminalization that mark urban poor and working-class communities in the popular imaginary are products not of these communities themselves, but of government policy. These spaces are also, at least to some degree, descendants of the same Atlantic economy that first brought Azorean and Cape Verdean workers to the shores of New England a century and a half ago. The “iconic ghetto” as manufactured through mass-mediated images represents not a reality, but an image that hides the underlying causes:

The media’s systematic avoidance of the destructive elements in urban renewal, deindustrialization, corporate crime and the woefully flawed public education system [are] left undiscussed, effectively severing the mass media and government from their critical role in perpetuating the conditions that foster violent street crime. (Rose, Black Noise 140)

Thus when Carvalho draws attention to the specific material struggles of the people of Pawtucket, he is not speaking solely to the conditions of the imagined “ghetto.” Rather, he is entering into a broader conversation between the poor and working classes and larger socio-cultural structures that press them to the margin.

While it’s important more generally, as Rose suggests, that we engage with the patterns of specific economic marginalization that videos like “Last Dollar” present, it’s especially important within the context of the Archipelago. Cities like Pawtucket, Providence, Fall River
and New Bedford have undergone a long and harsh process of deindustrialization. Single-industry cities, they witnessed profound collapse in the middle decades of the twentieth century, some years before the more general collapse of the so-called Rust Belt. Even in Conforti’s memoir of post-war Fall River, an era that, in retrospect, looks like a golden age, there are hints that the work is slowing down, becoming increasingly less sustainable, and moving southward. What Carvalho documents, then, is a long experience of deindustrialization that is perhaps unique to the communities of southeastern New England. All of this is to say that the “local” Carvalho engages with, defined by movement between an iconic and imaginary “ghetto” and very real Pawtucket, is emphatically local, but not just local. By paying close attention to specific urban spaces, Carvalho is able to express the aesthetic uniqueness of these communities while at the same time claiming space for these communities within national discourse. This challenges the notion that poor urban communities are undifferentiated spaces of suffering and poverty, a notion that, as Imani Perry has shown, has become needlessly prevalent. Moving between an imagined “ghetto” and a particular local neighborhood, Carvalho is able to draw attention to the existence of specific urban communities—and to their specific existence. This attentiveness to the local is indicative not just of Carvalho’s work, but of works from the Archipelago more broadly, as we have already seen.

“They wanna know if I speak kriolu, ouvim”: movement through place, memory, and language

42 For more on this, see especially Perry 38-40.
Further along in “Freedom Ring,” Carvalho expands this movement between the local and the national to include the international, engaging in one of the defining patterns of hip hop from the Archipelago (and, no doubt, from other diasporic communities). Carvalho moves his listener seamlessly from city (Pawtucket), to state (Rhode Island) before moving beyond the States to Cape Verde: “…I rep Rhode Isle/what you youngins know about style?/Nothin, so I’m carryin’ the state/I’ll take you overseas/I’m transported on a CD/that can fly and lands in CV.” In just a few bars, Carvalho captures the spatial complexity of the Archipelago. The mechanism by which he is able to do this is music: he moves, metaphorically, from Rhode Island to Cape Verde through a CD capable of crossing the Atlantic in a way the body isn’t. This kind of movement is indicative not only of the kind of work Carvalho, Sandro G and other emcees do in the Archipelago, but of the kind of work hip hop is always ready to perform. It represents a version of what Imani Perry calls the hip hop real. For Perry “[t]he Real is the location where an individual remains committed to his or her community, professes that allegiance, and remains honestly and organically rooted in his or her position in the world” (88). For Perry, the hip hop real is distinct from other notions of what is representative because it is tied to the generic conventions of the form. It is the emcee’s ability to “move” through metaphor that allows this representative real. Carvalho and Sandro G makes use of the generic convention of the real, but expand it outward, making it more dynamic and fluid through its engagement with diasporic spaces beyond the iconic ghetto.

