

# Musical Street Performance

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## Tourism

A Comparative Analysis of  
São Paulo, Cape Town, & Hanoi

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## Abstract

In this paper, I consider musical street performance, also known as busking, and its reciprocal relationship with tourism in São Paulo, Brazil; Cape Town, South Africa; and Hanoi, Vietnam. My first order research question asks about location and content of performance. My higher order question analyzes variation between performances, and the meaning of this variation. First, I show how buskers locate in areas of tourism, and how performance content varies across these three contexts. Next, I analyze how each city has a distinctive type of tourism, and apply John Urry's notion of the "Tourist Gaze" in order to understand the relationship between tourists, buskers, and "authenticity." This relationship has broader implications for cities, in that it reflects larger urban trends and changes. My research methods include photography and videography, locational mapping, first-hand observation, interviews, and consultation of relevant literature

*Keywords:* Musical street performance, busking, São Paulo, Cape Town, Hanoi, tourism, commercialism, 'tourist gaze', authenticity, urban identity

## **Introduction**

As a musician, I have always been drawn to musical street performances. Before this program, though, I paid little attention to performances in relation to informal economy, built environments, or social interactions. For this comparative analysis, I analyzed a familiar phenomenon through new academic lenses, taking advantage of prior expertise to bring new light to musical street performances in a comparative analysis between São Paulo, Brazil; Cape Town, South Africa; and Hanoi, Vietnam. A first order research question asked about location and content of performance. The more central questions investigated the causes of variation among street performances, and the significance of this variation. To answer these questions, I utilized a variety of techniques: photography and videography, locational mapping, first-hand observation, interviews,<sup>1</sup> and consultation of relevant literature. My research showed that musical street performances vary according to local types of tourism, and embody broader urban trends.

This paper will: 1) present the locations, 2) analyze and compare the content, and 3) investigate the causes and significance of variation of musical street performance. In it, I will use several key terms. Busking is the act of performing on the street, and buskers are the musicians themselves.<sup>2</sup>

## **Location**

The first step of research in each city was to find out where buskers perform. In all three cases, the vast majority of performers concentrated in a few specific locations. In São Paulo, performers concentrated along Paulista Avenue and outside the Liberdade metro station. In Cape Town, they concentrated at the V&A Waterfront, Greenmarket Square, Simon's Town and the Boulder Beach Penguin Colony, and in Hout Bay Harbour. In Hanoi, performers concentrated in the Old Quarter. This locational clustering is noteworthy because all are active sites of tourism.

I observed seventeen buskers in São Paulo (Appendix A). Thirteen of them performed on Paulista Avenue, mostly between the Consolacao and Brigadeiro metro stations.<sup>3</sup> I observed four additional performers in the Japanese neighborhood of Liberdade.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews were primarily with program affiliates. Interviews with performers were difficult to obtain due to language barriers, and the fact that performers are unable to hold interviews during the act of performance.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Ryan, Street Character (2007). pp. 42-47

<sup>3</sup> Some notable locations included Parque Vila Lobos and its outdoor market, MASP, Shopping Center 3, and the CCN.

Closer examination of these locations shows that both are active sites of tourism. In regards to Paulista Avenue, our local facilitator and a student volunteer both called the area “touristy;”<sup>4,5</sup> and the student volunteer cited the presence of, “two museums, a park, bars, theaters, show houses, movie theaters...”<sup>6</sup> Most notable is the Modern Art Museum (MASP), which frequently appears in online travel guides as a recommended site to visit.<sup>7,8</sup> Similarly, our student facilitator noted that Liberdade is also very touristic, with its range of restaurants and shops. Its weekly Saturday morning market draws in hundreds of visitors (both Brazilian and foreign) for its food and craft stalls.

However, São Paulo as a whole does not share this touristic quality. Students on this program frequently commented on how the city is unfriendly to tourists, in part because of its crowded transportation, lack of tourist destinations, and overwhelming size.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, Paulista Avenue has become both a tourist and commercial destination. Its role as a financial and business center attracts a high volume of visitors, complimented by shopping and restaurants.

In Cape Town, I observed sixteen buskers (Appendix B). The V&A Waterfront was the most common site, where I witnessed five different examples of busking. The next most common were Greenmarket Square and Hout Bay Harbor, where there were three performers each. The remaining were scattered at Simon’s Town, on Bree Street, outside the Bo-Kaap Museum, and at the Camp’s Bay beachfront.

