

THE CONSTRUCTION OF LATIN IDENTITIES  
AND SALSA MUSIC CLUBS IN LONDON:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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by

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## ABSTRACT

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**The construction of Latin identities  
and salsa music clubs in London: An ethnographic study**  
by  
**Patria Román-Velázquez**

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This thesis is based on ethnographic research carried out between October 1993 and September 1994 and examines the construction and communication of Latin cultural identities across a selection of salsa music clubs in London.

Through an engagement with contemporary theories of globalisation, 'power-geometry' and cultural identity the thesis argues for the need to understand music related practices in salsa clubs in relation to wider social, economic and political processes occurring from without the clubs, but which have an impact in the construction and communication of 'Latin' identities at these sites. In this sense, this thesis proposes three analytical distinct but interrelated levels of analysis as a way of studying cultural identities and salsa clubs in London; that of nation and migration, the identity of places and the performing body.

In addressing the issue of nation and migration this thesis considers how Britain's immigration regulations affect the movement of Latin Americans across London, having an impact on the visible presence of Latin American cultural practices across London. This is then related to the geographical location of 'Latin' clubs which seek to attract both Latin Americans and non-Latin people. In discussing the identity of places this thesis provides specific details about salsa clubs in London and describes the practices of club owners, promoters and disc jockeys in constructing the identity of the clubs so as to communicate a 'Latin' identity. The thesis also examines how places with different but particular 'Latin' identities are constituted out of participants' movements across salsa clubs in London. The construction and communication of Latin identities is further developed by considering the relationship between body and music as performed by dancers and musicians.

This approach to the study of 'Latin' cultural identities and salsa clubs in London has implications for theoretical discussions about the relationship between cultural identities and places: It suggests that the micro movements of the dancing body in a particular event needs to be related to macro attempts to regulate the movement of bodies at an international level. This, in turn, should be considered in relation to broader spatial relationships across the city of London whereby particular places have been given a 'Latin' identity. This thesis elaborates on this discussion and suggests the need for further exploration and explanation of ongoing relations of power between these three overlapping levels of analysis which are at play in the construction and communication of 'Latin' cultural identities in London.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines Latin American cultural identities in London, with particular attention paid to those activities that are related to salsa music clubs. Salsa is the name given to describe a specific musical practice that was originally associated with the Spanish Caribbean populations of Puerto Ricans and Cubans in New York City. As a result of the process of communication, initially between Cuba,<sup>1</sup> Puerto Rico and New York and later with other South American countries such as Venezuela and Colombia, salsa soon became associated with a pan-Latin identity. Subsequently salsa has become part of the visible presence of Latin American cultural practices<sup>2</sup> in many countries around the world such as France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Spain and Switzerland among others.<sup>3</sup>

I take salsa clubs as a starting point to focus on the construction and communication of cultural identities in relation to time-space processes. Hence, in this thesis salsa clubs are approached, not as contained and bounded sites for social interaction, but in relation to broader spatial practices and power relations which play an important part in the construction and embodiment of particular Latin identities. In order to pursue this I locate my initial discussion within debates about globalisation. This approach is an attempt to move beyond other research on dance clubs which have tended to focus on audiences as subcultures and the production of the event. Such an approach might have been useful for

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of Cuba, this communication stopped after the Cuban Revolution, particularly after the missile conflict of 1962.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis I am drawing from Raymond Williams (1981) conceptualisation of culture. In this sense it refers to material and symbolic practices. Material, as it is used in anthropology, to refer to a whole way of life; and symbolic, as in cultural studies, in that it refers to culture as 'the signifying system through which a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored' (Williams, 1981, 13). Cultural practices, thus, refer to the activities through which a culture is constituted.

<sup>3</sup> Research about salsa in these countries is still very small, however some introductory articles have been published. Cintha Harjadi has recently finished a research project on Salsa in Amsterdam. The original research is written in Dutch, a short version was published in English as part of the proceedings of the Popular Music Studies in a Dutch Perspective Conference, held on the 24 of October 1994, Melkweg, Amsterdam, Netherlands 1994 (pp 30-36). Also published is the article 'Salsa comes to Europe' by Solothurnman, J. in Jazz Forum 1988 (113): 48-51. This article is about Salsa musicians in Switzerland. Research on salsa in Japan is currently being developed by Shuhei Hosokawa.

exploring how salsa is appropriated so as to communicate Latin identities, and how audiences participate in the production of a music event along with various music industries interests. However, what this perspective alone might have left outside of any analysis is the possibility for exploring the processes through which salsa comes to be present in London and that what occurs in the clubs is constituted out of wider social processes and relations of power. Thus, taking globalisation as a starting point for researching salsa music clubs in London allowed for an understanding of the processes through which particular cultural practices (those related to salsa clubs in London) come to be present in a particular place-time in London. Having globalisation as a starting point was also useful for understanding how a salsa scene in London was constituted out of spatial relations and how these played an important role in the construction and communication of Latin identities in London. I emphasise that clubs need to be understood as part of wider social processes which I relate to the movement of people and cultural practices into London. These processes are constituted out of different power relations that at the same time contribute to the identity of a place at a particular moment. Thus, places here are studied not as the context in which events occur, but as constituted out of power relations and directly related to the construction and communication of cultural identities. Hence, debates about globalisation processes are interrogated in this thesis through an exploration on the relationship between cultural identities and places.

This approach considers the different elements through which salsa comes to be present in London. Salsa's presence in London is related to the music industries commercial interest in distributing and promoting its artists and products around the world; to the interest of non-Latin American people in salsa; to the commercial interest of individual entrepreneurs; and it is also related to the immigration of Latin Americans into London. Salsa, as a 'dislocated' cultural practice often associated with Latin Americans, raises questions about the movement of Latin Americans to London, their relationship to salsa and their practices in London. This is not to say that salsa and the presence of Latin Americans in London directly correspond in a straight forward way, but that these are related.

Here I should make clear two things, my use of Latin America and thus Latin Americans. First, it is important to clarify that the term Latin America is a historical and ideological construct dating to the early 19th century and which was associated with Simón Bolívar's ideas of a political and economic continental confederation. This idea of Latin American unity was further elaborated at the turn of this century, just after the Spanish American War of 1898, when the United States was seen as another threat to the region. Identifying a Latin American unity through a sense of shared cultural identity was mostly accentuated in the literature and art forms of the time. However, these attempts to define a Latin American cultural identity have been seen as a concern for those who, during that period, were part of intellectual circles and part of the hegemonic ruling class. This class was, when taking into account the colonisation process, the 'newly defined Latin Americans' of 'European origins' in 'new' soil. Thus, in this attempt to define a Latin American identity the 'European' background (or Hispanic as was the case with the Spanish colonial territories) was privileged whilst black and indigenous populations were neglected, and often referred to in a pejorative way and as an isolated and minor group with lesser impact on the formation of a Latin American identity.

In recent years an outburst of sociological work, literature, art, museum exhibitions and some individual governments have recognised the presence and impact of indigenous populations and acknowledged the impact of African slavery on the history of black Latin Americans. Scholars have also addressed how the process of colonisation developed with different levels of intensity, varied forms and was expressed differently in each country. Thus, what is referred to as Latin America encompasses a vast and varied geographical region, with different languages, traditions and political systems. I recognise the problems in trying to define a specific group of people as Latin Americans, specifically when Latin America as a concept has political, cultural, geographical, ideological and historical implications for the construction of a Latin American identity. However, what I want to stress here is that I acknowledge that Latin America as a concept, a historical, cultural and ideological construct has undergone different processes of transformation. Latin America is thus characterised by its cultural variety, diversity and change.

Thus, when talking about Latin American cultural practices in London it is important to bear in mind that there are different and varied groups of Latin Americans in London from different countries, regions and cities, and of different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds. Those who I refer to in this thesis are mainly those for whom salsa - as this was the starting point for this research - was part of the way in which they experienced a sense of identity.

In this sense, then, Latin Americans in London do not just carry their culture with them - as if there was a unified culture - but attempt to construct, within the local circumstances and geography, an environment that provides them a sense of identification. In the same way that salsa is not simply 'flowing' across and reaching the entire world to the same degree but moving in specific ways and undergoing processes of transformation.

This thesis attempts to incorporate into the analysis of Latin identities and salsa clubs theoretical debates about globalisation processes and its implications for cultural identities. Hence, in Chapter One I discuss the theoretical approaches that frame this thesis. The chapters in this thesis are informed by the theory as much as by the ethnographic research. Thus, Chapter Two is an account of the practicalities of the research strategies as an attempt to reflect on the process through which this research developed. The argument of this thesis, however, is being moulded throughout the entire thesis. Each chapter contributes to the argument by adding a different level of analysis. Thus, the theoretical concerns are interrogated in this thesis across three different levels of analysis; that of nation and migration, the identity of places and the performing body.

My aim is to show that understanding Latin identity across salsa clubs cannot solely be understood through a focus on the clubs alone but by adopting an approach which can encompass multiple levels of analysis which take in to consideration macro as well as micro elements. This thesis is therefore an attempt to develop three different levels of analysis as a way of analysing the movement of cultural practices around the world. Hence, the importance of exploring various levels of analysis in this thesis is an attempt to

understand the complexities and dynamics involved when looking at Latin identity construction.

The first level of analysis, that of the nation-state is discussed in Chapter Three in relation to Britain's immigration laws and how these affect the movement of Latin Americans into England and across London. The main argument in Chapter Three is to highlight the importance of the nation-state in regulating national boundaries through immigration laws, which have a direct impact on people's visibility, movement, strategies and rights. This leads into the discussion of how places are constructed to communicate a 'Latin' identity. By focusing on Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common I stress how Latin Americans are transforming and participating at these sites as an active part of establishing new social relationships with places.

Chapter Four goes further in this aspect by discussing how particular Latin identities are constructed and communicated through salsa music clubs in London. I will also discuss the routes and routines being created by dancers, and how these spatial practices occur within the wider spatial power relations I have discussed prior to this. Specifically, I will be concentrating on those issues that affect the intersection or co-presence and exclusion of those who participate in salsa music clubs in London. Participation, as I use it in this thesis, refers to the different ways in which the event is created by dancers, disc jockeys and musicians to whom I refer as participants. However, participation at the event (that particular moment in which participants come to be together), needs to be understood in relation to processes occurring from without the clubs. This I explore in relation to the geographical distribution of the clubs, the routes and routines being created by participants, the monitoring of licensing authorities and policies and practices of club owners and promoters. From this I suggest that the degree of participation and therefore the construction and communication of Latin identities at the different salsa clubs has to be understood in relation to these ongoing practices and relations of power across salsa music clubs in London.

In Chapter Five I will explore how the body becomes important for the construction and communication of a particular Latin identity. This is addressed through particular practices related to gender relations and sexuality as these unfold in salsa clubs in London. The body as another level of analysis in the construction of Latin identities raises questions about a micro-politics of the body in relation to ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

As well as providing a critique of theoretical debates about globalisation process, this combination of approaches enabled me to indicate three interrelated levels of analysis at which the construction and communication of Latin cultural identities across salsa clubs in London could be analysed: That of nation and migration, the identity of places and the performing body. Hence, my research shows how both the nation state and the dancing body are related, and play a part in the way that particular cultural identities are constructed and communicated in London. This approach also allows for exploring the interrelations between the different levels of analysis, and thus is useful for understanding how Latin identities in the clubs are not confined to an event, but constituted out of wider social and power relations.

These multiple levels of analysis, however, are informed by theoretical concerns related to discussions about globalisation processes. Thus, I would now like to move on to Chapter One, where I discuss the theoretical discourses that frame this research.

## CHAPTER I

### THEORETICAL DISCOURSES: GLOBAL PROCESSES, POWER-GEOMETRY AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

#### 1. Introduction

The theoretical approach that frames this thesis provides a way of understanding salsa music clubs and Latin identity construction in relation to debates about globalisation processes; specifically through Doreen Massey's (1993b) conceptualisation of 'power-geometry' and Stuart Hall's (1991) theory of cultural identities. Both writers critically engage with and extend theories of globalisation. In this chapter I will indicate that 'power-geometry' provides a critique of theories of globalisation by emphasising the unequal dynamics of the time-space process which globalisation discourses attempt to describe. I will also discuss how Hall's concept of identity as involving a constant process of change and transformation is a challenge to the globalisation theories which assume that culture 'flows' across the world. Cultural forms (in this study, Latin American) do not simply flow and then appear as the same in different places around the world. Instead, as 'global' movements (of people, images and things) takes place so new identities are made, remade and transformed in new places (Hall, 1991). Thus, I argue cultural identities (in this case Latin American identities in London) are constituted out of, and in relation to, different and ongoing time-space processes and relations of power.

In this chapter I will focus on those authors who have contributed to a critical understanding of the dynamics of time-space processes and cultural identity in relation to globalisation debates in an attempt to develop a framework for the different levels of analysis that this thesis addresses. Throughout this chapter I will refer to how these theoretical issues have informed the empirical research material presented in later chapters.

## 2. Globalisation

Globalisation, as it initially developed in academic discussions, was introduced as an idea which suggested that the world was moving towards a united space which is increasingly homogeneous but with complexities and dynamics permitting heterogeneity. In broad terms, the globalisation process debates were characterised by two distinctive positions: on one hand a position that privileged a more 'global' or macro approach and posited globalisation as a unified way of looking at the world, and on the other hand a more 'local' or micro approach that favoured the world as a heterogeneous space and therefore considered different ways of studying localities and specific cultural practices.

Much research on globalisation has been characterised by its attention to processes and strategies occurring on a 'global' scale. It has been mainly concerned with describing and mapping out the spans and speed at which technological, environmental, political and economic changes have been occurring in the world with specific attention paid to multinational corporations (Harvey, 1989), media technologies (Robertson, 1992), environmental organisations (Dyer, 1993) and the world-economy and 'world-system' (Wallerstein, 1991). The processes often associated with globalisation are not new, but it is the speed and complexities of such movements that discussions about globalisation as a process seek to understand and explain. Within this perspective such concerns have led certain authors (Massey, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1994; Hall, 1992b; Robins, 1991, Morley & Robins, 1995; Appadurai, 1990, 1993) to call for an approach that would consider the different dimensions and relations of power through which such movements and processes are constituted. Consonant with these authors, I acknowledge that the speed at which these processes are occurring has increased since the 1970s in specific parts of the world, but these processes have not been occurring for everyone in the world to the same degree.

This emphasis on global processes and movements has had implications for studies of locality. It has raised questions about the traditional anthropological sense of 'the local' as involving a particular tribe, village or locale that is visited and approached as a self-contained world, often from a western academic perspective (Rosaldo, 1993; Clifford

1988). As a result, attempts have been made to redefine the local (this has been discussed by Braman, in print). Against these attempts to define the local there have been a number of authors who have argued that there is a need to consider the relationship between global and local processes (Robins, 1991; Morley 1991). The suggestion has been that academic research should study the interconnections between the global and local rather than their differences.

Kevin Robins has proposed this approach, arguing that the 'global' development of capitalist economies has had implications for cultures, identities and local ways of life. He explains how, for example, the manufacture, distribution and sharing of cultural products through the media or 'new global cultural industries' is creating a 'new electronic cultural space', this is a non-geographical space based on image and simulation (1991). Thus, for Robins globalisation is about changing time and space horizons and about a new 'global-local nexus'. Within this context the local does not correspond to any territorial configuration, but is constituted through its relation to the global. In this sense, 'global space is a space of flows, an electronic space, a decentred space, a space in which frontiers and boundaries have become permeable' (Robins, 1991, 33). Thus, Robins argues that globalisation is the organising principle of economic and cultural transformations and therefore, 'has implications for both individual and collective identities and for the meaning and coherence of community' (1991, 41).

More specifically and dealing with media technologies, David Morley has highlighted the importance of considering the dynamics of global-local processes in studying television audiences. Morley proposes an approach that will integrate questions about the relationship between ideology, power and politics into 'the analysis of the consumption, uses and functions of television in everyday life' (1991, 5). Thus, he calls for an understanding of the macro-dimensions within which domestic television is understood and experienced. This approach he suggests, will provide a framework to 'grasp the significance of the process of globalisation and localisation' for contemporary culture (1991, 1).

The importance of this approach for my research is that I started by considering how a 'local' salsa scene in London develops from its relation to different time-space processes. Moreover, it studies the 'local' outside of its geographical boundaries in the sense that salsa and Latin Americans are 'dislocated' from their geographical reference (or what has been established as their geographical confines). In this sense, my use of 'local' is two-folded in that it treats the theoretical and ethnographic explanation of the local as interrelated. In the first instance, it does not attempt to define the local as self-contained and bounded, but it considers the local as constituted in relation to, and out of its interaction, with other localities through different (and differentiated) time-space processes. (This particular way of addressing the local has implications for my use of place as playing a constitutive part in the construction and communication of cultural identities, rather than simply as the context in which events occur). This theoretical approach towards the local has implications for, and challenges, the traditional anthropological sense of the local in that it does not refer anymore to a bounded tribe or village; but to a particular group of Latin Americans in London which is constituted out of its geographical, cultural and political relationships with other localities elsewhere in Latin America; as well as through the interactions with (and across) London.

Central to the debates that have arisen as a result of the critiques of globalisation theories have been discussions about time-space processes. The importance of concepts of time-space and their significance for the ordering and understanding of social life have been recognised in a number of disciplines and discourses and have been significant in a variety of areas of intellectual activity throughout the twentieth century, from art and literature to the physical sciences and the disciplines they are most commonly associated with (geography and history). Time-space and place have, in my understanding, no one definition but are articulated in relation to specific cultures or modes of production (Harvey, 1989) and systems of representation or meaning (Hall, 1992b). Although my discussion here is related to these broader concerns about time-space, because of the scope and limits of this thesis I am focusing and confining my discussions to those issues particularly relevant to discussions about globalisation and cultural identity formation.

Whilst I have drawn on broader discussions of the globalisation process (e.g. King, 1991; Wallerstein, 1991; Robertson, 1992) here I will concentrate on the arguments elaborated by Anthony Giddens (1990) and David Harvey (1989). Both approach the subject with attention to economic, political, social and cultural perspectives. Giddens focuses his discussion on the issue of modernity and its consequences, paying particular attention to the re-ordering or 'stretching' of social relations across the world. Harvey, adopting a Marxist approach, emphasises the power of capitalism and the compression or 'shrinking' of social relations. Both authors have influenced my initial thoughts in developing this study; Giddens for understanding the constitution of social relations across time-space, and Harvey in understanding the changing time-space processes in the capitalist system.

### **2.1 Time-space distancing**

Time-space processes are central to Giddens' use of the term globalisation which he has defined 'as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (1990, 64). Giddens argues that this process of 'time-space distancing' is one of the enabling conditions of modernity. Modernity, he explains, is characterised by four institutional dimensions which were initially clearly identifiable with, what he calls, the West: capitalism, industrialism, class relations and the nation-state. However, he argues that these 'no longer so distinctly differentiates the Western countries from others elsewhere' (Giddens, 1990, 52). Hence, Giddens argues that globalisation is a consequence of the way that modernity has spread across the world: 'modernity is inherently globalising' (1990, 63). Thus, time-space distancing is proposed by Giddens as a condition of modernity and its consequence, globalisation. In this sense, globalisation refers to a 'stretching process', to the disembedding of social relations across time-space and to a greater awareness and knowledge of this disembedding process through faster

means of transportation, international finance and the movement of capital, communication technologies and the spread of the mass media which have led to 'cultural globalisation'.<sup>1</sup>

Giddens suggests that social relations are 'stretching' across time and space; people in a particular locale are influenced not just by what is physically present but by what is absent or by 'distanciated' relations. In explaining this, he defines place as the locale or 'the physical setting of social activity as situated geographically' (1990, 18). He then suggests that social relations within the locale or place are being 'disembedded' and 'lifted out from local contexts of interactions' and restructured across time and space (Giddens, 1990, 21). Time-space distanciation, as defined by Giddens, refers mainly to the process by which social interactions in a locale can be shaped by what is occurring distant from them.

Giddens' concept of time-space distanciation is useful for my research in that it directs me to how social relations are 'stretching' across the world. The importance of Giddens' work here is that social relations which occur in a specific place have to be understood in a broad macro context in relation to processes elsewhere. As I explained in the introduction, this thesis moves from considering broader macro processes outside, but related to, salsa music clubs to the very micro dynamics of the body as participating in the clubs.

However, it is Giddens' assumption that place is a 'container' of social relations which poses a problem for my research. Place he identifies as 'the physical setting of social activity as situated geographically' (1990, 18). This concept of place lacks any sense of a dynamic, there is no sense of human activity contributing to the place. This is particularly so in relation to Giddens' concepts of 'disembedding' and 'reembedding' - things are up-lifted and then tied down, but there is no sense of the processes whereby things come to be in another locale and how these interact with that particular place and how 'restructuring' might occur. Throughout my thesis then, Latin American cultural practices are not simply treated as disembedded from somewhere and then re-embedded in another place. Instead, I

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<sup>1</sup> I recognise that these ideas are explained by Giddens in an extensive and developing body of work which considers wider issues related to 'structuration theory'. Here, however, I am only dealing with the issues most relevant to the argument of this chapter.

am interested in the making of places as central to the re-making (construction and communication) of Latin American identities.

On this issue, Giddens has been criticised for not paying attention to the 'production' of place (Gregory, 1989, 1994; Pred, 1990). Pred has argued that even when Giddens recognises the importance of embodied human agency and social relations he tends to neglect how the body is a constitutive part of social relations and is actively engaged in the production of place: People are involved in 'producing' a place as much as a place 'contains' people. Pred also suggests that in analysing the production of place it is also necessary to consider the way that bodies and places interact in mutually producing each other. Pred points out:

Giddens also fails to remark on the culturally arbitrary gendering of spaces at both the micro- and meso-levels, on the shaping of gendered spaces that in turn shape gender, on the binary oppositions symbolically embedded in segregated male and female spaces, on the role of gendered spaces in the ordering of social experience, on the power relations that physically separate male and female practical (time-) spaces, on the power relations that are reproduced by men and women practising in separate (time-) spaces' (Pred, 1990, 26).

Following Pred's criticism of Giddens, but not adopting Pred's un-sexed opposition between genders, my research attempts to bring the body into the production of place, a body that is gendered, sexed and 'ethnicised'. Hence, in considering the construction of Latin clubs I also consider how a sense of Latinness is produced through specific body practices which communicate a particular 'Latin' identity.

## **2.2 Time-space compression**

David Harvey's conceptualisation of time-space compression (1989) differs from Giddens theory of time-space distancing, in that it does not refer to the stretching and disembedding of social relations due to modernity, but to the 'shrinking' or 'collapsing' of time-space barriers as part of the development of the capitalist production process:

As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications and a 'spaceship earth' of economic and ecological interdependencies ... and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is ... so we have to learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds (1989, 240).<sup>2</sup>

Harvey focuses the discussion of time-space compression historically, by considering how the capitalist production process and technological changes have 'annihilated space through time'. This approach enables him to interpret how class structures, modes of production and political patterns have been manifested historically, and how they have repercussions for the forms of experiencing time and space. Harvey argues that the reduction of time in the capitalist production process, particularly through technological improvement, has contributed to changing space relations across nations and altered people's sense of space and thus changed people's way of organising their lives. In this sense, Harvey proposes that time and space cannot be studied outside of those processes and material practices that generates the reproduction of social life. These vary geographically and historically as each mode of social production generates different forms of conceiving time and space. Therefore, Harvey argues that the study of spatial and temporal practices can not be separated from social practices.

Harvey's way of conceptualising time-space compression has consequences for the way in which places are constructed. As Harvey later (1993) recognised, parallel to changing space relations due to the development of capitalism, were alterations to the character of places. As the dissolution of space barriers through capitalism has had an impact on dissolving the notion of places as fixed and bounded, so it also led to definitions of place as exclusively territorial. In this sense Harvey argues that this perspective of place 'when conflated with race, ethnic, gender, religious and class differentiation, is one of the most

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<sup>2</sup> Although Harvey does not discuss time-space compression explicitly in relation to theories of the globalisation process, he does engage with globalisation discourse and rhetoric as is clear from this quote.

pervasive bases for both progressive political mobilisation and reactionary exclusionary politics' (1993, 4).

In order to avoid proposing a sense of place that is reduced to that of a territory, Harvey suggests that 'what goes on in a place cannot be understood outside of the space relations that support that place any more than the space relations can be understood independently of what goes on in particular places' (1993, 15). Thus, Harvey insists on places as social constructs which are, as such, constituted out of the interrelation between representation, imagination and material social practices.

In an attempt to develop this idea and explain the changing experience of time-space compression, Harvey, inspired by Lefebvre's work (1991), proposes a 'grid of spatial and temporal practices' which considers the way in which space-time is experienced, represented and imagined. Spatial and temporal practices, he argues, 'take on their meaning under specific social relations of class, gender, community, ethnicity, or race and get *used up* or *worked over* in the course of social action' (1989, 223). Thus, in this sense 'power relations are always implicated in spatial and temporal practices' (1989, 225). However, even though he recognises the importance of exploring the different positionings or power relations within a such a 'grid' Harvey gives no sense of how these positionings are to be explored, apart from his continual reference to capitalism. As he acknowledges,

My purpose in setting up such a grid is not to attempt any systematic exploration of the positions within it, though such an examination would be of considerable interest ... My purpose is to find some point of entry that will allow a deeper discussion of the shifting experience of space in the history of modernism and post modernism (1989, 222).

Harvey's call for an understanding of place in relation to space relations, and his treatment of place as not simply a container, but a construct that is constituted in relation to spatial practices was important for my thinking in this thesis and caused me to reflect on the immigration of Latin American groups into England as an important dynamic contributing to the presence of Latin American cultural practices in London. In an attempt to consider

how space relations are implicated in place, I reflected on how the spatio-temporal movements of Latin Americans around the world are connected to economic and political policies occurring both 'globally' and 'locally', and in particular to national political policies. In chapter three I consider how immigration controls in Great Britain affect the movement of Latin Americans into Britain and how this is related to possibilities for participating in the construction of Latin places and later using these for specific social practices.

Harvey gave me a way of starting to think about places as more than containers and of understanding wider relations outside a specific setting. His idea of a 'grid' was (as he acknowledged) a starting point for discussing ideas about spatial and temporal practices, but as he also acknowledged (1989) this 'grid' did not allow for an understanding of the different positionings that certain groups have in relation to these processes. It is on this point that the works of Hall and Massey become important in developing my research further. I would like to incorporate Doreen Massey's (1993b) concept of 'power-geometry' and Stuart Hall's argument on cultural identities to the debate on time-space processes, which I find useful for studying the dynamics of movement and re-making of Latin American cultural identities in London. I hope that this combination of approaches would be useful for understanding the relationship between cultural identities and places, which is a way in to interrogate discussions about globalisation process.

I will be drawing on Massey (1993b) to critique and extend concepts of 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989) and 'time-space distancing' (Giddens, 1990). Massey argues that time-space compression and distancing are not even processes and have to be understood in relation to the politics of mobility, access, international migration, transportation, gender and ethnicity - in relation to what she calls 'power-geometry' (1993b). By focusing on the work of Stuart Hall (1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b) I will discuss time-space in relation to the construction and representation of cultural identities. The argument here is that the increasing development of technological devices and transnational corporations has altered our notion of time and space; thus, these

'global' changes are also altering the way cultural identities are constructed, represented and experienced.

Although Harvey explains issues such as the construction and transformation of place, the works of Massey and Hall allow me to incorporate at the centre of the debate the issues of power and identity, which I consider important for understanding salsa clubs and Latin identity in London. In what follows of this chapter I will concentrate on discussing those issues from Massey's work that are relevant for my research and then move on to Hall's work.

### **3. Power-geometry of time-space processes**

Doreen Massey has criticised Harvey's conceptualisation of time-space compression and the production of place because of his constant reference to capital. Even when Harvey recognises the importance of gender and ethnicity for the experience of time-space he only mentions these issues in passing. In Harvey's work, social power is reduced to the accumulation of surplus value in the capitalist production process and to the control over the means of production. Massey argues that the experience of time-space is not solely determined by capital but ethnicity and gender are also important parts of how time-space compression is experienced (Massey, 1993a). To understand Massey's argument it is important to go in detail to how she explains time-space compression in relation to what she calls 'power-geometry'.

In criticising Harvey's theory of time-space compression and Giddens' concept of time-space distanciation, Massey argues that the increasingly rapid technological and economic development of capitalism or modernity are not enough to understand how time-space processes are experienced. She argues that time-space compression is an unequal process. Not everyone experiences time-space compression to the same degree; some are in a position of control, others are participating on that process but are not in charge of it, some are at the receiving end, and others are contributing to it but imprisoned by it (1993b). This is what she calls the 'power-geometry of time-space compression';

For different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who does not although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and movements (1993b, 61).

Massey states that it is important to understand the way in which people are placed and assume a position in relation to politics of mobility, access, international migration, transportation, ethnicity and gender. She adds, 'it is not simply a question of unequal distribution, that some people move more than others, some have more control than others. It is that the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people' (1993b, 62). Thus, Massey argues that it is important to consider how different social groups are occupying different positions in terms of power relations. In this sense power is constituted through and out of these relations: 'Space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation' (1993a, 156). This notion of power relations, which challenges the idea of a power imposed upon individuals, draws on Michael Foucault's work on the relationships of power. Foucault approaches power not in terms of a 'theory' or 'source' of domination but in terms of 'power relations' which can be found 'at different levels, and under different forms' and which are 'changeable reversible and unstable' (1988, 12). Although Massey uses a similar notion of power to that of Foucault, from her reading of Foucault she criticises the notion of power that separates place/space from time and the way this neglects the 'positive interactions' through which places are constituted. This leads to Massey's call for an 'alternative view of space' and a 'progressive sense of place'.

In explaining Massey's call for an alternative view of space and a progressive sense of place, it is important to understand the distinction that she makes between the spatial, space-time and place. The spatial, Massey argues, is constructed out of a multiplicity of social relations across multiple spaces. Spaces intersect with each other and exist 'in relations of paradox or antagonism' because 'social relations of space are experienced differently, and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions as part of it'

(Massey, 1994, 3). Thus, the spatial is full of power and signification through the experience of social relations. If social relations have a spatial form and a spatial content, that is, they exist in and across space; then, place can be thought of as particular moments in the intersecting of social relations (Massey, 1994). Massey stresses that social relations are interacting with other relations in other places. She argues that understanding place this way challenges the notion of locality as a contained area with clearly delineated boundaries.

Massey suggests an alternative view of space to that proposed by Harvey. First, and consonant with Harvey and Giddens, she proposes that space and time must be integral to each other. Massey argues that any movement in space is also temporal and any temporal movement is spatial. Therefore, she suggests that space cannot be defined as timeless.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Massey's argument for the inseparability of space-time and that space-time should be thought of as integral to each other (Massey, 1993b). Second, this notion of space-time suggests that space is constructed out of 'the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global', hence it is multi-dimensional (1993a, 156). In this sense space is a moment in the intersection of social relations, and therefore not static, this being her third proposition. This leads to her conceptualisation of space as disrupted and as such open to politics, which is her fourth proposition.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, she argues that disruption opens the possibility for politics in the way that the spatial is integral to the making of history.

Massey's call for an 'alternative view of space' does not differ greatly from that of Harvey and Giddens, in that both consider the transformations on notions of space and that both consider time-space as integral to each other. In doing this, Massey does provides a view which I understand moves beyond Giddens and Harvey in that it allows for spaces as

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<sup>3</sup> In this conceptualisation of space-time she draws on Einstein's theory of relativity, in which time and space are interdependent and therefore four dimensional; a three dimensional space and one dimensional time.

<sup>4</sup> In this, Massey is criticising Jameson's conceptualisation of space as essentially chaotic and Laclau's conceptualisation of the spatial as 'essential orderliness'. To conceptualise space as chaotic, she argues, is to reduce space to the unrepresentable, which 'is also problematical in what it implies for the notion of time. ... time has a coherence and logic to its telling, while space does not' (contra Jameson) (1993a, 158).

disrupted and open for transformation. This I understand is Massey's major criticism of Harvey and Giddens in that both seem to provide a fixed history of capitalism and modernity (respectively) and the changes which are provoked in the notions of time-space; this is to privilege one history, which Massey argues should be seen in a more multi-dimensional and 'progressive' way. Massey links the four propositions on an 'alternative view of space' to her propositions for a 'progressive sense of place'.

Massey connects the multi-dimensional and 'progressive' production of place to its identity construction as that particular moment of intersection of social relations: place has its specificity, its identity (1994). Elaborating on this statement Massey argues that the 'identity of places' is continuously being produced. According to Massey this notion of place implies that identities of places are constructed through their interactions with other places. The identity of a place, Massey argues, is that being claimed by a particular group interacting in a particular moment with a net of social relations in and across space (1994). Identity of places should be understood as that being claimed by different groups at that particular moment/location. Thus and simultaneously, the identity of any place is continuously being produced in its relation to other groups. The identity of any place is, Massey argues, 'for ever open to contestation' in the sense that other identities of place are being produced simultaneously by other groups. In this sense identity is unfixated; places cannot 'be characterised by some essential internalised moment' (Massey, 1994, 169). This way of understanding identities of places rejects an essentialist identity of place. This is possible by exploring the different identities of places being formed or produced through that mixture of social relations within and without place. Although, as she points out drawing from Stuart Hall's conceptualisation of cultural identities, this task will not be completed or complete because places are always in the process of formation. The identity of places, in this sense, is always being produced and therefore open to contestation. She emphasises that places are constantly being produced through positive interactions of social relations within and without place (Massey, 1994).

Not only does Massey make a clear distinction between space-time, place and the spatial when criticising time-space compression, but provides an approach which incorporates politics, economics and gender into the analysis of space-time/place. Massey raises the importance of time-space compression as an unequal process, not only because of unequal distribution of capital but because of the characterisation of space and place as socially constructed and their implication on society. She focuses on the issue of gender as an example of her argument; 'spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood' (1994, 179). She explains this in terms of women's mobility and how this is affected either by 'the power of convention or symbolism or through the straight-forward threat of violence' (1994, 180). Thus, she argues that those issues that affect women's mobility will influence the sense of space and place, and this I would say is true for any other class defined, ethnic and sexualised group whose mobility is constrained at any particular moment and place. As Massey states 'The hegemonic spaces and places which we face today are not only products of forms of economic organisation but reflect back at us also - and in the process reinforce - other characteristics of social relations, among them those of gender' (1994, 183).

Through these arguments Massey provides a clear conceptualisation of how places are produced and transformed. Her understanding of 'power-geometry' or what she later calls the 'geography of power' (1995) allows for multi-dimensional power relations and processes of change that cannot be reduced to capitalism or modernity. As Massey has pointed out a 'geography of power' is a way of thinking about the 'spatial organisation of society', because

Power is one of the few things you rarely see a map of. Yet a geography of power - that is, of social relations stretched over space - is what sustains much of what we experience around us in any local area - from the nervousness of going down a particular street at night, to the financing of the local company down the road, to the arrival of the latest US movie at the multiplex. And it is out of the intersections of all these geographies that each

‘place’ acquires both its uniqueness and its interdependence with elsewhere’ (1995, 71).

As Massey recognises, this is not a concept that can be treated simply as a ‘theory’, but a way in to discuss relations of power, and these have to be explored on their own terms in any given research situation (1995). Massey offers three ways in which this can be explored. First, in that it suggests that in order to consider power relations it is important to consider the position that different groups occupy in time-space. Second, the production of place is approached in terms of its identity. This does not reduce the identity of place to its representation, but points to how places ‘can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings. ... the point is that there are real relations with real content, economic, political, cultural, between any local place and the wider world in which it is set’ (1993b, 66). Thirdly, that places are constituted out of positive interactions with other places.

I consider that this way of thinking about power-geometry is a useful way in to explore and understand the particular dynamics through which relations of power are constituted and through which the identities of places are established. Thus, ‘power-geometry’ or the ‘geography of power’ is a way in to developing the threads that I bring together for the argument of this thesis. Thus, my research into salsa music clubs in London is approached in this thesis taking into consideration these three points (and a fourth element which draws from Stuart Hall’s work on place and identity, which I will shortly discuss). As I explained in the introduction, my research into salsa music clubs led me to different routes from without the clubs, and it is these routes which I discuss according to the three points presented above. First I explore Latin American’s routes through the city. For this I focus on immigration laws and how these have an impact on the movement of Latin Americans into England and in London. I discuss how these regulations constrain the routes that Latin American choose to adopt once in England and in turn have an impact on the identity of places at a particular moment in time. Thus, secondly, and through the examples of Elephant and Castle shopping centre and ‘La Cancha’ (The pitch) at Clapham Common I

explore how Latin Americans have transformed these sites with a particular Latin identity and later used them for particular social relations and cultural practices. This is an attempt to demonstrate how places are constructed and transformed through positive interactions within and without place, but without neglecting relations of power established by the nation-state in regulating its borders as these have an impact on the mobility and visibility of some Latin Americans in London. Third, by focusing on salsa clubs in London, I wish to present a narrative on the identity of the clubs; one that would consider the relationship between clubs and how power relations develop through the practices of club owners, disc jockeys, promoters and dancers. In considering the movement of participants around salsa clubs in London I explore how these contribute to the identity of the clubs, which are also constituted out of power relations in the sense that the legal status of participants and the control of licensing authorities have a direct impact on the routes that participants choose to adopt around the different networks of salsa clubs.

Hence, I approach places as that moment of intersection in social relations and it is that aspect which I look at when exploring salsa clubs in London. Thus, I consider, not only the co-presence of social relations on that moment of intersection, but what is excluded from it. Those absences in that moment of intersection are also considered when looking at dancers' routes and participation at some salsa clubs. Thus, here I refer to not only to the ways in which movements in time-space/place are not the same for everyone - the 'power-geometry' of time-space/place processes - but to the ways in which the routes of some limit the movement of others who are involved in a similar process (Massey, 1993b).