Sandro G’s song and video, “Dança” highlight these movements. The video offers a sort of micro-narrative of movement within the diaspora. While, as Carol Vernallis notes, “[m]usic videos do not [typically] embody complete narratives or convey finely wrought stories,” “Dança” does offer a visual account of trans-Atlantic movement (3). As the title card fades, a
blurry outline of a land mass (São Miguel) occupies the frame for a moment before it camera pans across what appears to be ocean. Finally the camera zooms in on the coast of Massachusetts, eventually coming close enough to show East Boston runways of Logan Airport. A stretch Cadillac arrives; Sandro G and a friend walk through the airport with luggage; a frame split unevenly between the Portuguese flag and the Azorean flag occupies the full frame; the text “açoreano” flashes in quickly. In these opening frames, Sandro G has engaged in a (symbolic, metaphoric) process of movement across the Atlantic. He has left the Azores and arrived in Boston. Crucially, the images used to convey this movement also foreshorten it: what is in reality a long voyage by plane becomes a quick pan of the camera. The distance between Archipelago communities in the U.S. and communities in the Azorean archipelago is in this way closed. At least in this video, Sandro G can unproblematically and rapidly move between the two archipelagoes as if they were one and be simultaneously açoreano and American.

Maintaining a claim to realness, then, is not just a matter of proving that one has come from a particular urban, working-class community, but rather demonstrating that one continues to be from that community. The neighborhood is not just the source or wellspring of the emcee, the music, and the culture, but is also a sort of birth-giving entity that must be continuously re-engaged. Movement outward from the local is a fundamental element of the hip hop aesthetic. In this chapter’s epigraph, Carvalho untangles his own complex lineage and makes a claim to represent the various places which he has been/will be/is from. In his verbal mix, he dedicates the song to the particular place from which he has come and continues to be from. He again claims Rhode Island, underscoring both his power as an emcee to claim an entire state and the
importance of making his claim intelligible to a national audience.\textsuperscript{43} By citing the state as the eleventh island in the ten-island Cape Verdean archipelago, the emcee places his city within the diaspora. He also places his work within a long Cape Verdean- and Azorean-American tradition of adding the New England diaspora to the homeland as an additional island. Sandro G’s quick visual movement from the Azores to Boston might represent a similar claiming of the “tenth island.” For Carvalho and Sandro G both, the hood is not just Somerville or Pawtucket but the diaspora, the tenth or eleventh island. Carvalho, taking a cue perhaps from Sandro G, completes his metonymic movement across the Atlantic by claiming to represent (for) Cape Verde as well. For Carvalho, authenticity entails not only his continued presence in a particular urban community, but also his presence in a broader diasporic community, as well as the availability of the idea of a homeland outside of the United States, whether or not he is able to be physically present there.

In the first verse of his hit “Sabim,” which interpolates the song of the same name by singer Grace Evora, Carvalho traces the explicit linkages between himself, his father, and his sense of being part of a Cape Verdean community. Carvalho raps: “my pops was smart/he taught us bout the food and the land/the music and the art.” In this direct way, he brings his father into his verse as the originator of knowledge of culture and place. He goes on to explain his father’s more passive cultural influences that come not from explicitly teaching his son about Cape Verdean culture but from directly exposing him to musical genres like the morna. He suggests the closeness he feels to his father: “And I imagine how he felt/When he saw me rappin live on TV/wearin a shirt that said CV/reppin the Carvalho name and I made it look easy.” As he

\textsuperscript{43} It is interesting to note too what making this claim suggests about Carvalho’s intended audience. While members of the diaspora—in southeastern New England, in Cape Verde, and for that matter in the Azores—would certainly recognize Pawtucket, the general American audience would not. Rhode Island, then, offers a legible location for the general American audience in a way Pawtucket, Rhode Island cannot.
delivers the last line, Carvalho pulls down his tank top to reveal the family name inked across his chest. Here he emphasizes his father’s position as a powerful source of cultural knowledge, including the knowledge that makes it possible for Carvalho to sample Grace Evora, a key figure in the previous generation of Cape Verdean music.