All of these locations are heavily touristic. The V&A Waterfront contains a large shopping mall, a Ferris wheel, a range of bars and restaurants, and a strip of gift shops. Its pier has a row of stands offering helicopter tours, sunset boat cruises, cage diving, etc. Greenmarket Square is a bustling outdoor market that sells arts, crafts, and other souvenirs. Hout Bay Harbor is the departure point for a boat visit to the famous Seal Island, and similarly Simon’s Town is a tourist destination for seeing penguins. All of these sites rely heavily on tourist patronage and see large flows of foot traffic. Conversely, I did not encounter a single example of busking aside from these tourist destinations outside of the City Bowl or in any of the Townships.

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<sup>4</sup> Pedro Carvalho. Informal conversation. Nov. 13, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Tiago Genoveze. Informal conversation. Sep. 1, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Pedro Carvalho

<sup>7</sup> Things to do in São Paulo, Brazil: 30 Suggestions. <http://thisismyhappiness.com/2013/04/03/things-to-do-in-sao-paulo-brazil/>

<sup>8</sup> São Paul (City) Tourist Attractions. <http://www.planetware.com/tourist-attractions-/São-paulo-city-brasps.shtm>

<sup>9</sup> Elena Crowe. Informal conversation. Sep. 19, 2014

In Hanoi, busking is far less common. In fact, my own explorations yielded no results, and it was only through borrowed photographic and observational data from another student on the program that I succeeded in finding any.<sup>10</sup> From them, I found out that there were four performers that were all located in the Old Quarter (Appendix C).

The Old Quarter is very well known as a tourist destination, primarily for its traditional European street layout and specialized vending stalls. TripAdvisor recommends it as the number one place to visit in the city.<sup>11</sup> Its touristic character manifests obviously on the street through prices advertised in USD and street vendors speaking to passersby in English. Similarly, it is the only place in the city with a steady flow of white-skinned people. The Night Market in particular is a popular place to buy Vietnamese goods like pants, jackets, sunglasses, and jewelry.

There was an obvious imbalance in the number of buskers between the first two cities and Hanoi. Part of this difference might be explained by the differences in the built character of areas of tourism in each city. In São Paulo's Paulista Avenue, for example, wide and well-maintained sidewalks facilitate both a steady stream of foot traffic and an area for performance. Similarly, the V&A Waterfront has several open public spaces where performers typically set up. In both cities, areas of tourism actually facilitate busking. Oppositely, the Old Quarter in Hanoi is cramped, crowded, and chaotic. Sidewalks overrun by vending or parking and streets clogged by foot and vehicular traffic leave little space for performance.

### Content

Having established that buskers concentrate in areas of tourism, I move now to analyze the content of performance in each city. To do so, I looked at musical genre, instrumentation, language of lyrics, song choice, and dress of performers. Although there was variation among individual performers, I discovered trends in these markers that link together multiple performers in each city. In fact, a comparison of these markers shows how each city has its own dominant style of busking.

In São Paulo, the dominant performance was modern western (Appendix D).<sup>12</sup> The most common genres were rock and roll and European classical. The most common instrument was

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<sup>10</sup> Gabe Setright, IHP Program Participant

<sup>11</sup> Things To Do In Hanoi: <http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g293924-Activities-Hanoi.html>

<sup>12</sup> São Paulo had the most performances of the three cities, and with such a large sample I saw notable variation in performance content. As such, I do not want to discount the research that showed other musical genres and styles. Instead, I focus on a dominant character that unites a majority of performers.

acoustic guitar, but there were many drum kits, trumpets, and violins. In a city that required a translator for nearly every interaction, there was a high prevalence of English as the lyrical language. Similarly, I was able to recognize and identify many of the songs, which were American or British. Clothing of buskers did not differ from other people on the street, and consisted largely of jeans, button down shirts, t-shirts, and sneakers. What was most striking about the content of these performances is how the genre differed from what I expected. I went to São Paulo expecting to hear Samba and Bossa Nova, knowing them to be two genres distinctive of Brazil. This expectation proved true in bars and formal performances, but it was scarce on the streets.

