1

The North End

❊

The North End is a state of mind surrounded by waters.

—*A Bostonian proverb*

The first time I went to the North End I followed the Freedom Trail, a tiny red line painted on the streets that goes through downtown Boston in order to facilitate the tourist enterprise of visiting the historical sites of the city. Exiting the subway, I led myself all the way to Downtown Crossing, not lingering enough at the Old State House, giving a quick look at the window of the Old Corner Bookstore, rapidly crossing the courtyard at Faneuil Hall, while still taking long enough to pay due homage to Sam Adams's statue (I am not a proper or improper Bostonian, I am not even an American, but I do like a good beer), and of course stopping at the Union Oyster House for a ritual cup of clam chowder. Even though I was late, I allowed myself to stop at the Holocaust monument for what soon became another personal ritual of respect. It was Saturday morning, therefore Haymarket Square was crowded with people shopping for fruit and seafood but I found my way through the multitude and finally reached my final destination, the gateway to Boston's North End. The small entrance led to a concrete winding tunnel overlooking the Big Dig, the gigantic construction project for the subterranean Central Artery. Every passerby could see the unceasing and endless work in progress from Plexiglass windows, viewing what seemed to be a supernatural—at least from the economic point of view—effort to make a more livable city. Nowhere along the walls of the tunnel were advertisements of any kind posted, but rather historical maps of the city and municipal coats of arms of many Italian cities: Napoli, Parma, and Roma, to name but a few.

I moved from my initial surprise and astonishment at these seemingly odd urban decorations to arrive at a logical and economic explanation of them. They

were advertisements of the two most appealing and marketable resources of the neighborhood: history and ethnicity. After all, I was entering the oldest residential district of the city, that "for the last half century . . . has been known as "Little Italy." Its streets are lined with espresso bars, old-fashioned grocery stores, and Italian restaurants housed in 100-year-old brick buildings. Today, a sizable chunk of the neighborhood's residents bear Italian last names. It's not unusual to hear Italian being spoken on the streets, or, in some cases, yelled from upper-story windows."[1] This is what I will explore in this work—the two fundamental categories: history and ethnicity.

On Boundaries and Changes

Boston's North End is a peninsula of almost one hundred acres, half a mile long and wide, confined by the ocean on the north, east, and west sides. The ocean can be considered, above all, a physical frontier, even if it is embedded with different symbolic meanings. For instance, the feeling of territoriality and belonging connected to the ocean is certainly not the same between a North Ender born in the mountain of Montefalcione and working in a factory or holding a local, terra firma, business and a neighbor from Sciacca, a fisherman from generation to generation, who expands the idea of territoriality beyond streets and buildings, including ships, waters, and courses.[2] Another physical as well as symbolic border was the Big Dig project separating the North End from the rest of the city on the south and southwest sides. Despite all the problems connected with this almost endless work, the North End, protected by the Big Dig, became more and more a sort of exotic secret place to protect and discover, favoring a sort of strategic essentialism of the "Italian" neighborhood (Spivak 1989, 1993).

It is important to state immediately that these boundaries are historically and culturally determined, changing over time. I will explore in the following paragraphs some of the ambiguities and persistences, changes and maintenances, of these elusive and exclusive boundaries that have delimited, and above all defined, the North End in the past and into the present. Shaping and naming an area should be seen not only as a process of drawing down physical borders, but also, and not surprisingly, as a process of building symbolic boundaries, declaring and reinforcing situational and ephemeral identities. Following Fredrick Barth's seminal work (1969), any discussion concerning ethnicity must involve boundaries. Boundaries inevitably influence the life of both the insiders and the outsiders, they dichotomize "we" and "the others," giving a sense of ascriptive identity for exclusive groups. Mainly, scholars' investigations of ethnicity focus on the construction and maintenance of social and symbolic boundaries, and my study will be the same. But along with this sort of analysis, I will look also at the geographical markers of territories: It is quite evident that they

carry symbolic implications too.[3] Territorial boundaries, in other words, should be considered as important variables in the discussion about the complexity of identity negotiations. This idea of boundaries is a heuristic tool that can help unfold the ambiguities, contradictions, and dynamics of an ambiguous, contradictory, and dynamic space. Therefore, the discussion of territorial boundaries will allow me to suggest the idea of a conflicted space, in which a society, hierarchically structured, struggles. The metaphor of a territorial border delimiting a group from my point of view is restrictive and misleading. But a territorial border that incites social dynamics is a useful metonymy in order to reconceptualize groups and identities.

In my argument I am critically questioning the postmodern concept of "deterritorialization" in a globalized world, in which territory supposedly becomes increasingly less significant. I am very much in favor of a notion of "reterritorialization," as proposed by David Newman:

> Globalization does not lead to a reduction in the significance of territory per se, but it does lead to a new, more complex, understanding of the multi-dimensional, and dynamic, components of territory as a mechanism through which society is bordered, ordered and controlled. . . . Reterritorialization, as contrasted with deterritorialization, is the process through which territorial configurations of power are continually ordered and reordered. (2004, 6)

This concept, not new as Newman points out, refers to the creation of new states and the disappearance of others.[4] Scholarship focuses mainly on international borders and borderlands, border-crossing and narratives of nation-states, territorial conflicts and transnational communities. In other terms scholars privilege territorial borders on a macroscale. My argument demonstrates that analyses of these types of boundaries at the microlevel raise important epistemological questions: such as in the specific case of Boston's North End such analysis is fundamental for understanding social conflicts and ethnic behavior.