Without digressing too much, it is important to consider here the way both Carvalho and Sandro G link their experience of cultural life in the Archipelago with their parents. While Carvalho chooses to speak for his father—to, like Conforti, “imagine how he felt”—and to position his father as a fount of cultural knowledge, Sandro G takes a different approach. In “As Palavras da Minha Avó” (“My Grandmother’s Words”), the emcee reaches back lyrically and visually to the words of his grandmother. His grandmother, crucially, does not accompany the artist’s parents to New England but remains behind in São Miguel. The video finds Sandro G returning to his hometown of Rabo de Peixe, searching the streets before ultimately laying down a rose on what is presumably his grandmother’s grave. Here, too, the emcee has chosen a crucial figure from an older generation of music, in this case Portuguese musical legend Amália Rodrigues, as the source of a plaintive sample. In the song’s verses, Sandro G offers an account of his family’s poverty in the Azores, of the necessity of migration, and of course, of the subsequent experience of saudade.44 While each verse is clearly narrated by Sandro G, each also

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44 “Saudade” is one those crucial cultural concepts necessary to understanding Portuguese culture; unfortunately, it is also far too complicated a cultural signifier to delve into in depth here. For now, it’s enough to say that saudade is an intense feeling of longing that carries in it also a sense of the hopelessness of that longing. “Saudade” is present (and important) in Brazilian and Lusophone African language and culture, but it is most prominent in Portugal and in the Atlantic Islands. In Kriolu, it is spelled “sodade.” The Portuguese critic Eduardo Lourenço has made saudade a central element of his conceptions of Portuguese nationality, and a volume of his writings, This Little Lusitanian House (2003) is available in translation. Readers of Portuguese can refer to his O labirinto da saudade (1972).
calls the listener’s attention to the importance of listening to and remembering the family’s stories through the shared concluding refrain “I cannot forget my grandmother’s words.”

What “As Palavras” offers us that “Sabim” doesn’t is the dynamic play of memory and place. While neither emcee remembers their father (or mother) the way the memoirists do, presumably because their parents are still alive, Sandro G does very explicitly claim to remember—or to not forget—his grandparents. He performs the act of remembering in this song in two ways. Lyrically, he retells elements of both of his parents’ childhood experiences; visually, he returns physically to what is (presumably) the family home to search for these lost words. The visual elements of the other videos—the street, the houses, the children, and the centering of the emcee—are all present here, suggesting continued engagement with the same themes. Yet here the movement outward is put in service of memory, to bring the emcee “back” to his place of birth, to perform a function very similar to the reflections on birthplace and community in the memoirs. The temptation to suggest a neat parallel is strong, but these texts are too complex for that. Sandro G’s act of memory brings him back to his actual birthplace, but Carvalho remembers the words of his (living) father while noting, in the same song, that he’s never actually visited Cabo Verde. By the time he films the video in Son Visent, though, he has clearly made the trip.

Interestingly, both emcees deploy similar visual techniques in the videos they shoot in the islands. Carvalho has shot two videos in Cape Verde; the more interesting is “Sabim.” In this video the gray tenements and mills of Rhode Island are exchanged for the colorful houses and bright skies of Mindelo, Son Visent. The opening frames of the video place Carvalho in the

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45 This sounds a bit underwhelming in translation, perhaps because the translator (me) hasn’t been able to capture the poetic sense of the original, which works powerfully as a refrain: “As palavras da minha avó eu não posso esquecer.”
center with collaborator and fellow Cape Verdean-American artist DJ Therion behind him. A woman passes them on the right, an SUV on the left. As the video progresses, Chachi enters into a shop and gives the owner daps while the camera remains on the street. The quick moment of acknowledgment in the store, the rows of houses, and even his engagement with kids along the way reproduce the visual cues of “Freedom Rings.” They also reproduce some of the elements of Sandro G’s biggest hit, “Eu Não Vou Chorar.” Set in Rabo de Peixe, the video features centered full-body shots of Sandro G in most frames. One key scene, cut and mixed in throughout, forms the video’s aesthetic spine. In it, Sandro G walks down the center of a street with a line of children stretched out on either side of him. This core shot, mixed in with others focusing on the buildings and people of the town, performs the same symbolic function as the shots in Carvalho’s videos: it emphasizes the emcee’s rootedness in place. From the very first verse of the song, too, Sandro G is concerned with both claiming the town as his own and countering popular misconceptions of it: “Eu sou de Rabo de Peixe/mas não tenhas medo.”46 The emcee claims both his birthplace and its place in the Azorean imaginary as impoverished, marginal, and, here, a bit scary: in other words, as an “iconic ghetto.”