In Cape Town, the dominant style was traditional South African. I derive the use of the term traditional from our first day in the Langa Township, when local musicians introduced us to a range of “traditional South African” instruments and musical styles.<sup>13</sup> Local hosts told us about instruments like the marimba and the djembe, and performed a variety of songs with them. The songs involved syncopated Afro rhythms, multiple part vocal harmonies, and often a form of chant singing. Additionally, the performers moved in a rhythmic dance-step. These were the same instruments and styles I saw in two common types of busking. In one, the marimba and djembe created syncopated afro-rhythms with vocal accompaniment (Appendix E). In another, choirs chanted, danced, and sang complicated vocal harmonies (Appendix F). They used indigenous languages like Xhosa, identifiable by the unique clicking sound made by the tongue. They wore clothes that stood out from other people on the street, like a group of young singers/dancers who wore patterned skirts, thin cloth around their chests, and white body paint. These two types of performances were traditional, according to the introduction given to us by local musicians upon arrival.

While São Paulo and Cape Town each had one dominant busking character, Hanoi’s small sample was divided into two dominant styles. Two performances were traditional Vietnamese, using Vietnamese instruments like plucked lutes and wooden flutes (Appendix G). The performers wore robes fringed in red and gold (the colors of the Vietnamese flag and central to many storefront decorations), and the music itself was eastern style.<sup>14</sup> Lyrics were even in

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<sup>13</sup> Local musicians at Guga S’tebe Tourist Center, Langa Township, South Africa. Oct. 12, 2014

<sup>14</sup> This conclusion about the style of music comes from my own prior musical knowledge. The music lacked typical chord progressions of western music. Similarly, the vocal performance relied on voice ‘cracks’ and trills, which are uncommon in the western canon.

Vietnamese. The other two performances were modern and western, using instruments like electronic keyboards, saxophones, guitars, and even an accordion (Appendix H). Performers wore jeans, button down shirts, sneakers, and jackets. They even performed covers of American pop songs like “Apologize” by Timbaland.<sup>15</sup>

### The “Tourist Gaze”

So far, I have shown that buskers concentrate in areas of tourism, and that the content of busking varies by city. What accounts for this variation? More specifically, what accounts for the striking difference between the modern performances in São Paulo, the traditional ones in Cape Town, and the mixture in Hanoi? In this section, I will introduce the notion of the “tourist gaze” from John Urry, and apply it to street performance in all three contexts.

According to Urry, the “tourist gaze” is a lens that tourists have, a set of expectations and desires for an “authentic” experience. Urry, MacCannell, Culler, and Robsinson all discuss this phenomenon.<sup>16,17,18,19</sup> Culler writes that, “The tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself.”<sup>20</sup> He similarly notes how tourists read landscapes and experiences in search of signs that align with their pre-established notions of what a place should be.<sup>21</sup> In practice, this gaze facilitates a reciprocal response from local populations, when they reflect the gaze and its encompassing expectations in order to make money. Through this line of thought, Urry explores the roles of both the “gazer” and the “gazed upon.”<sup>22</sup> When applied to musical street performance, this framework helps explain the variations in dominant busking styles across these three cities. Each city has its own unique character of tourism, and I argue that this character informs interactions between the “gazer” and the “gazed upon.”

On a site visit to the Condominio Conjunto Nacional,<sup>23</sup> our tour guide proudly called Paulista Avenue, “São Paulo’s own strip of the first world.”<sup>24</sup> This quote indicates the area’s

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<sup>15</sup> Timbaland is an American rapper and producer, known for top pop hits like “Cry Me A River” and “Apologize”

<sup>16</sup> John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel MacCannell. Staged authenticity: arrangements of social place in tourist settings. *American Sociological Review*, 79: 589-603. New York: 1973.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Culler. Semiotics of Tourism, *American Journal of Semiotics*, 1: 27-140. 1981

<sup>19</sup> H. Robinson. *A Geography of Tourism*. Plymouth: 1976.

<sup>20</sup> Culler 1981: 127.

<sup>21</sup> Culler 1981: 128.

<sup>22</sup> Urry, 1990: 151

<sup>23</sup> The CCN is a large-scale, multi-use condominium complex. Its first level contains a massive mall complex, with shops ranging from high-end fashion to bookstores.

unique character of tourism as one of globalized commercialism. Its mix of shopping malls, museums, restaurants and cultural centers make it a commercial and tourist destination that, for the most part, reflects historical trends and changes in the city. As Caldeira discusses, democratization and structural adjustments shook the city in the 1980's, but were followed by an intense period of neoliberal privatization.<sup>25</sup> Privatization brought international business and a prioritization of western ideals of consumerism.