Thus, I suggest that the construction and communication of cultural identities needs to be understood as constituted through different and ongoing relations of power, which the idea of power-geometry provides a way of approaching.

#### 4. Cultural identities and places

Stuart Hall has theorised the relationship between place and cultural identities with specific reference to particular groups in their relationship to the immediate local environments in a specific moment in time (Hall, 1992b). In theorising about cultural identities Stuart Hall engages with theories of globalisation and in particular with time-space processes.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on theories of globalisation Hall is concerned with 'those processes operating on a global scale which cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organisations in new time-space combinations, making the world in reality and experience more interconnected' (1992b, 299).<sup>6</sup> Hall, like other authors who have engaged with globalisation debates which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, points out that social and cultural transformation is increasingly and rapidly occurring in relation to the speed at which technological development and administrative and political change is occurring around the world. He adds to this that the processes whereby these transformations and changes are occurring have had an impact on collective and individual identities (1992b).

Hall mentions that in order to understand the shifts on ideas about identity it is important to understand that the two dimensions of identity, that of collective social identity and individual identity, are interdependent; as thoughts on collective identity changed, so did

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<sup>5</sup> Time-space processes have been central in recent discussions about identities particularly in debates about how the production and movement of capital, images and information occurring around the world have changed or have had an impact on cultural identities. Although I am particularly interested in the relationship between cultural identities and places, it is important to acknowledge that there is a growing number of works on the relationship between place and identity. These works cover a wide and a diversity of subjects; some consider the built environment, specific types of architecture, geographical 'imaginings', cities or particular localities (King, 1991; Keith and Pile, 1993; Agnew and Duncan, 1989; Mlinar, 1992); others deal with the Black British experience in Great Britain (Gilroy, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1993; Mercer, 1994) the political struggles of women in Latin America (Radcliffe, 1993) and Asian experience in United States (van der Veer, 1995) The relationship between identities and time-space has also been discussed with reference to media technologies and corporations (Morley & Robins 1995) and the way that the process of international restructuring within capitalist economies is changing not only the space of economy but also 'imaginary spaces' (Robins, 1991). However, what unifies these works is an attempt to move beyond the idea of space and place as a mere representation of social life or as the context in which social relations and actions occur.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall has also defined globalisation in cultural terms in relation to mass communication. He says that global mass culture refers to the speed up of images across linguistic frontiers. But here I am specifically interested in his discussion about the impact of time-space compression for cultural identities.

ideas on individual identity. He explains how, as part of the Enlightenment thought the idea of a collective identity as centred and unified was related to the notion of the subject as placed, positioned and stabilised. In this sense identity was explained or thought of as internalised in the self and autonomous from society (1992b). Consonant to this notion of the subject was the notion of time-space as absolute and homogeneous (Harvey, 1989). As part of modern thought this notion of the subject and identity shifted to one in which the subject interacted with the society she/he was part of. This division demarcated the individual as subjective and society as an objective rational structure. Still, identity was thought of as unified, one which stabilises the subject and society, 'making both reciprocally more unified and predictable' (Hall, 1992b, 276). In this sense and as part of modernity social identities were thought of as collective social identities. In what he calls late modernity (what others call post-modernity) collective social identities have not disappeared, as he acknowledges, but these are not anymore placed nor can they be thought of as homogeneous (Hall, 1991a, 1991b). Hall argues that the changing time-space relations have altered social relations in and across place, and have had effects on how identities are located and represented. Through these processes of transformation identities are not anymore thought of as unified and homogeneous, but as de-centred and fragmented. Thus, in what he calls late-modernity these two ways of thinking about identity coexist (1992b).

Having, generally and briefly, presented the shifts on collective and individual identity I will now pay particular attention to Hall's discussion of cultural identity, as it is of relevance to this thesis. Stuart Hall has identified two dimensions for thinking about cultural identity. One that defines cultural identity as a shared culture and therefore emphasises shared meanings and historical experiences. The second recognises difference as much as similarities by considering ruptures and discontinuities of cultural identity. Cultural identity he states, 'is a matter of becoming as well as being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture' (1990, 225). Thus, cultural identities are not just grounded in an essentialised past, but refer to the different positions in which we locate ourselves within

discourses of history and culture. Thus, cultural identity is formed out of similarity and continuity, and difference and rupture. The first is established through a continuity with the past, the second through a shared experience of discontinuity by processes such as slavery, transportation, colonisation and migration (Hall, 1990). Thus, he argues,

Cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, in transition, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalised world (1992b, 310).

In this sense he argues that cultural identities are not fixed, never completed as they are always in the process of formation and transformation, connote the process of identification, and are part of a narrative or a representation (1991b). This way of understanding cultural identities is central to his discussion about the relationship between cultural identities and places.

Cultural identities, Stuart Hall argues, have no necessary relationship with place, but as he states it is still common to think of them as placed (1995b). As 'cultures can be sustained by peoples who do not live in the same place and who have never met' (1995b, 183), then there is no correspondence between culture and place. In this sense cultural identities are not fixed in place.

In order to understand Hall's argument it is important to clarify his conceptualisation of culture and place. Cultures are systems of shared meanings, and as such are constructed within meaning. Trying not to neglect the material social world he adds, 'culture includes the social practices which produce meaning as well as the practices which are regulated and organised by those shared meanings' (1995b, 176). It is in this sense that shared systems of meanings such as language, religion, custom, tradition and place, can develop into a sense of belongingness to a culture. Thus, culture, Hall argues, is 'one of the principal means by which identities are constructed, sustained and transformed' (1995b, 176). Hall includes place as another system of cultural meaning. In this sense place is cultural. Thus,

places, as cultures, are systems of shared meanings, and as such are constructed within meaning, thus in constant transformation.

Consonant to the way in which cultural identities are thought Hall explains two possible reasons for why cultures are often understood as placed, one 'imagined' another 'real'. These are at the same time closely related to the way in which places are thought of as clearly delineated locales. First, cultures are 'imagined' as placed in the sense that place is associated with a particular locale, and in this sense it is 'common to think of cultures as if they depended on the stable interaction of the same people, doing the same sorts of things, over and over again, in the same geographical location' (Hall, 1995b, 180). This notion of place has been challenged by Massey, who has defined it as the specific moment of intersection of social relations, thus always in the process of formation, and by Hall's notion of places as systems of shared meanings which are constructed within meaning and thus in constant transformation.

Hall proposes that places as clearly defined locales is also challenged by the process through which transnational migrations relate to place of origin and place of settlement or by modern communications through shared consumer tastes amongst people who are separated in places and perhaps, have never met (1995b). This way of understanding culture as placed has led to a search for origins which has developed into antagonistic and essentialist assumptions that the coexistence of different cultural groups is not possible;

... though cultures are sometimes 'placed' and we tend to imagine them as strongly unified and homogeneous, integrated by tradition in a landscape and tied to a 'homeland', the effort - against the complex and tortured background of modern history - to actually make 'culture' and 'place' correspond with one another turns out to be a hopeless, expensive and sometimes violent and dangerous illusion (Hall, 1995b, 186).

He adds that this way of imagining cultures as placed is linked to the narrative of the nation on national cultures as placed, well-bounded and internally unified. National cultural identities are sustained by the narrative, memories and images of the nation (1992b), also

by the process whereby we are encouraged to imagine, represent and give meaning to members of a nation who we will never meet as 'imagined communities'<sup>7</sup> (1995b).

The second possible way in which culture is understood as placed is in terms of cultural belongingness whereby place 'establishes symbolic boundaries around a culture, marking off those who belong from those who do not' (1995b, 181). He sustains that within this second perspective there are two contrasting ways in which culture is often related to place, one which focuses on tradition and place of origin; another on hybridity, whereby meanings are constantly being negotiated, contested and transformed (1995a, 1995b). This way of understanding culture emphasises the formation and transformation of 'hybrid' cultural identities. Debates on hybrid cultures have often led to a celebration of difference that ignores the conditions and circumstances under which different cultures come to be existing together or the meeting of cultural forms. Discussions about hybridity also posit the argument of the erosion of national boundaries (Hall, 1992b). Thus, Hall proposes, a way of understanding cultural identities in relation to places; one,

... where meanings are not fixed, but are constantly being negotiated, contested and transformed; where cultural forms and practices are not 'pure' but combine with elements of other cultures; and where identities are not stable and invariable because of where they come from, but are constantly producing themselves in new forms, in new places, out of combinations of elements and meanings (1995b, 199).

It is in this sense that he introduces the idea of diaspora as a way of understanding the relationship between culture, place and identity. Diaspora, or 'cultures of contact zones' (1995b, 191) carry the idea of location and dislocation. Diasporas are placed, settled in different places to that which is considered to be their original homeland. Thus, diasporas are both dispersed and physically placed, and as such imagined as belonging to various places. This way of understanding diaspora challenges the idea of places as bounded and lacking dynamics of transformation and change in their relation with other places. Thus,

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<sup>7</sup> Here Hall draws from Benedict Anderson's (1991) notion of imagined community.

the idea of places as bounded systems to which we belong in a pure way does not correspond with the idea of diaspora. In this sense Hall argues that diaspora allows for identity to have different relations to place, but never tied to it (1995b). Thus, Hall proposes that approaching diaspora in this way 'does not depend on thinking about culture, identity and place in a closed unified or homogeneous way, as a return to roots, but instead redefines culture as a series of overlapping routes' (1995b, 209).

Before expanding on the relevance of Hall's work for this thesis I should clarify that although I agree with Stuart Hall's position I understand that most of his interesting arguments on the relationship between culture, identity and place are sometimes obscured by his emphasis on meanings. In theorising about cultural identities Stuart Hall is drawing from Raymond Williams (1958) definition of cultures as a whole way of life and on theories of cultures as produced through language. Stuart Hall's latest work has privileged the second, whilst his earlier work privileged the former. I should acknowledge this shift in his work as my criticism of him is of more relevance to his latest work and specifically related to his reflections on cultural identities and place. By setting up this model of culture, place and cultural identity as systems of meanings, Hall argues that it is through meaning that culture, place and identity are related. Thus, it is through meaning that cultural identities are understood in their relationship to place. Culture, place and identity are reduced to meaning and as such open to contestation and in constant transformation. Even when he acknowledges material social practices, he privileges language and therefore meaning over social practice in his conceptualisation of culture, place and identity. He writes,

... events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive, but that only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning (Hall, 1992a, 253).

Thus, in his conceptualisation of place he overemphasises its representation, and the 'discursive construction of place' becomes more important for the construction of places. Although I am looking at this aspect of places by considering the narratives of those who

participate in the construction of salsa clubs, I do not want to reduce the construction of places to their representation. Thus, in order to avoid this, I consider that Massey's conceptualisation of place is more grounded and useful for this research. It is Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity in its relationship to place that I consider to be of most relevance to my research. As has perhaps become clear from discussing Massey's explanation of the identity of place (its production and transformation) and Hall's discussion of cultural identities, these are not contradictory or separate arguments, but feed each other. The difference between these two authors is one of emphasis; Massey emphasises social action and power relations in her conceptualisation of place, whilst Stuart Hall emphasises meaning produced through discourse.

Following Hall and Massey, then, salsa music clubs in London are not approached as the context in which events occur, but as directly related to the construction, representation and experience of cultural identities. More than establishing a link between cultural identities and place, my intention is to politicise this relationship through the question of 'power-geometry'. Thus, as Massey has pointed out in order to politicise these issues it is important to consider the positions that different groups occupy in space-time. As Massey also points out it is important to move away from 'easy and exited notions of generalised and undifferentiated time-space compression' (1993b, 63) in order to confront issues of power relations and politics.

This research therefore considers the processes whereby particular cultural forms come to be present in London. But these do not just flow - flows can imply that identities are fixed rather than changing. In this sense culture is not a thing that flows with 'an' identity - but a process and as such, always in the process of transformation, as Hall argues. Following Hall's and Massey's argument in my research into salsa music clubs in London I approach the cultural routes developing from interactions within and without place. Thus, cultural identities are not fixed in place, but a relationship with place is established through the active transformation and later identification with particular places. Thus in this research I

consider those, sometimes overlapping, cultural routes in their articulation with cultural identities and power-geometry.

In this research I also discuss how Latin identities in London are not being made exclusively by Latin Americans. Thus, in this sense, the idea of diaspora introduced by Stuart Hall is not of use for this research and in some instances it could be a problematic concept. Although the concept of diaspora could be useful for exploring the relationship between cultural identities and place; I am unsure if diaspora is a useful term to describe Latin Americans in London. Here, I refer to two different ways of conceptualising diaspora; as a theoretical concept and as a way of identifying a group, the two are linked as one has implications for the other. I shall now address these two points in terms of their implications for wider theoretical discussions and my reservations about using diaspora either as a concept or to identify a group.

Conceptually, I understand that diaspora does suggest the enduring relevance of origins over current physical location in that, as Stuart Hall explains, diasporas are settled in different places to that of their homelands. This idea of diaspora also raises the issue of those who are excluded from this 'category' as they are not diasporas, and this I believe extends the idea of origins even further. I do not have an answer to this, as this idea of origin is grounded in wider discourses about the nation state and its citizens or subjects, and as Stuart Hall acknowledges, this is the way in which cultures are linked to places. This, because as long as political systems are designed to define those who belong from those who do not, it is difficult to 'imagine a world without frontiers'. Thus, diaspora as a concept also establishes boundaries around groups.

Thus, my point is that even when diaspora could prove to be a useful concept to theorise the relationship between cultural identities and places, it poses some problems when it

comes to identify Latin Americans as a diaspora.<sup>8</sup> As I mentioned in the introduction, Latin America is an ideological-historical construct, and as I shall highlight through out this thesis there are differences amongst Latin Americans in terms of class, nation and gender which contribute to how 'Latin' identities are constructed and communicated in salsa clubs in London.

## 5. Summary

Throughout this chapter I have introduced the main theoretical debates and issues that frame the argument of this thesis. I have situated my study in relation to debates about time-space processes and cultural identity. Firstly, I introduced globalisation theories and followed those writers who have stressed that the 'global' and the 'local' should be treated as related rather than defined separately. The relationship between the global and local should be understood as interrelated processes, rather than an attempt to define what the global or the local is in relation to a geographical location. I suggested that globalisation theories are primarily concerned with the changing time-space relations and their implications for political processes, social practices and cultural identities.

I then drew on three distinct, but overlapping and related approaches to globalisation and time-space processes and outlined the importance of these for my study of salsa music clubs in London. I drew on Giddens' concept of time-space distanciation to argue that cultural practices in one part of the world (in this case Latin cultural identities in London) should be understood in terms of how social relationships are stretched or distanced across the world. I also discussed Harvey's concept of time-space compression and how this was the starting point for addressing wider issues related to time-space processes in relation to place construction. Harvey was the starting point to address the issue of places as processes and not as containers of social action.

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the questions (for which I do not have any answer as my research was not aimed at that particular problem) but that made me think about the problems of identifying Latin Americans as a diaspora were: Do Latin Americans in London see themselves as a diaspora, sharing a historical past or sharing the spatio-temporal movement to England? Do Latin Americans think of themselves as a single diaspora, or as Colombians, Chileans, Venezuelans and so on? These questions are only set up as some reflections that helps to understand why I am cautious in identifying Latin Americans as a diaspora.

Drawing on Massey's critique of both Harvey and Giddens I continued the debate on time-space processes by following her argument that places and social practices and relations (in this case 'Latin' places and salsa clubs) should be understood in terms of unequal processes that would affect the way in which time-space are experienced, represented and constructed. The compressing and shrinking of space highlighted by Harvey and the stretching of social relations across time and space emphasised by Giddens due to global processes are not occurring in the same way for everyone. On this point I pursued Massey's argument that time-space compression and time-space distancing need to be understood in terms of what she calls 'power-geometry'. This I understand as a multi-dimensional approach in which distinct power-relations constrain, shape and enable the movement of people across space-time/place. She provides an approach which considers possibilities for transformation and change. Social relations across place and space, Massey argues, are not only defined in their opposition or through negative interactions with other places, but through positive interactions - what Massey calls a 'progressive sense of place'.

To this broad framework of time-space processes and social relations approached through the concept of power-geometry, I have incorporated Hall's concept of identity as in a constant process of change and transformation. Hall also addresses theoretical concerns on the relationship between cultural identities and place. He explains how this relationship is imagined and real. Imagined in that cultures are not necessarily fixed to a place, but this is the way we tend to imagine cultures; and in that places are not bounded fixed entities, but this is the way we tend to imagine places as it is closely related to the narrative of the nation and national cultures. Real in the sense that nation states define those who belong from those who do not. Hall argues that the relationship between cultural identities and places is thus constructed within meaning.

Massey and Hall have both approached theoretical enquiries on identity. Massey focuses on the identity of place so as to emphasise the way in which places are made and remade by different groups at any one particular moment. Hall emphasises how cultural identities are

constantly being made and remade and as such are part of a narrative, whilst Massey emphasises the dynamics through which places are made out of social relations, Hall emphasises their representation.

Both Massey and Hall develop their arguments largely at a theoretical level. My aim is to contribute to their discussion by examining the dynamics through which Latin identity and cultural practices in London are actively being created and communicated in relation to the power-geometry of salsa clubs in London. This I explore through a specific framework of analysis which attempts to incorporate the nation state's immigration regulations as well as issues concerning the construction of places and bodies to the analysis of cultural identities and places. In Chapter Three I specifically identify immigration laws in Britain as an attempt to regulate and control the movement of people into Britain. I discuss how these regulations are not only establishing national borders, but constraining the routes that Latin Americans choose to adopt once in England. Through the examples of Elephant and Castle and Clapham Common I emphasise how places are constructed through positive interactions in their relationship to other places. I explore how places are transformed to communicate an identity and argue that it is through this process of formation and transformation that cultural identities are linked to places. In Chapter Four I present the narratives through which Latin clubs are constructed to communicate an identity, but emphasis is placed on the routes and routines as a further way of identifying a power-geometry of salsa clubs in London. I trace the routes of salsa clubs in London by locating them geographically and discuss this in relation to the social and economic divisions of London. However, I argue the power-geometry of salsa clubs in London is not established through the geographical location alone, but has to be understood in relation to wider issues of city licensing authorities and through participant's routes and routines. Although these routes are routinised, I also explore how these are disrupted and in this process possibilities for change are occurring. Finally, in Chapter Five I focus on the body, not only as the site of representation, but in terms of how Latin bodies are constructed through music related practices at these clubs. These chapters articulate the levels at which this

thesis tries to work; that of nation and migration, the identity of places and the performing body.

I suggest that the unfolding formation and transformation of cultural identities have to be understood in relation to dynamics of power-geometry. Hence, the relationship between cultural identities and place, I suggest, is established by those who participate in the transformation of places and then actively use them for particular social practices. This is best understood through particular dynamics of power-geometry, which I explore throughout this thesis in relation to the three interrelated levels of analysis mentioned above. I hope that the approach I undertake throughout this thesis provides a contribution to theoretical discussions and debates about globalisation processes. I suggest that an understanding of these three levels of analysis is important to discuss how particular temporal-spatial practices (related to discussions about global-local processes) are actually enabling and simultaneously constraining the movement of people around the world and across a particular locality.

In this thesis I also intend to provide new empirical material about Latin Americans in London. The information about Latin Americans in London can only be thought of as a selection and in no way as a complete account about Latin Americans in London. I started this research in the salsa clubs of London, and thus the practices and places I discuss outside the clubs could be thought of as those routes that developed in relation to the clubs. Here I should stress that my emphasis is on the construction and communication of Latin identities in London and these are not exclusive to the activities of Latin Americans.

In the following chapters I present some of the ethnographic material gathered during my research on salsa music clubs. As theory and ethnography are interrelated in the sense that one feeds back to the other it is this issue which I will address in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### ETHNOGRAPHIC TALES: REPRESENTATION, PARTICIPATION AND IDENTIFICATION

#### 1. Introduction

Doing ethnography involves a series of practices which include careful thought on the research strategies adopted in the fieldwork, analysis and interpretation; all of which are closely related to theoretical explanation (Geertz, 1973; Williams, 1983). In presenting a detailed description of the ethnographic research there is the risk of suggesting that it was a linear process. I do not want to imply this, because it has not been this way. Although the ethnographic research was conducted in an organised manner and with a clear idea of what I was interested in, it was not limited or closed by the preliminary outline prepared before starting the research. On this point, Derek Layder (1993) has argued that by tying information from fieldwork directly to a favoured framework the researcher might merely verify and reinforce a preconceived perspective. Here I follow the idea that a certain degree of discovery and openness is important for the development and progress of 'innovatory' knowledge (Layder, 1993). Thus, this chapter is an account of the process of reflecting on the ethnographic research. By presenting this element reflexively my intention is to emphasise how a thesis or research project does not involve a linear path but a process of going backwards and forwards between theory and ethnography. In this case it has also involved a process of self reflection on what I am doing and how to do it, on how my identity is embedded and embodied in the process of the research.

This chapter is divided in to four sections, all of which are attempts to reflect on those issues which I considered relevant for the development of the research including the shape and organisation of this thesis. In the first section I explain the relationship between theory and ethnography as this provides the framework for the development of the research and the organisation of this thesis. This discussion is followed by a section that provides a detailed description of the practicalities and research strategies, such as

the different stages of the research including the development of categories for the selection of the clubs and also some reflections on the interviewing process and gaining access to interviewees. In the section on writing ethnography I reflect on the organisation of the thesis and how this relates to the theoretical framework presented in Chapter One. The last section reflects on how my sense of identity and those identities attributed to me affected the research. Both had an impact on the type of knowledge assumed by me and of me. At the same time this had implications for the constitution of ethnographic authority, both when conducting the research and in writing this thesis. Ethnographic authority refers to the way in which the ethnographer builds on preconceived knowledge, status as a researcher and personal identity to conduct the research and later by writing a selected ethnographic account of the fieldwork experience. First I want to draw attention to contemporary debates about ethnography, particularly within anthropology, media and cultural studies, and how my use of ethnography draws and differs from the anthropological use.

### **1.1 Ethnography, popular music, media and cultural studies**

As I mentioned in Chapter One discussions about globalisation processes have had an impact on the traditional anthropological definition of locality. This in turn has implications for the anthropological use of ethnography as it was traditionally approached within the discipline. As a research method ethnography has also crossed disciplinary boundaries and has been used in a variety of ways (Clifford, 1988; Cohen 1993).

Ethnography initially developed within social anthropology, and its concern was with the study, description and interpretation of 'other' cultures (other to European and North American cultures). As a method ethnography required that the researcher spent a long period of time amongst members of a community (often other than his/hers). It entailed micro sociological focus of specific subjects. This could involved acquiring the knowledge of a language, the social customs, laws and codes of behaviour of a particular people, or social group, with prolonged face-to-face contacts, and participation in some

of the activities of that particular group (Cohen, 1993). Throughout the 20th century there has been a shift on who and what is studied through ethnographic research. As old colonial empires started to collapse the focus of attention has shifted - from a concern with trying to understand social groups and activities within colonies overseas to a concern with trying to understand groups that were often labelled as 'deviant' within the home nation (Rosaldo, 1993). The increasing speed at which economic and human mobility has been occurring (which globalisation processes attempts to describe), discourses of the post-modern, and a turn to interdisciplinary studies have also had an impact on the way in which ethnography is pursued, not only for anthropology, but for other areas of study in which a cultural approach has been undertaken (Clifford, 1986). Conversely, ethnography has been questioned by a number of anthropologists (Clifford, 1988; Marcus, 1992; Rosaldo, 1993; Cohen, 1993), particularly in relation to the production of knowledge, the researchers' position and the 'invention' of a culture rather than its representation.

Along with these changes there has been a shift toward the idea of culture as 'ordinary' (Williams, 1958) and an interest in local forms of cultures was initiated at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (England). Here the focus of attention turned to studies of youth subcultures and media products and consumption. Given the Marxist and feminist approaches and the literary and sociological background of the researchers, ethnographic methods from anthropology were used together with other methods from social analysis and literature, such as quantitative data surveying, semiotic analysis of texts and focus groups. Studies of youth and their leisure time were concerned with issues of class, race and gender (Willis, 1990; Hebdige, 1979; McRobbie, 1991). Whilst in the case of media studies, particularly those concerned with media audiences, the interest shifted from media effects to what was known as the 'encoding/decoding' model (Hall, 1974). The concern was with the 'double-edged implication of ideological effectivity and audience activity' (McGuigan, 1992, 131), rather than on the unidirectional effect of the media on people (Morley, 1980, 1986). This type of research

on media audiences dealt with focus groups and open ended interviews which has come to be recognised as an 'ethnographic turn' in audience studies.

There is a growing debate about the loose use of ethnography in media studies, particularly as it is often limited to the use of qualitative methods of analysis that do not consider the everyday lives and contexts in which media related practices occur. My intention here is not to debate on the validity of the use of ethnography, but to draw attention to a range of qualitative methods that are used to describe research of an ethnographic type (Cohen, 1993). In media studies, this loose use of ethnography has in turn led to a call for the 'study of communication process in detail and in so far as it is possible, in real space and time, to take a broadly ethnographic position, and to examine the dynamics of action and constraint in the daily activities and practices of the individuals and groups who are engaged in the socially situated production and consumption of meanings' (Morley, 1992, 183).

Recognition of the need for a similar position has been growing amongst those involved in popular music studies. As Sara Cohen has noted, most research on popular music that has been referred to as ethnography often relied 'upon preformulated questionnaires, surveys, autobiographies or unstructured interviews with people outside their usual social, spatial and temporal context. Their discourse is consequently disconnected from their day-to-day activities, relationships and experiences ...' (1993, 127). In this sense, Cohen has suggested that an ethnographic approach (in the anthropological sense) is needed in popular music studies. Rather than focusing on structures, texts or products, and drawing on her own research, she proposes an anthropological perspective; one which considers ethnography as a major research approach for the study of music as a social practice. That is, one which would 'focus upon people and their musical practices and processes' (1993, 127).

In this sense, then, my use of ethnography is not strictly anthropological, but neither is it limited to simply producing qualitative material divorced from the physical setting in which musical practices occur.

An open approach to ethnography was particularly relevant for this research due to the theoretical debates that frame this research. Defining the research project in terms of a setting, rather than an audience identified in terms of taste or by focusing on the analysis of a particular text, poses significant challenges for ethnographic research particularly for those concerned with the construction and communication of cultural identities. Related to this issue, George Marcus (1992) has argued that theoretical explanations of global processes have challenged ethnographic practices. This is particularly in relation to the places in which ethnographers conduct the research, since 'the identity of anyone or any group is produced simultaneously in many different locales of activity by many different agents for many different purposes. ... This multi-locale, ... thus reconfigures and complexifies the spatial plane on which ethnography has conceptually operated' (315-16). The construction of the temporal in ethnographic research is also problematised by focusing on a present that is not determined simply by 'history' but by memory. And thirdly, in that the perspective of voices in the research need to be presented as a result of a dialogical relationship between the observer and the observed (1992).

In this sense my adoption of an open approach to ethnography was partly due to the theoretical issues addressed in this thesis. Although I explore how Latin identity was constructed and represented at different sites and as a result of different time-space processes, the research was limited to the construction and communication of Latin identity at salsa clubs in London. This research did not explore music practices in relation to people's everyday lives, but only a particular fragment of them (whilst participating at salsa clubs). Thus, and although limited by its focus on the clubs, this is an ethnographic research of salsa clubs in London. However limited the focus of the research I hope that the following study provides an insight into the challenges and complexities that discussions about globalisation and locality poses for ethnographic research. It is the relation between theory and ethnography that I will discuss in the following section.

## 2. Theory and ethnography

The theoretical perspective that frames this thesis developed from leaving the initial framework open to contestation - as part of an ethnographic strategy. The process and progress of the ethnographic research fed back on my initial theoretical concerns. Hence, the theoretical shifts that occurred in the process of developing this thesis are related to the ethnographic research. Because both ethnography and theory have mutually enriched each other, I would like to start by presenting the process by which the shifts in the theory became possible. Although, as it will become clear, there are certain concepts that have always been central to this research, most of the richness and complexity came from that degree of openness - which led me to specific theoretical enquiries.

In this section I will start by discussing some issues about the relationship between ethnography and theory as this discussion is important for understanding my position towards what doing ethnography is and as this has affected the approach, organisation, and style of this thesis.

I would like to start by setting out what ethnography as a research practice involves. I want to take a passage from Geertz, in which he suggests that

In anthropology, or any social anthropology, what practitioners do is ethnography. And it is in understanding what ethnography is, or more exactly *what doing ethnography is*, that a start can be made toward grasping what anthropological analysis amounts to as a form of knowledge. This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of a textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, ... 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973, 5-6).

In this sense doing ethnography involves analysis and interpretation. Geertz explains further; 'Analysis, then, is sorting out the structures of signification ... and determining

their social ground and import'. Ethnography, he continues, 'is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with - except when (as of course he must do) he [sic] is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection - is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another...' (1973, 9-10).

The ethnographer's challenge then is to be able to represent what happened in the field without divorcing it 'from what, in this time or that place, specific people say, what they do, what is done to them' (Geertz, 1973, 18). Thus, interpretation involves keeping the analysis closely linked to what occurred. Representation, thus, is 'a form of knowledge': a 'thick description' of 'social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes' (Geertz, 1973, 14). But, as Geertz explains, if thick description is used only as background information, then the 'anthropological writing' is obscured by it. Thus, it is important for thick description to be interpreted.

In this sense then, doing ethnography is more than just a method, it is a practice. This is not to imply that theory is opposed to ethnography. But if practice, as Raymond Williams once pointed out, is 'a particular thing done (and observed) which can immediately be related to theory', and theory is a 'systematic explanation of practice' then theory and practice are actively related (1983, 317).

I want to discuss the relationship between theory and ethnography because my understanding of what doing ethnography involves has influenced the way in which, for example, the first chapter was written (and also subsequent chapters as emerging theories from the ethnography are addressed in different chapters, rather than in the first). In Chapter One, rather than providing a detailed overview of the existing literature on the subject, I adopted an approach in which I discussed specific theoretical debates through individual authors who have influenced my thoughts and arguments throughout the research process. I also related this discussion to specific chapters of this thesis. In this section I want to highlight the active relationship between theory and ethnography. .

Before starting my research my initial theoretical concern was to explore the relationship between time-space processes (which I had conceptualised in theoretical terms) and cultural identities in a specific setting, that of salsa clubs. I was interested in salsa as a 'dislocated' cultural practice and how it was being appropriated and received in London. At the time the major concern was to study the 'local' outside of its geographical boundaries. My intention was to challenge notions of the local by focusing on the different forms and appropriations of salsa music when dislocated from their geographical reference. This was the starting point for research enquiries about the relationship between time-space processes and cultural identities, which I initially identified as my research problem. To start pursuing this I engaged with current theoretical discussions about globalisation. Hence, I started with a general critique of globalisation theories and deconstructed them in order to emphasise the interaction and interrelation between time-space and cultural identities. I highlighted the importance that social time and space has in the construction and representation of cultural identities. This was not just difficult to pursue ethnographically, but, the more involved I was in my research, the more problematic this theoretical connection became. I was not only visiting salsa clubs, but learning about Latin American groups in London. I was beginning to move beyond the clubs, which meant that my initial setting and theoretical concerns were shifting from concepts of time-space and identities in specific locations (that of clubs) to very specific issues related to Latin American cultural practices in London.

Through the ethnographic research I began to realise that in order to address the theoretical concerns I needed to understand the event not as self-contained but in its interrelation to processes occurring from without, but in relation to it. In this way I realised that the possibilities for participation did not begin and end in the clubs. This led me to re-assess my theoretical focus and to consider broader spatial processes. Hence, I decided that I needed more than the literature on specific musical events and audiences (with a focus on subcultures and clubs) was providing me with, and needed to look for a perspective that would give me a way of relating the event to broader spatial processes.

It is in this way that I found Massey's theoretical conceptualisations on power-geometry of direct relevance in trying to consider the interrelations between the event and outside time-space processes. In this sense power-geometry gave me a way in to consider the relations of power developing from the different networks of salsa clubs, and other processes from without the clubs that were having an impact on participation at salsa clubs.

Thus, the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter, which I present in a linear and 'neat' narrative - from discussions of time-space processes to power-geometry and its relation to cultural identities - was only obtained after reflecting on my own work and in active relation to the research. The organisation of Chapter One (and other chapters) is part of this process. I consider that explaining this process is important because in a sense it both disrupts and explains the neatness of the theoretical framework. Hence, my research was not simply 'testing' theory, as the first chapter might imply, but has been part of the challenge of writing ethnography - 'knotting' the analysis to build up a theoretical argument in its relation to thick description.

Thus the shift from a focus on salsa clubs to a focus on spatial practices and identity is part of a process that involved a combination of theoretical reading and active ethnographic research. One does not simply come before the other or opposes the other, but as I have mentioned involves a process of going backwards and forwards between theory and research practice.

### **3. Practicalities of research strategies**

The fieldwork for this research was carried out for a period of eleven months, from October 1993 to September 1994. Although a large part of the research was carried out in salsa music clubs, which were my initial setting, I also visited shops owned by Latin Americans, obtained information about the different organisations providing advice and services to Latin Americans in London and interviewed or talked to people who were directly or indirectly involved in organising activities for the different groups of Latin

Americans in London. As part of this process I also participated at other activities organised by Latin Americans, such as the Colombian Independence celebration and the Clapham Common football league. During the first three months of the research I was mainly discovering and visiting places that would connect me to Latin American cultural practices and learning about the lives and activities of Latin Americans in London. During these three months I attempted to receive as much information as possible and feed this knowledge into my original research proposal. Thus, perhaps inevitably, many of the ideas with which I started have changed focus during the ethnographic research.

A certain degree of openness was necessary because when I started doing this research I did not know of any Latin places in London, apart from those being weekly advertised in the commercial music listings in Time Out. In addition, I did not know any Latin Americans in London. As I will explain, learning about Latin American practices in London did not happen by chance or in isolation from my visits to clubs, but was related to the networks developing from my research into the clubs. This approach together with interviews with club owners, promoters, disc jockeys, musicians and dancers continued throughout the year, but particular and careful attention was given to salsa music clubs in London, which remain central for this research. Different research strategies were adopted as part of the process of reflecting on my research; and as I will explain, this was possible partly due to the length of time spent on this research project.

Thus, for this research the fieldwork was defined in terms of a series of places - that of the salsa clubs in London. Although the fieldwork was initially restricted to the clubs, it was not limited to these, as I also considered other locations that were related to certain networks of salsa clubs.

### 3.1 Discovering a salsa network

During the first three months of the ethnographic research, from October 1993 to December 1993, I visited clubs that advertised as 'Latin' or which included salsa and other Latin American rhythms, such as tango, lambada and Latin jazz as part of their repertoire. Initially I prepared a list of clubs from the information published in Time Out (which was the only source of reference before starting the research). I collected further information through leaflets in restaurants, clubs and shops. I would also visit the Elephant and Castle shopping centre at least once a month to collect new leaflets and the two Latin American newspapers: Noticiero Latinoamericano and Crónica Latina, and Leros a Brazilian magazine. With this information I would keep a weekly table which included the clubs and days on which these operated. This was mainly a working table to which I would refer when deciding which club to visit. By recording the days of the week on which each club operated this table also served the purpose of establishing patterns of regularity of clubs. This information was later used as a criteria for selection of clubs.

By January I was able to produce a reduced list, this time by including only salsa music clubs; lambada and Latin Jazz were included when played together with salsa, as part of the same club.<sup>1</sup> With the information gathered, most of it through interviews with club owners and disc jockeys, and from my observations of salsa clubs I produced five categories of salsa club; whether it was a bar, bar-restaurant or a tapas bar; if it had live music, recorded music or a mixture of both; whether the venue was rented, owned (leased) or hired; if it operated on a monthly, weekly or daily basis; and, the days of the week on which salsa clubs operated (See Table 1). Although these categories were mainly related to how clubs operated, these had an impact on the location and type of audience each of these clubs would attract, which were also important criteria I considered when selecting clubs.

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<sup>1</sup> Tango was excluded as it was never played in a salsa club, nor part of the club.

These categories were also informed by theoretical concerns, in that rather than looking at these clubs as contained settings for carrying out the research, my intention was to consider their interrelations. As I explained in the previous chapter places are approached not as the context in which an event occurs, but as constituted out of the interrelation with other places. Thus, each of the categories was an attempt to develop patterns of continuity and repetition which would allow me to explore the relations between different types of clubs. With the information at hand I was able to decide on the final selection of clubs for the research. The clubs on which I based most of this research were Bar Rumba, Bar Tiempo, Club Bahia, Barco Latino and Mambo Inn (see map in Chapter Four for their locations). In terms of location Bar Rumba, Bar Tiempo and Barco Latino were located North of the Thames whilst Club Bahia and Mambo Inn lie south of the River. In relation to the audience, Europeans outnumbered Latin Americans in Bar Tiempo and Bar Rumba, whilst Club Bahia and Barco Latino were mainly frequented by Latin Americans, but of differing class backgrounds. Mambo Inn is included here because the audience was different to these four clubs; and although part of the salsa network it was also part of wider music scenes (see figure 4.2 in Chapter Four for identifying networks of clubs, where the issues mentioned here are explained). Throughout the year I kept a diary in which I recorded the visits to the clubs and the interviews held. During the first three months of research I concentrated on visiting each advertised salsa club at least once. From the beginning of January to the end of August 1994 in a period of 34 weeks, Bar Rumba was visited 27 times, Club Bahia 17, Bar Tiempo 16, Barco Latino 17, Mambo Inn 16, and Bar Cuba 15 times. Bar Rumba was visited a greater number of times because there was no other salsa club operating on Tuesdays, whilst the other clubs, which operating days overlapped, were visited twice a month. As none of the clubs selected operated on Wednesdays I would occasionally visit Bar Cuba, which was excluded from the selection because it was mainly a bar-restaurant.