Another aim of this work is to bring into consideration historical perspectives. Most of the anthropological work on territorial borders, according to Alvarez, has been ahistorical:

> History is more than context, yet we have not incorporated historical interpretation into our border studies. In our quest to expose and illustrate the importance of difference and contrasts, the role of the border in people's creation of bonds and social networks over time has been neglected. (1995: 466)

The historical perspective I suggest allows me to introduce a more theoretical argument about constituting, modifying, and maintaining these boundaries.

The question therefore becomes: if boundaries, every sort of boundary, canalize social life, what kind of social dynamics correlate with borders, bridges, expressways, or the Big Dig?

I propose the concepts of "instability," "negotiability," and "permeability" of the border to illustrate the processes of continuous definition and redefinition of Boston's North End boundaries. This particular idea of boundaries allows me to avoid the major risks that occur when studying a bounded territory. Boundaries often are taken to imply essentialism and primordialism, containing unchanging cultures. According to this approach, boundaries delimit sorts of innate, fixed, un-modifiable characteristics (the Geertzian assumed "givens"),[5] persisting over time because they are fundamental for group and personal identity. My idea of borders, any kind of borders, is more instrumentalist, because I approach them as develop-ing in a dialectical and historically determined relationship to social requirements.

In conclusion what defines a boundary are the social dynamics excited by them and around them. In other words, I am not looking for any territorial in-tegrity, but for social negotiations, conflicts and crossing processes, that arise around the borders.

Instability: Physical and Symbolic Borders

Instability of boundaries seems to be the fundamental characteristic of Boston's North End. Over time the neighborhood negotiated its own geographical dimen-sion with the rest of the city and, subsequently, the specific assumption of territory and territoriality. Physical and symbolic boundaries concur to define the identity of the group settled in the neighborhood, therefore the endless negotiation of these boundaries inevitably implies an endless negotiation of identity, especially in terms of ethnicity. The boundaries of the North End, being elusive and unstable, con-tinuously changing over time, inevitably carry an ephemeral and more synchronic dimension into the present: historical changes lead to contemporary ambiguity.

The starting point for my analysis is a definition of the North End, made by Robert Woods in 1902:

> The North End is less than half a mile in any of its dimensions. It is a "tight little island," hemmed in by continuous and ever-encroaching currents of commercial activity. The station thoroughfares lead to the markets. The markets extend to the docks. The docks reach around from the markets to the railroads again. (1902: 2–4)

A century later the boundaries so clearly delineated by Woods are obsolete, as they were hardly predictable centuries before.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, this land was a hilly peninsula, called by the local Native Americans "Shawmut." According to Whitehill and

Kennedy (2000, 3), Reverend William Blaxton (or Blackstone) was the first European settler in the area. He arrived in New England as a chaplain following the expedition of Robert Gorges in 1623. The failure of Gorges's plantation in Wessagusset (now Weymouth, Massachusetts) did not discourage Blaxton, who moved north to the Shawmut peninsula in 1625. The solitary reverend settled in the vicinity of what is now Beacon and Spruce streets, slightly southwest of the North End, until the arrival of the Puritans led by John Winthrop in 1630. The Puritans first settled in Charlestown, on the mainland, but soon moved, apparently for lack of fresh water, to the Shawmut peninsula (now called Trimountain, for its geographical characteristics). On September 7, 1630, they renamed the area Boston. Winthrop's first settlement was near the present Dock Square, back then certainly part of the North End. As the toponym suggests, Dock Square derived its name from the town dock that was, in Whitehill and Kennedy's words, "at the head of Town Cove, which, jutting in from the harbor, divided Boston into North and South Ends" (2000, 5). Dock Square is now well inland but it is important to remember that the actual geographical limits of Boston now exceed by more than half the land available in 1630.[6] Over the years, the marshy lands surrounding the Neck, a narrow area along the line of Washington Street, were reclaimed with dams, excavations, and fillings.

It is possible to get an idea of the human settlement in Boston from the data contained in the *Book of Possessions*, presumably compiled in 1643.[7] According to these data, householders had established themselves primarily along the shore in the North End. The Town Cove—developed by Valentine Hill and his associates after which the city granted in 1641 the land of Bendalls Cove, now Faneuil Hall Square—at this time was considered part of the North End. The other side of the peninsula, the marshy north cove facing Charlestown, was granted in 1643 to Henry Symons, George Burden, John Button, John Hill, and their partners

> on condition that within three years they "erect and make upon or neere some part of the premises, one or more corne mills, and maynteyne the same for ever." They were to make a flood gate ten feet wide for the passage of boats into the cove, and were to have the right of cutting through the mars from the cove to a creek on the line of present Blakstone Street, and to dig trenches in the highway or waste grounds provided they "make and mainteyne sufficient, passable and safe wayes over the same for horse and Cart." (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000, 11)

The cove was partially separated from the Charles River by a narrow ridge "that had been used by the Indians as a footpath over the flats" (Rutan 1902, 15).[8] This natural boundary was reinforced into a dam, with possibilities of waterpower. The marshy cove was therefore transformed into Mill Pond, with grist mills using the tidal power. The beneficiaries of the grant also exploited the right to dig a

trench connecting Mill Pond and the Town Cove, and bridging it. It was known, as Rutan reminds us, "for a century and a half as the Mill Creek" (1902, 15). The erection of the dam and the construction of the trench had two important effects on the landscape of the North End: first, the shallow water of Mill Pond covered a large section of the peninsula (presently Salem and North Margin streets); and second, Mill Creek divided Boston in two, shaping the North End as the "Island of Boston." The North End was physically separated from the rest of the city, connected through the bridges at North and Hanover streets. Dock Square and Bendalls Cove are, at this point, outside the North End, now completely surrounded by water: the harbor, the Charles River, Mill Pond, and Mill Creek. At this time the North End was the most populous neighborhood of the town. According to Rutan (1902, 16), the growing population can be inferred from the building of the Second Church (also called Old North Church), in 1650, in North Square which decades later became the center of the area.[9]