Paulista Avenue is, as our tour guide suggested, representative of this change and the city's subsequent drive to modernity. Its tourism is built on globalized commercialism, and its destinations are modern. The area's tourism is, additionally, closely linked with the steady flow of international business and businessmen. It is likely this drive towards modernity that underlies the character of busking that, for such a country and city with rich musical history, centers on American and British music. However, the focus of interaction between tourist and performer is really about contextual continuity. In other words, buskers attempt to actually be as modern as the area is purported and strives to be. Thus buskers likely appropriate American and British music in order to fit in with the area's image, and cater to a different understanding of authenticity.

In many ways, Cape Town defies tourist expectations of an African city. Our country coordinator noted how many visitors arrive expecting to "feel" like they are in Africa, but instead feel they are in Europe.<sup>26</sup> The city's colonial history created a built environment reminiscent of European cities because of the style of Cape Colonial architecture, cobbled roads, and an ordered street grid. Within this European built environment, though, buskers have carved out a niche market for themselves that thrives on the "gazer" and his quest for authenticity by harnessing South African musical tradition.

While São Paulo's buskers ignored their musical past, Capetonian buskers thrive on it because it exoticizes them. For example, the groups that dance and chant represent what MacCannell calls, "staged authenticity."<sup>27</sup> Specifically, these performances involve intense body movement. Urry notes that, "the moving body is often what gets gazed upon...such dances

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<sup>24</sup> Tour guide at Condominio Conjunto Nacional, Avenida Paulista, São Paulo. Site visit, Sep. 10, 2014

<sup>25</sup> Teresa Caldeira. From Modernism to Neoliberalism in São Paulo: Reconfiguring the City and its Citizens. In *Other Cities, Other Worlds – Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age*. Duke: 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Mia Goldblatt, Cape Town Program Coordinator

<sup>27</sup> MacCannell, 1973: 589.

appear to be real performances...of an age-old tradition rather than something merely undertaken for the visitor.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, with performances of marimba music, the instrumentation exoticizes the performance by creating a unique tone that is different from what a tourist might normally hear in his own context. This adheres to the “tourist gaze” according to Robinson’s interpretation that the subject of gaze must represent a, “basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus, tourists in Cape Town who seek an African experience are gratified when they see dancers in skirts and body paint moving animatedly to exotic musical tones. Buskers likely acknowledge this truth, and cater their performances to the tourist’s quest. This is not to say that their performance is inauthentic, or that the instruments and styles are not characteristic of South Africa. Rather, it is a performance of authenticity that may not have otherwise occurred if not for the presence of tourists. Because of Cape Town’s unique character as an African city of European atmosphere, buskers are able to successfully respond to the “tourist gaze” by staging these traditional elements.

Hanoi is an interesting example, as it sits in the middle of the tourism spectrum compared to the other two cities. It is neither heavily modernized, nor striving for its roots. Ta Quynh Hoa, a guest lecturer on Urban Planning School from the Hanoi School of Civil Engineering, characterized Hanoi as, “an Asian city of authentic culture at the doorstep of globalization.”<sup>30</sup> This sentiment is one that I have heard repeatedly while in Hanoi through lectures and readings, evident in the tensions of rural to urban migration and urbanization. That tension is clearly exemplified in the divergent characters of Hanoi’s buskers, and the simultaneous expression of a traditional and a modern urban identity.

On one hand, busking responds to the tourist in search of an authentically Asian or Vietnamese experience. Choice of traditional robes, instruments, language, and music are likely all ways in which the “gazed upon” perform authenticity. However, the other style of busking in Hanoi responds to the city’s entry into the globalized, modern world. This duality is reminiscent of larger urban trends towards modernity, and their simultaneity suggests the transitional state of the city.

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<sup>28</sup> Urry, 1990: 156.

<sup>29</sup> Robinson, 1976: 157.