When I began visiting salsa clubs I was still starting to know my way through London and as I was dependent on public transport, (not knowing how safe it was for a woman to travel on her own on a bus I used to take the last underground train), for the first two

months of the research I spent a maximum of three hours in any one club, sometimes less, as I would visit more than one club in a night. As I started to meet and become involved in a network of people who would regularly visit clubs I started staying in the clubs for longer periods, and on occasions until closing time. In general, there was a period of about four hours which were productive in terms of talking to people and obtaining information. Towards the end of the night, as the effects of the alcohol in people were noticeable, it became more difficult for me to engage in a conversation. Even when I was not talking to new people, however, the rest of the time was useful in that I could observe the changes occurring in any one club on a particular night.

As part of the research I also visited, at least once, salsa dance lessons being organised in community centres, dance studios and in most of salsa clubs in London. However, it was in the London School of Salsa where I actively participated in the dance lessons and became another student learning how to dance to salsa. From October 1993 to September 1994 in a period of 47 weeks I participated in 41 lessons. The London School of Salsa in Islington Green<sup>2</sup> started as a Latin dance school during September 1993, just a month before I started visiting it; this being one of my main reasons for focusing in this School. Its newness was an important element because I could notice the changes occurring to the place and follow-up the progress of some of the people who regularly participated in the dance lessons. Another important issue was that of access to observe and participate in the dance lessons. For this, Xiomara, the dance teacher, had no hesitation when I overtly introduced myself and asked for permission to participate. Although I would usually identify myself as a researcher to each individual approached, I was not introduced as such in the dance lessons. Thus, as a participant my presence as a researcher was partly 'covert' and partly 'overt' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). The process of being recognised as a participant and a researcher developed little by little and as time went on my presence as a researcher became overt for most of the regular dancers. The fact that my presence as a researcher was not exposed to the students at the beginning was a

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<sup>2</sup> The London School of Salsa was ran by Xiomara from Colombia and Andy from Trinidad. From September 1994, Xiomara left the School and started teaching in different clubs.

positive element for conducting the research as my presence did not intimidate students, but as they got used to my presence as a participant, so they did as a researcher.

Salsa dance lessons were important for my research for various reasons. Before coming to England I knew very little of how to dance to salsa and this made it even more difficult for me to approach or be approached by participants in the clubs. I have occasionally practised in a corner of a club or at home with some friends in Puerto Rico, but I never dared to go to the dance floor. When I first visited Latinos (the name given to the club organised after the dance lessons at the London School of Salsa) and I was asked to dance I decided I should just go ahead, but before doing so I told my partner that I was not a great salsa dancer. On that occasion I could not follow his steps, although he was trying hard to lead me. After that I spent most of the night observing and thinking that I should learn how to dance. From that experience I realised that attending salsa dance lessons was important for my research - knowing how to dance was important in order to become a participant. Also, by participating in the dance lessons I could identify and be identified in the clubs by other students. As a female visiting clubs, most of the time on my own, dance lessons gave me a way of approaching people to whom I was not a complete stranger. At the same time I was learning the codes that were being taught, and as a 'beginner' I obtained reactions from those who were my dance partners during the lessons. Most importantly, I became a participant and recognised as such by other participants.

The research from visiting salsa clubs connected me into wider networks that were outside the clubs but related to these. Within these networks I learnt that the Elephant and Castle shopping centre was one of the main sites to collect leaflets about Latin American owned shops, and other services and activities. I did not know of this site when I started my research nor did I discover it by chance. I learnt about the Elephant and Castle through Carlos Rivas who was in charge of Mambo Loco, a club which no longer exists, organised at the underground floor of The Equinox in Leicester Square. When I approached him to arrange an interview he asked me about the places I had visited and

started giving me hints of other places and where to look for leaflets. But most importantly I learned about the Elephant and Castle shopping centre, the location where we were to meet. Before walking to his council flat nearby, where the interview was to be held, he took me around the shopping centre and told me where to get leaflets and newspapers. Through the visits to Elephant and Castle shopping centre I started discovering clubs that were not advertised in Time Out. I also started discovering the many ways in which Latin Americans are present in London.

It was during one of these visits to the Elephant and Castle shopping centre that I met Jaime Flores. Meeting Jaime was very important for my research. He helped me, not just by accompanying me to clubs on some occasions, but by introducing me to a different Latin America in London; different to the one I was beginning to know from the clubs. 'Latin-Americans are not just dancing or here as labour immigrants, there is much more to it than that' he used to tell me. He introduced me to a group of people, most of them Latin Americans, whom I would not have met by visiting the clubs alone. Participating in these activities was important for understanding the contrasting experiences and differences amongst Latin Americans in London.

### **3.2 About interviews**

Different research strategies were adopted according to the particular circumstances in which interviews and participant observation were carried out. The interviews were conducted throughout the year of the ethnographic research and occasional follow-up interviews were conducted whilst writing-up. I interviewed club owners, promoters, disc jockeys, dancers and various people that were involved with Latin American groups in London. The interviews were held either in Spanish or English depending on the specific individual. I conducted no more than three interviews a week in order to have time to transcribe them immediately afterwards, and would not arrange other interviews until having the transcription done. This was useful in identifying subjects and reflecting on the interview process as I went along. At the end of the research these were categorised in terms of roles of the individuals interviewed. After reading these I identified possible

subjects of analysis in each interview. For this I developed a cover page for each interview which would correlate the numbers and subjects with those in the text. This was useful for quick referencing when needing to clarify some point or when needing quotes.

As part of my research strategy I first approached disc jockeys, identified myself and arranged an interview with them. I then asked them for the name of the owner or the manager of the club. Once I knew who the owner or the promoter was, I would approach them in the same way that I had made contact with the disc jockeys and arranged an interview. Generally, interviews were arranged through a personal approach on the night I visited the club, or by telephoning and asking to talk to the owner. However, phoning was not always successful, and I found personal contact to be the best way of arranging an interview. Asking for additional contacts was also used as a strategy to arrange further interviews. Maintaining an open contact with those interviewed was also important and as I was constantly participating in the clubs this was not difficult to achieve.

As I was informed of changes, new clubs and concerts, sometimes before they were promoted publicly, my presence as a researcher was also being recognised. I often had access to the clubs free of charge, as some musicians, club owners or disc jockeys would agree to put my name on the guest list. Thus, through these practices my status as a researcher was being acknowledged and in this sense gaining access to club owners, promoters, participants and to the clubs itself was not difficult.

Before starting the interviewing process I had prepared four sets of structured interviews, one for owners or promoters, disc jockeys and musicians, and a preliminary outline of issues I wished to speak to dancers about. The sets of interviews were structured in a similar way, each had four sections; a first section of general questions, mainly about motives for their involvement with salsa and information about Latin clubs in general; a second which addressed specific questions regarding the particular clubs which the interviewees were directly involved with; a third considered external relations and networks developing from their experience in the clubs; and finally, a fourth section

which contained open questions, which would vary according to each individual and to how the interview developed. The first three sections were useful in obtaining insight into and information about each club and the networks that owners, promoters, disc jockeys, dance teachers and dancers developed. The last section was open and was intended to address subjects and issues that developed from each individual interview. Initially the set of interviews prepared were intended to address some of the issues related to the theoretical framework I had developed - that of the construction of the identity of places and the interrelations between places.

When starting the process of interviewing I realised that the structure of the well-delineated interview questions which I had prepared was too rigid and did not allow for the context where the interviews were held. This, because I had created for myself an idea of where and how the interviews were going to be held. Although some of the interviews were held in people's home, the first interviews I conducted were held in bars before the opening of the club or during the club hours, not in offices or quiet places as I imagined. After the second interview, which was held in the disc jockey's booth next to the bar area, I decided to leave behind the list of questions and concentrated on the issues that I was interested in covering. This involved changing the structured interview approach and adopting an 'ethnographic interviewing' approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). In this sense the type of questions asked were various, some were intended to obtain specific information related to the role of the person in the club, others were open-ended and intended to obtain the interviewees' perspective about specific issues related to clubs in general and some were direct questions which attempted to clarify or obtain a wider perspective on specific details gathered from other interviews. Carrying out interviews in this way gave me the opportunity to adopt a less 'formal' and more 'natural' approach. The ethnographic interviewing approach which I adopted took into account the changing and different circumstances within which interviews would be held.

Hence, the place where the interviews were being held had an effect on the information and level of interaction I could expect from the owners, disc jockeys and musicians. The place could become a pressure in terms of the time they had available and the circumstances surrounding us, such as loud music. In these circumstances I had to be fast, direct and precise. Thus, the amount of information I obtained on some occasions was limited. However, it allowed me to observe interviewees' interaction in their work, such as dealing with some technical problems at the last moment.

On other occasions the interviews were held in a cafe or a park, usually in a location that was convenient for both of us. Sometimes I conducted an interview in people's home and when this happened the interviewees were usually willing to spend hours talking with me. On these occasions I was often able to see their record and leaflet collection, and engaged in a more friendly and relaxed conversation, sometimes staying over for dinner. In this sense the interview process was also being fed by observations on their everyday lives. This was important in that I was making other observations about where people lived in relation to the clubs they promoted or worked at.

The interview process was not always so successful. On some occasions I had to be patient and wait, sometimes for over an hour, before realising that the person I was going to interview would never turn-up or had cancelled the interview. As a result, I began confirming interviews when ever possible.

As the research progressed, some complications arose, in particular how to deal with contradictions, the inaccuracies of narrated memories and attempts to manipulate my agenda. For example, some of the people I interviewed sought to prevent me from visiting other clubs by saying things against this or that club or by directly telling me that it was not worth visiting this or that club. Due to this I became aware of the level of competition that existed and began to identify particular agendas and how some people were providing me with only the partial information they wanted me to know. Over time I was able to identify various contradictions and inaccuracies, these I would perhaps not have been able too during a shorter period.

I also cross checked the information gathered from the interviews. By pulling together bits of information from different interviews I was able to confirm the inaccuracies of memories, specifically those regarding names of previous clubs. In this respect, reviewing old issues of local Latin newspapers also proved to be a useful exercise. In research methods literature the use of different research strategies is called triangulation. However, as Geertz (1973) has pointed out, ethnography is precisely a combination of research strategies.

On only one occasion did I feel that the type of research I was conducting was an obstacle. During the initial approach to arrange an interview I was told that as I was not writing a newspaper article or making a television program I was of no direct benefit to the person and his business. The fact that I was doing academic research and not an article that could be used for promotional purposes was not usually an obstacle or a barrier, except on this one occasion. More often, the fact that I did not have such objectives was an advantage, as some people felt freer to speak and discuss ideas with me. Most of the time interviewees were extremely helpful and friendly. However, some thought of me as a source of information and I had to be careful about becoming involved in gossip. Hence, maintaining a level of integrity with my interviewees was crucial.

In relation to dancers, I started with a clearer idea of the setting, thus I prepared a preliminary outline of subjects I wished to cover rather than a structured interview. Still, this involved a period of adjustment and assessment of the clubs. During the first three months of fieldwork I was observing and absorbing more than I was directly participating. I occasionally approached dancers to ask their impressions of salsa clubs. During this period of time I was more interested in learning the best way of approaching dancers and identifying the best spot in the club to position myself and how much time should I spend in the clubs. Thus, during this time I approached many people, some of whom I did not see or talk to again. I would always introduce myself as a researcher, but as I was going to be there for a year I did not rush to ask too many questions at the same time. I would trace people's routes and talk to them every now and then. This strategy

proved to be useful, as I would obtain more spontaneous answers or reactions than through formal interviews outside the setting or by trying to rush too many questions at the same time. It was also positive in that I gained the confidence and trust of participants. It was after the first three months of research, once I knew or could identify those who regularly visited and moved around clubs that I started asking more direct questions.

I took notes on the same night. Either I went to the toilet and wrote some observations down (particularly fragments of conversation that I thought I might forget if leaving it for the end of the night) or noted things down at home immediately after returning from the clubs<sup>3</sup>. As I would usually return late from clubs, I also found that tape recording my observations of a night out immediately after returning home was a useful exercise. I would transcribe these the next day. The writing of observations started by including a description of the place and some general comments about the particular night at the club, these were mainly my impressions and thoughts about the place. At that stage I would also identify people who I had started recognising when I saw them in different clubs, in an attempt to start tracing the movements around certain clubs. As I started to meet people, I began including their names and fragments of conversations I had with them or a summary of the topics we talked about.

In the case of approaching and participating in other activities organised by and for Latin Americans in London sharing the same language (when Spanish) made it easier in terms of being accepted or integrated in to a group of Latin Americans. Being relatively fluent in English also facilitated the initial approach and conversations with non-Spanish speakers.

Towards the end of the research I asked those dancers who regularly participated at salsa clubs and to whom I regularly talked for interviews outside of the clubs. This has been discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson who have stated that the 'the "artificiality" of the

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<sup>3</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) have referred to the ethnographer's fears, anxieties and jokes of field note taking.

interview when compared with “normal” events in the setting may allow us to understand how participants would behave in other circumstance, for example when they move out of a setting or when the setting changes’ (1983, 119). Thus, both approaches were useful for the research as I obtained responses and information from dancers in the actual setting in which the event was occurring and outside of the clubs I had the opportunity to talk about other activities, such as their occupation and other leisure activities they participated in. Also, I could obtain their opinions and position about certain issues that it would have been difficult to ask about in the clubs. This was certainly the case in discussing issues of gender relations and sexuality, for example, as some participants assumed a reflective position toward these issues when outside the clubs. The type of information gathered outside the clubs was useful for me as I was also interested in participants’ points of view and position towards these issues.

The type of questions I asked in the clubs were limited, and I had to be careful not to create barriers or distance by asking the wrong sort of question. For example, I had to reconsider questions about dancers’ employment, and if it was prudent asking these sort of questions. There are several reasons for people to visit Latin clubs: curiosity, an interest in the music, a sense of identification or simply escaping from their work circumstances. I also started to become aware that many Latin Americans had overstayed their leave in England, thus me asking a question about their ‘working place’ could be rude and intrusive - my presence could be viewed with justifiable suspicion as there were previous records of police and immigration officers raiding clubs.

By adopting a degree of openness and adapting the interviews according to the setting I was able to identify issues that were not addressed in the preliminary set of questions. This approach was also important for the final writing of this thesis in that some of the issues addressed, specifically those related to gender relations and ethnicity in the last chapter, were not initially part of the subjects covered in the preliminary set of questions, but developed from the interviews and from my participation in salsa clubs.

#### 4. Writing ethnography

This section focuses on the organisation of the chapters of this thesis in an attempt to relate it with discussions about global-local relationships. This I hope will provide an understanding of how theory and ethnography are actively related not only in relation to the content of each individual chapter but in 'the logic of its story telling' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

The shifts in the initial theoretical concerns - from globalisation, time-space process and cultural identities to issues of power relations - began affecting the way in which I started representing Latin American groups in London. In one of my early drafts I emphasised the constraints faced by Latin American groups in London and presented a polarised version of the clubs; one which separated Latin Americans from non-Latin Americans. This approach was firstly based on my observations and expectations. For example, when I started the research in to salsa clubs I was expecting to find more Latin Americans. Instead I started noticing that, although there were a great number of Latin Americans in London most of them were absent in many of the clubs I visited; and when Latin Americans were present, the absence of non-Latin Americans was noticeable. This was not the case in every club, as there were some in which Latin Americans and non Latin-Americans were present. This initial observation was important for developing an ethnographic analysis of the dynamics of power relations, as I started identifying structures of analysis such as Britain's immigration legislation and how this affected Latin Americans in London.

However, I realised that this approach could lead me to represent Latin Americans as victims. This I thought of as a problem because I might have used this approach rhetorically, partly because of my commitment to Latin Americans, and partly to do with my anger towards the way certain people were being treated. I also thought of this as a problem because it could have been interpreted as a static model which did not capture the movement of Latin Americans in London, nor a sense of cultural identities in transformation. Thus, if on one hand I did not want to neglect the problems faced by

Latin Americans, on the other I did not want to neglect positive interactions and possibilities for change.

At this stage I decided to have discussions of early outlines of some of the chapters with some Latin American people who have lived in London for longer than me and who have been actively involved in organising the different groups of Latin Americans in London. It was through these discussions that I realised that possibilities for change and exchange were being created and that their concern in not portraying Latin Americans as victims coincided with what I saw as a problem in my research. This led me to analyse the information gathered from my research in a different way: Whilst some groups were creating possibilities for change by providing social and legal services for those who remained constrained and marginal to the social, economical and political system in Britain, other groups were also creating the possibilities for change by actively transforming places. This was my way in to develop the idea of routes and routines, which refers to the movement of people across place and which I discuss in the following two chapters. Thus, this approach was more fluid in that it allowed me to consider identities in transformation and in relation to spatial practices.

These considerations were important in writing the final representation of Latin Americans and for the selection of Latin American cultural practices that appears in this thesis. My representation is composed of many narratives: from my observations and participation at some of the Latin American cultural practices in London; from my conversations with those who participated in these practices and from those who I interviewed. I also make use of secondary sources, like newspapers, specialised journals and magazines, particularly in Chapter Three where I also use information from the Census of 1991 and House of Commons Reports on Immigration Relations. Thus, what finally appears in this thesis articulates my representation of Latin American cultural practices specifically in relation to the clubs in London at a particular moment in time.

Overall the organisation of the chapters dealing with the ethnographic material follow a similar pattern to that of the theoretical framework - in that it takes a linear path, in this

case, from macro concerns of the nation state's policies to the clubs and finally to the body; even when I started the research in the clubs. This organisation, again could suggest a linear pattern of analysis. However, what I want to stress is that, as a whole, this thesis is an attempt to expose the complexities and different levels of analysis that the researcher is faced with when writing ethnography on cultural identities and place. Thus, each chapter is dealing with particular issues of the overall theoretical framework (which I identified in Chapter One), at the same time as addressing specific debates and other research.

##### **5. Identity of the researcher, personal narrative and authority**

In this part I include some reflections on how my sense of identity and what I represent for others affected the ethnographic research on salsa clubs. In my case this takes a particular dimension because a Puerto Rican doing research on salsa clubs in London brings to the centre of this discussion issues of authority and knowledge. This is particularly important to discuss here because during the fieldwork the knowledge and authority that participants assumed of me was either 'tested' or taken for granted. Thus in this section I will be discussing how the identities that were attributed to me by participants had an impact on what they assumed about my knowledge.

In addition, I also participated in salsa clubs and other cultural activities organised by Latin Americans in London with some knowledge, preconceptions, presumptions, similar personal and cultural experiences (as I was brought up in Puerto Rico) and also the experience of migration. Thus, I will also discuss how my sense of identity was affecting the research. I will concentrate on particular issues such as nationality, gender and language.

This issue is particularly important here because the way in which ethnographers' use personal narratives has implications for the constitution of ethnographic authority. In using a personal narrative I run the risk of implying that I was a complete insider (which was not the case) and that this provides me with an authoritative voice. However, this has

another side to it, by justifying that I was not an insider and how to become one I run the risk of assuming a 'naive' position as if the researcher's position and views were not affecting the research or affect the ethnographic writing. It can also imply that the researcher's voice is lacking authority.<sup>4</sup>

The point I want to make is that in my case ethnographic authority cannot be solely constructed through narrating the process of becoming a participant of salsa clubs as if I was a complete outsider nor completely distant from the experience of other participants. Nor can it be constructed through my sense of identification, as if my presence was invisible or did not affect the research.<sup>5</sup> It is in this sense that the use of a reflexive voice in the rest of this section and chapter serves to highlight this potential dichotomy between personal narrative and ethnographic authority.

### **5.1 Identities attributed to the researcher**

My sense of identity and identification with Latin Americans can not be separated from my participation, what I represent for other participants and my account of it. As Diana Kay has pointed out in relation to her ethnographic research study about Chileans in Scotland, 'the researcher is assigned a number of identities by participants themselves as they attempt to make sense of the project and the person but, more generally the researcher's gender, age and ethnic identity all play a part in shaping the account produced' (1987, 26).

The identities given to a researcher can affect research in terms of gaining access and it also has implications for the constitution of authority. To club owners, disc jockeys, dance teachers and individuals involved in the organisation of Latin American groups in London I presented my self as a student doing research on salsa music clubs in London. To dancers I had different strategies as the setting made it difficult to just introduce my

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<sup>4</sup> The issues raised here have been extensively discussed in Rosaldo, 1993; Clough, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988; Clifford and Marcus, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> A similar issue has been raised by David Wellman when reflecting about his research with longshoremen's unions in San Francisco (1994).

self as a researcher (and as I have already discussed, during the first three months of research I was trying to find the best way to approach dancers). My approach in the dance clubs was more spontaneous and my strategy was to be as 'natural' as possible and to only tell people about my research if they asked or once I had been accepted as a participant. It was then when I would say that I was a student and explain the purpose of the research.

Consequently I was perceived in different ways. For owners, disc jockeys and dance teachers I was PhD student in England researching about salsa clubs in London. It was during the interview when I was more likely to be asked questions about where I was from, as my accent was difficult to 'locate'. As salsa is often associated with Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican musicians in New York, my nationality was crucial in the construction of ethnographic authority in terms of both conducting and writing-up the research. Thus, I was careful in not presenting myself as a Puerto Rican unless asked. However, as the research progressed more people knew about 'the Puerto Rican woman doing research on salsa clubs in London'. Thus, even when my authority and trust was constructed little by little, my nationality played an important part in the construction of ethnographic authority.

For some dancers I was seen as a young Puerto Rican student who did not know how to dance salsa because I had spent too much time in the library. As a Colombian man once said to me: 'You don't know how to dance salsa! Where have you been all these years?' Over a year his perspective changed. So did I, as he noticed, 'finally you have learned how to dance'. This made me reflect that no matter how much I thought I was integrating, other participants did not necessarily think I was and sometimes reminded me that I was not. There were also various occasions when people tested my knowledge, usually by spelling out a list of names of musicians and bands to find out if I had heard of them. In some instances assumptions about my identity were taken for granted, some people found it impossible to believe that I could not dance or that I did not know a salsa band, musician or song.

There were also occasions when people were suspicious of me. For example, when I approached the Latin American House they were reluctant to give me access to written documentation, perfectly understandably as they deal with confidential information that could be used against the individuals concerned. In this particular case I relied on interviews with individuals who were initially involved in buying the House. The key point here is that the fact that I was from Puerto Rico was not taken for granted when trying to gain access to the Latin American House.

Hence, the fact that I was a Puerto Rican had implications for the constitution of ethnographic authority. This, as I have tried to demonstrate was particularly the case in relation to the knowledge that was assumed of me, which was either tested or taken for granted.

## **5.2 Identity of the researcher**

As a Puerto Rican I have always identified myself as Latin American. Thus, although a student temporarily staying in Britain, I was a Latin American living in England, my first language being Spanish and personally and politically I identified with Latin America. These issues made me reflect on how much personal involvement I should allow myself in the research. The implications of differing degrees of involvement has been a significant issue in ethnographic research (Pratt, 1986; Rosaldo, 1993). In my research this was an important issue because I was aware of my sense of identification and knowledge of Latin America, although in both instances partial.

To question the degree of involvement was important, but without distancing myself from what was occurring. It is in this sense that a reflexive approach was important for my research in that it allowed me to interpret certain signs and actions that at some point of the research were at a level of transparency for me. However, this did not happen isolated from the research, but was part of a process that in instances involved people pointing out issues to me.

For example, there were some elements that I did not identify as signs of a particular Latin American cultural identity until these were pointed out to me by other participants. Perhaps, because I was too familiar with these, or perhaps because I had similar reactions, thus I did not notice it as a major difference or even as an issue to be considered. For example, when Daniel Castillo, a disc jockey at Mambo Loco, explained to me how a shout '¡Viva!' coming from the dance floor made a difference to the atmosphere of the club and how he identified with it. This aspect was important because for this Venezuelan disc jockey singing along with the song or verbal expressions were some of the major differences between Latin American and English dancers. On another occasion Gerry Lyseight, a disc jockey at Mambo Inn, mentioned the horizontal and vertical movement of dancers as a major difference between salsa clubs and other types of clubs.

However, the research was also enriched through my knowledge and sense of identification. There were other signs, dress codes, language, icons and bodily mannerisms that I could identify. The fact of being in England also made me more perceptive of cultural differences. Thus, my familiarity with certain cultural codes and conventions was enriched as I had other cultural practices and signs to compare and contrast with. In this sense I started to understand in different terms my preconceived knowledge or conceptions about Latin American cultural practices (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). At the same time this provided me with a framework to reflect on the performance of 'Latin' identities through various verbal, visual and physical codes. This is important because I was slowly being directed towards an issue that I discuss in Chapter five of this thesis, how 'Latin' identities were 'embodied' through salsa music practices.

Being a female became a key issue that affected my research. As I depended on public transport, I felt more vulnerable on the streets, when populated by drunken men and women as in the case of the West End, or when deserted streets outside the centre of London. The anxieties associated with walking to the bus stop alone late at night in a city

I did not know made me extra careful at the beginning of the research and also led me to adopt different strategies. I started asking friends to accompany me or would arrange to meet up with some of the network of people I was meeting at the clubs.

It also affected my approach to the research particularly in approaching people. I realised that the way I started getting into the atmosphere could be interpreted in different ways. When visiting the clubs I would start by asking for a drink and wandering around the club. I observed people, and looked for the best moment to approach participants. At the beginning it was not easy, I would stand next to a group or person thinking how should I approach them. I recall one of my first visits, in which I stood next to a man and considered how I should approach him. Should I make reference to the music or to the place? I did not know how to start and I noticed that this situation gave people the opportunity to realise that I was alone, and that my behaviour could be interpreted as a sign that I was looking for some one to 'pick up'.

As a female it was easier for me to be approached by a male dancer than it was by a female dancer. However, this issue also made me vulnerable as there were instances in which my female body was the object of male courting or even harassment. I recall from my observations a conversation that lasted less than two minutes with a man whom I had noticed in the underground train and who followed me into the club. Once in the club, whilst I was trying to get a drink, he asked me;

- Are you alone?
- Yes.
- Where do you live?
- Somewhere in Camden.
- Do you live with your parents?
- No. Actually, I am doing a research on Latin music clubs and I would like to know if you regularly visit Latin clubs.
- Not a lot, sometimes.
- But are you interested in the music.
- Well, I did Spanish studies.
- Do you know how to speak Spanish?
- Just a bit. Are you living with some friends.
- Yes.
- Well, if we both came alone, why don't we go to another place.
- No. I am fine here. I am here because I am doing this research ...
- Well, but later we can go for a cup of coffee, if you want.

- No, really, I am fine here. I am moving on, see you.<sup>6</sup>

To overcome situations like this I began to let the bar tenders and disc jockeys know what I was doing. In addition, as the research progressed my insecurities and anxieties faded because as I met more people and as more people knew about the research I felt more confident. I would co-ordinate to meet up with some people in the clubs or if involved in an uncomfortable situation I felt I could 'be sheltered' amongst a group of people I was friendly with.

Spanish being my first language and having English as a second language was important when approaching and interviewing participants. However, this also posed the problem of translation (which are my own), because there were some terms that are usually used in English, but have no direct translation into Spanish. For example, this happened with the words 'performance' and 'scene', which were used in English, even when the interview was held in Spanish (particularly the word scene, as there were other terms for explaining performance in Spanish, although the word could not be literally translated). If considering the meaning of these two words in relation to their use in the clubs, there is no direct translation into Spanish. Their Spanish translation is equivalent to their English meaning as in the theatre context or usage ('actuar' or 'acto' for performance and 'escena' for scene). Directly related to Chapter Four the concept 'scene' has been used by Will Straw (1991) to describe a particular network of people and practices involved in the development of a musical genre or label. Even, when I acknowledge his perspective and the importance of it for this research I am careful in using the word scene in this thesis as there is no Spanish translation. There is an issue here that leads me beyond the boundary of this thesis in that I am drawing on a theoretical vocabulary that has developed in Anglo-American communication and cultural studies and which has no direct translation into Spanish.

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<sup>6</sup> From observations 22 March 1994 at Bar Rumba.

## 6. Summary

In this chapter I have discussed ethnographic research as a method, and highlighted the interaction between my theoretical concerns and the process of conducting research. I have tried to show how the two are related and mutually fed off of one another in the development of this thesis. Specifically I have discussed the practicalities of the research and how a degree of openness in my research strategy enabled me to gain access to networks operating outside of, but in relation to the clubs. I also discussed the importance of participating in dance lessons and how this was important for understanding the issue of Latin identity in the clubs. In the final part of this chapter I reflected on how my own identity was an important issue that had an impact on how I both conducted the research and represented the subject of Latin American cultural practices and identities in London. Together with the first chapter this provides a context for understanding the empirical material and theoretical arguments in the following chapters. I would like to conclude this chapter with some reflections on possible limitations of this approach and directions that it might suggest for further study.

As I have stressed throughout this chapter, I started the research with an open approach, not only theoretically, but ethnographically. Although there are certain concepts that have always been central to this research, most of the complexity of the analysis and the final theoretical arguments came from that degree of openness - which not only led me to different research enquiries, but to wider networks outside of the initial setting of the clubs. One possible weakness of the research, is that it does not provide a wider perspective on the situation of Latin Americans in London, by considering such issues as housing, health problems and family life in greater detail. This thesis does not directly engage with the issue of social policy that might have a 'practical' and immediate benefit for the different groups or organisations as such. However, it does, I hope, provide a resource which starts to map out some of the different ways in which a group of first generation Latin Americans started to incorporate, despite the initial problems and adjustment, into a city that seem closed, cold and grey, not just physically but

metaphorically. Thus, I hope that this research might be a starting point for wider research questions and theoretical enquiries into Latin Americans in London. The next chapter is, thus, an attempt to map out the movements of Latin Americans into England and the routes developed once in London.

### CHAPTER III

#### LATIN AMERICANS IN LONDON: ROUTES THROUGH THE CITY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF PLACE

##### 1. Introduction

This chapter attempts to map out the movement of Latin Americans into Britain and the routes taken and developed once in London. To address these issues I focus on how immigration controls in Great Britain have had a direct impact on the movement and visibility of Latin Americans across London. From this starting point I discuss how the visible presence of Latin Americans in London can be detected in very specific parts of London. Particular attention is given to how Latin Americans have appropriated, transformed, and used particular areas of the city for specific cultural practices. It is in this sense that Latin Americans are developing links and establishing new relationships with existing places whilst contributing to, and becoming part of, London's 'ethnoscape'.<sup>1</sup>

To pursue this approach the first part of this chapter addresses two separate, but interconnected issues. The first is related to the role of the nation state in defining its territorial borders through the implementation of immigration laws. The second explores how these regulations have a direct impact on people's mobility and later on the visible presence of Latin American expressions across London. In the second part of this chapter I discuss how Latin Americans operate within and attempt to subvert these constraints by adopting less visible time-space practices across the city and by transforming places and giving them a particular Latin identity.

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<sup>1</sup> I take this term from Arjun Appadurai to refer to 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons that constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree' (1990, 7).

### **1.1 Immigration into Britain and the regulation of space**

Space is politically regulated and the movements of Latin Americans into and then across London are directly related to the attempts to regulate, classify, order and control the entrance of people into Britain. This I also argue has a direct impact on the way in which Latin Americans interact with existing places by transforming them and later by using them for specific social relations and cultural practices. Thus, my argument is that the relations of power established by the nation-state through the implementation and regulation of immigration and later by policing immigrants have a direct impact on the identity of places at any given moment.

Immigration controls are one of the ways in which nation-states define those who belong to a nation from those who do not. In this sense the nation-state is politically and culturally defined in terms of its territorial borders. Legislation to control territorial borders in Britain not only serves the purpose of nation building, but contributes to provide a sense of belonging whilst reinforcing nationalism and exclusion (Miles, 1993; Jackson and Penrose, 1993; van der Veer, 1995; Sales and Gregory, 1995). This argument has implications for the relationship between cultural identities and places in that the practises that develop from this exclusion allows for the creation of new spatial relationships due to the way in which those who are not defined as nationals of Britain, in this case Latin Americans, are transforming places with a specific identity. As this occurs a sense of identification develops with particular parts of the city.

Immigration controls in Britain are also related to global and local economics. Research on the relationship between nation and migration has substantially sustained the argument that immigration legislation operates along the lines of racial, sexual and class discriminations (Miles, 1993; Jackson and Penrose, 1993; van der Veer, 1995; Sales and Gregory, 1995; Sachdeva, 1993). These issues have been discussed in relation to Britain's position regarding ex-colonial territories. However, there have been instances in which British policies regarding immigration have been directly linked to political positions and economic reasons that are not necessarily related to policies concerning ex-

colonial territories or new commonwealth countries; this was the case, for example, of the Aliens Act of 1905 which was introduced with aim of stopping the entrance into Britain of Jews with no economic support (Miles, 1993). The relationship between nation and migration is further established if considering that in instances of economic instability these immigration policies have been used as a tool to attract a labour force. This was the case in post war Britain when there was a need to recruit workers so as to restructure the economy and aid the economic growth of Britain (Miles, 1993). With the increasing spread of a 'global capitalist economy' and inflation affecting the economic stability of Britain, the government has announced its intention to attract investors, rather than labour force. When Britain needed workers it was easy for Latin Americans to get a work contract from abroad. Nowadays as the economic situation is more unstable, it is possible to enter the United Kingdom easily if you have enough money to support yourself or if you are willing to invest £750,000 in this country.<sup>2</sup> This law was announced in May 1994 by the Home Office and put into effect in October 1994.

Asylum cases provide another example of the political positions assumed by Britain with regard to 'aliens'. For example, during the year I carried out the ethnographic research (October 1993- 94), asylum seekers who were held in detention centres went on hunger strike and protested because of the conditions in which they were being detained. Britain was highly criticised, not just because political refugees were treated as criminals, but also for the repeated patterns of nationals to whom asylum is granted and refused.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to Travis, A. 'Change lets rich 'buy' entry to UK', *The Guardian*, 24 May 1994d, p4; Travis, A. 'Backtracking on 'pounds immigrants', *The Guardian*, 25 May 1994b, p6. As I was writing this chapter tighter immigration regulations were announced to force employers to trace illegal immigrants in their workplace and by imposing fines on those who contract illegal immigrants. Refer for example to Milne, S. and H. Nowicka, 'Crackdown on employers 'may boost race bias', *The Guardian*, 7 April 1995, p10; also to leading article, 'New purge on illegal immigrants' *The Guardian*, 9 May 1995, p12; Travis, A. 'Immigrant checks extended to curb benefit claims', *The Guardian*, 9 May 1995a, p1.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to 'Secret state: Campaign to close Campsfield' in *Index on censorship*, November - December 1994, (6):168-173.

addition to this, a 'white list' of countries from where it is assumed nationals may not need to apply for asylum was published in December 1995.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst Britain is establishing links with the European Community, it is also enforcing immigration controls to exclude certain groups (Sutcliffe, 1994; Islam, 1994; Sivanandan, 1990). Thus, in this process some boundaries are being eroded but new ones are being created. It is within this context that I started reflecting on the nation-state and 'time-space compression' in relation to United Kingdom immigration laws and how these have affected Latin Americans in Britain and had a direct impact on the participation of different groups in 'Latin' cultural practices across London.

Throughout this chapter I will argue that the movements of Latin Americans across London are in part related to the policy attempts to regulate, classify, order and control the entrance of people into Britain. I suggest that an awareness of these regulations is important to understand how the legal status of Latin Americans has had an impact on their mobility and visible presence in London. These regulations are also relevant to understand participation at salsa clubs in London. For some Latin Americans, participating at London's salsa clubs involves confronting state regulation of citizenship and enforcement of immigration laws - most apparent when immigration officers raid premises which are being used by Latin Americans. Thus, these regulations are not only having a direct impact on people's mobility and therefore the identity of places at any given moment, but influencing the presence and absence of who participates at salsa clubs.

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<sup>4</sup> Travis, A. 'Refugees face 'white list' test. Secret plan to bar asylum seekers', *The Guardian*, 25 October 1995b, p1. For a criticism and explanation of asylum and Commonwealth policies see Satvinder S. Juss *Immigration, Nationality and Citizenship* (1993); also Ronald Kaye, *Post entry control of politically active refugees in the UK* (1992).

## **2. Latin Americans in London**

This section attempts to outline those policies that have affected the movements of Latin Americans across London. By focusing on the particular case of Latin Americans in London I want to draw attention to the fact that international migration is not only possible because of better and faster means of transportation, because of the internationalisation of a market economy, or due to political or economic instability; it is also defined by economic and political alliances amongst countries at any particular moment, and by stipulating legislation to exclude the entrance of certain nationals to this country. This emphasis on immigration controls I hope will serve as a critique of debates about globalisation in that it helps in understanding how the movement of people around the world is regulated by policies of nation-states. Thus, the spatio-temporal movements of Latin Americans around the world are connected to economic and political policies occurring globally and locally.

### **2.1 Latin American immigration to Great Britain**

Latin Americans are one of Britain's most recent immigrant groups. The arrival of Latin Americans as a big labour immigrant group in Great Britain started in the early 1970's. However, the number has increased and the presence of Latin Americans has become more apparent since the end of the 1980's. The experience of migration is not the same for everyone. Large numbers of Latin Americans arrive in England because of economic reasons as migrant workers, some come as political refugees, and others are escaping from political and civil violence in their countries. There is a heterogeneous group of Latin Americans in London; not just because there are many people from different countries, cities and regions in Latin America, but due to their reasons for being in this country, whether political, economic or cultural.