So far, I have focused on exploring movement between spaces and the way memory informs, or perhaps makes possible, these movements. I have looked primarily at the movement of music videos, and the sort of telescoping of space they make possible. I have also explored the way memories of parents and grandparents, expressed directly in lyrics, can facilitate movement outward from the localized spaces of the Archipelago to the Cape Verdean and Azorean archipelagos. Lyrically, another mode of mobility is also prominent in the work of both emcees: movement between languages. Carvalho and Sandro G move back and forth between English.

46 “I’m from Rabo de Peixe/but don’t be afraid.”
and Kriolu or Portuguese, respectively, both within songs and between tracks. When one language is used exclusively on a track or album, Jannis Androutsopoulos suggests, it implies that the track is intended for an audience that speaks that language; but when multiple languages are used, it suggests a bilingual audience (65). While anyone can listen to the music, then, it is only fully comprehensible to those who speak not just one or the other of the languages, but both. In this way, when multiple linguistic shifts occur on a single track, layers of meaning and representation are created. These linguistic layers—which parallel the spatial layers of hip hop—create incredible complexity. For example, on “Eu Não Vou Chorar” Sandro G raps exclusively in Portuguese, which directs his verses clearly at a Portuguese-speaking audience. While this audience would include most of the people of the Archipelago, it would exclude those who do not speak Portuguese; it might also exclude those speakers of Portuguese who can’t make out Sandro’s Micaelense accent. Chachi’s verses in Kriolu work in a similar way.

In one of the most linguistically fluid tracks of his career, “Crack na Cozinha,” Sandro G and two featured emcees, Hex and K-9, shift back and forth fluidly between English and Portuguese. The way they do so mirrors the use of multiple codes in the Archipelago and in so doing marks off the intended (or at least anticipated) audience quite clearly. Sandro’s verse is almost entirely in Portuguese but includes English words that might be used, untranslated, in Portuguese speech in the Archipelago (most noticeably “crack,” used whenever Sandro chooses not to use the more general Portuguese droga, itself derived from the English word drug). He concludes his verse with an English version of the hook. The other two emcees, meanwhile, rap exclusively in English but include some Portuguese words, and rap the hook entirely in Portuguese. This code switching, besides being a key aspect of life in the multi-lingual Archipelago, also does important structural work. Through its movement between languages, the
video telescopes the distance between local and national in image at the same time as it brings together English and a “foreign” language. Director Nelson Reis further underscores this layering by superimposing images of the Azorean flag, jail bars, and street scenes over posse shots of the emcees delivering their rhymes.

The linguistic and visual strategies of “Crack na Cozinha” form an interesting comparison with those of “Sabim.” The track opens with sung phrases from a sample of Grace Evora’s hit “Sabim” before giving way to Carvalho’s first verse. The emcee, in the bars about his father and his culture that I close read in some detail above, interpolates Kriolu into his verse in the same way the emcees do on “Crack na Cozinha”: where diasporic speech patterns would call for it. This means, for example, that the national dish cachupa remains untranslated, while the words that introduce it don’t: “and I can smell cachupa in the air.” After numerous bars in English, Chachi crosses a boundary of a sort. Approaching a young boy, he raps “they wanna know if I speak Kriolu, ouvim” and then proceeds to prove himself by rapping several bars in Kriolu. These bars, addressed first to the boy in the video and then directly to the audience, mark the song as a product of the diaspora. In the context of the song—in which Chachi notes “and I ain’t never been there yet/but I hold Cabo Verde in my heart”—these lines are directed at speakers of Kriolu who would doubt whether the American-born emcee can speak the language. These lines, by extension, demonstrate that the diasporic community that produced Chachi remains linked to its linguistic roots in the islands. Even though he grew up in Pawtucket, he can still speak Kriolu.
For hip hop artists within the Archipelago, the neighborhood always comes first. Chachi makes this clear through repeated ad libs of “from the hood to the Islands.” This emphasis on the local is one of the cornerstones of hip hop. It is also one of the defining characteristics of working-class cultures more broadly. Yet, for emcees like Sandro G and Chachi Carvalho, the neighborhood is in dialogue not just with the “iconic ghetto” of American popular culture but with other neighborhoods within the Archipelago and across the Atlantic. This complexity provides a useful counter to the domestication of hip hop. It suggests that the emcee cannot be contained within the marginal spaces of the American city. It suggests the power of the emcee to represent both self and neighborhood in complex ways that do not allow for the simple generalizations typical of depictions of working-class ethnic communities. In this way, it represents a continuation of the project memoirists like Nunes Lopes, Reis Felix and Conforti are engaged in. In the final part of this section, I hope to carry key analytic threads forward from my analysis of the memoirs and apply them to the work of these two emcees.