The need for protection against attackers from the sea (Todisco 1976, 7), who were feared by the newly successful community, led to the erection of a fortification—the natural boundary of the seashore was strengthened with an artificial battery: the North Battery, also called the Battery Wharf. If North Battery is definitely a protective artificial boundary, built not to be crossed, on the other side of the island (former peninsula) from Hudson's Point the natural border of the Charles River was continuously and increasingly crossed by ferries to Charlestown.[10]

The time of the Puritans concluded with two catastrophic fires: one in 1676 and one in 1679. The rebuilding of the neighborhood marked a profound change in the social conditions of the population, as witnessed in their dwellings. If the early seventeenth century is denoted by the presence of skilled artisans living in wooden hovels, the late period of the century (the colonial or Queen's time) saw the rise of rich merchants, living in brick and cement houses, elegant and prosperous.[11] According to Rutan the difference between the two periods can be seen in the varying names of the neighborhood streets:

> In the early Puritan times, the titles given to the streets [of the North End] are mostly of a cumbrous, descriptive character, as "The street leading up to the house of Sir Williams Phips, Knight." In Garden Court Street there still lingers a pleasant flavor of the descriptive custom; but most of the old names that survive chronicle events rather than characteristics, and show the difference between the simple expedients of a hamlet and the exacting demands of a growing town. The more formal and permanent names of the streets appear in the complete list already mentioned as having been made in 1708. At that time Black Horse Lane ceased to be called after the tavern at its head and was known as Prince Street, while Fleet Street became the recognized title of Scarlet's Wharf Lane. (1902, 23)
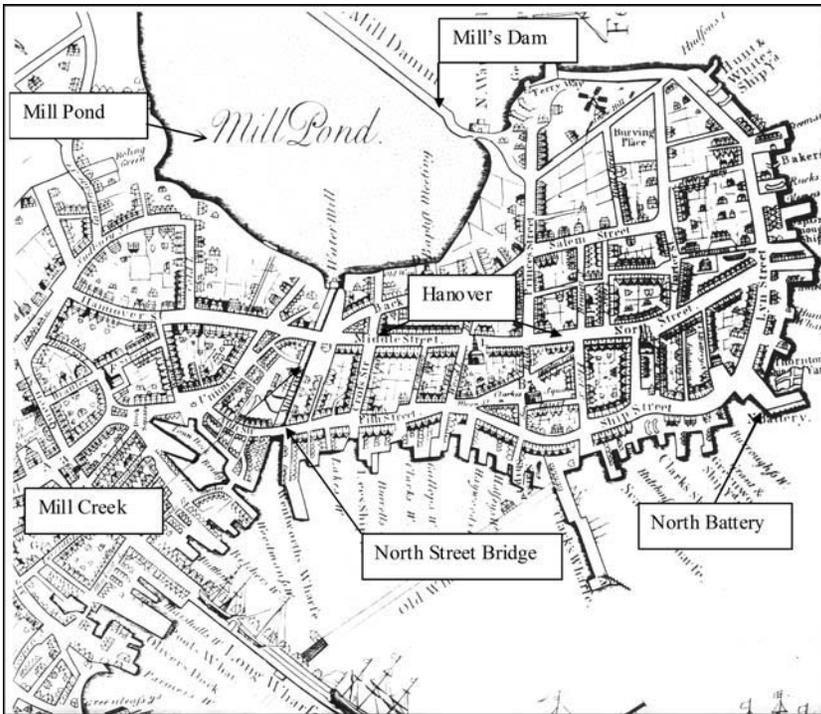
MAP 1.1   Map of Boston by Captain John Bonner, 1722

The first detailed and contemporary map of the city is Captain John Bonner's map of 1722 (map 1.1). It shows many topographical aspects.

Although Mill Creek can be considered an important boundary between the North End and the rest of the city, nevertheless new topographical transformations suggest the ambiguity of the southern border. In 1742, Peter Faneuil built a two-story brick structure.[12] According to Rutan (1902, 28), Faneuil Hall established the gateway to the North End for the remainder of the century as the heart of Boston business. Naturally the question I am raising is not about a more or less formal identification of a landmark of separation between two or more components of an urban landscape; rather, it concerns how the identity of the contained or excluded social group is shaped through a process of boundary-making and boundary-maintenance. Symbolically, but also pragmatically, Faneuil Hall refers to the mercantile, business-oriented bourgeoisie. Including this building inside the North End borders denotes the neighborhood as a wealthy place for wealthy business.[13] Excluding Faneuil Hall from the North End is a consequence of a drastically modified economy and a prelude to the creation of a slum. This process culminates in 1805 with the filling of the Town

Dock and the construction of North and South Market streets, as desired by Mayor Quincy. The boundaries' modification, combined with the evacuation of tradesmen after the War of Independence, led to progressive abandonment of the North End by businessmen and the bourgeoisie, subsequently creating room for the poor and marginal and, also for, immigrants.

According to Whitehill and Kennedy (2000, 46), the years preceding the Revolution were turbulent under the political point of view, but from a topographical perspective they did not see significant modification: few changes on streets, the Clark's Wharf now called Hancock's Wharf, and the new religious buildings, such as the Old South Meeting House (replacing the Old South Church's wooden building) and the King's Chapel (rebuilt in 1750 on the site of the original church).

The eighteenth century witnessed the publication of many maps, showing the growth of the city. In these maps, Boston is no longer the Puritan hamlet established by Winthrop and it is not even the town by the sea, with a harbor of scarce importance. At this point drawing maps is not just a bureaucratic tool to track the evolution of the city, and it is not even just a functional tool utilized for topographical, economic, or tourist reasons. It is a symbol of importance. It is a declaration, in both directions, to the city itself and to the outside, that the area is rising to an important level, that it has reached the dignity of a city. In other words, the rising middle class, the merchants, and the bourgeoisie need visible signs of identification and recognition. Maps are one of these signs.