At this moment it is very difficult to estimate how many Latin Americans are living in Britain, mainly because a considerable number have overstayed the initial period granted by the Home Office. There are various problems involved when considering Home

Office statistics. First, the categories established by the Home Office do not provide enough information to know how many of those leaving the country were visitors or had previously settled in Britain. This makes it impossible to calculate how many of those granted leave to enter the United Kingdom have overstayed. From Home Office statistics it is possible to calculate the number of Latin Americans accepted to settle in the United Kingdom. However, this poses another problem because before 1982 'the Americas' was calculated as a whole, this included Canada, United States and former United Kingdom colonies. It was only after 1982 that the Americas category was broken-down by countries. According to Home Office statistics from 1982 to 1992 a total of 7,610 Latin Americans have been accepted to settle in the United Kingdom (See Appendix 1).

The other source available is the census of 1991, in which a total of 41,549 Latin Americans were registered as living in Great Britain (See Appendix 2). Brazilians and Colombians are the biggest groups of Latin Americans, with 9,753 and 5,682 respectively. They are followed by Chileans who started arriving as political refugees after Pinochet's coup d'état in September 1973. It is estimated that 2,400 Chilean came into Britain in a period of three years following the military coup, from June 1974 to the end of 1977 (Kay, 1987). During the same period many Argentineans also asked for political asylum in Britain (Visram, 1993). There are also minor numbers of Venezuelans, Mexicans, Cubans, Peruvians, Uruguayans, Bolivians and Ecuadorians.<sup>5</sup>

According to the 1991 census 12,327 Latin Americans were residents of Inner London (appendix 3); Brazilians numbered 3,182 and 2,945 Colombians (refer to appendix 3). These numbers have been questioned by many Latin American organisations in London who have argued that the number of Latin Americans in London can fluctuate from

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noticing that Bolivia and Ecuador are not registered as categories in the Home Office statistics, whilst for example the 1991 census has a category for other South America (which excludes Brazil and Colombia) which is significant as Appendix 2 demonstrates.

50,000 to 60,000 if these figures were to include the number of people who had overstayed.<sup>6</sup>

Immigration and the status of immigrants in Britain, whether legal or illegal, not to mention economic marginality, is not the result of a one way process. Economic difficulties were starting to intensify in England during the 1970's: Unemployment was rising, inflation was high, there was an increase in racial attacks and the mobilisation of right political parties around a xenophobic agenda.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, it was during this period when Latin Americans started to arrive in England as a big labour immigrant group. The situation in Latin America was not the best either. High external debts, civil wars, invasions, dictatorships, economic instability and currency devaluation among other social problems were experienced in Latin America. The immigration of Latin Americans to England during the 1970's was related to the situation in Latin America, however, the question to consider here is; Why England? It is in relation to this question that the Immigration Act of 1971<sup>8</sup> played an important part with regard to Latin American immigration into Britain. The importance of this act is that it allowed people from countries that had no relationship with the British Empire to enter the country. Whilst the entrance of Latin Americans occurred prior to this act, most came as spouses or dependants of British subjects.<sup>9</sup> The 1971 Act marked a significant change from previous attempts to control the entrance of certain people into Britain which had started at the beginning of this century and continued to operate until the Act of 1971. This replaced previous regulations concerning aliens. A brief look at these changes is useful for clarifying the importance and relevance of this Act.

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<sup>6</sup> Personal conversation with Enrique Saenz, Administrator, Latin American House, 10 July 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. *The Empire strikes back*, London: Hutchinson, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Immigration Act 1971 (chapter 77 page 1653-).

<sup>9</sup> As reported by the Immigration and Race Relations Committee for the House of Commons Reports (1986).

There have been a number of nationality acts since the seventeenth century which aimed 'to specify the status of people resident in England who were born elsewhere, and of people born outside England of parents who were 'natural born subjects' of England' (Miles, 1993, 152-53). However, it was at the beginning of the twentieth century with the Aliens Act of 1905 that a direct attempt was made to control the entrance of certain groups into Britain, particularly Jewish immigrants (Miles, 1993). In 1914 as a result of the First World War a restriction on the right of entry was imposed over 'aliens'. This Act was further amended in 1920 and 1953. Under the orders of 1920 and 1953 'aliens' were admitted to enter the United Kingdom and work permits were issued subject to conditions of the British state (Juss, 1993). These included a limitation on the type of employment 'aliens' could undertake, with restrictions imposed so as to confine immigrants to areas of employment in which a labour force was needed (Miles 1993). As Robert Miles has reported, from 1920 to 1951 most of the immigration into Britain was from Europe and co-ordinated under state programs like the 'European Volunteer Worker' and the 'Blue Danube' schemes which would directly recruit employees from Europe, particularly Germany and Austria. Immigration from colonial territories also existed; however as these were legally British subjects they were not under the scrutiny of immigration controls. After the 1950's most of the immigration was of citizens of colonial territories and from this period up to 1971 legislation was aimed at regulating the entrance of Commonwealth citizens into Britain (1993).

These Orders remained valid until the Immigration Act of 1971. Similar to previous orders this act provided work permits to semi-qualified and unqualified workers in order to enter and stay in the United Kingdom for a limited period, but with no opportunity of work promotion. Regarding this issue the Act stipulates, '... if he is given a limited leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, it may be given subject to conditions restricting his employment or occupation in the United Kingdom, or requiring him to register with the police, or both'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in terms of employment conditions this Act

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<sup>10</sup> Immigration Act, Section 3(1)(c).

was not different to the previous orders. However, the importance of the Immigration Act of 1971 is that it 'ended the temporary basis of control over the entry and residence of Aliens and of Commonwealth citizens and placed it on a permanent footing' (Juss, 1993, 46). By imposing controls over the entry of Commonwealth citizens this act was intended to stop the number of people from ex-colonial territories coming into Britain, particularly those from the Caribbean colonies who had been regulated under immigration control since 1962 even when they were legally British subjects.<sup>11</sup> However, this act was not successful at reducing the number of people coming into Britain (Juss, 1993). The Immigration Act of 1971 provided the possibilities for Latin American immigration into Britain and the movement of Latin Americans as a big labour immigrant group into Britain was directly related to this Act which allowed the entrance of nationals of countries that had no colonial relationship with the British Empire.

Some of the amendments that followed this Act are directly linked to the political circumstances within ex colonial territories or affecting commonwealth citizens, others are related to Britain's political and economic relation with foreign (or alien) countries. New regulations and restrictions have been introduced, the Act has been changed considerably and is constantly changing.<sup>12</sup> As immigration laws in this country have changed, so different strategies have been adopted by Latin Americans wishing to enter.

In the early 1970's many Latin Americans came from their countries with work contracts. Most of them came to work in hotels, factories, restaurants or as domestic employees. Those who came to Britain during this period and under the policies established by the Act of 1971 did not have problems with their visa because they came with work permits. After working for four years with the same patron the person could then apply for residency and was then 'free' to look for another job. However, this did not necessarily mean that an individual's economic situation and employment circumstances would

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<sup>11</sup> The British Nationality Act of 1981 was intended to solve this contradiction by creating three different types of citizenship. See for example Supperston and Cavanagh (1988).

<sup>12</sup> Juss, S., 1993, pages 46-48.

improve.<sup>13</sup> As Rigo Pizarro, who in the early 1980s was co-ordinator of the Latin American Advisory Committee, pointed out,

Not only was it impossible to change one's job category, but then it was also very difficult to change one's job within the same category. Let us say that a person was given residence in this country. From that moment he had another problem, he had lived here for four years without learning the language properly for lack of time and money. Another problem is that these people do semi or unqualified jobs without any prospects of promotion, not even legal residence improves working conditions. We know of many Colombians with university degrees, or who are highly skilled and qualified craftsmen, who can't find a job in their profession because they have no working background here (in Castrillón, 1984).

Employment conditions, working standards, wages and work promotion were some of the problems that Latin Americans had to face; added to this was the uncertainties of searching for new jobs and facing the cultural differences of the host country, housing conditions and health care.

At the beginning of the 1970's there were also many Colombian women, between 18 and 23 years, coming into Britain as 'au-pairs'.<sup>14</sup> The main objective of au-pairs was to study English whilst living with an English family and they were allowed to do some domestic work on a part time basis, for which they were paid. According to Juan Rincón, a founder member of the Latin American Advisory Committee, the 'au-pairs' scheme provided an opportunity for Colombian women to get a job and learn English, which would have been difficult to do in Colombia. However, the situation changed in 1978 when new immigration controls were imposed over 'au-pair' immigrants because the government claimed that it was being used as a strategy to stay working in Britain.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Personal interview with Jorge Ramírez, a Colombian man who works for a Human Rights organisation.

<sup>14</sup> Juan Rincón cited in Santiago Castrillón, 1984.

<sup>15</sup> Juan Rincón cited in Santiago Castrillón, 1984.

By the mid 1970's a big group of Latin Americans had also come to England as political refugees, principally because of the dictatorships in Uruguay and Argentina. Chileans also arrived after Augusto Pinochet's coup d'état in September 1973. However, in the first instance Chileans were not granted refugee status in England due to political reasons;

Refugee cases are commonly very complex because they depend so much upon the government of the day's policies towards the relevant country of origin. For example, the Conservative government under Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher did not accept Chilean Refugees. During the last Labour government (1974-1979) the policy initially was to take a long time to accept Chilean refugees, but that changed with lobbying from within the Labour party, trade unions, and most importantly pressure by Ministers sympathetic to the plight of those refugees ... This particular case was complicated by the fact that intelligence information had to be acquired from the American government because Britain did not have a network covering Chile (Morgado, 1989, 24-25).

Condemnation of the military coup also came from Solidarity campaigns and various pressure groups in Britain. In March 1974 the Labour government announced its intention to consider applications from Chilean refugees, and in July 1974 a Joint Working Group was formed in order to receive and support Chilean refugees (Kay, 1987).

Unlike labour immigrants, political refugees were entitled to certain protections and benefits. As stated in the report from the Home Affairs Committee on Race Relations and Immigration to the House of Commons:

These include protection from expulsion to a country where the applicant's life or freedom will be threatened (refoulement), entitlement to travel documentation and full access to social benefits, housing and education. ... Refugees are normally given leave to enter or remain for one year in the first instance, and then for three years ... there is no restriction on employment and consideration is given to granting them indefinite leave to remain after four years here as a refugee (House of Commons, 1986, 68).

However, in Diana Kay's account of Chilean refugees she notes that they had little say in decisions on where to live and most were unemployed. Refugees came from different economic and social groups in Chile and had to adapt to different circumstances:

Working-class and middle-class exiles also confronted a different panorama. The professional workers, whose jobs in Chile had often involved the exercise of a degree of personal influence and autonomy, were unable to find the equivalent in Britain. Together with living on working-class council estates, many middle-class exiles experienced downward social mobility, undertaking low-status jobs and, in some cases manual work in exile. Workers, meanwhile, had a more uniform experience. They had been manual workers in Chile and where they found work in Britain, were manual workers in exile. Their loss of status was expressed in terms of loss of collective power which had arisen from the political and organisational context of their work in Chile (Kay, 1987, 86).

The initial period of settlement for Chilean refugees involved feelings of confusion and a loss of political activity and most thought of this as a transitory period. This was important for reorganising politically in Britain, whilst maintaining links with what was occurring in Chile (Kay, 1987).

Many Colombians whose lives were being threatened due to political and civil violence also asked for asylum in Britain. Asylum is an alternative for many Latin Americans escaping from political and civil violence in their countries.<sup>16</sup> Refugees in exile have reorganised politically and established solidarity campaigns for the countries they come from. These groups have also played an important role in organising and advising Latin Americans already in London.

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<sup>16</sup> Before July 1984 asylum with refugee status and asylum without refugee status were two different categories, each entitled to different benefits and protections. Asylum without refugee status were not guaranteed state benefits. The entitlement of any benefit was discretion of the state and 'leave to remain was granted for only one year at a time. Like refugees those granted asylum were generally granted indefinite leave to remain after four years of residence here in that capacity'. Source: House of Commons, Third report from Home Affairs Committee. Session 1984-85. Race Relations and immigration sub-committee, report on 'Refugees and asylum, with special reference to the Vietnamese'. Vol. 1 p68. London: HMSO, 1986.

The British government has claimed that applications for asylum have been used as a strategy by people wishing to stay in the United Kingdom. British authorities have continually maintained that many of the applications are 'bogus' claims (Juss, 1993). As a result, stricter controls and policing of asylum seekers have been put into practice. As I mentioned earlier, Britain's policies with regard to asylum seekers are becoming more rigorous and an announcement of countries from which it is assumed that there is no need to claim for asylum was published in December 1995. The number of asylum seekers in detention centres has increased in the last few years and it is estimated that more than 9,000 asylum seekers are detained each year (Travis, 1994c).

When attempting to ask for asylum in Britain, Latin Americans have been deported from the airport or held in detention centres. Deportation from the airport is not a rare thing to happen, yet it is not usually public knowledge unless it is a complex news story like the many people that came on the flight from Jamaica, who were arrested at their arrival on December 1993.<sup>17</sup> Another case was of public knowledge through the press, perhaps because of its paradox. This was the case of Gabriel Echevarría, a Colombian man who asked for asylum in Britain after his flight made an unexpected landing in a Portuguese Island. The Guardian published his story three months after Mr. Echevarría was sent backwards and forwards in different flights to different cities without any success of asylum. After being rejected in British territory, he was sent to Lisbon, where he was not admitted because he did not have an entry visa.

In the face of new Portuguese penalties on airlines which carry passengers without visas BA arranged that he should travel to Ríó de Janeiro, Brazil, where Colombians do not need a visa. When Mr. Echevarría arrived distraught in Lisbon he was put on the Rio flight but he believed he was being returned to Colombia and became so agitated that the pilot refused to carry him beyond the first scheduled stop at Oporto, in Portugal. His sister flew out to be with him and he was admitted to a hospital psychiatric ward. At this point the Home Office did decide on

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<sup>17</sup> There have been other cases, although not related to Latin America or the Caribbean. As an example and for an explanation of the Tamalis' case refer to Juss, *op. cit.*, page 18; and Morgado, *op. cit.*, page 25.

compassionate grounds to allow him to return the UK for a substantive consideration of his case. Amnesty said he could quite possibly have ended up 'in orbit' between several countries (Travis, 1993).<sup>18</sup>

This case illustrates that the 'global' movement of people around the world - one person's 'orbit' - is shaped by nations and their immigration controls.

This example raises another issue that has been often criticised; that of the exercise of power and control by immigration officers at the airport. This is illustrated in the case of Harold Martínez Quijano, a Colombian man of 18 years old, who was held as an illegal immigrant at Feltham young offenders institution in West London since he was arrested in December 1992. On March 1994, the Home Office decided to deport him against which an appeal was made. The Home Office lifted the decision of deportation and granted him bail whilst reconsidering his case (Travis, 1994e, 1994f).

Amnesty International has accused the government of violating human rights and international law through the unjustified detention of asylum seekers and by the arbitrariness in which decisions are taken (Travis, 1994a). Regarding this issue Richard Duntan of Amnesty International mentioned 'that in many cases decisions to detain are arbitrary, dependent upon factors such as the availability of detention places on a given day or the immigration officer's attitude towards refugees rather than an objective assessment of whether detention is necessary' (in Travis, 1994a). This points towards the issue that there are laws but these have to be implemented by people, and here certain contingency factors intervene.

This issue indicates how a law has to be applied and negotiated and can be subverted by human activity. Although there have been many attempts to stop the incoming of immigrants into Britain there are still people from Latin America making their way into Britain. Many strategies have been adopted by Latin Americans in order to enter into

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<sup>18</sup> (His sister had lived in Britain for 16 years). For another example of a similar situation see the Iranian couple case in Morgado, *op. cit.*, page 25. Britain has also stipulated some regulations on airlines. The Carriers Liability Act of 1987 initially imposed a fine of £1000 (later increased to £2000) on airlines who brought a passenger without a visa (Juss, 1993, 21).

Britain. This issue leads the discussion towards those Latin Americans that have negotiated their way into Britain and then overstayed their limited leave granted by British authorities. Here I wish to clarify that the type of immigrants I will discuss are overstayers and not illegal entrants.<sup>19</sup> These have legally enter British territory; however, as overstayers they become illegal immigrants.

## 2.2 Illegal immigrants

The importance of addressing the issue of illegal immigrants is that these have to negotiate their routes in London in quite distinct ways to other immigrants whose legal status in this country is clearly defined. In relation to the salsa clubs this was important because there were club owners who were directly interested in excluding this group of immigrants and others who attempted to address these particular groups. Thus, this section is important for understanding the division and contrasting experiences of Latin American cultural practices in London, which affects participation at salsa clubs.

At the end of 1970's the number of work permits issued were reduced. However, there were many areas of work, especially in restaurants and hotels in the West End where staff were required and where owners were willing to employ people without the necessary permit. An awareness of these possibilities attracted employment agencies and travel companies, which 'offered credit facilities for air fares and a job - which most of the time did not exist' (Rincón in Castrillón, 1984). Big and small travel agencies started providing group offers with reduced price tickets and in some cases offered credit facilities. It was also possible and cheaper to buy a ticket in England but start the flight in Latin America. This opened up the possibility for families and relatives to come to England as 'tourists'.<sup>20</sup> This possibility was also attractive for Latin Americans because a

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<sup>19</sup> The number of illegal entrants in 1992 was 3,300 (plus 300 who left voluntary). This was made up of 50% from Africa, 15% from the Americas, nearly 15% from the Indian sub-continent, 10% from Europe and 10% from Asia. Home Office Report , Extract from Immigration control, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview with Juan Salgado, owner of a Travel agent and founder of Crónica Latina, a London based Latin American newspaper.

visa could be obtained in the airport, unlike in the United States where the visa needs to be issued and obtained before travelling. Once in the airport the person travelling just had to come into Britain as a 'tourist' to obtain a visa of six months. As Juan Salgado, who owns a travel agent, mentioned, 'In order to convince the authorities in this country that their intention is true, that of being a tourist, they buy a tour ticket around Europe that is very expensive. This with the idea of paying for it once finding a job in England'.<sup>21</sup> This strategy allowed people without a work permit to transgress the legal boundaries. This strategy offered a type of subversive spatial practice, perhaps for those who came into this country with the hope of economic promotion (not work or status promotion), to operate illegally in this country.

The point I want to stress is that, once immigration controls have been subverted, the movement of people across places is limited as these are followed by internal policing to trace those who according to the nation state's regulation have no right to be in Britain. Immigration controls are not the only ways in which nation-states define those who belong from those who do not, but internal local policies are also established to create a sense of belongingness to a country. In this particular case this involved the privilege of having rights to state benefits or deportation if discovered by the authorities.

Once trespassing the legal boundaries the worry is then to operate without being caught, or finding a way to live 'legally' in Britain. Illegal immigrants do not have any employment rights and are thus often susceptible to exploitation in their place of work. Many of these 'invisible workers' come with the idea of working hard for a couple of years, saving some money and then returning to their countries. But many of them never go back. In many cases, England offers economic stability not just to the person living in England, but to many families back home. For an illegal immigrant to return to their countries might mean, among other things, the risk of not coming back, or not being

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<sup>21</sup> Personal Interview with Juan Salgado, 30 November 1993. Interview held in Spanish, text follows: 'Con la intención de convencer a las autoridades aquí de que su intención es genuina, de que están aquí como turistas también compran un pasaje con un tour por el resto de Europa, que vale una cantidad de dinero. Todo eso lo hacen con la idea de poder pagar aquí, una vez encuentren trabajo'.

allowed back to England (a risk many people do not wish to take). The need for a labour force, immigration laws, Latin Americans' political, civil and economic situation, and their hopes for better living standards once back home explain why many people opt to operate as 'invisible workers'.

One of the most difficult issues to deal with is health problems. There are some clinics that provide medical help for Latin Americans, whether here legally or illegally. This service, which operates at the Latin American House, is practically the only health service an illegal immigrant can obtain in this country. Illegal immigrants can not ask for treatment through the National Health Service because their details will be given to the Home Office. In some cases the simple act of attending a clinic or hospital might lead to their arrest. As Rubén Cárdenas narrated, after being discovered by British authorities,

In August I decided to get a National Insurance number, but I didn't say anything to my father. Later, when they refused to give me the number I told my father and he said I should never have done it. He was right. That was what finally gave me away (in Castrillón, 1984, 40).

The person quoted above entered the United Kingdom through Edinburgh on 19 June 1982 and was finally deported in May 1983.<sup>22</sup> Illegal immigrants have no right to apply for any services in this country, nor have any rights. These problems also extend to their children as new immigration laws stipulate that a child is not British just because he is born in Britain. One of the parents must be British in order for the child to be given British nationality.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The Home Office statistics of 1992 show that from the 2,500 persons deported in 1992, 15% correspond to the Americas. The biggest per cent is from Africa with 45%, nearly 15% from the Indian sub-continent, and about 10% from Europe and other 10% from Asia (Extract from Immigration control, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> *Crónica Latina*, a London published newspaper for the Latin American population of London has published articles about the changes on immigration laws in the UK and how these affect directly or indirectly Latin American groups in London. In relation to this particular issue, refer to *Crónica Latina*, December 1-15 1987, p5.

Illegal immigrants live with uncertainty about the system and the constant fear of their illegality being recognised. As Jorge Ramírez, a Colombian man, recalled his first days in London,

I still recall the impression I had during my first week in London that Colombians lived with much fear. Colombians felt unsure about the English system. They live with fear about legality and illegality, it became an obsession. The social life was very unpleasant because that fear always exists. If you spoke loudly they always asked you to speak lower. The idea of many was to live badly for few years and then return.<sup>24</sup>

For these reasons illegal immigrants find it very difficult to integrate into British society. Castrillón, writing about Latin Americans in London, argues that 'these restrictive immigration rules create a class of people outside normal society who are inhibited by legal devices from integration into that society' (1984, 41). Jorge Ramírez, who has lived in London for over 14 years, believes that many labour immigrants do not mind acquiring status in England because their models of progress are not in this country, but in Latin America.

Our middle class patterns are in Latin America. We are not aspiring to the English model. The mentality of many immigrants is that they do not mind not acquiring status in England or New York, because they come to later be rich in their countries. The immigrant does not notice how he lives in England because he is isolated. They return to their towns and know that they are not so low, even if they live in one of those 'barrios' (he refers to a big photo covering one of the walls of his flat of a popular 'barrio' in Colombia).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Personal interview with Jorge Ramírez, 28 April 1994. Interview held in Spanish, text follows: 'Me acuerdo que la impresión que tuve durante la primera semana era que los colombianos vivían con mucho miedo. Estaban inseguros del sistema Inglés. Miedo por la legalidad e ilegalidad, se vivía con una obsesión en eso. La vida social era muy desagradable, porque ese miedo siempre estaba ahí, y si hablabas muy alto te mandaban a bajar la voz. La idea de muchos es vivir mal por unos años y luego regresar'.

<sup>25</sup> Personal interview with Jorge Ramírez (1994). Interview held in Spanish, text follows: 'Nuestros patrones de clase media están en Latino América, no es el modelo inglés al que aspiramos. La mentalidad de muchos inmigrantes es la de qué me importa tener status aca o en Nueva York, el viene para luego ser rico en su pueblo. El inmigrante no se da cuenta de cómo vive en Inglaterra y no lo siente porque están aislados. Van a sus países y saben que no están tan bajos aunque vivan en un barrio de esos (señalando a la foto en la pared, una foto de un barrio popular en Colombia)'.

This point is important in that it shows that illegal immigrants can not visibly express their identity nor move through the city without the fears about their status in this country and the fear of being discovered and deported. Thus, the movements of Latin American illegal immigrants are constrained and this encourages the development of distinct spatial patterns and routes across London.

For those who are moving in such illegal spatio-temporal spans their major concern is operating without being caught. Many people have created alternative routes to operate in London. As an example Rubén Cárdenas narrated the spatial patterns he developed from his working place to his home once his visa expired,

When the visa ran out and I had to leave work at midnight, every time I came across a policeman on my way home I began to shiver and shake, but I learned to calm down and worked out a way home through the back streets of Pimlico. Before that I used to get off in Victoria tube station, but you encounter many police in that area, so now I get off at Pimlico which is a longer walk but with less chance of coming across policemen (in Castrillón, 1984).

Illegality means that people must adopt carefully thought about spatio-temporal movements in the city. Illegal immigrants in England were (and are) working and operating socially at different spans of time and space.

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In this section I have discussed the routes through which Latin Americans have come to be in London in relation to my argument that the movement of people around the world is regulated by the policies of nation states (alone and in alliances with other countries in specific regions at a particular time). Space is thus politically regulated and the movement of individuals and groups of people in space will depend on these policies.

I have discussed how the movement of Latin Americans into London and then in London varies according to their legal status and economic situation in Britain. Latin Americans are not simply 'flowing' across the world but influenced by the politics of immigration in

Britain and by the economic, political or civil situation in the countries they come from. What I want to stress here is that the legal status and the economic situation of Latin Americans in Britain have a direct impact on their possibilities for visibly establishing a sense of cultural identity. However, as I have already discussed, policies and laws by themselves do not determine the movement of people - these are applied in certain ways and negotiated and subverted in particular ways by Latin Americans.

In the next section I look at how Latin Americans transform places and in doing this visibly establish a presence in London. This also relates to the next chapter in which I will also discuss how the location of salsa clubs in the city is directly related to the desire of some Latin Americans to avoid the surveillance of authorities.

### **3. Latin Americans throughout London**

One of my aims in this section is to provide a socio-cultural map of where Latin Americans are starting to position in London. I will discuss how the presence of Latin American cultural forms and practices in specific locations of the city is directly related to different social experiences and time-space practices across London. The intention is to highlight the positions that Latin Americans are occupying in London and how certain cultural practices are constituted within a set of specific power relations. Throughout the second part of this section I will address how Latin Americans participate in constructing a Latin cultural identity in particular areas of the city. First I will provide a general view of the different organisations and services that provided help and advice to Latin Americans in London.

#### **3.1 Organisations and services**

The initiative to organise the different Latin American groups in London was an aim of many Latin Americans who settled in Britain and who soon after their arrival experienced cultural isolation and had difficulty to adapt to English society. These problems were strengthened by the fact that many Latin Americans came with a limited knowledge of

English language. Latin Americans were working very hard with almost no time and place to share or socialise with other Latin Americans in London.

Another element that strengthened these problems was the fact that, unlike citizens of the Commonwealth, the British government has no moral obligation to provide any help for Latin Americans. This was highlighted in an article published by Judy Hirst, in New Statement and Society, who argued that Latin Americans were an 'invisible community' for the government.

Latin American migrants are an invisible community, ..., of little interest to politicians because, as non-Commonwealth citizens, they don't have the right to vote. With few exceptions, local authority support has been 'terrible' - and the community is anyway too dispersed to make an impact on any one borough. Nor are Latin Americans eligible for ethnic minority funding provisions under Section 11 of the Local Government Act: the regulations also only apply to 'persons of Commonwealth origin' (Hirst, 1988).

This demonstrates that at the political level Latin Americans were almost non-existent for the government, increasing their problems in this country. Thus, it became important, for many Latin Americans, to exist as an organised community in order to have an impact on the government so as to be able to receive economic and social support. Many initiatives developed from the awareness of these problems and from an intention to improve the situation of Latin Americans in London.

The Latin American House was one of the first attempts to organise the different Latin American groups in London. The Latin American House provided a space for organisations (set up to help and advise Latin Americans) to operate under the same building. Before going into detail about the Latin American House I would like to provide an overview of the different organisations that operated from the House during the year this research was carried out. There were several organisations providing help and advice to Latin Americans in London like for example, a health clinic which aimed to provide initial treatment and health advice to Latin Americans whose status was

not solved or who had language difficulties communicating their health problems.

Women's organisations, legal and social services were also set up to provide advice and help for Latin American women, individuals and families who were facing problems in this country. A child care centre for single mothers and a language tuition centre were set up with the intention to teach Spanish to children of Latin American parents and English speakers interested in learning the language.

There have also been several attempts to organise and provide information to the Latin Americans living in Britain from outside the Latin American House through media forms and cultural activities. Media forms in London play an important role in providing information about the situation in the different countries of Latin America and about Latin American cultural activities, artistic events, clubs and restaurants in Britain and other parts of Europe. There are two regularly published newspapers: Crónica Latina was founded in 1984 by Juan Salgado, first as Notas de Colombia before adopting the current name in 1986. During the time of this research, Crónica Latina was published once a month and mainly covered the lives of Latin Americans in London along with news from Latin America. It also included a broad coverage of arts and contained advice columns about health and immigration issues. Noticias Latin America is also published in London but is more oriented towards news from Latin America. Information about Latin Americans in London is included with articles from various other European countries (including Sweden, Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland). Radio Spectrum (55.8 AM) is an 'ethnic minority' broadcasting service that was established in 1990 and which features a programme dealing with issues from Spain and Latin America between 3:00 and 4:00 pm each day. Whilst I was carrying out this research, a cassette newspaper had begun to be distributed.

Independent meetings and activities arranged for particular subjects of interest are organised by different groups of Latin Americans in London. For example, during the year this research was carried out, once a month artists, poets, film makers, students and actors would gather together (each month at a different house) with the idea of creating a

space to talk in Spanish about their works as in England they usually had to talk about their works in English. They also wanted to create the opportunity to meet other Latin American people doing similar works in London. Sport events were also important for different Latin American groups in London. The Lambeth and Clapham football leagues organised the 'Alfredo Fernández' Cup and 'Libertadores de América' throughout the year. A Latin American Spring Tournament of Basketball, Volleyball and Football for children and women is also organised throughout the summer every year.

Other organisations and solidarity campaign groups have been set up with the aim of establishing links between Britain and some Latin American countries, and to provide economic and political support to individual Latin American countries. For example, there are various Anglo-Latin societies (Anglo-Peruvian, Chilean, Brazilian societies) promoting friendly relationships between the countries involved. Solidarity campaign groups like the Cuban, Mexican and Nicaraguan solidarity groups were highly active during that year. These groups would occasionally organise special music nights at some of the established salsa clubs or organize their own event as was the case of the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign, with Club Clandestino.

There are also other initiatives that have been set up as a way of generating extra income whilst providing a space of interaction and entertainment for many Latin Americans in London. This was the case of Club 20, which was organised by a group of twenty Colombians. This club operated as a co-operative in which duties, responsibilities and profits were distributed among the twenty people involved in the project. Club 20 was organised every Sunday afternoon and it ran for about six years until 1992. It was initially set up as an attempt to overcome some of the problems that Latin Americans were facing in England. Three objectives were pursued. First, there was a growing concern about the children that were growing up or born in England. In this respect Club 20 was interested in creating a cultural space in which their children could get together and talk in Spanish. Second, Club 20 was also a meeting point for Colombians to eat typical food, listen to music and get to know other Latin Americans. Although at the

beginning it was mainly for Colombians there was an attempt to attract other Latin American groups like the Ecuadorians and Peruvians. The intention was not just to provide cultural facilities and entertainment, but it was also a way of sharing information about legal rights in England and it was a source of income for the people involved in organising the Club.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, there are a number of services, organisations and activities run by Latin Americans in London. Although there have been several attempts to organise the different groups of Latin Americans in London, for many it is still too early to speak about a Latin American community. Nacho Gálvez, a Chilean political refugee who during the first years after his arrival was actively involved in the development of the Latin American House in London and in trying to organise the different groups, believes that,

... there are many cultural differences amongst the diversity of Latin Americans. Though it is true that we speak the same language and share the same historical past, we are very different from each other. ... Really, I believe that it is very difficult to talk about a Latin community as such. What exists is a number of Latin Americans dispersed in London and some with similar interests get together. ... Latinos identify with their little groups. There is no identification as Latin American, feeling part of a great nation, no, it is not that way, unfortunately. Latinos try to maintain their national identities through little things: football, handicrafts and music.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Personal interview with Rosario Hernández, 3 December 1993 at Club Tropical las Palmas, 10 Westmoreland Rd. SE17. Rosario is also involved in the organisation of the Colombian Carnival and during the year in which this research was carried out she was co-owner of Club Tropical las Palmas, a Colombian restaurant in Camberwell.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with Nacho Gálvez at Club Bahía, Vauxhall, 18 March 1994. Interview was held in Spanish, original follows: Pienso que hay muchas diferencias culturales entre los diversos Latino Americanos. Si bien es cierto que hablamos el mismo idioma y tenemos el mismo pasado cultural somos bastante distinto uno de otro. ... De verdad creo que es bien difícil hablar de una comunidad latina como tal, lo que existe es una cantidad de Latino Americanos desgregados en Londres y que algunos de ellos se reúnen con algunos que tienen intereses similares. ... Los latinos se identifican con sus pequeños grupos, no hay una identificación como latinoamericano, sentirse parte de una gran nación no, no es así. Desafortunadamente. Los latinos tratan de mantener sus identidades nacionales a través de cosas muy pequeñas, fútbol, artesanía, música.

Although some Latin Americans maintained that Latin Americans do not exist as an organised community, for others like for example, Rosario, who has lived in Britain since 1974 and has been involved in the organisation of Colombian cultural activities, Latin Americans exist as a community because there are different organisations providing help and advice to Latin Americans in Britain. When she arrived there was 'nothing', people were not aware of their rights nor of what the government could give them. She recalled that at a political level Latin Americans were almost non-existent for the government. Hence, in order to be acknowledged and receive economic support it was important to exist as an organised community.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to these attempts to organise Latin American groups in London in terms of ideas about a community, individual entrepreneurs have also attempted commercial initiatives. It is to these which I now turn the discussion as these have been a further element that has contributed to the visible presence and representation of Latin American identities in London.

### **3.2 Mapping out the locations**

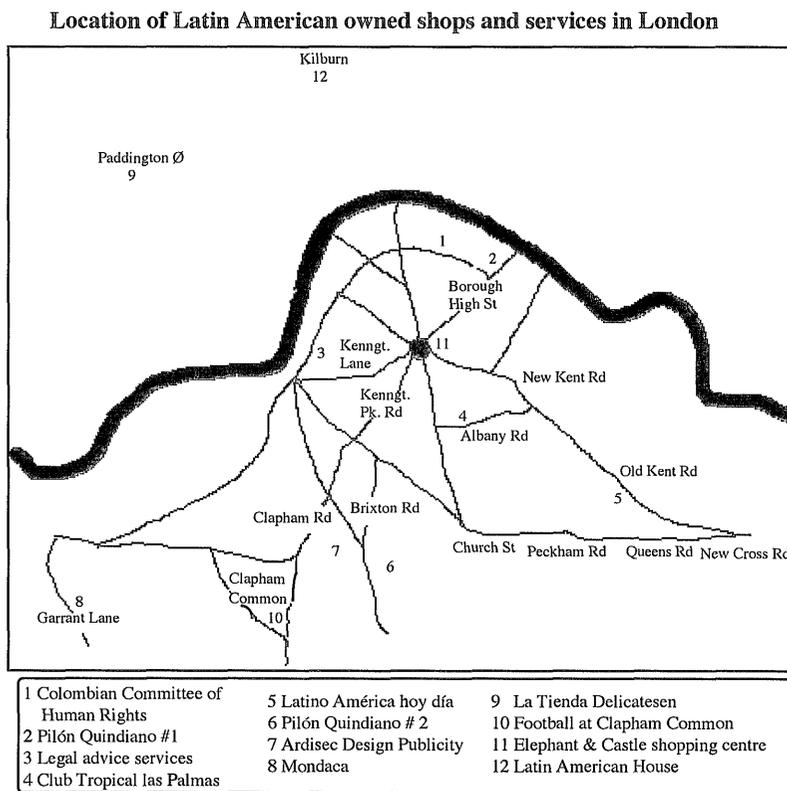
In this section I am concerned with the cultural and economic presence of Latin Americans in London during the year this research was carried out. It should be clear that in this section I refer to those businesses opened by Latin Americans who have settled in England, not to those clubs and restaurants around the West End that addressed a 'Latin' subject but which were not owned by Latin Americans (these will be included in the next chapter).

There are certain areas of the city where Latin Americans are starting to position themselves economically. Most of the shops and restaurants owned by Latin Americans are located south of the River Thames where small businesses have been set up around the administrative boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark. Tracing the route on a London map

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<sup>28</sup> From interview with Rosario Hernández, 3 December 1993.

shows the area within which the major concentration of shops or restaurants are located (see figure 3.1).



**figure 3.1**

This map presents where Latin Americans have started to locate in London whilst creating and negotiating routes through out the city. To explain this map I will start at the Elephant and Castle shopping Centre where ten shops owned by Latin Americans were operating during the year of this research. Many shops have been opened within the area that surrounds the Elephant and Castle shopping centre. Opening from the ring of roads around Elephant and Castle there are around twelve shops or restaurants. The shops are located around Brixton, Vauxhall and Clapham Common underground stations. Elephant

and Castle, Camberwell, Peckham and Borough could be identified as areas in which these shops are located. This map shows that the economic and cultural activity is most visible in very specific parts of London.

To further explain these locations it is important to mention the socio-economic context in which Latin Americans were starting to locate in London. There are specific economic and political reasons why a Latin American presence was starting to be detected in particular areas of London.<sup>29</sup> The cases of the Elephant and Castle shopping centre and the Latin American House at Kilburn are given here as examples to explain this point.