**Representation, the Archipelago, and the emcee**

By claiming free movement into and out of the spaces of the Archipelago, the United States, and the Azores and Cape Verde, Chachi Carvalho and Sandro G make a strong claim for their own individuality. I mean this not in the sense of their uniqueness, but in the same sense that I have used the term before, when writing about Nunes Lopes, Reis Felix and Conforti, to mean their completeness or fullness as subjects and humans. While their approach is necessarily different, their project shares this much in common with that of the memoirists: all are deeply

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47 While Sandro G and Chachi Carvalho are by far the most famous, other Azorean-American (Hex, K-9) and Cape Verdean-American (DJ Therion, D. Lopes, Petcha, Elji) emcees and producers are active in the New England area.
concerned with challenging popular images of them that would limit their individuality and confine them to particular spaces. Movement is important in this context because the kind of movements these emcees engage in are only possible when paired with a firm claim to be from a particular place. At the risk of being overly theoretical here, I’d like to point out that the claim to “be from” somewhere is of the ultimate importance politically. Derrida traces this requirement back to the right of the state to obtain knowledge from a “foreigner”—their name and their place of origin—before offering them entry into the city. Without first asking these questions, “hospitality”—passage into the nation—is not possible: “hospitality…is not offered to an anonymous new arrival and someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor social status, and who is therefore treated not as a foreigner but as another barbarian” (25). Unless one can prove to be from somewhere, one cannot prove their humanity. In order to be able to claim to represent a particular place, one must be able to prove birth or right. This applies not just to citizenship within a nation but to citizenship within a genre, a diaspora, or a neighborhood. The challenges to claiming a place of origin are very real for people of color, working- and poverty-class people, and immigrants. As Anderson notes, an extensive system of social and economic policies ensures that poor people stay in their designated spaces (“The Iconic Ghetto,” 14). Writers from the Archipelago are especially attuned to the way their bodies are contained within specific urban spaces and consigned to particular forms of work. Immigration policies and the regime of deportation further limit the movement of people within the Archipelago.

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48 See also Nicolas DeGenova, *The Deportation Regime*.
49 As Iton suggests, the control of black and poor bodies and their containment within the border of the specifically national helps instantiate and maintain apparatuses of economic and racial oppression. See especially p. 195.
Hip hop provides a particularly strong means for claiming space and place, though it is not the only form in which to do so.\textsuperscript{50} As Dustin Engels argues, the emphasis on defining and representing space is not confined to hip hop alone, but is consistent with other filmic and literary representations of black working-class culture. Replete with visible markers of black, urban, working-class experience, genres like Blaxploitation cinema and “gangsta rap” were able both to define a potential space for “citizenship” within the borders of the United States and to protect it from appropriation by dominant cultural groups (Engels 2). These forms have been able to do this by centering urban working-class spaces. The “iconic ghetto,” as imaginary as it may be, relies on constant reference to real, particular neighborhoods. This provides the genre with a firm (literal) “grounding.” Neighborhoods, after all, are not as easily appropriated as music. As Basu and Werbner argue, “even though rap music is consumed by millions, the black ghetto exists in reality only for black urbanites, whose source of identity is profoundly tied to that location: socially, culturally, and geopolitically” (251). Hip hop and other working- and poverty-class forms of cultural production, by emphasizing the local, prevent those who cannot claim the local from claiming the form. If the black ghetto exists only for those who live in it, those who share memories and cultural practices that emerge from the experience of that ghetto, the Archipelago is similarly bounded by experience, memory, family and language. To claim to represent one of its spaces, one must be able to show where they are from.