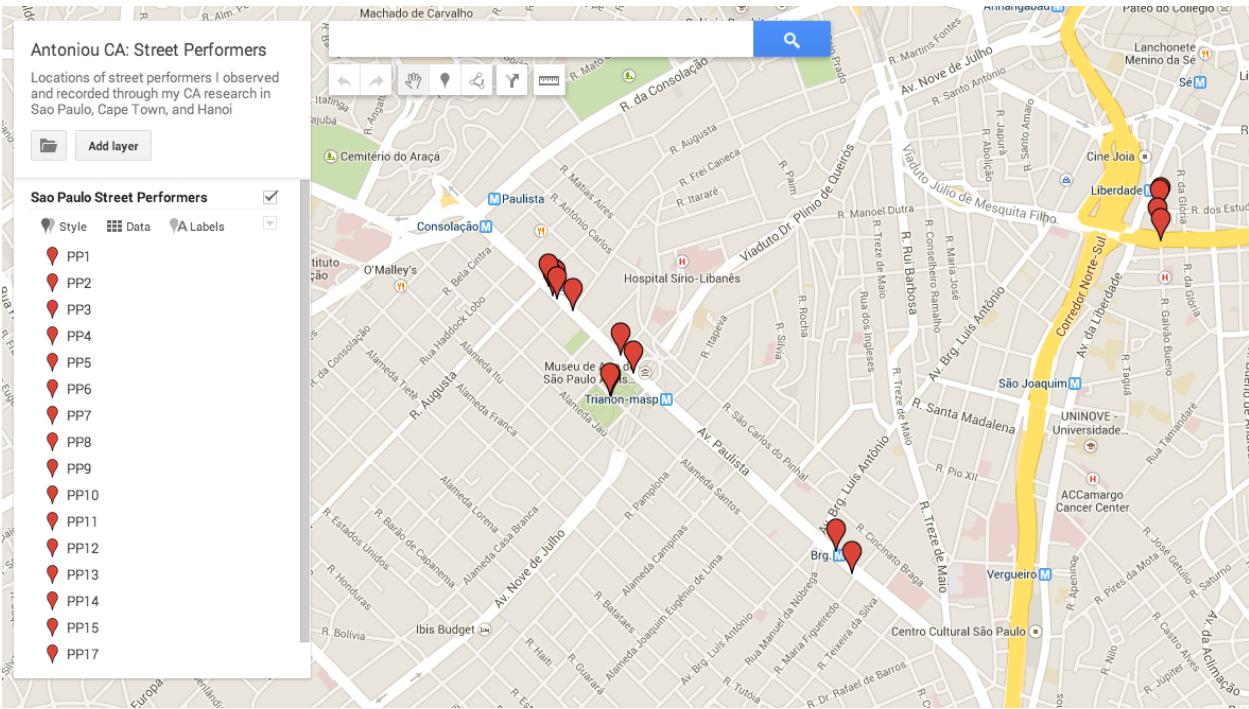
<sup>30</sup> Ta Quynh Hoa, Guest Lecturer on Urban Planning from the National University of Civil Engineering – NUCE. Nov. 12, 2014.