The maps of the end of eighteenth century certainly show the crowded and narrow streets in the North End, anticipating a troubled urban expansion, ready to redirect itself toward the south. A couple of factors can account for this topographical and social change. One is the evacuation following the War of Independence. "When General Howe left Boston, on the eight of March 1776, he took with him nearly one thousand of the residents of the town.[14] Such wealthy and important families as the North End had held were among these refuges" (Rutan 1902, 30). Another factor is the rebuilding of the city caused by the evacuation of the loyalists and the arrival of newcomers, mostly wealthy country families from Essex County, attracted by the economic opportunities. The North End, because of its topographical characteristic, was already crowded and, at that time, town planning concerning the area such as the filling in of Mill Pond was not yet approved.[15] Therefore, the newcomers built their mansions on Fort Hill, Beacon Hill, and Bowling Green, relocating the social center of the city out of the congested North End.

I suggest that the construction of a series of buildings on North and South Market streets, completed in 1826 following a city planning meeting led by Mayor Quincy, marked the climax of this double process and a new negotiation of the symbolic boundaries of the North End.

> Mayor Quincy undertook a major piece of city planning that involved
> filling the Town Dock and building over the wharves between it and

the Long Wharf, thus creating space for a new two-story granite market house, 555 feet long and 50 wide, that was flanked by harmonious granite warehouses, fronting on the newly created North and South Market Streets.[16] The whole series of buildings, which were designed by Alexander Parris, provided Faneuil Hall with an approach from the harbor of extraordinary dignity and beauty. (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000, 96)

As shown by the contemporary maps, in 1829 important changes in Boston's urban landscape can be observed: Quincy Markets and the already filled Mill Pond, and the two new bridges (the Charles River Bridge completed in 1786 and the Warren Bridge, inaugurated on Christmas Day 1828). The two bridges run on two major arteries delimiting Mill Pond: Charlestown and Causeway streets. The boundaries surrounding the North End became more and more artificial and the new and improved transportation, made possible by bridges and highways, modified the characteristic of the neighborhood: for the newcomers there is no longer a need to live there, they can move out to more desirable locations.

Another important change concerns the Mill Creek. In 1828 water was cut off from the canal. The North End was no longer an island and, as Runan (1902, 35) suggests, no longer a peninsula, because the filling of the Mill Pond now directly connects the North End with the West End, leading to unstable and blurred boundaries.[17] All the area is now an ambiguous place. Therefore, despite the possibilities offered by filling Mill Pond and the new lines of communication resulting from the new bridges and thoroughfares, the North End never again, in the nineteenth century, reached the status of wealthy neighborhood. It was necessary to wait another century.

The landscape of Boston has been completely transformed in less than four centuries, and of course not without consequences to the social dimensions of life in the city. Coming back to the specifics of the North End, it is important to state that the modification of its boundaries, with the consequent dislocation of the economic center, determined the progressive decay of the North End. The economy in the neighborhood was completely based on shipping and merchant business, which means the incessant growth of dockyards and warehouses. Sailors, immigrants, and, generally, unskilled workers became the biggest components of the North End's population. From its earlier wealth, the North End was degenerating into a slum. The paradox of the North End at this time is exactly this: topographically the North End was being reabsorbed by the city. The natural borders were so profoundly modified and the new artificial ones were continuously negotiated, suggesting an ambiguous territory and an even more ambiguous territoriality. The Island of Boston became a memory. But simultaneously, social boundaries were erected, establishing the neighborhood as a dangerous place to live—a slum—comprised of immigrants.

Negotiability

The question I am raising here is about who defines a specific territory, in other words, who draws maps, builds bridges and trenches, expressways or endless tunnels, and so on, that make a territory so specific.[18] A first answer about "who traces the borders" is that technicians such as urban planners, architects, and cartographers are responsible for this process of boundary-definition. While correct, this is quite a naïf answer. For the moment I will simply note that technical agents are situated in complex social dynamics at the structural level such as economic trends, ethnic segregation, political discourses, or a combination of all three. They are at the same time the products and the producers of social changes. But technicians are not alone, of course; we must ask who commissions the urban planning and the maps, and why. An answer such as the city's mayor or the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority's Board is situated on a different level of naivety, adding a bureaucratic dimension but leaving the question substantially unaltered. In this complex dialectic we must discover the influences and the possibilities of negotiation that the inhabitants can bring to bear. Even in this more participatory situation, anonymous agencies occupy important roles influencing the structural level, and vice versa. The mirroring game between structures and agencies is endless. I will analyze a few examples in order to illustrate the complexity of the problem.

Mill Creek

The digging of Mill Creek, and the consequent isolation of the North End in the middle of the seventeenth century, ought to be framed in a more general situation. From the *Book of Possessions* it is possible to notice first a relevant concentration of householders' residences along the shore of the North End. The reasons were, on one hand, the proximity to the sea, a more suitable location for an economy based on trades with England necessarily supported by wharves and ships, and on the other hand, the marshy ground along the shorefront (the *Book of Possessions* indicates no settlements on Fort Hill, Copp's Hill, and the Trimountain). The economy of the town was rapidly increasing. Thus, the need for more wharves and warehouses led to the Town Council's decision on November 29, 1641, to grant merchants such as Valentine Hill (see Whitehill and Kennedy 2000, 11) the wasteland in Bendall's Cove (now Faneuil Hall Square) with the purpose of building a great and ordered cove: the Town Cove. A similar decision was made a year and a half later for another cove, Shelter Cove, near State and Milk streets. And on July 31, 1643, the merchants Henry Simons, George Burden, John Button, and John Hill were granted the marshland of the North Cove. The town was expanding on the northern side, facing Charlestown, an area not suitable for wharves but perfect for building mills, therefore allowing a differentiated economy, supporting but also expanding the

sea-based contemporary markets. In a few years the North Cove was converted into a mill pond, maintaining a grist mill, a saw mill, and a chocolate mill. A system of tidal flow was necessary for the operation of the mill's water, made possible by the digging of Mill Creek, connecting the Town Cove and Mill Pond. The result, as I have said, was the creation of the North End as the "Island of Boston," the center of the town's life.