This same dynamic informs the occasionally touch-and-go relationship Joseph Conforti presents with his neighborhood of birth. In writing about the Flint and its first- and second-generation Azorean culture, Conforti tries to walk a thin line between identifying with the place and distancing himself from it. The generic conventions of working-class life writing, like those

\textsuperscript{50} Country music prominently engages with many of the same dynamics. See especially Pam Fox.
of hip hop, require that he present his credentials. If he is going to write a “memoir” of Fall River, and particularly if he is going to write one of working-class Azorean-American Fall River, he has to prove that he is from there. As I have already suggested, this proof takes the form of discussions of family, labor, and place, each of them presented in great detail. At the same time—and here Bidinger’s close attention to the ethics of working-class life writing becomes crucial—Conforti presents his claim in the form of a remembered narrative from a position of relative power. Charles Reis Felix and Belmira Nunes Lopes also present their narratives as acts of remembering a relatively distant past from a position of social and economic privilege. While Conforti, Felix, Carvalho, Nunes Lopes and Sandro G all make important claims to represent the Archipelago, they make use of memory in a very different way.

In a very real sense, this shift can be attributed both to differences in age and changes in the Archipelago. While the older writers grew up at a time when the communities of the Archipelago were economically viable, when working-class labor was, if not valued, at least a prominent and viable aspect of neighborhood identity, the younger emcees came up in a very different Archipelago. When work is available in these cities now, it tends to be service work, not industrial work; the “real social, economic, and psychological resources for constructing masculinity” that Linkon suggests industrial work made possible are no longer commonly available (148). Neither of the emcees explore work, their own or that of their parents, in the same way the memoirists do. Rather, through songs like “Last Dollar,” they explore the absence of work. If the memoirists use memory to re-create a particular space they have been from, one that links them in to a larger community, the emcees claim to be presently part of a particular space and to be empowered to represent it. While these seem on the surface very different processes, their primary difference may be that of time. Their common foundation in the urban
spaces of the Archipelago suggests that they are, in a fundamental way, different responses to similar experiences of work, life, and marginality.\textsuperscript{51}

The ability of emcees in the Archipelago to complicate popular notions of urban, ethnic working-class people and cultures—and in so doing, to reclaim their own individuality—is tied up in the local. In the introduction, I claimed that life narratives from the Archipelago are deeply imbedded in the particular spaces of urban New England, and that they use these spaces to challenge common misconceptions about urban working- and poverty-class communities, specifically the notion that these communities are “stuck” as it were in the local, incapable of moving beyond the pathologized spaces of the iconic ghetto. In this chapter, I have suggested the way a close focus on local space, attentive acknowledgments of the challenges of the postindustrial working class, and fluid presentations of movement beyond the local help challenge such notions. This is all made possible through a deep engagement with the conventions of hip hop as a form that demands the emcee make big metaphoric leaps in his rhymes. When Sandro G and Chachi Carvalho put this telescoping movement to use, they do so in a way that emphasizes the wideness and transnationality of the Archipelago.

\textsuperscript{51} I will not attempt to trace in detail the way deindustrialization has changed the experience of people from the Archipelago; there simply isn’t enough time or space to do that here.
IV. “So mais um”: a final note

Any of the Cape Verdeans and Azoreans I thanked at the beginning still reading this have a lingering question, no doubt, that I haven’t taken up since introducing it in the first section. Azorean-American and Cape Verdean-American people see themselves as sharing common experiences, common cultural elements, and common spaces, but they don’t necessarily see themselves as constituting a common culture. In some way, then, this project has an element of fantasy in it. Cape Verdean Kriolu and Azorean Portuguese are, or at least can be, mutually intelligible. I have seen my grandfather and my aunt’s father get past whatever linguistic barriers there may be between these two languages with nothing more than a pool table and a beer. Some blend of Kriolu, Portuguese and English will get you understood anywhere in the Archipelago. But these experiences, like those of the authors, are very personal. Many, if not most, Azorean families in southern New England have Cape Verdean members; many, if not most, Cape Verdean families in southern New England have Azorean members. But this, too, is personal and anecdotal. Systematically, likely for the very reasons Nunes Lopes suggests, Cape Verdean-Americans and Azorean-Americans do not consider themselves the same people. They are neighbors, friends, co-linguists, and co-sufferers of deindustrialization in southern New England’s mill towns. “White” Luso-Americans continue to occupy an uncertainly-marked ethnic position in the United States: during the 2004 presidential campaign, as Matthew Moniz notes, John Kerry’s Portuguese-American wife was portrayed by biracial comedian Maya Rudolph on Saturday Night Live. But Azorean-Americans today encounter few, if any, of the