The Latin American House was established as a direct result of the Greater London Council's policies at a particular moment. From 1981 the Greater London Council (GLC) was controlled by the Labour group who had a strong political agenda in which a cultural politics of identity - prioritising inequalities due to race, ethnicity, class and sexuality - was central. These policies were mainly concerned with re-distributing resources to take into account the needs of those groups who had been excluded. It was also concerned with improving housing, creating employment and providing transportation for the poor, women and ethnic groups (Hall, J, 1990). It was within this context that Latin Americans were recognised as another growing minority group in London. It was also within this context that the GLC provided funds to buy what is now the Latin American House, located at Kilburn. The Latin American House, founded in 1986, was bought within the last months of Greater London Council's existence. Major debates around the abolition of GLC were held from 1984 to 1985. The GLC was finally abolished by the Conservative central government on the 31 March 1986. When the abolition was definite many funding proposals were approved by the GLC (Hall, J, 1990). It was at this moment

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<sup>29</sup> If considering the 1991 census the boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster appear as the areas in which most Latin Americans lived. However, it was in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark where most of the Latin American owned shops were established. Many Latin Americans who I talked to often mentioned that these were the areas where many Latin Americans lived because these were the areas in which most of the employment was. However I would not like to draw any conclusion regarding this information because as I mentioned earlier there were a number of Latin Americans in London who have overstayed in Britain and thus not registered in the 1991 figures.

that the Latin American Advisory Committee,<sup>30</sup> managed to get £200,000 to buy the house. The allocation of the money was approved near to the date when the GLC was due to be abolished. This put pressure on finding a place. It was difficult finding a suitable building and there were also many disagreements about the most suitable location. However, the fact that the GLC was about to be abolished sped-up the process of buying a house.<sup>31</sup> After the abolition of the GLC, the responsibility for funding matters was taken over by the London Boroughs Grants Scheme (LBGS). In 1987, a year after the abolition of the GLC, the Latin American Cultural Centre lost its grant. Organisations like 'Comunidad Latinoamericano', 'Latin American Children's Project' and 'Chile Democrático's nursery project' also lost their funding during this year (Hirst, 1988). Support from the GLC was eliminated and affected the different groups that benefited from these programs.

The point I want to highlight from this is that the Latin American House (Later Latin American Association)<sup>32</sup> was a direct result of the policies of a particular governmental institution at a specific moment of disintegration and political conflicts. Hence, the existence and support for the Latin American House and the different organisations it houses had relied on local state support and this has been an unstable source of existence. Its existence is important in that it attempts to address and solve some of the problems that many Latin Americans faced in London. However, as has also been acknowledged in a research proposal prepared by the Latin American House, 'An entrepreneur culture has

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<sup>30</sup> The initiative of applying for funding to create a centre for Latin Americans in London came from various sources. However, as this committee existed as a formal body, the various groups joined and the application was finally put forward by the Latin American Advisory Committee. From interview with Nacho Gálvez.

<sup>31</sup> Personal interview with Nacho Gálvez. 18 March 1994.

<sup>32</sup> In Spanish 'Casa Latinoamericana', as it was translated into English as Latin American House Association, it created confusion because it was thought to be a housing association. Thus, the change to Latin American Association in English. Although in Spanish still known as 'Casa Latinoamericana'.

also touched this community and through this it participates in a modern British way of life'.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in moving from Kilburn to Elephant and Castle I address how Latin American entrepreneurs were participating in the economy of London at a moment of economic decline. The Elephant and Castle shopping centre was one of the first in Britain when it opened in 1965. Apart from its location: 'Marooned by hurtling traffic on a life-threatening system of roundabouts in Southwark, south London, ...' (Hall, M. 1992, 18); and in one of the areas of highest unemployment, the Centre was also strongly affected by the economic recession at the end of the 1980's (Hall, M., 1992). Almost all the shops were closing or ceasing operations. By 1991, for example, there were hardly any shops open on the first floor of the Centre. A year later Latin Americans started opening shops on the first level of the shopping centre. La Fogata opened in June 1992, followed by Inara Travels whose manager tried to encourage other Latin Americans to open up shops at the Centre. By 1994 there were ten shops owned by Latin Americans; fritters, food shops, travel agency, a jeweller, work agency, hair dresser and a tailor shop.

Latin Americans started moving into a shopping centre that was depleted due to a recession at a time when many were leaving the centre (Hall, M., 1992). The economic situation affecting the shopping centre at a particular moment was an important element stimulating the movement of Latin Americans into the shopping centre. Low rent was one of the most attractive features. Latin Americans with some capital to invest or with an initial loan started their business at the Elephant and Castle shopping centre. Also, cheap rent within the area made it economically possible for Latin Americans to start their business around the Elephant and Castle. Usually they looked for locations that had not been used for a long time or that had been completely closed for several years. They repaired these places and put up their shops or restaurants.

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<sup>33</sup> From 'Over thirty Latin American cultures within one building', prepared by Latin American House Association. No date.

As positive as this could be for a group that is starting to locate within a big city like London, it is important to point out that Latin American shops are still a minority within the Centre. At the moment the Elephant and Castle shopping centre is in a marginal location in relation to other shopping centres that are connected to underground or train stations in London. The Centre is being used as a transit route by those using the Network South East train service, but it did not start as such. It is marginal if we compare it to High Street Kensington underground station in which the entrance is through the shopping centre; or to the shopping centres at Wood Green or Brent Cross built on the outskirts of the city. The division between inner-city shopping centres and malls on the outskirts of the city are creating even more social divisions within London (Hall M, 1992).

Elephant & Castle shows the signs of a deprived inner-city shopping area which is frequented by low income groups and which has been aesthetically neglected. Hence, Latin Americans started investing in a place when there was no guarantee of economic success. Latin Americans were running businesses in areas that were in decline and had been vacated at the end of the 1980's boom. This is an indication of how Latin Americans are located in an economically marginal position within the city, but also of how the economic decline provides possibilities for those who otherwise would not have the economic capital for investment. Economically these shops are also important because these are a source of employment and income for many Latin Americans in London.

Throughout this section I have discussed how the location in which Latin Americans started organising and investing can not be isolated from the social, economical and political context in which it is occurring. These two sites (Latin American House and Elephant and Castle shopping centre) might differ in purposes, but they are both important to understand the different ways in which Latin American cultural identities are developing in London.

Elephant and Castle shopping centre, for example, has become a social meeting point for many Latin Americans in London. Thus, in this sense Latin Americans are not only participating in the economy of the shopping centre, but transforming it and in this process creating a particular Latin cultural identity. It is this issue which I will address in the next section. I will discuss the process through which a particular group of Latin American entrepreneurs and their customers, colleagues and friends have participated in transforming the shopping centre by constructing places with a particular Latin identity.

#### **4. The making of Latin American identities across places**

This section will specifically make reference to those shops run by Latin Americans and how these are mediating representations of cultural identities. I will argue that these representations can not be separated from cultural practices occurring in relation to, and in place. Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common are provided here as specific examples of this last point. I will discuss the way in which places are transformed, used and appropriated for specific cultural practices. Places in which people interact and with which they can identify. My intention is to present the ways in which a place is transformed by its usage to create a sense of identification. I will argue that it is in this way that a social relationship between place and identity develops.

Most of the shops that existed during the year in which this research was carried out offered products that were not available in England. This was the case for example at 'La Bodeguita' in Elephant and Castle shopping centre or 'La Tienda Delicatessen' at Paddington. These shops were making available products that Latin Americans could not get hold of in this country, like for example the banana leaves to wrap the 'tamales', the flour for the 'arepas' or 'empanadas', 'fríjoles' and boxes or ready mix desserts from Latin America; also, Colombian newspapers, magazines and handicrafts. These shops also include a large collection of music CD's and cassettes from Latin American artists. Greeting cards in Spanish were also being sold at La Bodeguita. These shops were not only making available products, but the selection of products itself was an important part of the identity of these shops.

A further way in which these shops were mediating representations of a particular Latin American identity was through the decoration. In the case of the La Bodeguita and La Tienda, various Colombian icons were hung over the wall. Photographs of the Andes region, of popular 'barrios' of Colombia and handicrafts of the 'chiva' were part of the decoration of these shops. The 'chiva' is a bus that travels around the rural areas of Colombia. The handicrafts show the buses with fruits and people's luggage and belongings on top of the buses. These buses are painted in bright colours, usually red, blue and yellow (the colours of the Colombian flag). A photo of the Colombian football team was in both shops during the World Cup of 1994. Together with the food, and the icons, Latin music was also being played all the time. The representations of cultural identity in these cases are not generally Latin, but specifically Colombian; a direct reference to the social experiences and places from which the owners have come from.

El Pilón Quindiano was also an interesting example in which a different representation of Latin American cultural identity was mediated. Run by Colombians, this snack bar was opened on 6 November 1993. Pilón Quindiano is located in 'south London and heart of Brixton' (from leaflet). Among stalls of fruit, vegetables and fish, Pilón Quindiano was one of the units of the market at the Grandville arcade in Brixton. As a snack bar it mainly specialised in fritters, like 'almojábanas', 'arepas', 'empanadas' and 'pandebonos' which are part of the diet for many Latin American people. It also served some traditional Colombian food, like the 'Bandeja Paisa' (a plate with rice, kidney beans, fried green plantains and a fried egg). It is constructed as a little wooden house. The 'house' is divided to create the illusion of being indoors or outdoors, whether in the main room or the balcony. The balcony is at a higher level than the main room and it overlooks a stall with plantains, green bananas and coriander leaves. It is painted with very bright colours; there are trees, flowers, mountains, lakes and houses painted over the walls. There is a photocopy of an article about Colombians stuck on the wall. The article highlights all those things people forget about Colombia: Colombia does not just produce and export drugs, but coffee. It made reference to Colombia's contribution to literature and sports. It is the country of Gabriel García Márquez and of well known cyclists and

football players - not just drug cartels, state corruption and the violation of human rights. Although this article made a direct reference to Colombia, the place was also decorated with icons and objects like parrots, Argentinean 'llanero' outfit, musical instruments like wind pipes characterising mostly Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, and other handicrafts made in Latin American countries. Pilón Quindiano tried to simulate a physical place within another place, and it created an environment to 'make you feel like you are in South America', as stated in their promotional leaflet.

However, these shops were not just mediating representations of identities but playing an active cultural role amongst some Latin Americans in London. Not only were some of these shops important for maintaining links with home countries, but they were actively being used as meeting places and it is this last point that I am particularly interested in discussing next. In transforming these sites with a particular 'Latin' identity Latin American entrepreneurs were not just engaging in economic but also in cultural practices by creating places that many other Latin Americans could develop a sense of identification with, an issue I shall now discuss in more detail.

#### **4.1 Transformation of places: Elephant & Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common**

Elephant and Castle and Clapham Common will be provided as examples in which specific sites are being used and transformed for particular cultural practices. First, I will start by presenting some information that will help in understanding how Latin Americans are contributing to the identity of places such as Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common by further transforming these sites. The borough of Lambeth, specifically around the areas of Brixton and Elephant and Castle, have become known for the concentrations of Afro-Caribbean populations. In Lambeth 30% of the population is of an 'ethnic minority group', from which 13% are Black Caribbeans, 7%

Africans<sup>34</sup> and 2% Latin Americans. These groups have had an impact on the local borough council, which has developed an agenda to address particular problems and concerns of these groups. In the case of Lambeth, for example, the borough's council has demonstrated a further interest in Latin Americans by supporting cultural activities through sponsorship.

From these details, the issue I want to draw attention to is that these groups have had a visible impact on these areas, not only in terms of government support as in the case of Lambeth, but in terms of the identity of places. For example, the areas of Brixton and Elephant and Castle are often associated with Afro-Caribbean groups who have not only settled there, but have transformed particular sites whilst providing an identity to these places (Massey, 1995). To this issue I want to add that Latin Americans have contributed to the identity of these sites by further transforming places such as the Elephant and Castle shopping centre so as to be a 'Latin' place in London; one that in certain respects makes direct reference to the geography and architecture found in certain regions of Latin America, but one that is sometimes over-emphasised in relation to the surroundings of the shopping centre. Thus, places are always changing and shifting identities as these are open to transformation. It is in this sense that Latin Americans were also contributing to, and becoming a visible part of, London's ethnoscape.

#### **Elephant & Castle shopping centre**

Elephant and Castle shopping centre has become an information centre. Leaflets and newspapers were the major sources of information: from legal advice, currency exchange centres, services for cheap phone calls to Latin America and Africa, inter flora services to Latin American countries; sending money to Latin America, moving back to Latin America or sending parcels or money were some of the services being offered.

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<sup>34</sup> Source: London: Facts and figures, 1995 edition, London: HMSO. Calculation of Latin Americans from was done by cross reference to appendix 3.

The Elephant and Castle shopping centre was also a meeting point for many Latin Americans and Afro-Caribbean populations. In an article about shopping centres, Elephant and Castle was described by one of its visitors as a place for socialising rather than simply shopping. Paraphrasing him the news reporter wrote,

Though the Elephant looks its age - there's not much of the dreaded 'leisure shopping experience' to be had here, and at least no one's trying to flog you a 'lifestyle'. ... 'This is as good as a top quality centre in terms of footfall,' ... (Footfall is mall-speak for people wandering about) (Hall, M, 1992, 19-20).

For Latin Americans living in London the Elephant and Castle was not just a shopping centre to buy food, products from their home countries or information, but also a meeting point. During the week many people pass by to have their lunch or snack at the Centre; or perhaps to solve a problem, get some information or just to have a chat. It was on Saturdays when many Latin Americans gathered in the first floor of the centre around the Latin shops. Many people gathered in front of 'La Bodeguita' or 'La Fogata' to talk, whilst eating or waiting for their empanada. It was only on Saturdays when 'La Bodeguita' prepares fritters. For many the Centre on a Saturday is 'a bit like home'.<sup>35</sup> A short stroll around the shopping centre made me realise why. Saturdays were very busy; the atmosphere was lively, people were talking, eating or waiting for someone to arrive. The music played was salsa or cumbia<sup>36</sup>; the language spoken was Spanish with a variety of accents from different regions of Latin America; the food eaten were 'empanadas', 'tamales', 'fríjoles' or 'patacones'. However, these elements were interrelated with the images of Latin America on the walls, and the structures of some of the shops.

The shops at Elephant and Castle shopping centre were constructed with the illusion of being outdoors. Constructed of wood, these shops were in a row in the middle of the corridor (previously the floor space of the centre) as if they were a row of shops in a little

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<sup>35</sup> Silbers of Inara Travels, in Malcom Macalister Hall. "A nation of shoppers", *Observer Magazine*, 13 December 1992 p18.

<sup>36</sup> Colombian popular dance music which combines modern and folkloric elements.

street. These shops were organised and decorated so as to resemble many of the little shops you could find in some rural areas or inner-country towns in many countries of Latin America. Thus, the representation of cultural identities here was interrelated with the social interactions occurring in the place.

The social experience of Elephant and Castle shopping centre is different for those Londoners who use it merely as a transit route, to visit a supermarket or to make a train connection and for those Latin Americans who use it as a meeting place. As I have explained, the first floor of the centre has been appropriated and transformed and later used by Latin Americans to create a specific 'local' Latin place in London.

#### **Football at Clapham Common**

In the case of Clapham Common Latin American cultural identities were mainly articulated through the different local football teams. Gathering on Sundays at Clapham Common to support the Latin American football league in London has become a social activity for many Latin Americans. The Latin American football league has been gathering at Clapham South since 1980. Its existence is communicated through word of mouth publicity and it is not that easy to find. I went with someone who knew the exact location of 'La Cancha' (The Pitch) within the park. Whilst I was waiting for the person at Clapham South underground station I could identify those who were going to 'La Cancha', because they were speaking Spanish or wearing baseball caps or sweatshirts with labels of Latin beers, or other icons related to Latin American countries on their t-shirts and caps.

The football players and a few people gathered at Clapham South early on Sunday mornings to organise the teams and put-up the food stalls. One of the stalls was prominently visible, since apart from a table with the food to be sold, it was covered by a three side tent with yellow, blue and red horizontal stripes. For those who recognised it, this was obviously the Colombian stall because these are the colours of the Colombian flag. There were also the Peruvian, Ecuadorian, Bolivian and Chilean stalls. Passing by

each stall you could listen to the different types of music (i.e. salsa, cumbia or merengue) coming from the cassette-radios on the stalls.

Most of the teams at Clapham Common are named after the countries or cities they represent, like for example, Bolivia Marka, Atlético Perú, Real Perú, Ecuador, Club Deportivo Chile, Departamento Pereira or L.D.U Quito. This is different to the teams at Lambeth football league which carry the names of their local supporters: La Tienda, Condors Jrs, Quintana Travel, Cali Barco Latino or Emigrante Latino, for example. Although the teams at Clapham sought to represent specific countries or cities of Latin America the players are not necessarily from these, as a Bolivian or Brazilian player could be playing for Ecuador or Perú.

Most of the people started to arrive from two in the afternoon. People gathered for more than football. As Leonardo Sozza, a Chilean political refugee who participated at La Cancha, has commented when interviewed for an article published in The Guardian: 'You arrive in London on flights from South America on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Many people come straight here from the airport: they've been told that you meet people who can advise you about immigration problems' (in Salewicz, 1991).

'La Cancha' has become a meeting point for many Latin Americans and it is also a family event. This is a characteristic of many of the events being organised by different Latin American groups in London. Groups of friends were sitting on the grass talking about their everyday lives, whilst the children were running around, riding bicycles or playing football. Amongst Latin Americans in London there is a growing concern for children growing-up in England. They want their children to learn part of their culture. On one of the sides of the big 'Cancha' there was an improvised small 'Cancha' for the children. The parents had prepared small goals and bought national football uniforms for the children. More than keeping them entertained it is an attempt to encourage their interest in football.

It is important to point out that there is also a women's Latin American football league which takes place on the opposite side of the Common. An account of this is not presented because the league was organising the teams during the year I was doing the ethnographic research.

At Clapham Common representations of cultural identities were articulated through national icons, such as the flag or the colours of the flag of different countries. The flag as an expression of national identity has become a strong cultural symbol in London. National identities rather than Latin were also emphasised through the 'national local' teams together with the 'national' food stalls. Overall, it was the Latin American football league gathered at Clapham Common.

The experience of Clapham Common, thus, demonstrates how Latin Americans have created a sense of identification by transforming part of this park into a very particular event-place. This park is a transitory space which is regularly transformed by Latin Americans into a very particular cultural place but at a particular time. It operates on Sundays afternoons when most Latin Americans were not working. In this sense Latin Americans were creating particular routes across London according to the very specific time-space processes they were involved in that in turn led to the creation of specific 'Latin' places.

In Clapham Common and Elephant and Castle cultural identities were also maintained through memory. In many occasions by recalling similar experiences to the one in the countries they come from, but also by imagining these experiences. For example, those who arrived eighteen years ago try to make their experience in exile one very similar to the countries and time they come from. However, the barrio bar is still in the shopping centre, the cafe opens on to the sights and sounds of Brixton market and the football league is part of an English park on a Sunday morning. For those children and youths who are growing-up in England their knowledge about these countries and cultural practices is imagined through these 're-creations' of the adults. For many of these children the only experience of Latin American cultural identity would be the one they

get in England. The activities of Latin Americans at Elephant and Castle and Clapham Common demonstrates how people can use a space - a route through a shopping centre or a park - and create a sense of identification by transforming it into a very particular place and then participating at these sites.

## 5. Summary

This chapter started by outlining how immigration controls are used by nation-states (in this case Britain) to delineate boundaries around specific territories and how this serves the purpose of nation building. In this respect I briefly discussed how the relation between nation and immigration controls serves to create a sense of belonging and exclusion. With specific reference to Latin American groups in London I argued that immigration regulations in Great Britain have a direct impact on the articulation of cultural identities; as for those who, as defined by the nation-state, are not nationals of Britain have to negotiate and confront these controls in quite distinctive ways.

To explain this I discussed the importance of the Immigration Act of 1971 for Latin American immigration into Britain. This Act provided a possibility for many Latin Americans, the biggest number of these being Colombians, to come into Britain with work permits. In the case of refugees special programs were set-up by the government after strong political pressure from various groups and solidarity campaign groups; specifically after the military coup in Chile. I also mentioned that, although further changes to immigration controls had been implemented in an attempt to stop the incoming of immigrants, Latin Americans are still coming into Britain. Thus, although new laws are introduced and tougher and tighter immigration controls implemented, these can be negotiated and 'subverted'. This was the case of, for example, many Latin Americans who come into Britain with a tourist visa but with the intention of working. These groups as overstayers are treated as illegal immigrants and if discovered, deported.

My point in discussing these details has been to highlight that the movement of people around the world is regulated by policies of nation-states and that the movement of

people in place is directly related to the ways in which these policies directly affect particular groups of people according to their legal status, as stipulated in these laws. This I suggested is important for understanding why for Latin Americans the experience of being 'Latin' and any participation in London's 'Latin scene' involves confronting state regulation of citizenship and enforcement of immigration laws; creating different spatial routes through the city, operating at different temporal cycles and experiencing the social segmentation of the city.

I took this as a starting to discuss how the economic and cultural presence of Latin Americans can not be isolated from social, economic and political contexts in which they developed. With this perspective in mind I presented and discussed the locations in which Latin American entrepreneurs were starting to set up small businesses. I referred to how these places were not just mediating representations of Latin American cultural identities, but actively being used for specific social relations and economic practices.

With the examples of Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common I discussed how Latin Americans were delineating boundaries on places, transforming them and using them for specific social relations and cultural practices. In this respect Latin Americans were establishing new social relationships across these places as an active part of creating and negotiating routes through the city. In this process Latin Americans were delineating new spatial boundaries in these places and establishing a new relationship with these places.

Hence, in the case of Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common a relation between the actual social experience of cultural identities and places developed. A relationship that has developed by the people who re-create and participate of cultural practices in these places and by those who use these as meeting points. Although places have no necessary relationship with cultural identities (Hall, 1995), people create and develop a relationship with them. Thus, it is through transformation and participation that a relationship between cultural identities and places is established.

In the next chapter I will move on to discuss how, in creating routes through the city, Latin Americans confront a contrast between self supporting attempts to maintain a sense of continuous, yet changing, identity and the different constructions of Latinness that can be found in many of London's bars, clubs and restaurants. In the next chapter, focusing more specifically on the salsa clubs, I will discuss how non-Latin Americans also participate in the construction and communication of distinct Latin identities in London.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROUTES AND ROUTINES: SALSA MUSIC CLUBS IN LONDON

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on how particular Latin identities are constructed and communicated through a selection of salsa clubs in London. Whilst exploring the different elements and processes in constructing the identity of the clubs so as to be Latin, my intention is to also explore the relations of power that develop through a range of practices involving various groups, individuals and organisations (such as club owners, disc jockeys, promoters, dancers, commercial companies and local authorities). This chapter adds to my discussion in the previous chapter by introducing a further level of analysis which helps to understand the processes that contribute to the identities of specific salsa and 'Latin' clubs in London. Before the main discussion I shall make some comments about how the specific discussion in the chapter is related to recent writings about dance clubs and their audiences.

#### 1.1 Music scenes and time-space practices as routes and routines

Most recent research dealing with music clubs has been concerned with what is defined as 'dance music' by the Anglo-American recording industry.<sup>1</sup> The focus of this type of research has usually been on audiences as a subculture - either involved in appropriating symbols and constructing a distinct sense of alternative style (McRobbie, 1991; Redhead, 1990; Chambers, 1985; Willis, 1990), or engaging in using various types of 'cultural capital' and knowledge as markers of distinction (Thornton, 1995). This research has been mainly concerned with distinct groups of young people and the emphasis on youth subcultures has tended to maintain the idea of self-contained groups defined by musical

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to clarify that dance events are not limited to 'dance music' nor to music clubs. See for example anthropological research on dance events in Greece by Jane Cowan (1990); and Judith Hannah's (1992) discussion of performance dance events.

taste and alternative means of symbolic resistance (to dominant culture). In critiquing these approaches in relation to popular music studies, Lawrence Grossberg (1992b) has argued that because of the diversity and dispersion of audiences within popular culture there has been a tendency to identify and define specific audiences by reference to a text or a self contained and limited cultural group. Instead, Grossberg proposes an alternative approach to the study of popular music audiences; one which define audiences in terms of what he call 'affective investments' (1984, 227). This he uses to refer to the ways in which music affect us. Affect, Grossberg explains, 'refers to that dimension or plane of our lives that we experience as moods, feelings, desires and enervation' (Grossberg, 1992a, 164). These emotions can be expressed and experienced differently according to the relations established amongst three levels, described by Grossberg as affective difference, affective alliance and affective structure. The first refer to the study of music's function in relation to culture, the second in relation to social groups and the third to structures of organisation available (1992a). With this approach Grossberg does not seem to move beyond the definition of audience as unified, and by treating music as universal, in the sense that 'it is more than a language', he tends to attribute to music a crucial role in social change as it has the ability to form 'alliances' across space.

Although this way of approaching audiences is an attempt to understand audiences across spatial relations rather than as contained within a given geographical locale, it still tends to romanticise music as a universal language, leaving aside the issue of power relations that might be involved in such alliances.

In an attempt to move beyond music audiences as contained subcultures and in order to understand musical practices across space, Will Straw has introduced the concept of 'music scene' (1991). For Straw a music scene 'is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross fertilisation' (1991, 373). The importance of Straw's approach is that it challenges the notion of self-contained subcultures within a locale. Instead, his approach suggests the need for understanding musical scenes as 'a larger international musical culture'.

Although Straw acknowledges the diversity of a group by recognising the possibilities for regional variations, he also tends to emphasise the unity of a group through the notion of 'alliances'. As David Hesmondalgh has noted

Straw's avowed aim is to seek the cultural politics of music neither in an optimistic examination of audience activity, nor in a pessimistic reading of machinations of the industry. Instead he locates the political power of music in its possibilities for forging alliances across racial and gender differences. ...But potentially what might be lost in analysis which follow Straw's, suggesting the importance of cultural links between cosmopolitan centres, is the sense of unequal distribution of power across different spaces (1996, in print).

The importance of Straw's approach is that he introduces theoretical debates about space and place to studies of popular musical practices. However, as Hesmondalgh has pointed out, by privileging positive interactions across space Straw's conception of music scene lacks any sense of the way in which relations of power operate unequally across spaces (1996).

Up to a point, I follow Straw's notion of 'scene' in the sense that salsa clubs in London are part of salsa's movement around the world. Although I do not discuss in detail how salsa clubs in London interrelate with other localities as part of an international salsa scene, by focusing on salsa clubs across London I wish to consider the relations of power developing from salsa club practices in London. It is in this sense that I have developed the idea of 'routes and routines' as a way of understanding the dynamics of salsa clubs in London. The idea of routes and routines is used as a way of tracing the routes of salsa clubs in London with regard to two aspects; where the clubs are geographically located (whether permanent or moving from place to place), and the movement of participants across these locations. I argue that as people develop specific spatial patterns across places these routes are converted into routines, which at the same time contribute to the development of different networks of salsa clubs. Thus this idea of routes and routines allows for understanding the movement of people across a salsa scene in London. At the same time it allows for considering the relations of power developing from people's

movements and spatial practices. Thus, a local music scene, I argue, develops as part of a wider set of relations that can not be solely understood with reference to an audience group, the particular clubs or an international music scene; but through quite specific series of time-space processes and cultural practices. Using the conceptualisation of power-geometry already articulated in Chapter One, I will further delineate these in this chapter.

As this research was defined in terms of a setting - that of salsa clubs in London - the routes and routines discussed in this chapter are useful for understanding musical events in which Latin identities are constructed, not only in terms of how Latin American groups construct a sense of identity, but how other groups use certain ideas about Latin people and Latin America to construct the identity of a place and participate in particular cultural practices. (Dancing is central to these practices and to how participants are involved in the construction of a sense of Latin identity, and this is the subject of the following chapter). As new clubs open or as clubs re-open or move from venue to venue so participants' routines can be disrupted. Hence, the idea of routes and routines also captures change and transformation.

Thus, I hope that approaching salsa clubs through the idea of routes and routines challenges the idea of self contained musical events, as it allows for considering the relations of power of an international music scene (in the sense that salsa has reached major cities across the world) at a local level in London. In this sense the local is not treated as self-contained and bounded but out of its interaction with 'global' processes.

This chapter is divided into five separate but interconnected sections. In the first section I will discuss the routes of salsa into England by providing some general information that concentrates on the movement of salsa as a marketable category from the Caribbean and New York City to London. I also provide some information on the marketing, distribution and promotion of salsa in London. The information provided in this section will help to trace the routes of salsa into London and how a local salsa scene has developed in London. Second, and in the process of moving specifically to the clubs, I

attempt to build up an account of the different clubs that have existed in London. Particular attention will be given to those issues that have contributed to the identity of certain clubs during the year in which this research was carried out. From there I will move on to the third section in which I present the geographical location of the clubs that were operating in London whilst I was carrying out the ethnographic research (October 1993 to September 1994). The fourth section focuses on a selection of clubs that are representative of the different types of salsa clubs in London as each communicates a particular type of 'Latinness'. I discuss how club owners, promoters and disc jockeys constructed and communicated the identity of the clubs whilst positioning against or amongst existing clubs. This will be done by considering clubs' geographical location, distribution of the place, decoration, advertising and management strategies, music played and the aims and objectives of club owners. The last section of this chapter, which focuses on the routes and routines being created by participants, attempts to bring in dancers' voices and consider how participants create spatial movements across the salsa clubs whilst contributing to the creation of different networks of salsa clubs. This approach allows me to discuss the various elements through which relations of power developed from the different types of salsa clubs in London. Apart from the physical movements of participants, disc jockeys are contributing to a different set of routes through their music playing practices; thus, this section ends by mentioning how disc jockeys understand their work through 'musical routes' which are directly related to how people move on the dance floor and how music provides the possibilities for an 'imaginary' geographical journey.

I hope this approach will allow me to suggest that the processes through which the identity of places is constructed play an important part in shaping the routes and routines that people develop across particular networks of salsa clubs in London. Through these movements participants are also contributing to the identity of the clubs.

## 2. Salsa: From national and pan-Latin music to world music

In this section my intention is not to develop a chronological account of salsa, nor a description of the music itself, but to briefly mention some points regarding the movement of salsa around different geographical locations: from the Caribbean and New York City to England. My intention here is to highlight that salsa is a cultural practice and that this is important to understand salsa's spread and fusion around the world.

Salsa, if literally translated into English, means sauce, a blend of stylistic forms and rhythms that are arranged around a rhythmic matrix, called 'clave'. The clave is a rhythmic 3-2 or 2-3 pattern, often played on two wooden sticks (Quintero-Rivera, 1996).<sup>2</sup> The clave is a way of combining 'polyrhythms and melodic phrases in such a way that the melody appears to have no rhythmic connection to the underlying percussion. In addition, the movement of the "anticipated bass" seems to swing across the melodies and rhythms - rather than providing a persistent anchor to both rhythm and melody as in rock, rap or soul' (Negus, 1996). Different to the rhythmic beat (2-2 or 4-4) that characterises Anglo pop music, the rhythmic matrix of salsa does not suggest a musical hierarchy. Salsa, more than just a musical form or a rhythm, has been described as a way of making music which is a flexible blend of many styles that have developed in the Latin Caribbean and New York City and which is continually reblended and given slightly different 'flavours' in different locations (Quintero-Rivera and Alvarez, 1990).

An argument repeatedly stated in works about salsa (Quintero-Rivera, 1990, 1992; Manuel, 1991; Boggs, 1992; Calvino-Ospina, 1995) is that this music is the product of the blending of all the cultural manifestations of the ethnic amalgam that took place in the Caribbean. The musical diversity and variety of the Caribbean articulates the mixture of different ethnic groups established within the region. Kenneth Bilby has explained that 'most Caribbean musical forms are the relatively recent products of a meeting and blending of two or more older traditions on new soil, and a subsequent elaboration of

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<sup>2</sup> This clave is present in most Afro-Caribbean musics.

form' (Bilby, 1985, 182). Bilby maintains that this process has been repeating over many years and that salsa and other urban styles, such as reggae and soka, have emerged from this process. He argues that popular styles emerging from this process incorporate and absorb different influences whilst at the same time remain tied to folk roots. This process also encourages the development and growth of new hybrid styles (Bilby, 1985). Bilby points out that salsa is 'one of the more recent developments in a long line of musical innovations stretching back several decades' (1985, 208).

Within this context, salsa is an urban music that developed through the processes of immigration from the Spanish Caribbean Islands of Puerto Rico and Cuba to New York City. After the defeat of Spain in the Spanish American war of 1898, Puerto Rico and Cuba, then Spanish Colonies, were handed over to the United States. Migration from Cuba and Puerto Rico into the United States, principally New York, has occurred since very early on in this century. After the Cuban revolution of 1959 the United States broke all economic and diplomatic relations with Cuba but Cuban musicians playing in New York continued to play an important role in the spread and development of what has been labelled as salsa.

In the case of Puerto Rico, still a colony of the United States, the communication and immigration process continues today. The processes of migration, urbanisation and industrialisation experienced since then adds another element to 'the music scene' in Puerto Rico and New York. Works by Félix Padilla (1989) and Jorge Duany (1984) discuss the importance of salsa within New York City and Puerto Rico. Jorge Duany describes the 'process of migration, urbanisation, industrialisation and proletarianization of the Puerto Rican labour force' (1984, 196) and states that it is within this context that salsa emerges in both places (Puerto Rico and New York City). He adds, 'salsa, then, is the product of a semi-nomadic population perpetually in transit between its homeland and exile' (1984, 197). Padilla and Duany emphasise how salsa interplays between New York and Puerto Rico. They both share the position that salsa's content or lyrics are a major component of this music. Padilla discusses how salsa provides the sense of co-

operation and unity within Latin America, the Spanish-speaking community in the United States and America as a whole. From being a rhythm associated with national identity salsa developed as an expression of the Latin American population in New York City.

Here I have only briefly sketched some points of a long and ongoing process that has been extensively discussed and researched in previous works.<sup>3</sup> As Bilby pointed out,

Numerous Caribbean styles have managed to break through ethnic and geographical barriers. Some have succeeded in attracting substantial international followings indeed and have inspired important new musical developments by non-Caribbean musicians. In the history of Caribbean popular music, the phenomenon that has come to be called 'crossover' (in the jargon of the popular music industry) goes back farther than one might think (1985, 212).

The fusion that emerged from the contact of different groups in New York and later through the commercialisation of salsa created the possibilities for salsa to spread around the world. The importance of this point is that salsa as constituted within an amalgam of rhythms and practices can articulate its association with the different cultures it has come in touch with. These points are important to understanding the development and routes of salsa from the Spanish Caribbean to New York and to other Latin American countries, such as Venezuela and Colombia. Also, the later routes of salsa to other countries around the world such as Japan, France, Italy, Switzerland, Holland, Germany, Canada and England. As a result of this movement and outside of New York and other Latin American countries salsa - which also developed as a marketable category - is promoted and sold (by music and media industries, and record shops) as 'Latin', 'world' or

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<sup>3</sup> The process of musical fusion within the Caribbean has been researched by Angel Quintero-Rivera (1990, 1992, 1996), Luis Manuel Alvarez (1990, 1992), James Robbins (1990), Leonardo Acosta (1983) and Argelis León (1991) amongst others. As it developed in New York City it has been accounted in the works of John Storms Roberts (1975, 1985), Peter Manuel (1991), Ruth Glasser (1990, 1995), Félix Padilla (1989, 1990), Jorge Duany (1984), Vernon Boggs (1992) and César Miguel Rondón (1980) amongst others. In relation to the development of salsa in Colombia, Alejandro Ulloa (1992) and José Arteaga (1990), also, the book by Calvo Ospina (1995) has a chapter about salsa in Colombia.

'international' music.<sup>4</sup> Whether salsa, Latin, world or international these marketing strategies and practices signal the way in which the categorisation and placement of salsa in record shops is dependent on geographical boundaries and definitions.

My intention here is to highlight that salsa has been and is given different meanings through different time-space movements. Salsa's routes around the world are in part related to media exposure and distribution, and as this has taken place salsa has been placed within international music networks, whilst creating (as in the case of London) a local salsa scene. Hence, as salsa is placed geographically in different locales around the world so are different localised identities created, represented and experienced. It is my intention, in the next section, to explore how one element of the 'global' movement of salsa involves commerce and industry as well as the movement of people who bring the music as part of the process through which they recreate - in London - part of the cultural practices they experienced in the Latin American countries from which they migrated.

### **2.1 Mapping out the routes of salsa in London**

Although the body of my research is on Latin clubs, it is important to bear in mind that the emergence of salsa music clubs did not happen in isolation, but along with the growing number of Latin Americans in England, the growing interest of non-Latin American people in the music, the music industry's strategies, the interest of record labels and the sponsorship of borough councils and embassies.

Latin Americans have played an important role in the spread of Latin music in London. The contact with Latin music in this country started many years ago, around the 1920s with the popularity of tango. However, the recent popularity of salsa music is related to the immigration processes of the 1970s. Different groups brought with them, or asked their relatives to send them, the music they listened to in the countries they came from. They started organising house parties, or getting together in community centres to share

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<sup>4</sup> From observations at record shops in London, Paris and Brussels. Also refer to Shuhei Hosokawa's (1995) who mentioned that salsa is also refer to as international in Tokyo, Japan and Abidjan, Africa.

their food and music with other Latin Americans. Although for many Latin Americans in London a sense of Latin identity has been articulated through salsa, it is also important to recognise that there are differences among different Latin American groups. As I explained in Chapter Three there are differences depending on the reasons for different groups being in this country, their economic situation and the countries they emigrated from. Although there are cultural similarities, there are also political or geographical rivalries and economic differences. Hence, the Latin Americans groups I refer to in this thesis are those for whom music, particularly salsa, is part of the cultural repertoire through which they have developed and maintained a sense of identity.

However, the spread of salsa music was not simply due to the presence of Latin Americans. There was also a growing interest in the music among the music industries and non-Latin American people. The routes of salsa music into London can be related to simultaneous efforts among music industries, embassies, clubs, and other groups. Music industries, record shops, magazines, radio stations, clubs, solidarity campaigns and embassies were all acting for their own objectives and purposes, but at the same time they were developing links with each other. The networks developing from these relationships have contributed to the routes of salsa into London and to the development of a local salsa scene which at the same time is part of wider international networks.