What kind of negotiability is possible in this situation? The answer lies inevitably in what kind of social tensions between groups can be individuated. It is important to state that this is the time of the settlement of the Puritans, a basically homogenous group.[19] Class relations in preindustrial time and eighteenth-century towns were profoundly different than they later became. Instead of being based on the capitalist mode of production, social relations were contextualized within a face-to-face community. Economic and social factors were important, but not as significant as ideology and intimate social relations. According to Nash, this social organization was familially organized. The family was a little commonwealth and the town, as a larger collection of families, was a larger commonwealth "recognizing the common good as the highest goal. . . . The corporate whole, not the individual, was the basic conceptual unit" (1986, 2). In this relatively stable and homogenous situation, where the indispensability of social hierarchy was unquestionable (Nash 1986, 3), the level of negotiability of the borders was situated in the relationship between the Town Council and prominent members such as merchants, who sought a convenient, functional distribution of lands and the consequent allocation of economic resources. Stability did not mean equality. Indeed Nash's analysis of the distribution of wealth in Boston suggests that at the end of the seventeenth century 10 percent of the populace was in control of 40 percent of the community's assets, but this "was entirely normal, especially in urban centers, where the division of material goods and property was always less even than in the countryside" (1986, 10). Nonetheless unemployment was virtually unknown and poverty was an almost irrelevant factor except for widows, the disabled, and orphans. Stability did not mean that protest was impossible, but it was limited. Tager (2000, 25–40) notes a small number of riots, but they were rare. There were some riots for food, such as the sabotage of a grain ship owned by Andrew Belcher, the second largest shipowner in Boston, and the market riot of 1737, motivated by taxes and rising prices. Protests against the elite also occurred in Puritan society where formally every church member could vote but where in fact only those with a taxable property of £80 were allowed to, with the result that only twenty-four men (out of more than four hundred members of the congregation) could vote in 1687. "In 1690, the authorities extended the right of freemanship to all those paying taxes of at least four shillings, or holding houses or land in the value of £6. The new British charter abolished religion as a criterion for the franchise" (ibid., 20). But still, in 1692, only 350 people could vote in the Boston town meeting. A century later, in 1760, the number of people eligible to vote was estimated at 3,750, in a

population of 15,000, but only 1,500 had the financial requirements to vote in the town meeting. According to Tager:

> A better indication of the disposition of political power is not over eligibility, but how many people actually voted. In the early 1730s, for example, 650 or .04 percent of Boston's 15,000 people voted. While the population rose in the 1740s, thereafter it rapidly declined to just over 15,000 by 1763. In that year, 1,809 or .07 percent of the population voted, a sign of slightly increased participation by eligible voters. (ibid., 21)

The first evidence of antielite riots dates from 1720. A pamphlet was circulated against the rich and protested their custom of sending empty carriages out of the town neck to meet farmers coming to the market and buying farm goods during food shortages. As a result, the common people could not purchase food. Vandalism against Governor William Dummer's carriages occurring for the same reason is dated in 1725; and in 1755 "there was an attack upon a group of upper-class Bostonians returning from a Harvard commencement by ferry" (ibid.). The small number of antielite riots seems to confirm what I already stated, that in this society social hierarchy was considered to be an unquestionable right.

In stable and homogenous social groups characterized by social relations of taken-for-granted hierarchy, the development of Mill Creek, desired by Henry Simons and associates and granted by a Town Council decision, has to be seen as the consequence of the economic trend of a town experiencing rapid and dramatic growth. In its turn, this new, artificial border influenced the social landscape of the neighborhood.[20]

An early example of group identity, shaped by the creation of boundaries between the North End and the South End, can be seen in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries' boisterous ritual celebrating November 5, the "Pope Day:"

> On the eve of the Revolution, North and South End would organize rival processions, each with the effigies of the Pope, the Devil and the Pretender. When they met a free-for-all ensued, with broken heads and broken noses. A North End triumph meant the burning of the Southenders' effigies on Copp's Hill. A southern success led to the burning of the Northenders' Pope, Devil and Pretender on the Common. (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000, 29)

The Pope Day in Boston was always characterized by the violence of the celebration. According to Tager:

> At some point in the century, a rivalry developed between lower classes of the North and the South Ends. . . . The fighting was often quite

furious, resulting in many injuries. Vandalism was rampant, and property destroyed and stolen. (2000, 46)

The ritual celebrated the anniversary of the failure of the Catholic conspiracy in England, when on November 5, 1605, Guy Fawkes and a group of conspirators attempted to blow up the House of Parliament. Not surprisingly the Pope Day was one of the few English holidays that the Puritans brought with them across the Atlantic. According to Nash:

> In the 1730's or earlier, Boston's artisans began to commemorate the day with a parade and elaborate dramaturgical performances that mocked popery and the Catholic Stuart pretender. For several years artisans from the North End dominated the elaborate mummery. But South Enders soon began competing with them, parading through the streets with their own stage. What started out as friendly competition soon turned into gang battles. The victorious party won the right to carry the opposition's pageantry to the top of a hill and to burn it at night along with their own stage. As the years passed, artisans from both areas formed paramilitary organizations with elaborate preparation preceding the annual event. (1986, 165)