52 Moniz also cites the Travolta movie Phenomenon; the most successful Portuguese-American actor, Joaquim Almeida, who has made a career playing Latino and Latin American villains; and the Luso-Canadian singer Nelly Furtado, during the height of her career a regular guest at the Latin Grammys. I would add to this the film
barriers of racial prejudice and institutional racism that many Cape Verdean-Americans still face on a daily basis. Azorean-Americans today are white. Cape Verdean-Americans are black, non-white, or white, depending on a range of factors too complex for this project.

If I haven’t already stretched the Archipelago metaphor too thin, I’d like to elaborate on it a little more. It is an apt description of the Lusophone communities of southern New England, I have already suggested, because it captures something of the spatial distance between these communities. Somerville and Cambridge, Brockton, New Bedford and Fall River, Pawtucket and Providence are each some distance from each other. They’re not contiguous. Yet they are linked by dense networks of kinship, economic codependence, language, culture, and a rich, dense shared experience of diaspora. They are also, while not contiguous, close enough to permit regular travel between them. Reis Felix’s father essentially walks to Brockton to pay a debt; Conforti accompanies his father on regular trips to Providence; Belmira Nunes Lopes is born in Providence, raised on the Cape, educated in Cambridge, and ultimately ends her life in East Providence. This blend of distance and close proximity mirrors, I think, patterns of movement within the Azorean and Cape Verdean archipelagos. While each island is separate and distant from its neighbors, it is linked in a wider network. The Archipelago, like the archipelagoes, is marked by a tension between separation and connection, distance and proximity, difference and commonality.

In the past, however, the archipelagoes functioned differently. As Maria Luisa Nunes suggests, for centuries identity in the Atlantic Islands has been based not on the regional or national level, but on the level of the island, and on matters of class status and appearance within

*Mystic River*, which portrays a working-class Azorean-American community in Connecticut with a cast of not just white, but entirely Anglo-American, actors, save Vincent D’Onofrio.
a given island: “…ethnic solidarity or acceptance by Cape Verdeans of other Cape Verdeans is a tenuous matter based on island of origin as well as on class and phenotypes” (5). Each island in the Cape Verdean archipelago has developed slightly different accents, cultures, and ways of racially, ethnically, and culturally relating. Azoreans, too, have tended to identify more with their particular island of origin than with the notion of being Azoreans (and even less, until recent decades, with the idea of being “Portuguese”). Azoreans, too, vary in phenotype, in specific cultural practice, and in ethno-racial and phenotypic characterization from island to island. Brava is not Son Visent; São Miguel is not Faial. The Archipelago I have outlined here is also marked by the distance of individual communities and the proximity I-95 and I-195 provide them. It is also marked by the intense localism characteristic of the individual islands of the archipelagoes (though this, arguably, is a general trend in New England, where a state like Rhode Island can have thirty-two separate municipalities) and the un-nuanced American racial binary imposed on the Archipelago.