In music magazines, representatives of the music industry have pointed out their interest in Latin American artists as a source of 'repertoire' for 'global' markets. The music industry is recognising the potential of Latin American music as a market, not only in Spanish speaking countries, but also in various countries around the world (Scott, 1994).<sup>5</sup> There is a growing interest in Latin music among different networks in the music industry. Several articles in trade music magazines like Business Music International and Billboard point to the importance of Latin American popular music as a market in Europe; and specialised magazines like Latin Music Magazine and Latin Beat have been

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<sup>5</sup> Refer also to articles published in Music Business International by James Bourne (1993) and to the world report published in the same magazine.

published. Also world music magazines, for example World Music and Global Music and Culture: Rhythm Music Magazine, have included articles on salsa music. These magazines are addressed to a 'world music audience' and within this context salsa is referred to as 'world music'. This is a problematic term because it addresses certain people in specific geographical locations, within the context of Anglo-American music. It is a term created for specific marketing reasons and it is an all inclusive label for all non-English language foreign music. There have been attempts to create and describe what a 'world music' audience might be. One editorial wrote of its readers as 'world music' listeners who 'are intelligent and cosmopolitan in their outlook and tastes. ... For listeners like this, old barriers, boundaries and stereotypes no longer apply - but they do need accurate information more than ever to put it all in context' (1993). A world music radio program concentrating on Latin, Caribbean and African musics has been on air since 1988, coinciding with the creation of the 'world music' label. *World Beat Box*, the program transmitted on Greater London Radio, played an important role in catering for people who have an 'eclectic taste'.<sup>6</sup> Within this context salsa is being promoted to specific 'cosmopolitan' people in London who do not necessarily attend the clubs. These programs and magazines provide their audiences with information and new releases which not only contributes to knowledge-building, but establish a link between salsa and an international 'world music' network.

Record shops have created a new category and section for Latin music and in some stores subsections on specific genres such as salsa and Latin pop have been introduced. For example, Tower Records located in Piccadilly Circus used to locate salsa albums in the 'international' section under the Latin music category. This category included all forms of Latin music, from Latin pop music to salsa and merengue. A complete reorganisation of the store took place during the summer of 1994. The Latin music category was changed to 'salsa', and a '*Latin pop*' subheading was introduced. Although its location is still marginal in relation to other categories in the whole store, it is significant for Latin

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<sup>6</sup> Personal interview with Jo Shinner, Producer of World Beat Box, 8 November 1993.

music in that it signals the growing interest in Latin music, and specifically salsa, for the market.

Mr. Bongo, the first specialised record shop in Latin music, started operating in London during the summer of 1990. This was followed by Latino Records whose aim was to offer a variety of musics from different countries, not just salsa. Latino Records started in Elephant and Castle in May 1991 after a successful year at Camden Market; however, it ceased operations in January 1992.<sup>7</sup> During the year of the ethnographic research the only specialist Latin shop was Mr. Bongo. Dave Buttle, owner of this music shop, pointed out that Latin music sales were not high because there was a small number of people willing to buy and that he offered a market for re-issues of old records and collectable items. However, he mentioned that major profits came from distribution to Japan, France, Holland, Spain and Greece, among others, with Japan as his biggest market.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Bongo operates as a mediator and major distributor for salsa to markets outside the United States, excluding Latin America. The music collection of this shop has been built up through its interaction and exchange with recording industries in New York, Miami and Colombia.

In addition, there were independent mail order services and local market stalls. Latin Music, for example operated mainly through individual orders and kept most popular items on stock. In March 1992 they also launched the Latin Music Magazine, each issue promoting a resident salsa band, a club or an artist. Los Salseros also operated by mail order or to personal callers. They usually had a stall at Salsa Fusion, a fortnightly club at Notre Dame Hall in Leicester Square. Individual CD's and tapes were also available in shops selling products from Latin America, such as La Tienda in Paddington and La Bodeguita in the Elephant and Castle shopping centre.

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7 Personal interview with Carlos Rivas who together with Daniel Castillo started the store and Mambo Loco, a club at The Empire at Leicester Square. The interview was held 28 October 1993.

8 Personal interview with David Buttle, owner of Mr. Bongo, 4 November, 1993.

Re-issuing special collections was one of the major strategies adopted by record companies in England. Charlie Records was the major re-issue label for Latin music in Britain. The collections were put together by a specialist in Latin music. During the summer of 1994 Charlie Records launched five salsa album collections arranged by Dominique Roome, a salsa disc jockey.

The music industries were also interested in promoting their bands around the world. This involves the mediation of local promoters who were in charge of organising and promoting the concert. However, the London concerts by salsa bands from abroad have been considered a 'financial disaster' by one promoter I spoke to<sup>9</sup>. For example, El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, a well known salsa band that has been playing and releasing recordings for over thirty years, were advertised to play on 23 May 1993, but did not play because of problems with the promoters. I later found out that the band had decided not to play because of problems with contractual agreements. This incident ended with a legal action against the promoters of the event.<sup>10</sup>

Financial problems were again present at Eddie Palmieri's concert held at The Fridge on 14 November 1993. Another band, Grupo los Niches from Colombia, were being promoted elsewhere on the same day. Grupo los Niches had major support among Colombians, and this effected the attendance at Palmieri's concert, where there were financial problems. The concert was held but the band had to stay in the country for an extra day, as they were not paid on the day of the concert as had been arranged.<sup>11</sup> However, as Dominique Roome, a salsa disc jockey and a promoter, acknowledged, even if there were financial problems, the concert was a success for the people who were there. As she explained;

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9 Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November, 1993.

10 Almost a month later (13 of June 1993), Orquesta de la Luz, a Japanese salsa band, played in the same place. Although the promoters were different the public demonstrated little enthusiasm and support at the time.

11 Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November, 1993.

Musicians said it was not good at all, they were the ones who told me that the band was tired, that there were so many things going on, that there was no cohesion in the band and they did not play many numbers. But the people who went, my friends who were journalists and other friends who were members of the public, they all said it was great, electric. ... So, out of this it was a success but there was this financial problem.<sup>12</sup>

For Dominique these problems with bands from abroad are not simply local, but transcend London, as these incidents are known in New York and might affect the interest of music industries for promoting their bands in London. Though, as she mentioned, the situation is more complicated, because although this sends negative information to music industries in New York, there will always be bands willing to travel and be promoted around the world.

During the year of the research two production companies, Salsa Boogie and Tropicana Productions, were in operation. These companies jointly organised and promoted Oscar De León's concert which was held on 24 April 1994. These two production companies operated locally and the organisation of this concert was their first attempt to extend and expand their operations in London. Salsa Boogie was set up by Dominique Roome during the summer of 1992, after having worked for seven years as the music programmer for Bass Clef - one of the first venues for live salsa performances in London. Dominique operated this company from her house through computer networks, fax and telephone. At the time that the interview was held she was suggesting bands and providing advice to HQ (a salsa club in Camden Lock on Saturdays), d'jaying at Down Mexico Way (a Mexican restaurant and salsa club from Thursdays to Saturdays) and Bar Rumba, and promoting a local band called Roberto Pla's Latin Jazz Ensemble. Tropicana Productions was another small London based production company set up by Ramiro Zapata in the beginning of 1993. Through Tropicana Productions he did the marketing for Cuba Libre (a restaurant in Islington High St.), some consultancy work for Salsa (a salsa club and restaurant in Charing Cross Road), where he was disc jockey on Thursday

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<sup>12</sup> Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November, 1993.

nights, and organised dance lessons at Holborn Centre for the Performing Arts and Bar Tiempo.<sup>13</sup> These two production companies managed to get support for the concert from various sources related or connected with Latin America. The concert had the support of all salsa music clubs, restaurants and Latin-owned shops in London; it was also sponsored by record shops, a Venezuelan airline, a travel agency and a liquor company.

Whilst promoters, record shops, magazines and radio programs contribute to the development of a local salsa scene, the routes of salsa extend to other countries beyond United States and Latin America. These music industry related networks have contributed to the routes of salsa into London and to the development of a local salsa scene which at the same time is contributing to further routes beyond London, particularly with other European and Asian cities. With these examples what I want to highlight is that, although the emerging local salsa scene in London is constantly building up through its interaction with what is occurring in New York, Miami and Colombia, local circumstances are important for the continuation of salsa in London. It is in this sense that the growing presence and interest in salsa by Latin Americans and non-Latin Americans in London, the support of embassies and clubs play an important role in the development of a local salsa music scene in London.

For example, the concerts mentioned above also had an impact on the visible presence of Latin Americans in London. On the night of Gran Combo's concert, for example, the band were all at The Equinox, the equipment was set-up and everyone was waiting for the band to appear on stage when suddenly staff started taking the equipment out of the stage, whilst the disc jockey announced that the band was not playing for unknown reasons. This incident created a tense atmosphere among the people who were at The Equinox that night. A large crowd gathered together at the entrance of the club in Leicester Square to complain and began chanting 'El pueblo unido jamás será vencido' (A people united will never be defeated).

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<sup>13</sup> Personal interview with Ramiro Zapata, 22 March 1994.

The presence of Latin Americans who attended these concerts was also notably established through the language spoken by most of the people present. Spanish was the main language spoken amongst the public and the band was introduced in both Spanish and English, as these concerts are also attended by non-Latin Americans and non-Spanish speakers. After the concert, Spanish predominated at the bus stop and on the bus. People were approaching each other and talking about the concert in Spanish and I met many people from a number of Latin American countries on the bus journey from Hammersmith into central London after the concert by Oscar de Leon.

The presence of Latin Americans participating in salsa events has also been recognised by embassies which have supported music festivals, Latin fiestas and concerts in London. La Gran Gran Fiesta, one of the biggest festivals organised in London, had the support of The South Bank Centre Charity, Visiting Arts, Lambeth Environmental Services, London Arts Board, Arts Council, Camden Leisure Services, Latin American House, Cuban Embassy, Cuban and Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaigns, some Latin Clubs and various individuals involved with Latin American issues. The Gran Gran Fiesta is organised every two years,<sup>14</sup> with the major events usually held at the South Bank Centre, Clapham Common or Kennington Park. Major concerts are organised at Le Palais in Hammersmith and the Royal Festival Hall in the Southbank Centre. A Pequeña Fiesta (Small Fiesta) is organised in the year between; during the ethnographic study it was organised as part of the Coin Street Festival on 7 August 1994. Except for the major concerts other open air activities were free of charge. As Diego Medina, one of the organisers, mentioned, the intention is to promote cultural activities free of charge because;

Our young people are growing up in this country, and we have neglected them. Those of us who have a bit of political consciousness tend to worry for the problems of the people over there. This generation has grown up, most of them without knowing how to speak Spanish, they have forgotten

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14 Since I started my research two have been held, first from 19 to 27 June 1993, and 25 June to 9 July 1995.

it. It is a generation that could have lots of problems, because they are foreigners in this country and they are going to be foreigners in our countries. While we can offer them - free of charge - the great diversity of our culture, and we can also do things for all those people with family and the older generations that cannot pay six pounds every weekend to listen to their music or because there is no other place. As long as it is possible we should try to do things free of charge.<sup>15</sup>

The Colombian Carnival is another event that, in the last two years, has had sponsorship from the Colombian Embassy and the Borough of Islington. These events aim to present Latin American culture to the people in this country, and also to other Latin Americans who do not know about all Latin American countries. The interests of other local institutions - different from music industry related ones - are also contributing to the creation of a local salsa scene in London. What this demonstrates is that a local salsa scene is characterised by a variety of interests developing from the different London based organisations and institutions.

Musicians' interest in the music is also important for salsa's continuation and routes throughout England and beyond. During the period of my research, most musicians playing salsa music in London had a formal preparation in music. Their way into salsa, in most of the cases, came through jazz. Some musicians had full or part-time jobs and were playing as a way of gaining an extra income, while others were full-time musicians. Those who were full time musicians usually played in other bands; in some instances in other salsa bands (many sharing musicians and the lead singer), but also in jazz or acid jazz bands or Brazilian and African bands. During the year of my ethnographic research there were fourteen London based Latin bands (and it is worth pointing out that the

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15 Personal interview with Diego Medina, 17 August 1994. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Nuestra juventud que esta creciendo aquí, nunca nos hemos preocupado de ellos, los pocos que tenemos algo de conciencia nos hemos preocupado por los problemas de la gente de allá. Esa generación ha crecido, muchos de ellos sin hablar español, han olvidado su español. Es una generación que va a tener mucho problema, porque son extranjeros en este país y van a ser extranjeros en nuestros países. Mientras nosotros podamos darles a ellos, gratuitamente mostrarle, la diversidad tan grande de nuestra cultura y podamos tambien hacer esas cosas para toda esa gente que tiene familia y que son mayores y que no pueden pagar seis libras todos los fines de semana para escuchar su música, porque no hay otro lugar. Tantas veces sea posible hacer cosas gratis se deberían hacer'.

names of the bands, whether containing Latin or non-Latin musicians signify a particular identity): La Clave, Roberto Pla's Latin Jazz Ensemble, Palenque, Salsa y Aché, Candela, Víctor Hugo's Picante, Chili Havanero, La Explosión, Robin Jones' King Salsa, Los Originales del Vallenato, Viramundo, Ramón Vallejo's Descarga; and Pa'lante from Leeds and Como No from Birmingham, who would occasionally play in London.<sup>16</sup> Each band has an average of five to six musicians, although some like La Clave, Roberto Pla's Latin Jazz Ensemble and Salsa y Ache have nine to twelve musicians.

Musicians were moving around the same salsa bands. Thus, most of the salsa bands had at least three musicians who were playing in some of the other Latin bands in London. During the year of the research there were three venues which would regularly have live bands on weekends, Club Bahia, Bass Clef and HQ,<sup>17</sup> (there were other gigs for salsa bands but these were not regular). The fact that there was a limited number of venues for live salsa music meant that some members of bands like Palenque, Viramundo and Chili Havanero would also play as trios or duos mainly entertaining diners in small restaurants. This has also been adopted as a strategy by some bands because club owners who are operating in rented premises during the week are not prepared to pay for a five or six piece salsa band, but might pay for a trio or duo. Each musician in the band is paid an average of fifty pounds per presentation. In addition to restaurants, musicians occasionally played private parties, and in both instances were exposing salsa music to a wider public. Hence, the work of musicians was not confined to a bounded Latin club scene.

Musicians were also creating routes and routines that were wider than just their 'gig circuits' in London. They were playing at different venues in Leicester, Leeds,

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<sup>16</sup> Some of the bands mentioned are not only playing salsa music, some are playing Brazilian music such as Samba, or traditional folkloric music from Colombia such as Vallenato. New bands have been formed after the ethnographic research. Conjunto Sabroso, Tumbaito and Merengue Mania are new bands that started at the end of 1994 and during 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Towards Bass Clef closed for refurbishment, and when it reopened it did not include a salsa night. Latin musicians started boycotting Bass Clef because of the conditions in which they were treated.

Birmingham, Nottingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh.<sup>18</sup> Also, bands like Roberto Pla's Latin Jazz ensemble and La Clave have performed in Switzerland and Paris.<sup>19</sup> Whilst contributing to salsa's continuation in London, musicians were also part of a wider network of salsa music routes extending out through England, Scotland, continental Europe and other locations across the world.

Clubs have played the most important role in spreading salsa music in London. Disc jockeys' growing interest in the music has played an important part in the spread and continuation of salsa in London. In some instances the music collections of the disc jockeys were limited to what was available in England, but in recent years they have had access to other labels, mainly through Mr. Bongo and also from specialised agents like Salseros and Latin Music. Thus, at the time when this research was carried out there were a variety of labels available in England which gave disc jockeys access to music to widen their collections. Most of the disc jockeys I spoke to understood that they had to be aware of the changes in the music business and of new releases, not just in Great Britain but in New York, Colombia and other Latin American countries. Most preferred to get direct information from international music magazines and international music charts. They also travelled to New York or Miami (where most of the releases on salsa are launched), attended music carnivals or festivals (those held in Colombia and Tenerife were usually mentioned) or asked friends who were going abroad to bring them the latest albums that were still not available in England. Dave Hucker, for example, has been consulted from Japan, where people want to know what is happening in London, and has also been asked to D'jay in France and Japan.<sup>20</sup> Networks across the world are developing from this interest and through this process disc jockeys were bringing the latest records into England.

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<sup>18</sup> These were the most frequent places that the bands were playing during research.

<sup>19</sup> Roberto Pla's band went to Singapore during that year, sponsored by the British Arts Council. A band from Norway also came to England.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview with Dave Hucker, 22 February 1994.

In this section I have discussed the specific ways in which a London salsa scene has developed in London and referred to various individuals, groups and organisations that have been involved in its promotion and distribution. I have highlighted that the routes of salsa into London have developed as part of processes that involves (and need us to understand) establishing networks beyond London as much as local circumstances and networks.

In what follows in this chapter, and with specific reference to the clubs, I will examine in detail the ways in which a local salsa scene developed in London. By focusing on the clubs alone my intention is to discuss how this part of the London salsa scene involves a process of constructing and communicating particular Latin identities. In the next section I will discuss how salsa clubs started developing in London.

### **3. Salsa music clubs in London: A brief oral history**

Building up an account of the different clubs that have existed in London is a difficult task. I had to rely on oral history for most of it, along with information in the London based Latin American press since it started in 1984. Because most of the promotion for clubs was done by leafleting among certain groups, it was difficult to find exact details. Leaflets are ephemeral and hardly anyone collects them. Hence, this section relies mainly on oral history, with the inaccuracies or ambiguities that are part of narrated memories. My intention is not to present a chronological account, but to start differentiating among the types of clubs that have existed, and to highlight how this contributes to the routes that people take across salsa clubs in London.

From the beginning two different forms of commercial gathering can be distinguished, articulating the differences or interests of the different groups of Latin Americans that started arriving in London: Many one-off clubs were organised by and for Latin Americans in London, and a 'peña' was organised by a Chilean political refugee. A peña is a bohemian type of bar in which poets gather to read poetry or sing protest songs.

Most of the clubs and parties started being organised during the 1980's. Before then, I only found one place being mentioned. Juan Salgado, a Colombian man who was involved with the Latin American groups since his arrival in London and who founded the first Latin American newspaper, narrated;

When I arrived in 1978 I only found one place that had been started by a man named Lubín Reyes, ... a Colombian restaurant named El Dorado. It was there where the idea of having a place to go during the weekends to listen music and eat some of the Colombian dishes started.<sup>21</sup>

Salgado also mentioned that the person who had this restaurant also started a 'clandestine club' that worked as an extension of the restaurant. 'El Escondite' (the Hiding Place) was located in an underground floor at a location in Soho. El Escondite was considered clandestine because it operated without a licence. As Juan Salgado mentioned;

Reyes also had a clandestine place, because he did not have any license, in an underground floor. After closing the restaurant around one or two in the morning because of the license, the people in there would go with him to drink 'aguardiente' and they continued until four or five in the morning. It was not allowed to have that but he did it as a form of entertainment (distraction). With such bad luck, one day a Scottish man burnt it down and seventeen Colombians died. ... It was in 1980, I think it was in August. With people in there at around three in the morning. In the same place where this 'metedero' is there was a bar run by a Jamaican on the first floor. That Scottish man often used to go there, always drunken. That night they did not allow him to go in, he might have done something wrong. The entrance was the same for both places. As he was not allowed to go in so he went to a petrol station, bought a gallon of petrol and burnt the place and seventeen people along with around twenty members from the other club died.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Personal interview with Juan Salgado, 30 November 1993. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'En el 1978 cuando llegué me encontré con un solo sitio que estaba hecho por un señor que se llama Lubín Reyes, ... un restaurante colombiano que se llamaba El Dorado. Allí empezó a funcionar la idea de que había en el fin de semana a donde ir a oír música y a comer algo de platos colombianos'.

22 Personal interview with Juan Salgado, 30 November 1993. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Reyes además del restaurante tenía un sitio clandestino, porque no tenía licencia, en un soterrado. Era un sitiecito donde después de cerrar el restaurante, que cerraba a la 1 ó 2 de la mañana por la licencia

This incident was remembered by many people I spoke to, particularly when recalling how, at the beginning of the 1980's, Colombians started renting warehouses or underground floors of restaurants to run clubs during the weekends.

Another tendency was to hire church halls and community centres in South London. Colombians started hiring places to organise their parties or Latin nights. These parties were organised by a group of five or six people, who took it in turns to rent the same church hall or community centre each week for a period of five to six weeks or until they were discovered by the managers running these Halls. The different church halls and community centres hired out these places for private parties as a strategy to raise some funding. They were not aware that these were to be used as clubs. That is why these clubs were hired by different individuals each week. Camilo Pereira, who at the time of the research ran Barco Latino, started hiring Amigo Hall in Lambeth and Saint Matheus Hall in Brixton. As Hugo Benítez, who ran some of the clandestine clubs, recalled;

There was one in Brixton, in the underground floor of a church. That was a long time ago, not long after I first arrived here (1976). Camilo used to hire it, but anyone could, that was St. Matheus Hall. Another was Amigo Hall, Daniel started it to finance the lawyers for his mother. That church used to hire the hall and Colombians started hiring it. Each week different people. That is how Amigo Hall started. It was on Sundays until eleven at night. Then the police started researching and they had to stop because it was forbidden to sell drinks in there. In a church, could you imagine? There were fights, it was a scandal, and they had to close it. The same happened to St. Matheus, and it was also shadowed by fights. In front of that one a Colombian man was killed.<sup>23</sup>

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se iban con él a beber aguardiente y seguían hasta las 4 ó 5 de la mañana. No era permitido tenerlo, pero él lo tenía para distracción. Con tal mala suerte que un día un escocoz le pegó candela a eso y se quemaron 17 colombianos. ... Eso fue en 1980, el mes creo que fue en agosto. Estando ellos ahí a las tres de la mañana. En el mismo sitio donde quedaba este metedero, había un bar de un jamaiquino en el primer piso y a ese bar lo frecuentaba un escocoz borracho. Lo hecharon esa noche, algo hizo mal. La puerta era común para ambos sitios. Como no lo dejaron entrar arriba se fue a una surtidora de gasolina y le echó fuego y quemó 17 y veinte algo de miembros del otro club que era un club privado'.

23 Personal interview with Hugo Benítez, 21 February 1994. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Hubo uno que abrió en Brixton, en el sótano de una iglesia. Eso fue hace años, eso fue cuando nosotros recién llegamos aquí. Camilo lo alquilaba, pero eso lo alquilaba cualquiera ese era St. Matheus Hall. Otro fue el Amigo Hall, lo hizo Daniel para conseguir fondos para pagar abogados para su mamá.'

There were still some groups that would organise these types of parties at least once a month in these locations. During the year of the ethnographic research I was taken to one of these halls after a day at Clapham. This party was organised by the Ecuadorian Association. It was a family event and excluding the four of us who were invited by members of the Association all the others were members and had been invited by post. During that night the members of the Association selected a new executive committee.

These clubs were located away from the centre of the city and in places where they were less exposed to the police. As Hugo Benítez explained, 'people tend to look for places around here (south London). The problem is that over there in the North the authorities have more control and it is more difficult to manage. That is why Latins do not like to go over there'.<sup>24</sup> Whether or not the authorities did have more control in areas North of the River Thames, some of these 'clandestine clubs' were organised in the centre of London. This meant that maintaining the publicity within close circles was important for their continuity. As Camilo Pereira narrated,

During that period I used to work in a restaurant in the city and I asked the owners if I could have a night there on Saturdays. It was a risk, after 12 it was done as a private party. I used to do the leaflets and distributed them at the football grounds in Clapham and in places where the Latin community used to go. I used to play football in Clapham and was a good 'goleador'. I also started selling food and drinks there and that was how I started to get known by more people. Thus, I started there and through word of mouth the place became known and more and more people went.<sup>25</sup>

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Eso lo alquilan por semana a diferentes personas. Así comenzó el Amigo Hall, funcionaba los domingos hasta las once de la noche. Hasta que la policía comenzó a investigar y tuvieron que cerrarlo porque no tenían licencia para vender bebidas. Y, en una iglesia, imagínese, hubo peleas fue un escándalo y tuvieron que cerrarlo. ... Fue lo mismo con St. Matheus, pero también se dañó por peleas, ahí mataron a un colombiano afuera'.

24 Personal interview with Hugo Benítez, 21 February 1994. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'La gente tiende a buscar a sitios en esta área (refiriéndose al sur). El problema en el norte es que las autoridades controlan más allá. Es más controlado por las autoridades, son lugares difíciles de manejar, a los latinos no le gusta ir allá por eso'.

25 Personal interview with Camilo Pereira, 31 March 1995. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Para ese tiempo también trabajaba en un restaurante en la city y le pedí permiso a los dueños para

Many of these clubs were considered 'clandestine' because they operated without a licence or because they were open until six or seven in the morning. In England it is established by law that it is necessary to obtain various licences in order to keep a place open after eleven at night, the time at which all 'pubs' should close. Clubs are allowed to open, once the licences are granted, until two or three in the morning, depending on the area in which the club is located. In the centre of the city the licence is granted until three in the morning, outside the centre until two. Thus, many of these clubs were clandestine because they were operating without a proper licence or because they were open beyond the time allowed by law.<sup>26</sup> The processes of obtaining the licenses is a way in which the state (as a governmental apparatus) has the power to regulate and control public spaces. This is an important point because it politicises the geographical location of these clubs in London; their organisation and distribution in the city. The fact that Latin Americans started operating clandestine clubs away from the centre of the city is related to the licensing regulations.

At the beginning of the 1980s, when the first clubs were being organised by Colombians, Nacho Gálvez, a Chilean political refugee, organised what was the first 'peña'. This 'peña' was organised once a week above a bar in Soho. The idea was to create a meeting point for Chilean exiles, but it also attracted many other groups. Poets and song writers gathered to share their poems, or to sing Cuban or Chilean 'new protest songs'. The peña started getting very popular and six months after starting they moved to a bigger place in Brixton. This time they started playing salsa between the poet's sessions. By then the peña started changing character because people were becoming more interested in salsa than listening to the poets. The peña was transformed little by little into a Latin club,

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tener una noche los sábados. Era un riesgo, luego de las 12 se hacía como fiesta privada. Hacía los leaflets y los repartía en las canchas de fútbol en Clapham y en lugares donde iba la comunidad latina. Jugaba fútbol en Clapham, era un buen goleador. También comencé a vender comidas y bebidas y de esa manera la gente comenzó a conocerme más. Comencé allá y la voz se repartía entre la gente y poco a poco iba más gente'.

<sup>26</sup> To open a club it is necessary to obtain various licences, one that allows selling liquor after 11 PM; another called 'entertainment licence', this is the one that allows dancing. There are further regulations stipulated by the fire department and other security bodies.

although it kept its name, until it ended. This peña ended because the place was sold, and the new owners did not extend the rent of the place.<sup>27</sup> Gálvez, who organised this peña nowadays has a very successful Latin club, Club Bahía.

Sol y Sombra in Charlotte Street was mentioned as one of the first Latin clubs in London to be in the same location for a relatively long period. According to Diego Medina,

When I arrived in 1982 there was a Colombian restaurant named La Bambita. There was another place, I do not know how it was named then, now it is called Double Bass in Earls Court. ... It was one of the few places that was open after twelve. ... There was also Bass Clef, but only occasionally would it organise Latin nights. ... Then came Sol y Sombra. Well, in the end this was one of the first clubs because La Bambita was a restaurant. Bass Clef was a club, but not for Latin Americans only, it was a club that played salsa and sometimes other things. But we could say that the first established one was Sol y Sombra, then Bass Clef. El Cantiño was one of the first Brazilian clubs, around 1989, that was on Thursdays where Mambo Inn is now.<sup>28</sup>

Sol y Sombra was organised by a Colombian in 1982 and it ended in 1986. Dave Hucker, who during the year of the ethnographic research organised a club with the same name at Bar Cuba on Wednesdays and who was the disc jockey for Sol y Sombra, mentioned that;

This was the first, the original club, and that was burned down in 1986. It closed and now I have revived the name for my Wednesday nights in Bar

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27 Interview with Nacho Gálvez, Saturday, 30 October 1993.

28 Personal interview, 17 August 1994. The club he recalled in Earls Court was mentioned by other people as Las Cabañitas. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Cuando llegué estaba la Bambita, un restaurante colombiano. Había un lugar, no sé que nombre tenía en ese momento ahora se llama Double Base en Earls Court. ... Era uno de los pocos lugares que estaba abierto después de las 12. ... El Bass Clef estaba pero no tenía cosas latinas, o las tenía muy esporádicamente. ... Después llegó Sol y Sombra. Bueno al final fue uno de los primeros porque La Bambita era un restaurante, el otro era un club pero no era como si fuera un club sólo para latinoamericanos, era un club que ponía salsa y a veces le ponía otras cosas. ... Después fue Sol y Sombra. Pero, sí podemos decir que el primero establecido como tal fue Sol y Sombra. De ahí, el Bass Clef. El cantiño fue uno de los primeros brasileiro, como en el 1989 funcionaba los jueves en lo que es el Mambo Inn. La bambita fue en el 1982, ya yo estaba aquí, Sol y sombra como para el 1984-85. El Bass Cleff como en el 1984'.

Cuba, because I am trading on the fame of this club. I mean, because it was an award winning club. I won disc jockey of the year when I was playing there.<sup>29</sup>

The reasons for the fire were not clear for Dave Hucker, but he believed that it could have been a 'deliberate incident'; the person running the club was not long afterwards jailed in Miami for smuggling emeralds.<sup>30</sup> Sol y Sombra was recognised as a club because it operated for a long period in the same location. This differentiated it from those with very short lives that were organised in different locations such as church halls or community centres.

In the case of Bass Clef, this club played an important role amongst musicians, as for a long period it was the main venue for live music. As Dominique Roome, who worked as a music programmer for this venue for a period of seven years, mentioned; 'Bass Clef was the focal point for the Latin scene in London for a few years. ... We brought a lot of people over, and it was the place in London to see live music with medium scale bands'.<sup>31</sup> Bass Clef was also the venue for local bands. Although recognised by musicians as the first venue for live music, during the year this research was carried out all of the musicians I interviewed mentioned that the conditions and payment at this venue were the worst and they had started boycotting the place by refusing to play there. Towards the end of this research Bass Clef closed for a refurbishment and after the research I heard that it reopened under new administration and that it no longer had Latin nights.

After these two clubs many names were mentioned to me but in an indiscriminate order, and with a vaguer idea of exactly when they started. Names like La Plaza in Leicester Square, in the same venue where Mambo Loco was located; Yo te Amo in Holloway;

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29 Personal interview with Dave Hucker, 22 February 1994.

30 Personal interview with Dave Hucker, 22 February 1994.

31 Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November 1993.

Costa Brava near Tottenham Court Road; Changó, Chicagos and La Clave in Peckham; Tunel del Tiempo in Soho and Jacqueline's near Oxford Circus.<sup>32</sup>

These clubs were moving from and to different places all the time or they rapidly disappeared. Most of them operated until they were discovered by the police or stopped due to changes in the initial agreements. Some of these clubs ended, others opened in another place, perhaps with the same name or under another name. This is an important factor because it contributed to the building of a reputation which was not always a favourable one. These 'clandestine clubs' were shadowed by fights, the constant intervention of the police and by the fires. All these incidents contributed to the construction of a Latin identity as violent, aggressive, illegal and drug-related; an image and conception that some of the participants I spoke to had about these types of clubs, and which had an influence on the routes people took to different places. Here the identity given to these places was constructed through a series of specific incidents and practices rather than through visual and verbal representations alone.

In this section I have discussed the first clubs that were established by Latin Americans in London and highlighted two types of club, differentiated along the lines of political and economic backgrounds of those who ran these clubs, in which a distinct Latin identity was being constructed and communicated. This is significant for understanding how the different positionings between the different groups of Latin Americans in London was articulated through these clubs. First, I referred to those clubs considered 'clandestine' which were organised on a short-term basis in church halls, community centres and rented premises. These clubs aimed to attract working class Latin Americans and a series of incidents led them to be associated with a negative Latin identity. Although the people involved in organising these types of clubs began to operate in a more long term way in other premises and with the necessary licenses, the negative Latin image has continued to define the identity of such clubs for those who decide not to

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<sup>32</sup> From various sources throughout the research.

include these clubs in their routines (an issue I shall be discussing in more detail in the next section).

Second, I mentioned the organisation of the first peña. In contrast to the clubs, the peña was initially set up for poetry reading and the performance of new protest songs, and was established to attract a more politically active and intellectual group of Latin Americans (specifically exiled Chileans). This then developed as a salsa club. Although changing character in some ways by stopping poetry and introducing salsa dance music, this type of club continued to construct a type of Latin identity which was differentiated from the other clubs, particularly through class and involvement in political activity. This again has contributed to the routes that participants chose to adopt across the salsa scene during the year in which I was carrying out research.

In the following sections of this chapter I will build on these distinctions by concentrating on a selection of clubs that existed in London during the year of the research. First, I will present the distribution of the clubs in London. Then, I will discuss how these clubs are organised and how the owners constructed and communicated the identity of the club.

#### **4. Location of clubs in the city**

Here I will map out the position of salsa music clubs in London and highlight the importance of the location of these places when considering the creation of the identity of a club. These clubs are mainly located around the West End or North London. My intention in this section is to present those contrasting locations in relation to the areas where Latin Americans are starting to set up small businesses. In the previous chapter the administrative areas of Southwark and Lambeth were identified as those in which most of the shops run by Latin Americans are located. However, as I will show here, most of the salsa clubs are located in the administrative area of Westminster (see map in Figure 4.1). Figure 4.2 attempts to capture the different networks of clubs and the overlapping

routes of participants around the different salsa clubs as these contribute to further relations between these networks.

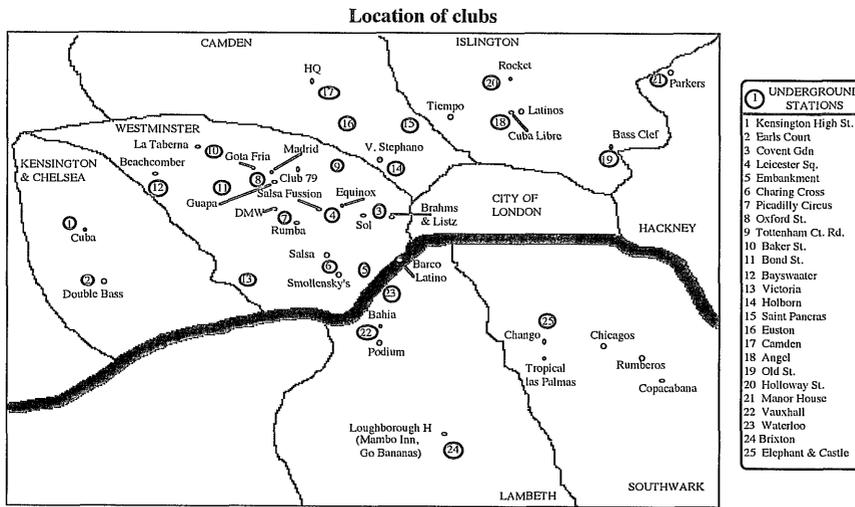


Figure 4.1

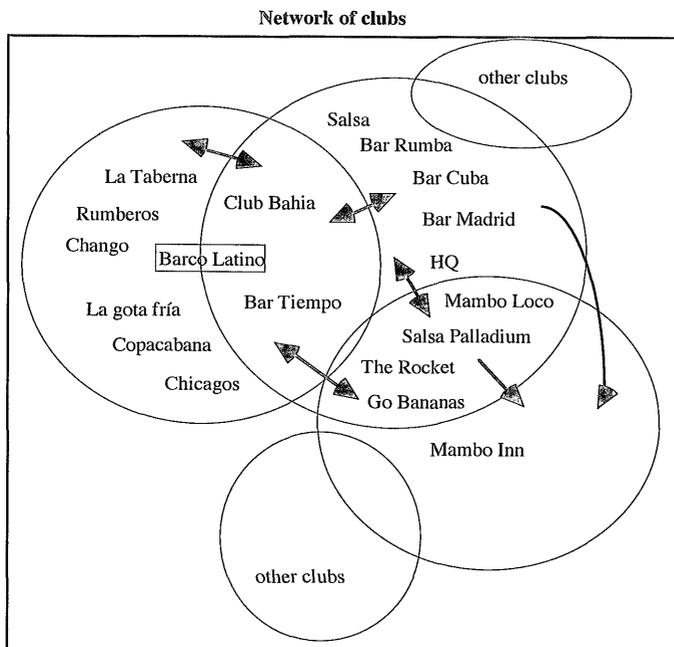


Figure 4.2

The geographical location of these clubs is related to the hierarchical social divisions of the city, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Those clubs located North of the River are located in very central locations and near underground stations. Most are very flashy and visible, located on main transit roads. Some are near tourist areas like Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Street, Charring Cross Road, Covent Garden and Kensington High Street. These locations are linked to the type of audience the owners want to attract. Because of their location these places are in many cases the only visible symbols of Latin American culture for many Londoners and tourists. However, other places such as Club Bahia or Mambo Inn in South London are usually visited by those who know about their existence, but are not clubs you find by chance whilst walking in the city. These were started in these locations for specific purposes by the organisers of these clubs. Those that are near Elephant and Castle - Club Tropical las Palmas, Chicagos, Copacabana and Rumberos - are not well connected with underground stations and are away from the centre of the city. These are mainly attended by Latin Americans and are intended to attract working class Latin Americans in London.

The geographical location of the club can affect the identity of the place and the audience it will attract. But other elements play an important role in constructing the identity of a place: the architecture and iconography; the concept on which it relies, whether mainly a restaurant, tapas bar or a club, and whether rented or owned; as I will discuss in the next section. Then I will provide a detailed description of the clubs selected for this research in an attempt to provide an interpretation of how particular Latin identities are represented and the different elements at play in this representation. The clubs selected for more detailed research were Bar Rumba and Bar Cuba, Bar Tiempo, Club Bahia, Barco Latino and Mambo Inn.