The festival was not only a claim for identity but, as often happens for carnivalesque celebrations, a moment of status reversal

> when youth and the lower class ruled, not only in controlling the streets of the town but also in going from house to house to collect money from the affluent for financing the prodigious feasting and drinking that went on from morning to night. (ibid., 165)

According to Cogliano, the festival was also a way to redirect repressed antiauthoritarian feelings toward an external subject:

> The elite appreciated the stabilizing impact of anti-papal rhetoric which unified and bound a socially disparate people together. The pope was thought to be a good lightning [*sic*] rod to direct anger away from them. (1995: 24)

The temporary suspension of any kind of social hierarchy is the basic characteristic of carnivalesque events, or, using Bakhtin's terms (1968, 9), the carnivalization of the everyday lives suggests the undermining of the hegemony of dominant ideology, proposing an alternate and alternative conceptualization of reality. But, as in this case, the narcotizing function of the festival is evident. It is a form of social control, allowing ritualized transgressions in specific, clearly

circumscribed, times of the year. The social tensions can be named and even violently mocked but at the end of the ritual the dominant social order is reassembled. Paradoxically therefore the ritual performance of destruction of the hegemonical authorities becomes the confirmation of authority itself.

The Pope Day was a public display for claimed identities (the North End and the South End). Interestingly, the identities are reaffirmed by the locations of the eventual burning of the effigies: on Copp's Hill, in case of a victory of the North Enders or in the Common, in case of South Ender's triumph. At that time both places were situated clearly inside the respective neighborhoods. Burning the opponent in effigy in the winner's territory is a sign of reinforced identity.

In conclusion, if it is true that the forming of Mill Creek as a boundary involved a negotiation inside relatively stable and homogenous groups, and affirmed the identification of the specific area (in this case as the economic center of the town), it is also true that the possible social tensions were canalized through the claim for a specific local identity. Mill Creek, desired for economic purposes, separated the town and generated differentiations and exclusive groups.

The discussion about this artificial border cannot be considered concluded if I do not analyze the complementary aspect of its creation, that is, its disappearance. Economic growth in the North End during the last part of the seventeenth century and most of the eighteenth was impressive. North Square, with the adjacent harbor in continuous expansion, was the social center of the neighborhood, characterized by the flourishing of all kinds of commercial activity, especially by skilled artisans. Once the external boundaries were established, the negotiations for a group identity turned inward. This process can be seen in the proliferation of differentiated religions and in the consequent building of churches. The Puritan times were over and the new social landscape had to satisfy different religious observances. This demand was mainly expressed by the new English merchants. It is no accident that in 1723 the Anglican Christ Church was built in Salem Street, which is famous for Paul Revere's enterprise. After the Second Church, which was founded in 1650 and for sixty-four years was the only church in the North End, a so-called New North Church, at the corner of Clark and Hanover streets, was formed in 1714. But in 1719 an important part of this congregation departed and founded the New Brick Church, also known as the "Revenge" (Todisco 1976, 8). Later, in 1741, Samuel Mather, and almost one third of the parishioners of the Second Church, founded a Congregational Church on a corner of North Bennett and Hanover streets. More significantly, in 1679, a place for worship was established by the Baptists on Salem Street, and in 1796, the Methodists also built a church on a corner of Hanover and North Bennett streets.

Another important element structuring the group was the development of the marketplaces. The need for a specific market was due to the expansion of small business activities but also of the sea-based economy all along the wharves. As a town of increased size, both economic and geographical, Boston erected three temporary structures for markets in North Square, Liberty Tree, and at the

Town Dock. In 1742, as already noted, Faneuil Hall was finally built as a market, but also as the place for town meetings. Quoting Rutan, it "established the gateway to the North End for the remainder of the century as the business heart of Boston" (1902, 28).

But the economic expansion of the North End was the reason for its growth as well as its decay. The area remained the center of the sea-based economy: beside the many wharves for ship landings and departures were built an increasing number of dockyards for recovery and warehouses for stocks. This brought an increasing number of sailors and transients to the area, therefore, according to Todisco:

> This created a less desirable neighborhood for the citizen who could afford to live elsewhere. Those who could afford to maintain the great mansion built by previous generations no longer wished to own them. (1976, 19)

The unoccupied mansions rapidly deteriorated because they were too expensive to rent and maintain. The centrifugal movement that coincided with the centripetal movement of immigration was pushed also by other factors. Thomas Pemberton in 1794 wrote that "the town is capable of great increase, as many large spaces of land still remain vacant."[21] This trend was even more evident after the Revolution and the subsequent evacuation of the loyalists and wealthy families above all from the North End. Newcomers—the bourgeoisie largely from Essex County—moved in, attracted to the economic advantages of the town. They soon became a prominent part of Boston's business life. But the crowded North End could not allow any new building, especially of the luxurious kind described by Pemberton. The wealthy business families as well as the enriched merchants moved westward to Fort Hill, Beacon Hill, and Bowling Green (now Bowdoin Square), but also to Roxbury, facilitated by the improvement of transportation. For many years, according to Rutan, the social development of the West End was at an inverse ratio to the decay of the North End. A signal of this trend was that even clergymen abandoned the neighborhood. Rutan quotes an old chronicler: "There are six large congregations to the northward of the canal, and only one of their ministers resides there" (1902, 33). The progressive decay of the neighborhood was slow but inexorable and at the turn of the century the narrow streets of the North End were no longer the core of economic life of the town; the old houses became tenements and retail businesses. The economic business center for the new industrial and financial economy was now downtown. The neighborhood was still a crowded center of social life but progressively was losing the quality of an attractive area.