Finally, there is the colonial project. The Portuguese Empire never encompassed swaths of territory as large as the British, French, Spanish, or Japanese empires did, with the notable exception of Brazil. Rather, Portuguese colonialism has tended to rely on trade centers, coastal cities loosely connected to each other, to the “interior,” and to the metropole. The notion that small, distinct communities of people would exist together within a loose framework of shared experience, connected by a nationalism that is truly more imagined than visible, linked together perhaps primarily by the way they have been treated, is especially attractive within the history of

53In his history of Azorean-Americans, Jerry R. Williams describes the phenomenon like this: “Within this close-knit society, the individual identified most clearly with his particular village and the island on which it was located. Little, if any, thought was given to the fact that these islands, collectively known as the Azores, were considered by the Portuguese crown to be an integral part of Portugal or that the inhabitants were Portuguese citizens” (15).
54For more on the nature of Portuguese colonialism in Africa, see especially Patrick Chabal, A History of Postcolonial Lusophone Africa.
the Portuguese empire. What do Macanese, Timorese, Goans, Angolans, Mozambicans, Cape Verdeans, Azoreans, Madeirans, Brazilians, and Portuguese, as well as descendants of small trading communities in places as distant as Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Bangladesh, have in common? Little more than a bit of language, a bit of bacalhau, some economic ties, some common saints, and the shared experience of Portuguese colonialism.

One of the most important things we can learn from re-focusing our approach to Cape Verdean-, Portuguese-, and Azorean-American cultural production in New England is a lesson about the flexibility of communities. When Belmira Nunes Lopes’ parents married and settled down, they did so in Providence’s Fox Point neighborhood. They did so decades before my own family did the same; half a century later, other families from the Azores and Cape Verde would continue to call this small section of Providence their first home in the U.S. Today, that is not the case. If you want to locate Azorean or Cape Verdean people in Providence now, you go to Washington Park, or else you go beyond the strict borders of the city to East Providence or Pawtucket. Fox Point’s proximity to Brown University has meant that, after more than a century of being a core “island” in the Archipelago, a densely-packed neighborhood of Cape Verdean and Azorean families, it is one no longer. If it still is an island, it is an island of wealth and privilege. While the street signs still bear the colors of the Portuguese flag, and the feast of the Espirito Santo is still performed there as it is in New Bedford, Fall River, Brockton, Somerville, Warren, East Providence, and Pawtucket, Creole and Portuguese are rarely heard. Projects like Claire Andrade Watkins’ film *Some Kind of Funny Porto Rican* can now explore Fox Point as a place of remembered community rather than as a living one.

Deindustrialization, “precariatization,” gentrification, and the other threats to working-class communities across the United States do not respect the boundaries of academic disciplines
any more than they respect those of ethnic identity. As Fox Point has been gentrified, Azorean families have been forced out as easily as Cape Verdean ones. As Fall River endures its steep and seemingly endless economic decline, it does so with the largest Portuguese-speaking population in the United States, but also with a significant population of Spanish and English speakers. While it is possible to read the texts explored here strictly within the context of Portuguese or Cape Verdean cultures – to continue to look out across the Atlantic for answers – it is not productive to do so. To do so would require ignoring the economic, spatial, linguistic and experiential links that, even if they do not create particularly strong activist links within the Archipelago, certainly cut across it.

I want to finish with a final, personal note. Once, at Christmas dinner at my uncle’s house, I watched my aunt’s father and my grandfather play a game of pool in the basement. In a blend of Kriolu and Azorean Portuguese, they argued, bragged, and occasionally sunk a ball (while they were both once great players at the social clubs in East Providence and Pawtucket, pool requires a steadier hand than either of them had at the time). When my aunt called us all back upstairs for dessert, my grandfather pointed to her and made a joke—that the way she said dessert sounded like eighteen, and was she really only eighteen? My aunt laughed a little to humor him. My mother did too, and my uncle, and my little cousins would have if they had been paying any attention. But my grandfather laughed like crazy with my aunt’s father, and I did too. My aunt says dessert like everyone else in my family, with a southern New England accent—d’zert, but with the r not quite there. In Azorean Portuguese, eighteen, dezoito, becomes d’zert. My grandfather and my aunt’s father hadn’t taught their children much Portuguese or Kriolu, but my grandfather was frustrated all the same that no one got the joke. I understood the joke, ironically, not just because I grew up in the Archipelago, but also because I went to school there.
At Brown University. Where I studied Portuguese, blocks away from the three deckers my grandfather grew up, in a neighborhood now full of middle- and upper-class, mostly white, students and academics, who acknowledge the Luso-American community they have displaced only by commenting on the pasteis at the last remaining Portuguese bakery.
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