## **Conclusion**

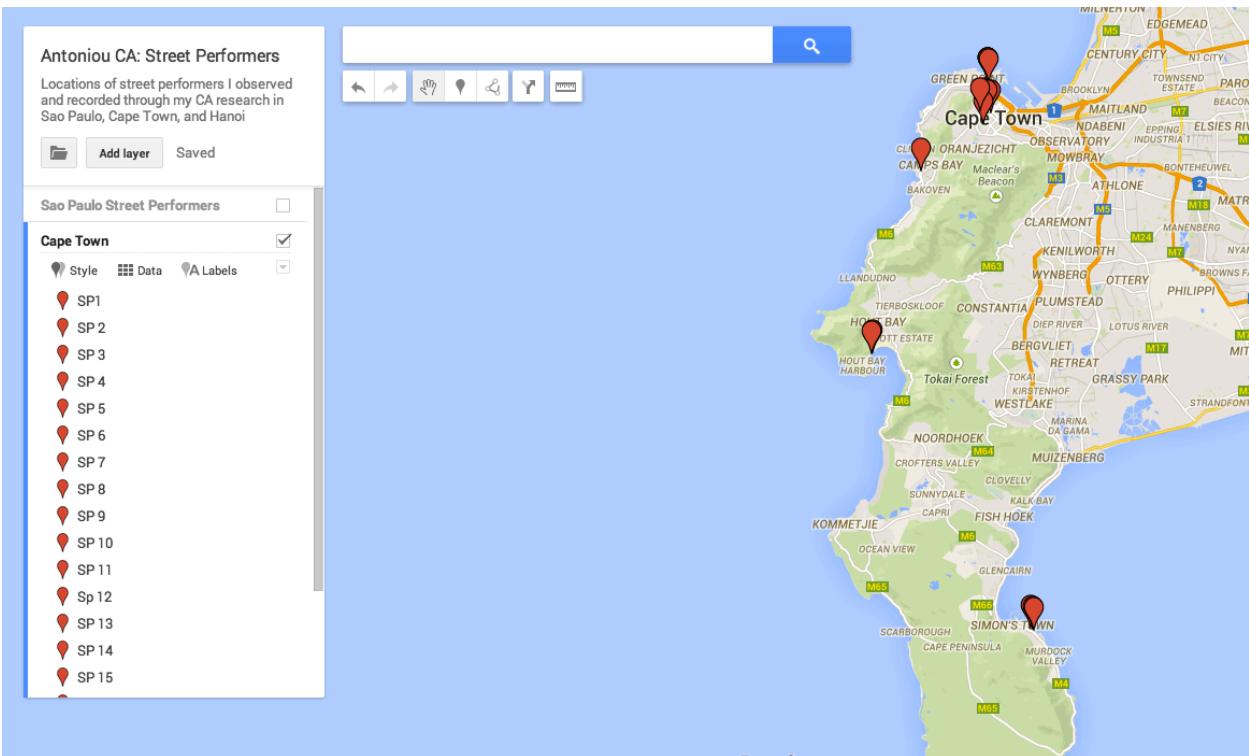
Given that buskers locate in areas of tourism and cater their performances to different manifestations of the “tourist gaze,” what links all of this research? The answer is predictable: money. Musicians perform for money, evidenced by simply noting that performers put out an instrument case or container to collect money. What is noteworthy about the analysis in this paper is not this conclusion, but rather the more nuanced ways that the busker’s quest for money informs the location and content of his performance. Furthermore, the variation among buskers gives insight into larger urban trends and truths. Busking in São Paulo shows a drive towards modernity and globalization. Busking in Cape Town reflects the importance of tourism and the city’s mixed European and African identity. Busking in Hanoi reflects a state of transition and attempt at balancing the old with the new. In all cases, Urry’s “tourist gaze” helps illuminate the reciprocal relationship between buskers and tourists.