This is the kind of social circumstance that promoted the filling of Mill Pond. The water was cut off from Mill Creek in 1828. The North End was no longer the Island of Boston. The disappearance of this artificial border should be

seen as one of the symbols of a fading identity of an original group, spreading in different areas and no longer in need of any kind of territorial boundary protecting the North End. Significantly, the Pope Day was abolished immediately after, in 1833.[22] Now the North End was becoming a slum, a place for all the emigrants. The new identity of the neighborhood was then shaped by more symbolic boundaries such as ethnicity and social class.

As a preliminary conclusion it seems evident that an important dimension of this territorial boundary was the product of bourgeois social actors who materially negotiated the forming and destroying of Mill Creek. Negotiations about the borders first occurred inside a relatively homogeneous group of Puritans and, later on, within the context of an increasingly differentiated social order of wealthy merchants and businessmen.

With the westward movement of the dominant group, the territorial and symbolic boundaries disappeared as well as their territorial-based identity. The question therefore becomes: in the absence of a hegemonic pressure for a common identity, with the concomitant redirection of antiauthoritarism toward public rituals, and the assertion of an imagined homogeneity, what kind of new identity was possible for the subaltern classes left behind after the flight of the elite? Territorial boundaries and old symbolic borders seem to have eroded, but this was just the prologue for different claims for different identities, ethnically enforced.

The Central Artery Project

For more than a century the North End was identified as a slum and isolated not by territorial boundaries but by even stronger symbolic borders, based on ethnicity and class. These are the effects of an impressive movement of emigration, involving the Irish, Jewish, Portuguese, and finally Italian immigrants.

I have suggested that territorial boundaries are made or at least are rendered more evident when the social class that inhabits the area is an economically strong one. A slum does not need to be geographically isolated, bounded as it is by symbols and representations of ethnic and class identities. The two terms were, in this era, almost coincident since immigrants were situated at the lower level of the social scale, and belonged almost without exception to the working, unskilled, class.

The first modern attempt to again divide the city can be considered the Central Artery Project. Modern urban planners were expecting that car traffic in the city would reach an unbearable level for the dimension of streets that had been built for another era.[23] An early project for "a Central Artery cutting through the heart of the city" (O'Connor 1993, 82) had been suggested in 1930, after three years of an extensive traffic survey, by the Boston Planning Board in the *Report on a Thoroughfare Plan for Boston*. Robert Whitten, president of the American City Planning Institute and the main consultant of the Boston Planning Board, had the vision of an upper-level roadway as a practical way to provide for the

through traffic and also for the traffic going to and from the Central District. The solution, revolutionary at that time, was delayed because of the Great Depression. Nevertheless, all the following reports of the board "continued to urge implementation of the project in much the same terms as the original project" (O'Connor 1993, 83). In 1948 the construction of the Central Artery became a fundamental point in the political agenda of Governor Bradford, but still it was impossible to start the construction. According to O'Connor (1993, 83), even if several contracts were already defined in 1951 (with a completion date at the end of the 1953), a number of problems arose: from the steel strike in April 1952 to the discovery of hordes of rats infesting the area and the consequent need for an extermination program; from the meat handlers of Haymarket ready to move to the new quarters only after the full completion of the refrigeration system to Chinatown residents who were against the cutting of a large swath through their area to the opposition of the Italians of the North End who feared the closing of many business and other important places. Eventually the final project, as designed by the state's Department of Public Works, led by the former chairman of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority William F. Callahan, to build an elevated highway (the "Highway in the Sky") through downtown Boston began to be realized.

Like early protests, other controversies immediately emerged with the construction of the Central Artery. On one hand, in 1954, the dream of the Highway in the Sky sank with the decision of the Department of Public Works to build a tunnel from Congress Street to Kneeland Street, better known as the Dewey Square or South Station Tunnel. This last elevated portion of the highway was considered "too obtrusive and disruptive in the midst of downtown life."[24] On the other hand, according to the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority: [25]

> And even as it was being built from the Mystic Bridge south, the new artery, which displaced more than 20,000 people and demolished more than 1,000 structures, was seen as ugly and divisive of city neighborhoods. Its construction spurred citizen groups and others to successfully oppose the building of the Inner Belt.[26]

The Central Artery, or Fitzgerald Expressway, was concluded in 1959, again with controversy. According to the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, the original project expected the amount of traffic to be 75,000 vehicles a day, but because of structural problems such as the twenty-seven exits and the lack of merge and breakdown lanes, inadequate for this level, it never reached the target, consequently causing slow and chaotic commuting.[27] Without any doubt the Central Artery brought about a deep change in the landscape of the city, creating an artificial border between the city and the North End. The North End became, again, the Island of Boston, separated not by water but by asphalt. The Central Artery did not solve the traffic problems; furthermore, it added the eyesore of an elevated highway, an evident demarcation signal.

Negotiability of this artificial border can be seen in the protests of neighbors. These protests were against the urban planners, politicians, bureaucrats, or technicians who were pushing for public support based on a supposed common good. Their solution for an increasing traffic problem seemed, at least in part, a reflection of economic interests. On the other side, clustered local groups were expressing their point of view. The controversies were multicentered

> but perhaps the most vehement objections to the proposed Central Artery came from the residents of the North End, one of Boston's oldest and most historical neighborhoods, which had been home to a succession of different immigrant nationalities including Africans, Anglo-Saxons, Irish, Jews, and finally Italians. Not only was the new expressway scheduled to destroy more than one hundred dwellings and uproot some nine hundred businesses, but its projected route would clearly slice off the historic community from the main part of the downtown area, thus isolating the North End from the rest of Boston. During the spring of 1950 store owners, restaurateurs, and food wholesalers organized a "Save Boston Business" to protest the coming disaster, while longtime residents formed a Committee to Save the North End of Boston to head off what they felt would be the complete obliteration of their old, colorful, and distinctively Italian neighborhood. (O'Connor 1993, 84)

The protests were not enough to stop the construction, not even after some buildings were torn down in November 1950. In October 1951, when it became clear that Hanover Street, the center of the North End, would be cut off, the inhabitants held another protest, but it again produced no positive results.