### **5. Constructing and communicating identities of Latin clubs**

I did not start my research with a set definition of what a Latin club was. Instead, I listened to how different owners, promoters and disc jockeys narrated how they constructed and communicated the identity of the clubs so as to signify 'Latin'. Thus, in this section I will present the information gathered from interviews with owners, promoters and disc jockeys of Latin music clubs jointly with my observations. I explore how Latin is signified through the location and decoration of the clubs, and through advertisements and marketing strategies and the music played in these clubs.

During the research I found out that most salsa clubs in London were operating under different circumstances and deals to the first ones. Most of these operated in rented or leased venues with proper licences. Occasional one-off parties were also organised in community halls to support the local football league. Those clubs that operated on leased properties were constructed so as to emphasize 'Latin' and this was done mainly through the decoration, music and food. However, many others that operated at rented venues and could not alter the property would built on an identity mainly through the name of the club which was usually promoted by the disc jockeys playing (who also acted as promoter of their clubs). These clubs were characterised by their mobility around different venues. As these clubs were contributing to create new routes for participants whilst disrupting their routines around salsa clubs in London, I start this part with a section about those clubs that had a short life. This is followed by those clubs that were selected for this research and, as a strategy that helped me develop a narrative for this chapter, each of these clubs is presented in a self contained section. In each of these sections I will pay particular attention to how the promoters of these clubs positioned their clubs amongst or against existing clubs as a way of creating and communicating the identity of the club. The issues presented throughout each section are important for the way that they will have an impact on and affect the routes and routines of participants and hence their participation at any event.

### 5.1 Short life clubs: Copacabana and Mambo Loco

During 1993-94, most of the Latin nights were organised in clubs with proper licences. These clubs are hired to different people all week round. Thus one night is not necessarily related to the other; perhaps just one day of the week is a Latin night. The place is prepared to operate as a club and decorated by the different uses and colours of the lights in order to accommodate the different clubs operating in that venue.<sup>33</sup> In these venues, the people involved arranged verbally which would be the cost of the place for that night and in some cases discussed any special deal; whether the person hiring the club would get a percentage from the profits of the bar (this because in most cases the bar belongs to the owner of the venue). These clubs were also characterised by their mobility or short existence because the owner of the place could change the initial arrangements at any moment. Thus, in many cases the club would end as was the case of, for example, the Podium, which lasted for less than three consecutive weeks; or started in a different place with the same name, as with Salsa Palladium; or with a different name, as was the case of those who ran Latin nights at Chicagos and then created Copacabana and Rumberos.

In Chicagos for example, Latin nights ran for about four months (August to December 1992) under the same administration. Latin nights have been sporadically organised after that, but by different people. Chicagos is a club in Peckham, initially hired by Hugo Benítez, (Colombian) who organised Latin nights on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Hugo Benítez left Chicagos because of disagreements with the owner of the club, who changed the initial agreements on the rent and deals regarding the entrance fee. The rent and the entrance fee were increased on 31 December 1992. After that incident Benítez and Guillermo Norton opened Copacabana in Old Kent Road. The case of Copacabana was more complicated. Although it was open for almost three months it was operating without a licence and there were many problems. First, the landlord agreed to prepare the place as a

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<sup>33</sup> The notion of club, when operating in hired or rented premises, is used here as fluid and mobile in the sense that a club, although operating in places, is not tied to a place. As a club it mainly built on disc jockeys' names and music collection, thus, in this sense the club can change from venues. Venues, then, refers to the actual physical place in which clubs operate.

club and the organisers would just pay a fixed rent. The place was not completed as stipulated by the licensing granting body, and during the inspection the license was not granted, however the place started to operate without a licence. It operated that way for about three months (December 1993 - February 1994), until it was discovered by the police. At the moment my interview was held they were planning to open another Club in Old Kent Road, to be named Rumberos.<sup>34</sup> These clubs aimed to attract Latin American workers. They were organised on the weekends because, as Hugo Benítez pointed out, 'Latin Americans in this country only go out on the weekends. It is not like in our countries, partying every night of the week. Here, the Latin American does not have the money. Latin Americans are just working and working very hard'.<sup>35</sup> They are interested in attracting the 'Latin worker and charge a reasonable price because we have to pay the rent and staff, but not an exaggerated cost, and not to exploit them'.<sup>36</sup> Clearly positioning against Club Bahia, a club also run by a Latin person, Benítez said,

I think the entrance fee is six pounds, it is too expensive. They sell drinks, not the bottles [of liquor]. If you start buying by drinks it is too expensive. They have bands. Also, the people there are selective. Not everyone can go, first because it is too expensive, second because it is calmer. It is not for 'the people', it is for people with a slightly higher level, those who earn more. Not anyone goes there.<sup>37</sup>

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34 I have never seen any publicity for this place. However, by the end of my research I heard Rumberos was opened, but closed before I could visit.

35 Personal interview with Hugo Benítez, 21 February 1994. Interview was held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'El Latino aquí no funciona sino el fin de semana. No es como en los países de nosotros que toda la semana, todas las noches estamos rumbeando. Aquí no, el latino no tiene plata para eso. Está trabajando solamente y trabajando fuerte'.

36 Personal interview with Hugo Benítez, 21 February 1994. Interview was held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Lo que nosotros tratamos es de atraer al latino trabajador y cobrarle lo que es razonable. Porque hay que pagar renta y 'estaff', pero tampoco una cosa exagerada, tampoco explotar'.

37 Interview with Hugo Benítez, 21 February 1994. The interview was held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'La entrada creo que vale seis libras, es muy caro. Venden por trago no botellas. Si usted comienza a comprar por tragos es muy caro. Ellos tienen orquestas. Inclusive la gente allá esta seleccionada. No dejan entrar así, primero porque es muy caro, segundo porque es, (pausa) es más calmado. Es como para la gente más, no es pa' pueblo, es para gente que tienen un nivel más altito, ganan más plata. Allí no va cualquiera'.

The distinction made by Benítez is one of class. He mentioned Club Bahia because the owner is also Latin American. However, each owner is aiming at a different audience and see themselves as part of different projects. Although I will be focusing on Club Bahia in greater detail later on in this chapter, what I want to mention now is how these two owners position their clubs within different networks. Nacho Galvez, the owner of Club Bahia, commented on these other types of clubs, but without mentioning any in particular,

These small clubs are oriented, basically, towards the Latin American immigrant. These are places of entertainment for them. I think that from that point of view they carry out a social function, by offering a cheap and popular place of entertainment for Latin American immigrants. ... I have to recognise that in a certain way they have a social function, at least they are a place of escape for large numbers of illegal Latin American immigrants who have nowhere to go and who are looking for the cheapest entertainment, and for the cheapest Latin American club. A relief from those weeks in which they work almost twenty hours daily. But these clubs are completely different to what we try to do here. We aim at a completely different clientele.<sup>38</sup>

The distinction made by Nacho Galvez is also of class, but one that relates to the legal status of immigrants. Illegal immigrants, as I explained in the previous chapter, were working early morning or late evening shifts and usually badly paid, thus their routes and routines across salsa clubs in London were limited (an issue I will discuss in the last section of this chapter).

These two clubs are operating in completely different ways. The owner of Bahia has a lease on the place, whilst Benítez was hiring Chicagos for three nights a week and

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Nacho Galvez, 30 October 1993. Interview was held on Spanish. Original text follows: 'Estos clubes pequeños están orientados básicamente al inmigrante Latino Americano. Son lugares de distracción para ellos. Pienso que cumplen una tremenda función social desde ese punto de vista. La función social que cumplen es la de ofrecer un lugar de distracción barato y popular para el inmigrante Latino Americano. ... No puedo dejar de reconocer que cumplen de una manera una función social, de darle a lo menos un escape a una gran inmigración Latino Americana ilegal que no tienen a donde ir y que busca la diversión más barata y el club Latino Americano más barato. Desahogarse de las semanas en las que trabajan hasta casi veinte horas al día. Pero son clubes totalmente distintos a lo que tratamos de hacer nosotros. Apuntamos a una clientela totalmente distinta'.

Copacabana was operating without licence. Copacabana was positioned among Latin Americans in London, whilst Club Bahia positioned within the 'cultural variety of London'.<sup>39</sup> I will provide more details about Club Bahia later on in this chapter, but the point I want to stress from the information presented up to now is how these clubs are in different positions according to economic differentiation and that both of their owners are aware of these positions.

The identity of Copacabana as a working class salsa club for Latin Americans in London was built by taking into consideration economic elements such as entrance fee, method of selling drinks and the use of recorded music rather than bands. Also, by maintaining the publicity for the club amongst Latin American circuits in London, such as Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common's football league and by advertising in the Latin American press. It would not promote in magazines such as Time Out as this reached a wider public which Hugo Benítez did not aim at.

The fact that a place is rented affects the continuation and identity of a club, this was one of the most common problems for Latin clubs in London. For example, the underground floor venue of the Equinox in Leicester Square has been hired many times as a Latin club. During the year I was carrying out the research there were three clubs with short lives in this venue, the longest been Mambo Loco with six months of existence under the first administration. There are many issues that become problems for the people hiring this place. They have no control over the bar and the profits from it belong to the Equinox, which also receives the money for the rent of the place for that night. The only profit the person hiring the place gets is from the entrance fee. No changes to the place are allowed and any damage to the walls would have to be covered by the person who hires the place, thus, the identity of the club is often built on the disc jockeys' playing. Also, the rent is high and subject to change at any moment.<sup>40</sup> This is one of the main reasons why different

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<sup>39</sup> Personal interview with Nacho Gálvez, 30 October 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Carlos Rivas, 28 October 1993.

clubs move from places and another one starts in the same place. In this particular venue, at least three different clubs were organised during the period of this research.

Mambo Loco was organised by Carlos Rivas and Daniel Castillo (Venezuelans), who together with Rufus (English) were also the disc jockeys of the club. Each had a different style and preferences in terms of music. They played a variety of salsa styles from different countries, to emphasize that 'salsa is not a rhythm that identifies a country'<sup>41</sup> but a new urban rhythm, as Carlos Rivas mentioned. They were positioned against Colombians, as Daniel Castillo explained, 'Colombian music was predominant and our intention was to let other people know that Colombian salsa is not all there is ... for them salsa is from Cali, and their intention is to attract only a Colombian public'<sup>42</sup> Rufus also had a similar line; Colombians, he commented 'are not prepared to accept that salsa is not from Colombia, they say "Cali, capital de la salsa!" And I just think; why can't you accept that it is not your thing'.<sup>43</sup> Through out my research I found that different groups were placing salsa music geographically and, like many music genres, there were continual arguments about its origins and what was authentic. These ideas about playing 'authentic' and 'original' salsa was an attempt to position the place and establish the identity of this club through the discourses and playing practices of these three disc jockeys.

Mambo Loco was aimed towards Latin Americans, because as Carlos Rivas mentioned 'a Latin club without Latin Americans is not Latin. It is we the Latin Americans who give the flavour to the place. I like to have Latin Americans of different nationalities, and for the rest of the clients to also be from different nationalities, French, English, we even have

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41 Personal interview, 28 October 1993. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'la salsa no es un ritmo que identifica a un país'.

42 Personal interview, 7 December 1993. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'La música colombiana predominaba. Así que nosotros comenzamos a abrirle los ojos a otra gente de que la salsa no sólo radica en la colombiana ... Claro, para ellos la salsa es caleña y su intención es atraer público colombiano solamente'.

43 Personal interview, 1 December 1993.

Japanese'.<sup>44</sup> Carlos commented that Mambo Loco's location guaranteed a 'more cosmopolitan audience'.<sup>45</sup> However enthusiastic and committed they were with this project, Mambo Loco's life was short; conflicts between the administrators of Equinox and Mambo Loco's creator eventually led to its end. Mambo Loco started in July 1993 and ended in the December of the same year because the rent was increased for the Christmas period. The idea and name of the club was sold, thus Mambo Loco reopened in the same place under a different administration, but its life was also short. Not long after, the venue was hired by different people. This time it was hired to Ara, who runs Salsa Palladium, a club that was previously organised at Club 79 in Oxford Street.

A hired night in a venue that already has a licence and that has been prepared for such purposes opens the possibility for those people without the economic capital to build up their own clubs. When doing this the tendency was to hire nights in different places, without any written contract. When it is not working for the owner or the person hiring the night then the 'oral contract' ends. It is a deal that benefits both parties involved, but it also leads to clubs having short lives or constantly moving.

Those clubs with a short life usually established their position through the disc jockey's reputation, or by carrying the name of the club around the different venues in which they operate. However, amongst the two clubs mentioned here the positioning was established in other ways. In the case of Copacabana it was established by addressing a more working class audience and by charging less for entry and drinks than Club Bahia. In the case of Mambo Loco the position was established along the lines of musical styles and the preferences of the disc jockeys.

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44 Original follows: 'Un club latino sin latinos no es latino. Somos los latinos los que le damos sabor al club. Si hay clientes latinos me gusta que sean de diferentes nacionalidades y el resto de los clientes que tambien sean de diferentes nacionalidades, que sean, franceses, ingleses, hasta japoneses tenemos'.

45 Interview with Daniel Castillo, 7 December 1993.

## 5.2 Bar Cuba and Bar Rumba

As I explained in the previous section it was possible to hire venues in the West End to start a Latin night. However, at the beginning of the 1990's another type of club started becoming visible in the West End. The physical presence of these clubs was more visible in the city because these were created and promoted as 'Latin' places through the names and menus available, although each night could change depending on the disc jockeys' or musicians ability to attract a greater public and therefore, their ability to be economically successful for the owner of the club. This is the case with Bar Rumba and Bar Cuba, names that also signify Latinness.

Dave, the owner of Bar Cuba, recalled that in 1988 a small group of entrepreneurs co-ordinated the opening of several clubs at the same time in order to start building up a scene. They started opening Spanish tapas bars; Bar Madrid, Bar Seville, Grey Camino and Bar Escoba were opened during this period. These tapas bars started including Flamenco nights and little by little started incorporating salsa nights. The incorporation of salsa music proved to be economically successful for the owners of these clubs. Thus, Latin nights started taking over from Flamenco nights. Some of the people involved in the creation of the Spanish bars started selling them and opening places in which the subject was 'Latin', instead of Spanish, although in many cases both concepts were mixed.<sup>46</sup> Most notable here are Bar Cuba (January 1992) in Kensington High Street, Bar Rumba (September, 1993), in Shaftesbury Avenue and Salsa in Charing Cross Road (March, 1993).

Bar Cuba's owner, Dave was involved in the group who started Bar Madrid, Bar Seville and Grey Camino; eventually these were sold and he started Bar Cuba in 1992. Regarding the process of creating Bar Cuba he told me the following, (before I quote him I should mention that he did not know I was Puerto Rican)

Eventually, we got rid of all those clubs and then I started this new place and what I had to think of was; what is happening to the Spanish, where is

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<sup>46</sup> Personal interview with Dave, 12 October 1993.

it going? if it is by the food, the drink, is it by the night life, music. I wanted to do something Spanish, but a bit different because everybody was catching on the same. ... So I took it from a Spanish idea to a Caribbean idea. What can be Spanish Caribbean, Puerto Rico, well no. Cuba, well that is a good idea, it is basically Spanish. Not Puerto Rico, because it normally reflects fairly violent images. Puerto Rico is West Side Story, things like that, Puerto Ricans in America and I did not want to have that sort of image. I wanted a mysterious image of the Caribbean extended in the food, be a little more competent in the food, rather than just the tapas.<sup>47</sup>

The owner of Bar Cuba was trying to move away from the Spanish bars that he had started by creating a new concept of a bar with a 'Latin' identity. In contrast with the clubs organised in hired venues which have no theme, these places address a particular subject and from there organise the different nights of the club. The owner of Bar Cuba was trying to construct the identity of the place through the decoration. As he explained,

I did some research, I went to Miami, to Little Havana ... I didn't want what the Cubans have now because they don't have the resources, so I wanted to see what the Cubans have done in America. Then I went to Cuba to see what was happening in Cuba, which is not exactly how it would have been years ago ... That was the concept, and we have built it up to what it is today. Nice old building, looking very old, very very different. ... We are pushing forward a certain idea. ... The whole identity of the place has to do with how it looks. It is smoky, noisy, it seems as if it is falling in parts, which it is not, but it's that sort of atmosphere, that is its identity. And yes, of course, we are pushing that identity, it is there.<sup>48</sup>

As Dave explained, the identity of Bar Cuba, located in Kensington High Street, was built up through the construction of the place. Cuba was taken as a theme to construct a very specific Latin identity, one which attempted to recreate the style of pre-revolutionary Cuba that the immigrant community had built up in Little Havana, Miami rather than what he found in present day Cuba. Hence, the Latin identity which was being constructed and

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<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with Dave, 12 October 1993.

<sup>48</sup> Personal interview with Dave, 12 October 1993.

communicated here was a 'mysterious' and nostalgic Cuba of the 1950s that drew on the way that such an identity has been maintained by Cuban exiles and Cuban-Americans in Miami.

The other elements taken into consideration, after the decoration, were the type of people he wanted to attract, the location of the club, and finally the music. The people Bar Cuba aimed to attract were 'casual smart ... upmarket, anywhere between the age 20 up to 40'. This was a middle class audience for whom this idea of Cuba was presented in a particular location, Kensington High Street, where the idea of a restaurant and club were combined. The music was one of the last considerations in constructing the identity of the place, as Dave mentioned; 'You can get away with any type of music as long it has the right atmosphere ... The main thing is the decor, then the people and then the music. What if you have the right music if it is in bad surroundings'.<sup>49</sup>

Bar Rumba was also constructed following a similar process to Bar Cuba. First, elaborating the concept of the club, then constructing the place according to the concept. Eric Yu, the owner of Bar Rumba, explained that the idea behind it was to construct 'a modern and trendy place that attracted trendy people'.<sup>50</sup> The idea of Spanish tapas bar was mixed with 'Latin food'. The menu was a version of Spanish tapas with 'Mexican food' (or better 'Mexican tapas') and Spanish or Mexican beers. Although this was appealing to a similar type of audience to Bar Cuba, and people tended to visit both clubs, it was constructed with a more generic Spanish-Mexican themed Latin identity, which drew on the food and beer rather than the decor.

As these two clubs operate on a similar basis and are part of the same network of clubs I will focus the discussion in greater detail on Bar Rumba. Unlike Bar Cuba, Bar Rumba operated as a club with a snack bar rather than a restaurant. In addition, music was far more important to the way that the club was given a 'Latin' identity on specific nights.

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<sup>49</sup> Personal interview with Dave, 12 October 1993.

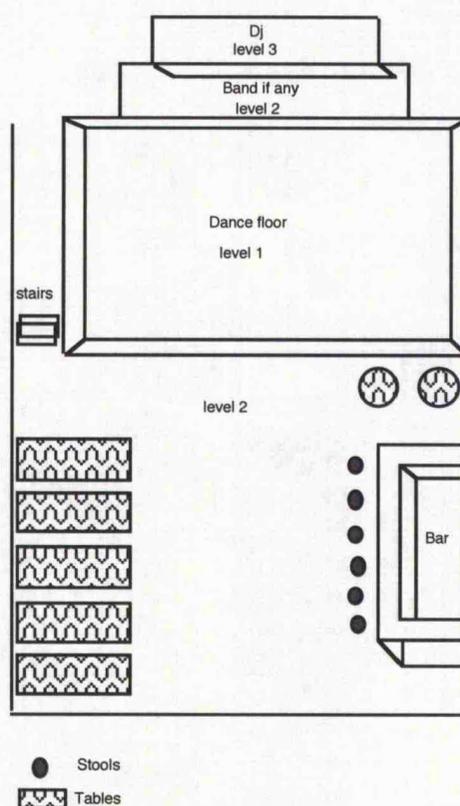
<sup>50</sup> Personal interview with Eric Yu, 22 October 1993.

Bar Rumba is a tapas bar located in a corner of Trocadero shopping centre in Shaftesbury Avenue, central London. The walls surrounding the entrance of Bar Rumba are painted with shapes of bodies in movement, which are coloured blue, orange, green and yellow over a beige background. The walls of the bar are painted with the same patterns and colours as outside. These figures have no specific reference to a country or a theme, accommodating to the different clubs that operate in Bar Rumba during the week. When entering, from either door, a visitor is faced with the bar and the tables. The dance floor is not visible at first glance, it is either too far away to be noticed or behind you. As shown in the diagram (refer to figure 4.3). Bar Rumba has three levels (approximately one foot height between each level); the highest is the area for the disc jockeys, there is a second level originally used as a stage which is the same height as the area where the bar is, and the lowest level is the dance floor. Although my description might imply that these levels are intended to draw attention to the dance floor, this is not the case because there is not much difference in height between the levels. Also, the entrance of the bar is located in such a position that it privileges the bar. Considering that it is an underground floor with no windows, only a back door that leads to the shopping centre, and that there are no fans on the ceiling, the fact that the air conditioning was usually turned off on Tuesdays made the dance floor hotter than the area near the bar. It was usually very crowded because those wanting to dance would stand at the sides of the dance floor waiting to be asked to dance, or making judgements about whom to dance with. Although fans are located in the corners of the dance floor and near to the bar, the dance floor gets very hot and it is almost impossible to dance without ending up completely covered in sweat.

Here I want to emphasise the physicality of Bar Rumba, particularly its location on an underground floor without windows reached through a corridor staircase. This contributes to an identity which is often associated with music clubs. The distribution of the place would also have an impact on the performance of Latin identities at these clubs. The location of the dance floor, its size and the hotness produced by the lack of air conditioning suggest (when compared to the other salsa clubs described below) particular emphasis on

the 'hotness' of the dancing body. This situation, however might be different other nights, particularly on Saturdays when the air conditioning is turned on.

The distribution of Bar Rumba also suggest that the dancing bodies are performing for each other and for those watching from the edges of the dance floor. This because the place is divided in such a way that the dance floor is not visible from any other area in the place. The bar occupies a prominent position in the club as it is visible from either the sitting area or the dance floor.



**Figure 4.3**  
**Bar Rumba**

After setting up the clubs the owners of Bar Rumba and Bar Cuba were interested in maintaining them as a commercial success and they contracted an 'entertainment manager' to make the place work. The owner was involved in the initial phase of creating the club, then his participation was limited to making sure that all of the parts involved in running the club were co-ordinated. The 'entertainment manager' was in charge of organising each night of the club. Chris Greenwood was the entertainment manager of Bar Rumba and Bar

Cuba and he made the arrangements with disc jockeys and musicians. He also dealt with the publicity for the place, although each disc jockey would promote and advertise their own night. The management of Bar Rumba and Bar Cuba also prepared a general leaflet advertising each club at the venue. All these arrangements were done verbally which guaranteed flexibility for the owner and the entertainment manager, who was also under a verbal contract. These clubs ran until they were no longer successful for the owner.

The entertainment manager has an important role in the club. Chris Greenwood had 'targets to reach' for the owners; 'They want to see money coming in. You've got to sell yourself, know that your ideas are going to make up money. You've got to market it'.<sup>51</sup> Greenwood was responsible for making decisions in these clubs, he had to meet clear objectives which corresponded to the owners' objectives. His interests and aims shaped each night of the place.

We were standing in the local community trying to do something for the Europeans as well. ... What I try to do is fuse things, I don't like being a purist. I mean there are Colombian clubs where the girls all sit on one side and the guys on the other, and they will wear a lot of gold. You know, like in Colombia. But our idea was not to duplicate what is happening over there and bring it here. You have to adapt it. We do dance classes to try to get people into it and it has been a great success.<sup>52</sup>

Greenwood used a stereotyped version of Latin identity to differentiate the clubs he was managing from those frequented by working class Colombians, by referring to the separation of men and women in the clubs and the wearing of exaggerated gold jewellery accessories. This emphasis on being different to 'Colombian' clubs highlights the way in which these two clubs (Bar Rumba and Bar Cuba) were not aiming at attracting Colombians in London. Within this context, it is worth noting that these clubs were promoted as 'Cuban' (or with Cuban signifiers - rumba), for example, rather than

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51 Personal interview with Chris Greenwood, 16 October 1993.

52 Personal interview with Chris Greenwood, 16 October 1993.

Colombian. However, Greenwood acknowledged that he was aware that this issue was creating tensions with Colombians in London,

In terms of salsa, lots of clubs here are mainly Colombian because there is a big Colombian population; but the New York salsa, the Cuban-originated music and Puerto Rican music interested us a bit more than the Colombian stuff, although now it is really strong. There was quite a lot of resentment from the Colombians. They thought it was a bit like cultural imperialism, you know, 'this is our thing, you should not be doing it'.<sup>53</sup>

Bar Rumba was also not oriented towards the Colombian population in London, although as Yu mentioned, some Latin Americans in the club 'gives authenticity', because after all 'it is a Latin bar'.<sup>54</sup>

As I mentioned earlier these bars have different clubs each night. Latin nights are organised in what are also late night clubs for Acid Jazz or Garage music on other days of the week. When it opened in September 1993, Bar Rumba started with two Latin nights during the week: Sunday School with Dave Hucker, which was free, and a live set by Ramón Vallejos Descargas on Tuesdays when a fee of £3 was charged. The same Descarga nights were organised in Bar Cuba on Mondays and a club called Sol y Sombra was organised by Dave Hucker in Bar Cuba on Wednesdays. According to the licensing authority Bar Rumba can not charge admission on Sundays. The other nights of the week Bar Rumba was the venue for funk, soul, garage and acid jazz clubs. Sunday School kept operating in Bar Rumba until June 1994, when it was moved to Villa Stephano, and the gay night held at Villa Stephano was moved to Bar Rumba.<sup>55</sup>

However, live performances on Tuesdays were not economically successful for the owners, so after two months the live set was eliminated. After this there was an experimental period in which the organisers would invite a guest disc jockey every

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<sup>53</sup> Personal interview with Chris Greenwood, 16 October 1993.

<sup>54</sup> Personal interview with Eric Yu, 22 October 1993.

<sup>55</sup> An Italian restaurant in Holborn, which is owned by the same people who own Bar Rumba.

Tuesday and admission was free. In January 1994 Salsa pa'ti was introduced in Bar Rumba. This name was a play on words, in English having the connotation of 'salsa party' but in Spanish meaning 'salsa for you'. Salsa pa'ti was initially organised by four disc jockeys who worked together for the first time during November 1993 in Bar Rumba. Each disc jockey had a different selection of music offering a variety of salsa music.<sup>56</sup> The entrance was free until August 1994 when one pound was charged. In comparison, a fee of between six to eleven pounds was charged for Saturday nights when it was a club for garage music.

Disc jockeys have to do the publicity for their night or for their club whilst also promoting the venue. Disc jockeys in this case are also promoters of their night in that club, which also has a separate theme or name. Although the publicity is prepared by what I would like to call the 'promoter-DJ', it has to be done according to the owners' aims. In Bar Rumba, Saturday nights are reserved for 'trendy people', this is 'for the people who like Soho and Covent Garden'.<sup>57</sup> The following advertisement for one Saturday night includes almost every element the owners are interested in attracting. '... Dress up and be grown up, as this is likely to draw an older (20- & 30-something) good-lookin' crowd'.<sup>58</sup> Near Piccadilly Circus, this tapas bar also attracts many tourists passing by. The following advertisements for Sunday School, published in Time Out, also address the audience the owners wanted to reach: 'DJ Dave Hucker hosts this tropical musical cruise of Latin America, West Africa and the Caribbean islands which draws Latinos and Global groovers'<sup>59</sup> or 'DJ Dave Hucker hosts this tropical musical cruise, spinning a sweaty salsa selection which always draws a packed dance floor of Latinos, gringos and Global groovers'.<sup>60</sup>

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56 Towards the end of my research only Ramiro and Dominique continued Salsa pa'ti.

57 Personal interview with Eric Yu, 22 October 1993.

58 Time Out, March 16-23 1994, section Clubs, p50.

59 Time Out, March 9-16, 1994, section Clubs, p54.

60 Time Out, April 6-13, 1994, section Clubs, p53.

Each 'promoter-DJ' also distributes leaflets advertising their clubs, so bringing into the club other people who are not reached by the publicity that the management of Bar Rumba prepares. For example, Dominique ran Salsa Boogie on Saturdays at HQ in Camden Town and Salsa Mania on Fridays in Down Mexico Way near Piccadilly Circus. She would usually promote these nights at Bar Rumba. Ramiro was taught salsa at Holborn on Tuesday nights and after that he d'jayed at Bar Rumba. Some of his students regularly followed him to the club, most of them English people. He also disc jockeyed at Bar Tiempo in Pentonville Road and Salsa in Charing Cross Road. Thus, people who visited these clubs would move around these venues on different days of the week. Hardly any Latin Americans participated at Bar Rumba, which was mainly frequented by Europeans.

Latin nights at Bar Rumba started with a salsa dance lesson from six to eight and from there on Dominique (White British), Byron (Black British) and Ramiro (Bolivian) would take over until 2 am. The three have different musical knowledge and tastes that are put in practice when d'jaying. Dominique prefers modern salsa, Ramiro likes Colombian salsa and Byron prefers old classic salsa. Dominique Roome's collection mainly included albums dating from the 1980s and onwards, the time when she started getting into salsa. Ramiro's started his collection<sup>61</sup> when he commenced as a disc jockey in Bar Tiempo, and he accepted that his knowledge of the music was very little. His collection was predominantly Colombian salsa and fairly new releases from other countries such as Venezuela and Puerto Rico.<sup>62</sup> Byron described his collection as 'authentic', which he explained as non-commercial salsa. His collection included what he called 'old school salsa' from Puerto Rico, Cuba and New York, and other tropical rhythms from the Caribbean. He would not buy Colombian salsa because it lacked the improvisation that the old salsa has. He organised two Mambo Rama nights at Down Mexico Way on Thursdays

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61 A year and a half before the time the interview was held, 22 March 1994.

62 Personal interview with Ramiro at La Finca, 22 March 1994. He usually buys his records from Mr Bongo or through fax orders to Miami.

and Saturdays, where he played a selection from his collection. However, in Bar Rumba he felt that people did not enjoy the 'old school salsa'.<sup>63</sup>

In Sunday School disc jockey Dave Hucker included other rhythms, such as soca and reggae. Dave Hucker's collection started in the late 1970s, when he started d'jaying, but he did not start as a salsa disc jockey until mid 1980s.<sup>64</sup> The night started at six with a salsa dance lesson by Elder (Colombian). Dave Hucker then took over from seven until eleven, when the Bar must close.

Because Bar Rumba was open all week round, the owner considered change to be an important element for its continuation. Although different groups of people were attracted every day, continuity was established on a weekly basis by those who participated regularly in the club. Continuity was also obtained through advertising and music policy, which was to include garage, jazz, soul, reggae, rock, Latin and acid jazz. Bar Rumba was constantly revising their strategies and responding to changes occurring in the music scene. Changes to Bar Rumba were discussed regularly at meetings of staff who considered the strategic position of the venue within the music scene.<sup>65</sup>

Although selling Mexican and Spanish food and beer, the 'Latin' identity of Bar Rumba was largely constructed through the music played on these two nights and the way these were promoted to a particular type of audience. One night aimed to attract a more cosmopolitan audience for whom salsa might be a part of 'world music', whereas the other attempted to attract those more interested in salsa as a dance. Both nights were organised within the context of the owners' strategy of positioning Bar Rumba in relation to a wider network of popular dance music in London.

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63 By the end of the ethnographic research Byron was no longer playing at Bar Rumba.

64 Personal interview with Dave Hucker, 22 February 1994. Dave Hucker buys his collection from Mr. Bongo, travels often to France, South American record labels, and from friends who travel regularly to New York. Nowadays he has a column in *Straight no Chaser* and does some consultancy work for Japanese clubs and promotion companies. He was invited to d'jay in a club at Osaka, Japan.

65 There are two types of staff meeting, one with all the staff, and another with those in charge of the strategic management of the Bar.

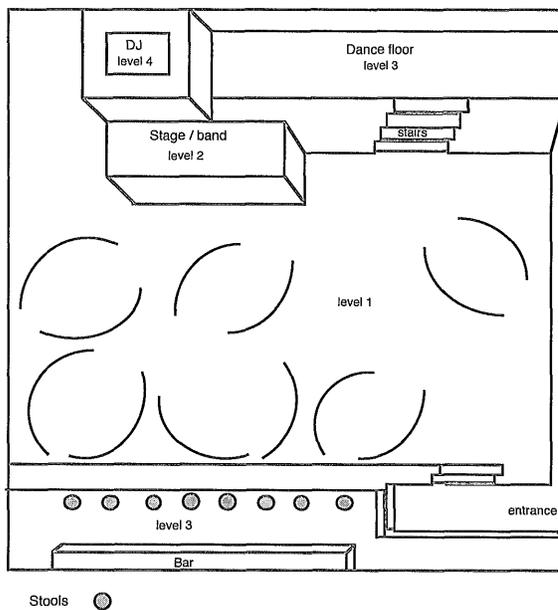
### 5.3 Bar Tiempo at La Finca

Bar Tiempo<sup>66</sup> is a club in Pentonville Road, north London. Bar Tiempo is on the first floor of La Finca, the Spanish restaurant on the ground floor. Among participants of this club there is no clear distinction between La Finca and Bar Tiempo, most would call it by La Finca, some by Tiempo, others as Bar Tiempo at La Finca. To avoid confusion I will refer to it as Bar Tiempo.

Bar Tiempo is divided into four parts, each with different levels (refer to figure 4.4). The lowest level is occupied with big rounded sofas facing the dance floor and the stage, and there are round tables in the middle. The second level is an improvised stage for the band, which is put in when there is any live performance, otherwise it is taken out. The dance floor and the bar, both in opposite corners, are at the same level, creating a third level. The highest level is the box for the disc jockey who is not facing the dance floor, but the bar. The bar and the dance floor are most visible from any part of the club. When entering you are faced with the bar to one side and the dance floor on the other side. The dance floor is at the same eye level as the bar, being predominantly exposed. However, it is interesting to notice that (contrary to Club Bahia) most of the people would dance to the music being played by the disc jockey and then stop and observe the band playing or visit the bar. Thus, the band and the dancers were not competing for attention. The disc jockey is located very high and can usually be noticed when located at the opposite side in a corner of the bar. In Bar Tiempo the dance floor occupies a privileged position in relation to the other areas of the venue. In this club the performance of dancing bodies is emphasised by the location and height of the dance floor.

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<sup>66</sup> It was very difficult to get hold of the owner of Bar Tiempo, Jim Walley. Thus, the information on this place was obtained through Ramiro Zapata who is the entertainment manager at the place. However, it was also very difficult to have an interview with him. At the time of the interview I had already arranged to meet him twice and after waiting for over an hour he had cancelled the interview on both occasions. I managed to interview him the third time but for this I also had to wait for over an hour. The interview was held in the break of a meeting he had at the time. This interview was continually interrupted by the person waiting for him, and he was reluctant to give information away. His answers were very vague. Thus, the quality of the information I could get from him was limited because of the circumstances in which the interview was held.



**Figure 4.4**  
**Bar Tiempo**

Bar Tiempo was decorated with painted images of musicians, the sun, beach and people dancing on the walls. Almost all of the pictures on the walls were painted yellow, orange and hints of brown over beige walls. There was an image of a sun with actual instruments attached to it, and one of a man playing maracas which are attached to his hands. There was another painting of a man playing congas on a beach and, another image of a couple dancing. This club combines elements associated with outdoor environment through the paintings on the walls with those of indoor furniture. Through its images it recreates a coastal environment within an enclosed area which is dominated by the furniture. Although contrasting, the physicality and combination of elements in the decoration suggest that the performance of dancing bodies on the dance floor are there to be watched from the comfort of the sofas. Thus, dancers on the raised dance floor are 'on stage', and one which attempts to resemble a sunny and bright site.

At Islington, near Angel and Kings Cross underground stations, this bar is less likely than Bar Rumba to attract tourists but more likely to attract middle class English people and middle class Latin Americans. Participants at this bar were mainly Europeans, although on Saturdays it was frequented by a mixed audience (Latin Americans and Europeans). Most of the staff were Latin American or Spanish. The club's advertisements were both in English and Spanish. They advertise in Time Out as well as Latin American newspapers, and distribute some leaflets in the stands of La Fogata at Elephant and Castle shopping centre. The club was promoted as 'Bar Tiempo, the temple of salsa. The music, dance and drinks of Spain and South America'.<sup>67</sup>

Bar Tiempo is a venue for Latin American music only and opened from Wednesdays to Sundays. Admission fees varied from four to seven pounds, depending on the day of the week and whether there was a band; usually Wednesdays and Thursdays are four pounds. Disc jockeys changed and they would bring guest disc jockeys at any time, but usually Ramiro Zapata, the promoter of the club, was the disc jockey. Ramiro Zapata (Bolivian) is the promoter of Bar Tiempo; he is mainly in charge of advertisement and establishing the contracts with the bands. He started working for Bar Tiempo at the beginning of 1993. As many other 'promoter-DJs', Ramiro promotes clubs, does consultancy work, d'jays, and teaches how to dance to salsa.

Wednesday and Thursday nights would start with dance lessons from seven to nine in the evening and then recorded music until 2:30 am.<sup>68</sup> On some occasions Bar Tiempo would bring live bands, usually on Fridays and Saturdays, however these are not regularly organised. Salsa y Aché and Roberto Pla's Latin Jazz Ensemble were two of the bands that often played at Bar Tiempo. Some non-resident Latin bands, when on tour through Europe, had performed in Bar Tiempo. It is interesting to notice that on the day that Raison band from Cuba played in Bar Tiempo, brochures and posters for tourism to Cuba

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<sup>67</sup> From leaflets.

<sup>68</sup> Wednesdays are not always open.

were distributed in the middle of the band's performance on stage. Within this context salsa was promoted as part of tourism to Cuba.