## Appendix

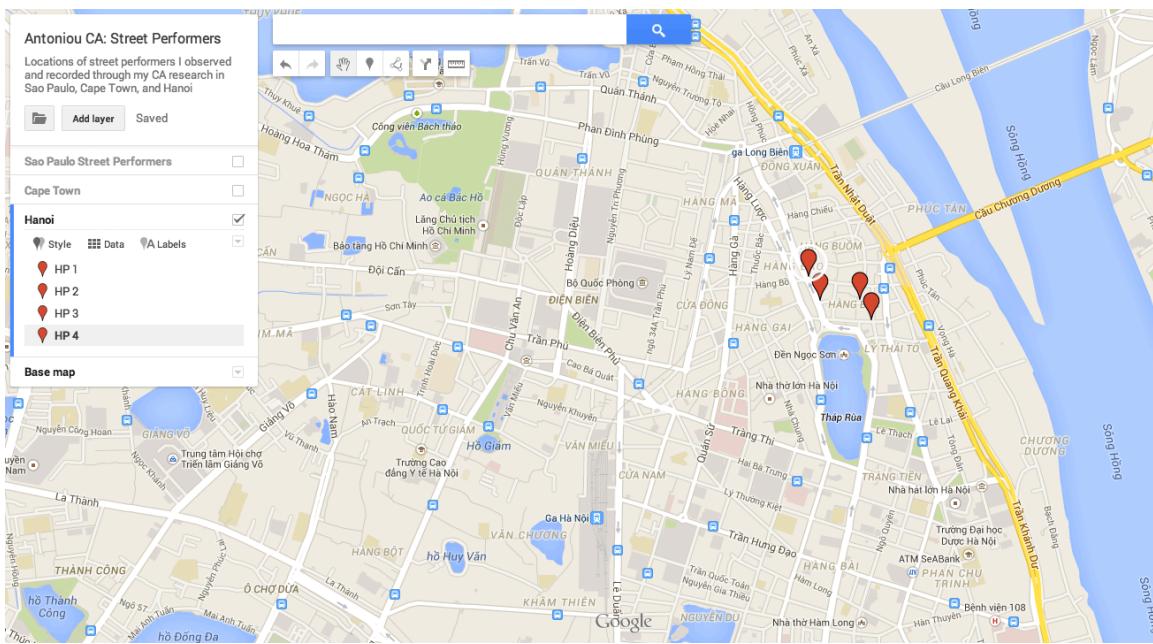
### A: Map of São Paulo busking



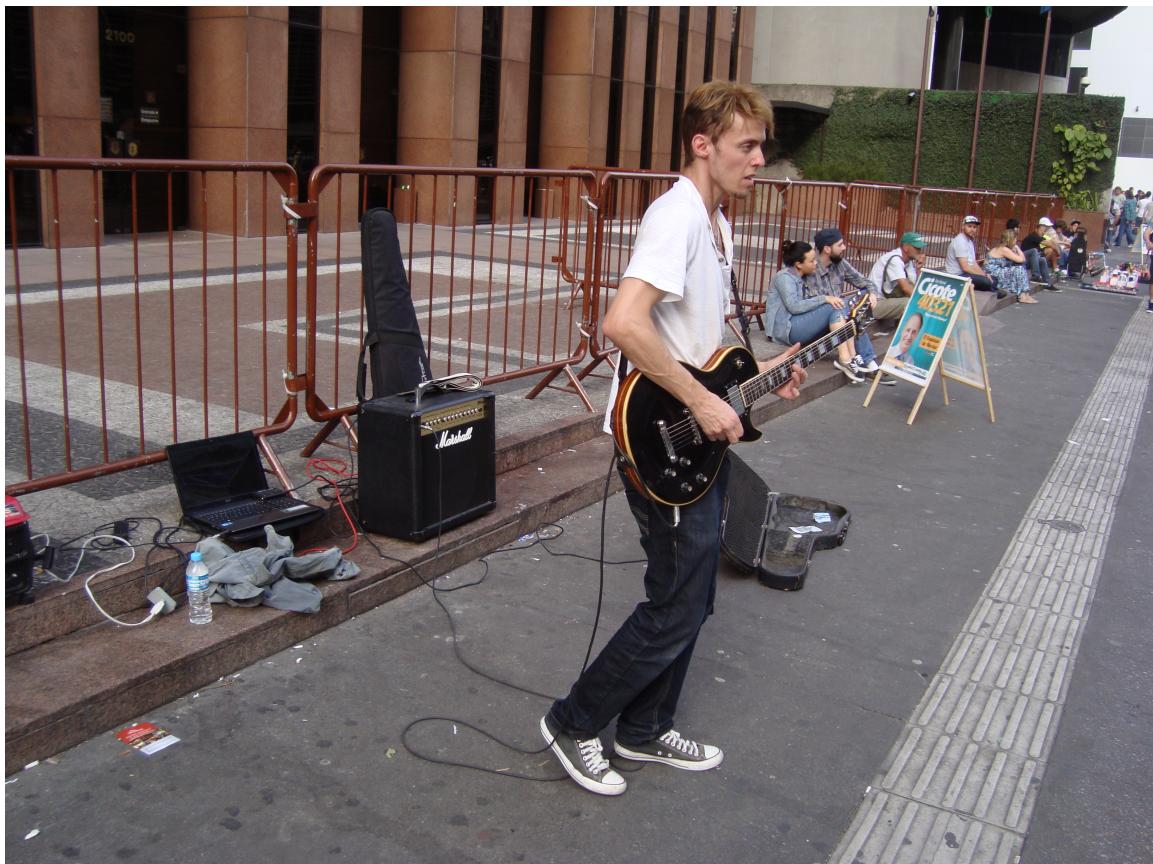
### B: Map of Cape Town busking



### C: Map of Hanoi busking



### D: São Paulo busker, electric guitar player



E: Cape Town buskers, traditional dancing, singing, and marimba



F: Cape Town buskers, chanting choir



G: Hanoi buskers, traditional performance



H: Hanoi buskers, modern performance



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## Interviews and Conversations

- Pedro Carvalho, São Paulo local student and language facilitator. Informal conversation. Nov. 13, 2014.
- Elena Crowe, IHP program participant. Informal conversation. Sep. 19, 2014
- Gabe Setright, IHP program participant.
- Local musicians at Guga S'tebe Tourist Center, Langa Township, South Africa. Oct. 12, 2014
- Tour guide at the Condomínio Conjunto Nacional, Avenida Paulista, São Paulo. Site visit, Sep. 10, 2014
- Mia Goldblatt, Cape Town Program Coordinator. Program introduction, Oct. 01, 2014.
- Ta Quynh Hoa, Guest Lecturer on Urban Planning from the National University of Civil Engineering – NUCE. Nov. 12, 2014.