> The old post office, where so many old-time residents had deposited their money, was also threatened with demolition, and local pushcart peddlers on Blakstone Street faced the possibility of eviction. All their protests were ineffective, however as the central artery expressway became a reality and slowly began snaking its way through the city. (O'Connor 1993, 85)[28]

The Fitzgerald Expressway was finally finished in 1959. The history of this project is probably a history of continuous negotiations, which sometimes had positive results for protestors, as in the case of the opposition for the Inner Belt, but more often resulted in frustration and failures, as occurred in the North End protests. This process of boundary-making provoked, inevitably, profound changes in the neighborhood. The most important being the North End was again an island, separated from the rest of the city. However, an observation is possible regarding the capability of the North Enders to take part in negotiation about boundaries. The Fitzgerald Expressway controversy now reaffirmed

the North Ender's power to negotiate a decision as an opposing party.[29] It was an important success to achieve a claim for self-expression, even if the political battle was lost. A few years later this capability (or power) led to success in other cases, as I will demonstrate with the Waterfront project and the North Ender Frank Langone's political work. The capacity to protest and negotiate is a signal of a radical change in the political relationship between the North End and City Hall: after years of Irish leadership in the political life the Italians slowly became influential as well. Not surprisingly the negotiations about the Fitzgerald Expressway were destined to fail. But in these negotiations the hegemonic, omnipervasive, decisions about boundary-making were finally contested.

The Waterfront

I analyzed the territorial boundaries of the North End paying attention almost exclusively to the southern border. This is the border that makes the neighborhood an island or a peninsula, where important urban renewal projects were proposed and made. But it is not the only border. The waters of Boston Harbor is the other frontier. I briefly talked about the construction of the North Battery, and surely the changes provoked by building and modifying wharves as well as by filling in coves needs better attention, but it seems to me that they affect the hypothetical group identity in a minor way, where economic interests and power tensions can be individuated but still not immediately and directly involving a supposed "others." However, in 1964 the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) proposed the North End/Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan. It is important to keep in mind that the late 1950s and the 1960s were characterized by urban renewal systematically directed toward working-class people and their neighborhoods, such as the West End, the East End, and Charlestown. Boston's urban renewal was aimed at the revitalization of downtown business districts, creation of new residences, and the rehabilitation of old working-class areas for the middle and upper classes. The strategic indifference for the lower social groups, provoking their expulsion from the center of the city and the creation of ghettos in peripheral areas (Mattapan, north Dorchester, Roxbury), eventually produced an intense reaction. According to Tager (2000, 190), the widespread discontent resulted in political expressions and negotiations; for instance, it was the basis of Gabriel Piemonte's political platform while running for mayor in 1963. Furthermore, in 1967, a populist candidate, Louise Day Hicks (chairperson of the Boston School Committee and an opponent of racial desegregation), challenged Kevin White for the mayoral post. Kevin White should be seen as a mediator between the economic interests of downtown businessmen and neighborhoods' needs. "Between 1968 and 1975, the White administration spent over $500 million on neighborhood capital improvements, a vastly greater sum than that spent by the previous administration" (ibid., 191).

The original North End/Waterfront Urban Renewal Plan "would have taken from the Callahan Tunnel, the entire right hand of North Street to Commercial Street" (Langone 1995, 43), including Fulton, Richmond, Langdon Place, Lewis, Fleet, and Clark all the way to the corner of North Street and Commercial Street. According to Langone, BRA director, Ed Logue,

> wanted to take Cross Street where Martignetti Liquors and the fruit stands, as well as Joe Pace and Purity Cheese now stands, for a ramp to be built across the top of the tunnel over Cross Street to Haymarket Square. This would have killed the North End shopping area and pedestrian access into Boston. (1995, 43)

Langone is a primary source, being involved in the political negotiation as a city representative. Solicited by residents primarily living on North Street, Langone began a controversy with City Hall on two fronts: the political arena and in the courts. The negotiation with Mayor White resulted in scrapping the idea of taking half of North Street and of making the ramp over Cross Street. The BRA accepted the reduction of the new Atlantic Avenue from one hundred to forty feet. After a long trial for federal housing subsidies the gained land was available for affordable housing and in 1975 construction of new buildings—the first new housing in the North End's recent history—began. The Christopher Columbus Senior Citizen Housing Development on Commercial Street and Ausonia Housing at the corner of Commercial and Lewis streets were built and Langone found an agreement for affordable housing for senior citizens in the Mercantile block (30 percent of the personal income). Langone (1995, 44) refers to a public meeting in Faneuil Hall held by the BRA which debated the division of eight and a half acres of land between the North End and the Waterfront. Langone was accused of being personally interested in this housing project because of the possible applications of his sons. He answered in the following way:

> It didn't matter because my first aim was to preserve the North End and its atmosphere and characteristics. I didn't want the same thing that happened to the West End.[30] As a result, our senior citizens were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to move to the waterfront at a much lower rent than the private condos and apartments. I planned this elderly housing to keep North End Italians here at an affordable rent. They, in turn, would preserve the aesthetics of our neighborhood. (ibid.)

Personal interests or not, the political action of Frank Langone could have a double interpretation. First, he can be considered an attentive leader of his community, acknowledging the request of the North End's inhabitants. Second, he can be considered as another agent of hegemonic power.