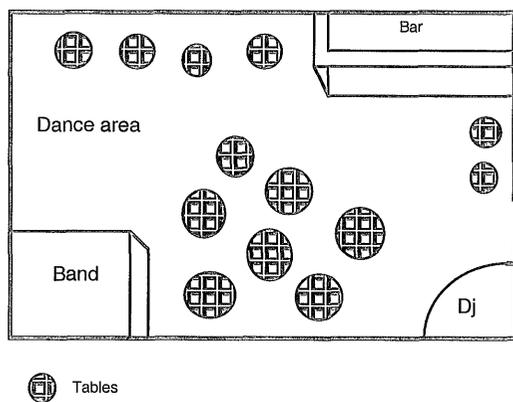
In Bar Tiempo salsa is part of an identity in which Spanish and Latin are mixed; Spain is emphasised through the food and Latin America through the music, dance and drinks. This is reinforced by the presence of employees who include both Latin Americans and Spanish. Visually, the club is decorated with images similar to those found in tourist brochures (such as bright sun and beach life). The club attracts a predominantly middle class audience, particularly those who are interested in dancing and learning how to dance salsa. The music played is 'tropical' salsa and contemporary Latin pop (in contrast to clubs that play 'classic' salsa from the 1970s and other sounds which are related to salsa through the idea of 'world music'). This music also attracts Latin Americans, usually on Saturdays, but most of the audience are European. The identity of the club is constructed through these elements to communicate a bright, tropical, coastal Latin identity which could also be 'Spanish'. It is often the case that some of the most visible 'Latin' clubs in London have been formed out of Spanish tapas bars or restaurants. Hence, Spanish elements are retained but the music and dancing tends to privilege the idea of Latinness.

#### **5.4 Club Bahia**

Club Bahia is on the ground floor of The Gallery which is a Spanish restaurant in Bond Way, south London. Club Bahia was opened by Nacho Gálvez, a Chilean political refugee in March 1990. Near Vauxhall underground station, on the corner of Bond way and Parry Street, it is located in an area where there is little night life, pubs or shops. Thus those who visit Club Bahia tend to do so because they know about its existence. Club Bahia is mainly visited by middle class Latin Americans and Europeans.

Bahia is decorated with signed photos of famous Jazz musicians like Dizzy Gillespie and Duke Ellington, and some top Latin Jazz musicians in London like Roberto Pla. The tables are round and covered with red gingham table clothes. Latin American handicrafts

and wooden parrots hang on the columns of the club. Nacho Gálvez, the owner of Bahia, explained that with the mixture of objects he intended to signify both Latin and jazz, simultaneously. As shown in figure 4.5 the club has a square flat floor, except for the stage which is located in a corner of the club and elevated approximately one foot from the floor. Participants tended not to dance to the recorded music, but instead danced when the band was playing, in contrast with Bar Tiempo. In Bahia the band and the participants performed for each other. I observed many interactions, for example the lead singer when improvising would sometimes mention the names of people dancing.



**Figure 4.5**  
**Club Bahia**

Initially Club Bahia opened only on Fridays, but during the year I carried out the research it was open on Fridays and Saturdays and occasionally organised a special night on Thursdays. Club Bahia was advertised in the Latin American press and in Time Out. Every two months a programme of the forthcoming bands was also produced and this was posted to those on their mailing list and some were left in the stand of La Fogata at Elephant and Castle, and in the Latin American House.

The musicians interviewed for this research mentioned Bahia as the best Latin club in which they have played, not just because of the venue or because of the interaction with the dancers, but also because of the relationship with the owner. Band members were paid reasonably well when compared to the other clubs they have played. Some of the

resident bands that have played at Bahia were Candela, Chili Havanero, Conjunto Sabroso, La Clave, La Explosión, Los Originales del Vallenato, Los Soneros, Palenque, Ramón Vallejos' Descarga, Roberto Pla's Latin Ensemble, Salsa y Aché, Tumbaito, Víctor Hugo's Picante and Viramundo. Some visiting bands from New York like Adalberto Santiago, Sierra Maestra (a Cuban band based in New York) and Máximo Jimenes y su Conjunto Vallenato (from Colombia). Bahia was considered by the musicians interviewed as the club where they received the most friendly environment, which many contrasted with HQ and Bass Clef that were always mentioned with discontent.

Apart from promoting bands in a prominent way in each leaflet by placing a photo on the front page, Nacho was also attempting to position Bahia's presentation of salsa within London's jazz music scene;

Club Bahia: Home of the Latin Beat. Club Bahia is Britain's first Latin jazz club. Latin jazz related music is filling a huge gap in London's arts and entertainment spectrum. Latin jazz band playing salsa, sambas to a packed dance floor. Top Latin Disc jockeys spinning the latest Latin tunes attracting everybody who loves Latin music. All of this plus ... a good selection of Latin American drinks and a warm and friendly atmosphere guarantees an unforgettable night.<sup>69</sup>

As is suggested by this quote, which appears in every leaflet, Nacho is interested in attracting a wider audience than just Latin Americans. As he pointed out 'in London there are British people as well as different ethnic minorities. ... Basically, it is towards this variety that our publicity is directed and open to'.<sup>70</sup> Although aiming at a mixture of people, Bahia is mainly frequented by middle class Latin Americans. This type of audience was maintained through the cost of the entrance fee (which was seven pounds);

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<sup>69</sup> From leaflet.

<sup>70</sup> Personal interview with Nacho Gálvez, 30 October 1993. The interview was held in Spanish. Original text follows: '... y en el gran Londres hay británicos y distintas minorías étnicas. ... Eso es a lo que la publicidad va dirigida, básicamente abierta a la variedad'.

the quality of the service (tablecloths, drinks served individually and not as bottles of liquor) and through the centrality of live music as something to be appreciated as well as danced to. The club established a direct link with its audience through a mailing list and the distribution of a professionally produced programme, rather than photocopied 'flyers' distributed more randomly on the street or in places where Latin Americans meet.

Nacho Gálvez positioned Club Bahia outside of and against those clubs that offered what he considered to be cheap entertainment for Latin American immigrants. He wanted to get away from what he called 'the third world image'<sup>71</sup> of Latin America that he feels many clubs were contributing to. In this context salsa in Club Bahia was presented as part of a Latin identity which was constructed in a deliberate contrast to those clubs frequented by working class Latin Americans and the clubs which draw on tropical and tourist images. A more subtle and sophisticated appreciation of music was privileged over dancing, drinking and eating, which was reinforced through the decoration and construction. Visually, Club Bahia placed an emphasis on musicians and it was constructed and organised in a similar way to jazz clubs rather than disco dance clubs.

### 5.5 Barco Latino

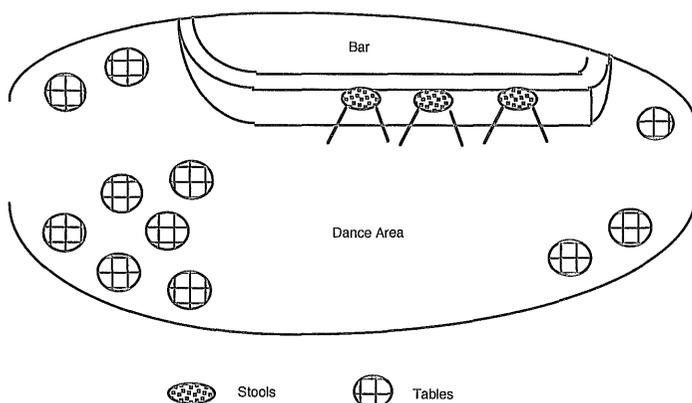
Barco Latino, as its name suggests, is a boat located on the River Thames (Temple Pier, Victoria Embankment). Barco Latino is open every day, from twelve mid day to three in the morning; during the day it is a Colombian restaurant and a Latin club after 9pm. Because of its location, during the day Barco Latino is frequented by tourists who stop for a beer or a bottle of wine, and by those working nearby for their lunch. As a club, Barco Latino is frequented mainly by Colombians, particularly on Saturdays. Amongst Colombians this is one of the most popular clubs that operates with a licence.

Barco Latino is a small boat that is limited by the licensing authorities to seventy-five people. It is arranged so that the dance floor area is in the middle of the boat, nearer to

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71 Personal interview with Nacho Gálvez, 30 October 1993.

the entrance and in front of the bar (refer to figure 4.6). The dance floor occupies most of the space, but is still a very small area.



**Figure 4.6**  
**Barco Latino**

The wall near the dance floor area was decorated with a collection of postcards from different regions of Colombia. These included images of the geographic variety of Colombia (mountain Andean region, the urban cities of Bogota, Cali and Medellín and the Caribbean coastal area of Cartagena and Baranquilla). The back walls of the boat are painted with a mural of a bright blue sky and a sunny beach site with palm trees. Some toy parrots are hanging near the bar area, but most prominent are stickers over the frames of the bar. These are all proverbs (refranes) of Latin sayings, many which are sexist, for example 'Mother in laws are good, but buried as the yuca'.<sup>72</sup> Barco Latino is administered by Camilo Pereira, Colombian, who has been living in this country for twenty-one years now (April 1995).<sup>73</sup> He started at the boat in November 1990, when he

<sup>72</sup> It also has some stickers that are play on words and images with advertisements of, for example, Coca Cola: 'Coma Caca, dietética', literally meaning 'eat shit, dietetic'; in Spanish it has a similar meaning to 'talking bollocks'.

<sup>73</sup> Personal interview with Camilo Pereira, 31 March 1995. Camilo was involved in organising some clandestine clubs for Latin Americans, such as El Escondite and Amigo Hall. He is also well known amongst Colombians because he used to play football at Clapham, where he then started selling food and drinks.

hired the place on Sunday nights. After a year he bought the lease for the business of the boat and converted it into El Barco Latino, a Latin bar-restaurant. He also changed the music, by playing Latin music all the time and included a menu which has a selection of Latin American dishes like 'tamales', 'sancocho', 'tostones' and 'chicharón'.

Contrasting with Bahia, as a club, Barco Latino has attracted mainly working class Latin Americans. Although, Camilo said he is 'not interested in attracting people by race, or social position. They can wear a tie or not, they could be blacks or not, this is a Latin place for everyone'.<sup>74</sup> 'Smart' dressing codes are specified in Bahia's promotion, whilst Barco Latino has no specification. There is no entrance fee at Barco Latino before eleven when a fee of three pounds is charged. The club offers a selection of Latin American drinks and beers, sold individually and by bottles of liquor (more economical for those wanting to spend a longer time at Barco Latino). This is in contrast to Bahia where drinks are sold individually.

Barco Latino started with a licence to open until eleven as a bar-restaurant, but it did not have a licence to operate as a club. Despite this, it would be open until very late.

Although it did not have the licence to operate as a club, Barco Latino advertised in the Latin American press and leaflets were distributed in Clapham Common and Elephant and Castle shopping centre. However, as Camilo explained, 'the place became very popular and the police passing by started to notice that there were many people coming onto the boat and that it was open until late. We are in the centre, that it is where the police and the council have a stronger policy, thus from February 1993 until November we had to start closing at eleven and the business went down'.<sup>75</sup> When it reopened in November 1993 Barco Latino was advertised in the Latin American press as 'a

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74 Personal interview with Camilo Pereira, 31 March 1995. Interview was held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'no me interesa atraer a gente por raza o posición social, pueden tener corbata o no, pueden ser negros o no, es un sitio Latino para todo el mundo'.

75 Personal interview with Camilo Pereira, 31 March 1995. Interview was held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Comenzó a hacerse popular y la policía y los bomberos comenzaron a notar que venía mucha gente y que abría hasta tarde. Como estamos en el centro que es donde la policía y el 'council' ataca más desde Febrero de 1993 hasta noviembre tuvimos que cerrar a las 11pm y el negocio se nos cayó'.

Colombian patrimony at the service of all the “Rumberos” of the world’, opening their doors ‘to the rest of the Latin American community and to the world in general’.<sup>76</sup> As Camilo explained, now that he is located in the centre, that Latin American food and music has become more recognised and that he is operating with a proper licence, he appeals to a wider audience. He felt that this way he could introduce Latin American culture into Britain.<sup>77</sup> Camilo Pereira was interested in attracting a wider audience, however, on Saturday nights it was still mainly frequented by Colombians.

Advertisements were in Spanish, usually published in the Latin American press, or leaflets were left at the Elephant and Castle shopping centre and other Latin American shops in London. However, advertisements were also being placed in Time Out and the club has started dance lessons during the week with José Polanco, a Colombian dance teacher.

Located a short walk from the Houses of Parliament this club has always been very visible for the authorities and has been raided by the police and by immigration officers on several occasions. Camilo explained how the police were alerted after an article published in City Limits which described dancing in Barco Latino as like ‘dancing in the underground trains at peak hours’.<sup>78</sup> A further example occurred during the last football world cup in which Colombia went into the finals, when the boat had a large screen transmitting the games. Just after the first match in which the Colombian team lost, an article was published in The Guardian.<sup>79</sup> The story was about Colombians watching the match at Barco Latino. Three days later the police raided Barco Latino - and it is worth noticing that no other Latin club transmitting the games was raided by the police during that period.

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76 Noticiero Latinoamericano, 16 noviembre al 15 diciembre 1993, p28.

77 Personal interview with Camilo Pereira, 31 March 1995.

78 Personal interview with Camilo Pereira, 31 March 1995.

79 Chaudhary, Vivek. ‘Up the creek with conspiracy theories. Why did the much fancied Colombia do so badly at the World Cup? The Guardian 28 June 1994, p19.

Camilo acknowledged that at the beginning it was fair enough because they were opening without the proper licence, but after obtaining the licence the police kept on visiting the place and insisting to see the licence. Camilo said,

I was getting tired, they would come every eight days and ask me to show them the licence, or to see whether there was a control over the number of people allowed in to the boat. Once I was a bit rough and told them 'this is racism, I bet that you are not checking out English discos as much as you do here'. That time they even took me to talk to the superintendent. But since then they have not come anymore, it has already been three months since that incident.<sup>80</sup>

The case of Barco Latino, where the owner has had to negotiate its position with the licensing authorities and the police brings me back to an important dimension to the power-geometry of the city - that of the hierarchies being established by the state. Through the process of establishing licensing times for bars and restaurants in the city and by granting licences the state as the governing entity has the power to regulate public space. This is a further factor that plays an important part on the routes that dancers choose to adopt.

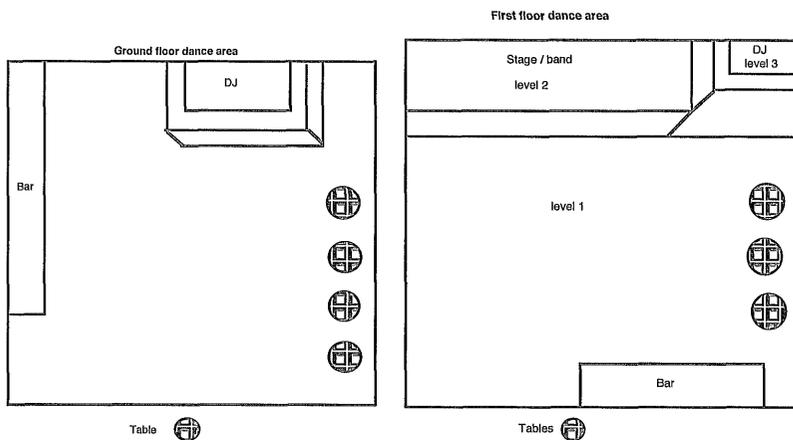
Barco Latino has been constructed to communicate a Colombian identity. The boat is decorated to resemble a local bar that might be found in a small town in Colombia and other parts of Latin America, particularly through the stickers of proverbs on the bar. The Colombian working class identity is more apparent during the evenings when the boat becomes a club that attracts working class Latin Americans, than during the day when it is a bar-restaurant. Due to its location and visibility it has gradually changed and attracted the attention of non-Latin American people who are interested in dancing.

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<sup>80</sup> Personal interview with Camilo Pereira, 31 March 1995. Interview held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Un día ya me tenían cansado, venían cada ocho días a pedirme que le enseñara la licencia, o a ver si se tenía el control en la entrada. Un día me le puse un poco grocero y les dije 'eso es racismo, a que a las discos inglesas no las están chequeando tanto'. Esa vez me llevaron a hablar con el superintendente y todo. A partir de eso ya no vienen, y de eso ya van tres meses'.

### 5.6 Mambo Inn

Mambo Inn is advertised as a Latin, African and Jazz club located in Brixton, south London. Since it opened in November 1987 Mambo Inn has been offering this musical variety in the same night. Mambo Inn occupies the four rooms of the building named the Loughborough Hotel; the two main dance floors, one on the ground floor, the other on the first floor; a 'chill out' room on the first floor, and an open area in the underground floor (refer to figure 4.7).



**Figure 4.7,**  
**Mambo Inn**

The club is decorated with dark African style cloth hanging on the walls, tables are decorated with table clothes and there were always fresh fruit, candles and flowers on the tables. The smell of incense is one of the things that characterises Mambo Inn. In the ground floor dance room, behind the disc jockey's cabin, there is a mural. This is a picture of a urban residential area with palm trees in a sunny and bright environment. As there is no reference to a country, but to Latin or African related music, this mural could be associated with tropical coastal cities in Africa, the Caribbean Islands or South America.

Mambo Inn operates in a hired venue. The Loughborough Hotel is hired by the organisers of Mambo Inn on Fridays and Saturdays. This venue is also hired on Thursdays for Go Bananas, a salsa and lambada club; and on Sundays it is for Cafetín Porteño, a tango night. The organisers of Mambo Inn had a special arrangement with the owner of the property whereby they were allowed to decorate the place. Although most of the decoration is removable, such as the hanging on the walls, these are kept in the place and used by the other clubs hiring the venue. On these other days those wall hangings which have the name of Mambo Inn would be covered with the name of the other clubs.

Mambo Inn is located in Brixton, South London. Here I want to highlight another way in which the geographical location of this club is important because it started as a political project for the people who live in South London. Mambo Inn was created by four people; (Sue Steward, Rita, Max and Gerry Lyseight) from South London. Gerry Lyseight, one of creators of Mambo Inn, narrated,

People like me and a lot of people from the South, because I live in South London as well, everybody used to travel to North London to go to Bass Clef or whatever because there was nothing in South London. When I found that place, I knew people like me would not have to go up of the river anymore. You know, we don't have to go to the West End, we don't need more of those people anymore, we have got the Mambo Inn in the very heart of South London.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to being a place for music, Mambo Inn started as a political project from the left and their publicity was directed towards a particular public. Through the publicity and the decoration of the place their intention was to attract people with a particular life style.

From the very start, well we are all socialist, left wing. Right from the start we were really clear who our crowd was. We aim at people like us. So, we leafleted in alternative cinemas, health food shops, clothes and

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<sup>81</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Lyseight, 23 February 1994.

record shops, but of a particular lifestyle. So, what we are talking about is a kind of audience or crowd that we stick by; partly from what they ate, wear, what they listen to and what their politics were.<sup>82</sup>

During my research the people organising Mambo Inn produced a monthly programme in which they included one or two verses containing their political position about a prominent news item of that month. I would like to present an example of how they expressed their political position, although I understand this was very particular to what was happening in England at a specific moment.

Loose tongues wag about government lies / Or more Basically swell upon  
government flies / Watch them shift all the homeless - to the back of the  
queue / Then criminalise squatters and single mums too / **Negative public  
perception, just requires interception / you want positive reception?  
Just tell them there's been no deception** / Tellin' all those porkies must  
rot their IQ / imagination gone and now memory too / 'Arm Saddam?? ...  
Not my decision. Must be someone else you know' / but just look how all  
those fibbies grow the libido! (With a note at the end that said repeat  
chorus for 3 more years).<sup>83</sup>

The title of the program for that month (February 1994) 'Back to Mbalax', referred to the government policy of 'back to basics'. The play of words together with the pronunciation expressed their position on the 'back to basics' politics.

Mambo Inn initially intended to attract black people from South London. However, as Gerry Lyseight pointed out, as soon as Mambo Inn became more popular it was difficult to control the publicity and therefore the people that would go to Mambo Inn. Thus, during the year of the research Mambo Inn was not exclusively a club for black people from South London. Participants at Mambo Inn were of different ethnic and economic backgrounds, and from different parts of London.

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<sup>82</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Lyseight, 23 February 1994.

<sup>83</sup> Mamborama Monthly, "Back to Mbalax", Issue 53 - February 1994. Bold indicates the chorus.

In this club salsa is played together with other type of music with African influence. As Lyseight, who is also a disc jockey in Mambo Inn, explained, salsa is part of the musical route in which the disc jockey metaphorically crosses the Atlantic. Starting with music from West Africa he moves towards the East Coast, then crosses the Atlantic until he reaches the Caribbean. This musical practice is a way of expressing the routes of Africans through the Atlantic.

In Mambo Inn salsa is placed within a left political discourse which was established through the aims and objectives of the promoter-disc jockeys and their monthly report. Through these practices Mambo Inn created a politically alternative identity for the club. Although it still maintains this identity, most notable through the position assumed in their monthly programme, it attracts a variety of people, from different ethnic backgrounds, class, political interest and areas of London. Disc jockeys' practice of playing music also placed salsa in a historical discourse - that of the culture created via the shipping of African slaves to America and the subsequent migrations to Europe. These practices can be interpreted as placing 'Latin' music within the construction of a distinct Afro-Caribbean identity in London.

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Throughout this section I have shown how a range of 'Latin' identities were constructed and communicated through salsa clubs via a series of particular elements such as the decoration and geographical location, advertising strategies and publicity. Each of these identities were based either on class or national differentiation, and involved various ideas and images of Latin America.

For example, I first mentioned how clubs like Copacabana and Rumberos were established as working class Latin clubs through elements such as the cost of the entrance fee, publicity distribution and strategies of selling liquor by bottles rather than individual drinks, all of which contributed to attracting working class Latin Americans in London. In the case of Barco Latino the identity was further established through the

decoration of the boat. At night Barco Latino was considered a working class Latin club. However, during the day and because of its location the identity of the boat was that of a Colombian bar-restaurant and the working class Latin references were less evident. In contrast, Club Bahia attempted to appeal to a middle class Latin American clientele and maintained this identity through elements such as price of admission, door policy, decoration and service. I also referred to clubs that had been created out of tapas bars in which the 'Latin' identity was usually fused with a Spanish theme and I concluded with Mambo Inn where 'Latin' music was featured as part of a multi-cultural, Afro-Caribbean and politically alternative identity.

One of the further points I want to highlight from this discussion is how these 'Latin' identities are constructed and communicated across the time-space processes of the city. This has a direct impact on the possibilities for different people to participate in these clubs. For example, participation is affected by the days of the week a club operates, the entrance fee and specifications on the publicity, advertising strategies, audience addressed, music policy or music selection, and through the granting and monitoring of licensing authorities. This involves relations of power, in that entrepreneurs, disc jockeys, managers and local authorities are all seeking to influence the participation of different types of people at salsa clubs. I suggest that all these strategies and club related practices contribute to map out a power geometry of salsa clubs in London. It is within this context that I will discuss the movement of participants around salsa clubs in London in terms of a pattern of 'routes and routines' which take place across the networks established through the power geometry of the clubs. It should also be noted here that these movements are also occurring within the context of the broader spatial relationships that were discussed in Chapter Three.

## **6. Routes and Routines: Dancers and Disc Jockeys**

In this section I discuss the routes and routines that participants are creating through their movements around salsa clubs. Routes and routines are used here to refer to the specific movement and patterns that dancers created by participating at certain clubs and not others. More than concentrating on participation at the event, which I consider to be that particular moment in which participants come to be together, I wish to concentrate on the specific dynamics through which the intersection of participants occur. Thus, in this section I present dancers' narratives on their routes and routines across salsa clubs and discuss how the intersection of participants, (during the period of the research) was shaped by their economic situation, legal status and by various beliefs (and stereotypes) about Latin identity. Thus, I argue that understanding participation across the salsa clubs in London requires an awareness of how the routes of some might limit movement of others who are involved in similar processes and movements. That is, through the specific dynamics which contribute to and are part of the way in which the power-geometry of salsa clubs is constituted.

My argument here was initially developed from my observation of the absence of Latin Americans in most of the salsa clubs I visited, and the fact that when Latin Americans were present, the absence of non-Latin Americans was noticeable. This was not the case in every club, there were a few in which Latin Americans and non-Latin Americans were present. However, this issue - the absences - concerned me and changed the focus of this research. This, because I understand that what is absent from the clubs is as important for understanding participation in these clubs as what is present. I do not want to reduce participation to presence or absence, but I am using the idea of presence and absences to think about the movement of participants around salsa clubs in London. Thus the movement of participants was not occurring across a whole or unified salsa 'scene', instead participants were creating and adopting specific routes and routines around specific clubs. Hence, I argue that the routes and routines created by dancers' movements

around the different clubs are important for understanding the power-geometry of salsa clubs in London.

Throughout this thesis I have mentioned that I consider different levels of analysis that move from macro concerns of the nation-state to micro levels of analysis when considering the body. Up to now I have discussed how immigration regulations in Great Britain affects the movement of Latin Americans into England and has had an impact on the routes that people choose to adopt once in England. I have also discussed how Latin Americans were involved in creating and constructing Latin places through positive interactions and explained how, through this process, Latin Americans were actively constructing and developing routes through London. In the previous section I mapped out the identities of salsa clubs and here through the idea of routes and routines I will demonstrate that participating at these clubs is related to the issues discussed in the previous chapters, thus the need for the different levels of analysis that this thesis address.

### **6.1 Dancers**

The routes and routines created by dancers can be influenced by the days of the week on which clubs operate, the band performing, the disc jockeys playing and the policies and practices of club owners or promoters. The movement of dancers can also be related to their economic situation and employment conditions with specific reference to the working hours and working days. The location of the club was also significant in influencing the intersection of participants at any particular club. Here I will be discussing these issues as they were raised by dancers in narrating their routes and routines around salsa clubs in London.<sup>84</sup>

The movement of participants happens across a network of particular clubs; some will regularly visit one club, others will go to different places every week and some would

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<sup>84</sup> For this section I am relying on my observations, informal conversations with some participants I approached in the clubs and from formal interviews with some dancers.

even have a routine of visiting clubs during the week. I would like to start by introducing John Madison, an English man who I met at the London School of Salsa and who participated at different salsa clubs. John, who was a self employed graphic designer, started dancing to salsa and visiting clubs in August 1993 through a friend who first invited him to La Finca. John developed a network of friends with whom he would arrange to meet in the clubs. When I asked him which clubs he visited most he said;

Oh, I can give you a list. It almost works like a routine now. Everybody goes to certain places on certain nights. There are slight variations obviously. Starting from Monday night it is Cuba in Kensington, on Tuesday it would probably be Bar Rumba. Wednesday nights could be at La Finca the early part of the evening and take the lessons, then go to a place called the Rocket in Holloway Road. On Thursday nights it is obviously here (Latinos), and the routine now is to meet down in Salsa in Charing Cross Road, sometimes we go to Palladium as well, we go there for an hour and then go to Salsa, because Salsa gets very packed about 11pm. So we go to Palladium, spend an hour there and then go back to Salsa. Friday nights, possibly I would not go anywhere. If I am taking somebody out maybe I'll go to Club Bahia. Saturdays, I used to do a class at La Finca on Saturday evenings, but that now has stopped. So, every fortnight I go to Salsa Fusion. Obviously the Saturday in between if I was doing salsa I maybe go to HQs or Mambo Inn at Loughborough Hotel, or maybe to Club Bahia if there is a good band. Sometimes there is a good band at HQ, although you don't get many serious salsa dancers there. Club Bahia is more a kind of place where you take somebody out, rather than a club you just go to dance. You take somebody to dinner and then go down to the club, sit and listen to the band. That is basically it.<sup>85</sup>

John had developed a routine according to the days of the week on which each club operated; whether he was going to meet some friends, if there was a band he preferred and if he knew he was going to find good dancers. His choices for the weekend were limited to Salsa Fusion, Club Bahia, HQ and Mambo Inn. These were different to the

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85 Personal interview with John Maddison, 30 June 1994.

clubs mentioned by Latin Americans, with the exception of Club Bahia which was also mentioned by Latin Americans. Club Bahia presented possibilities for meeting points.

Although John had developed a network of friends through the clubs, he mentioned that he had not met many Latin Americans in these clubs; 'obviously Elder, the guy teaching, and Xiomara; one or two people I know, but I do not know their names and can't regard them as friends'.<sup>86</sup> Though he was expecting 'the clubs to be full of people from South America. I was surprised how many Anglos were there'.<sup>87</sup>

Through these routes and routines John narrated how he was involved in specific spatial practices across salsa clubs in London. He also noticed the visible separation of Latin Americans and non-Latin Americans at the salsa clubs that he mostly visited.

Gili, an Israeli woman I met at the London School of Salsa and who first arrived in England in 1987, developed a similar routine to that mentioned by John. They are friends and have met through the clubs. She described her activities in the following way:

I think I have checked almost every club that existed. Not really, I haven't been to Chicagos. But, it is very Latin they said, not our people the ones who go out there so much. Clubs, our clubs obviously, Bar Tiempo, the Rocket, Cuba, I have been to Bar Rumba a couple of times, Barco Latino, Bahia and Salsa Palladium. ... I find the Latin people kind of stick to each other, in a way. I have heard of Chicagos, there have been quite a few places that I don't go to. I know them, but I don't go there because there are mainly Latin people. I tend to mix with Latins that like to meet with foreign people. I want to go to places where I know people, and then also the Latin mentality can sometimes clash. It is like, if you go here, you know Western people go on their own and you don't have to go with a man, you go to these places and if you want to dance with somebody you just go and ask them. Latin places, they tend to go in couples, from what I have heard, I have never been; and you might be considered like looking for it, 'it' (emphasis). If you go and ask them to dance, they get the wrong

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<sup>86</sup> Personal interview with John Maddison, 30 June 1994.

<sup>87</sup> Personal interview with John Maddison, 30 June 1994.

idea, you know. Hey you just want to have a good dance, nothing to do with them, and they can get pretty sticky, and thinking 'oh she wanted to dance with me, maybe she wants something else'. I can't stand it. So, unless, I go with somebody I wouldn't go to these places. I've heard that they tend to have a lot of fights and they get carried away.<sup>88</sup>

In the case of Gili, an idea based on assumptions of a 'Latin' identity influenced the routes she took and the routines she developed. In this quote two types of assumptions about 'Latin' arose, first one related to the role of men and women in the clubs; and second that related to violence. Even when, as she acknowledged, she had never been to these places her considerations were based on a narrow version of Latin identity. Some of these ideas were related to incidents that she had heard of. The sharing of accumulated meanings about clubs, through word of mouth, played an important part in shaping the routes and routines that Gili developed. Hence, what I want to emphasise here is that although this is an individual's experience, the identity of the clubs had an influence on her routes and routines.

Referring to those clubs that were frequented by Latin Americans, Miguel,<sup>89</sup> who had been in England for five years and whose visa had expired, thought that these clubs were reproducing the image of a 'ghetto'. He was doing various types of jobs, like cleaning offices, restaurants and washing dishes. He was actively working with a solidarity campaign group for a Latin American country. He used to visit these clubs during his first year in England but not anymore, 'because it is like extending the ghetto and you never can get out of it; you live, talk, work and also have fun with them, it is like a circle from which you never escape'.<sup>90</sup> The image of 'Latin' places as reproducing the 'ghetto'

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88 Personal interview, 2 May 1994.

89 I met him in a club, when it was closed for the public. I was waiting for an interview and he was rehearsing with a folklore group. The name has been changed for security reasons.

90 Conversation with Miguel, whilst waiting for an interview, 13 February 1994. The conversation was in Spanish. Original text follows: '... porque eso es extender el gueto y nunca sales de él. Vives, hablas, trabajas y también te diviertes con ellos, es un círculo del cual nunca sales'.

is another version of Latin identity, this time based on the differences amongst the Latin American groups in London.

The clubs that were most mentioned by Latin Americans were Barco Latino, Club Bahia, Rumberos and 'La gota fría' (The cold drop) in Bootleggers. This last club, which opened towards the end of my research, was located near Oxford Circus and it operated on those premises on Saturdays and Sundays and was frequented by Latin Americans.<sup>91</sup> The advertisement for this club was published in the Latin American press and leaflets were distributed in the Elephant and Castle shopping centre. Although many non-Latin Americans know about this place the ones I talked to did not visit this club. For example Chris, an English dancer I met at Bar Rumba said;

There is a place in Oxford Street, but I can not remember the name of it. I believe that mainly Colombians go there; and there is that other place, Barco Latino. I went there last Christmas, there was a Christmas party at Bar Rumba and Elder the teacher took us after to that boat. People seem to be seriously South American. You could tell that most people were from Latin America.<sup>92</sup>

The clubs that Chris excluded from his routine were based on an observation of the 'seriously South American' people that participated at Barco Latino and on the sharing of information about 'La gota fría' in Oxford Street gained through word of mouth. This is also a sign of the visible separation that existed amongst those who participated at salsa clubs in London.

Diego Medina, a Colombian man who was involved in organising cultural events for the Latin American Association, did not visit most of the salsa clubs mentioned by non-Latin Americans because he believed that these were reproducing stereotypical images of Latin America. As he explained,

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<sup>91</sup> I visited this club only twice, but I did not have time to visit it long enough to include it in this research.

<sup>92</sup> From observations, 28 June 1994.

If I go to any it is to Bahia. ... I do not go regularly, but I think it is important, I would go at least every three months. Sometimes I go to new places to see how they are. But generally I don't like them because they represent precisely the exoticism of our culture. If you go to places like Down Mexico Way, you don't see any Latin people around, but you are listening to salsa music, seeing Mexican food; and perhaps the only Latin is washing dishes. Then, I prefer not to go.<sup>93</sup>

Although, as I explained in the previous section, salsa clubs were constructed in a way that communicated various Latin identities, Diego thought that most of the salsa clubs that he had visited were reproducing images of Latin America as a tourist site or as an exotic culture, and this affected the routes that he chose to adopt. However, the fact that Diego's participation was limited to Bahia was also a sign of class difference amongst Latin Americans in London. In Club Bahia the entrance fee was higher than any other Latin club in London thus even when this club was included in the routes of dancers, it was not part of their weekly routines. The identity of Club Bahia was also created through the sharing of accumulated meaning about the commitment of the owner. The owner of Bahia was the same person who started the first peña, which was initially set up as a response to the interests of a particular group of political refugees in London, articulating the differences of Latin American groups in London. Thus, in this case the knowledge about the owner's previous clubs and practices contributed to the identity of the clubs, whilst having an impact on the routes and routines of some participants, particularly along political consciousness and class differentiation.

Diego worked in the organisation of Latin American cultural events in London and Miguel was involved in a solidarity campaign group for the country he is from; and they have created an image of these clubs based on their own experiences and commitments.

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93 Personal interview with Diego Medina at the Latin American House, 17 August 1994. Interview was held in Spanish. Original text follows: 'Si voy es al Bahia. ... No regularmente, pero pienso que es importante, cada tres meses voy. A veces voy a lugares nuevos para ver que tal son. Pero en general no me gustan, no me gustan porque representan justamente el exoticismo de nuestra cultura. Si tu vas a lugares como el Down Mexico Way no ves un latino en ninguna parte; de pronto estas escuchando salsa, ves la comida Mejjicana y a lo mejor el único latino que hay está lavando platos. Entonces prefiero no ir'.

Although both were labour immigrants their political commitments made them more critical of Latin clubs as a stereotype of 'ghetto' or the 'exotic'.

For Carmen and María,<sup>94</sup> two other labour immigrants, different considerations were taken into account. They would not visit Club Bahia or Barco Latino. In the case of Club Bahia the cost is a strong consideration, but not in the case of Barco Latino. There are other considerations taken into account when visiting salsa clubs. Carmen has been living in England since 1984 and María since 1989. María's visa expired in 1990. Both were doing domestic labour during the week, they worked all day, from eight in the morning to seven in the evening. They lived in the outskirts of London and did not earn much money. Thus, the idea of going to a club is a big economic investment; they can only visit clubs once a month and on Saturday nights. They make sure that they are going to meet some friends and that they are going to have fun and dance. Most of all they went to clubs where María could go without the fear of drawing attention to her status in this country. In their case they preferred clubs like the no longer existing Copacabana and Chicagos,<sup>95</sup> but most of the time they invited people over to their flat or went to one-off parties organised by different organisations, such as the Latin American football league fund raising parties. Thus, for those Latin Americans whose situation in this country draws them to operate 'underground' the routes have to be negotiated and created away from commercial areas, in places where they become less visible.

The geographical location is a strong element influencing participation. However, the location alone was not the only element influencing the movement of participants across the salsa clubs. This I discussed when considering how participants often created routines amongst clubs like Bar Tiempo, Bar Rumba, Bar Cuba, Club Bahia and Mambo Inn, but

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<sup>94</sup> I met them in a club and met with them in several other occasions outside the clubs. The names have been changed.

<sup>95</sup> Chicagos was often used as a venue for Latin nights on Saturdays. However, during the period in which I carried out the research this venue still existed, but stopped running Latin nights.

often not between for example Barco Latino and Bar Rumba. Here the identity of the clubs was a significant influence on the routes taken by participants.

Both of these clubs - Barco Latino and Bar Rumba - were located in the centre of London, and the entrance fee was minimal or none. Thus, the location of the club and the economic situation of participants were not the only elements that were taken into account when creating routes and routines across salsa clubs. Although geographically located in areas of major economic investment and activity in London, there were similarities and differences amongst those who participated in creating the event at these clubs. I would like to draw attention to some issues regarding these two clubs as up to now I have often been making contrasts between clubs located in different geographical areas of the city. This might lead to the assumption that those clubs that are located in the centre of London are mainly frequented by English, Europeans and tourists passing by, and that those away from the centre by Latin Americans. Although I have mentioned a number of clubs which would counter such an assumption, I will now consider these two clubs (Bar Rumba and Barco Latino) and their interrelation to extend the discussion of routes and routines.

In Bar Rumba Saturdays were for what the owner considered to be the most 'trendy' clubs, attracting people of certain age and high economic status who could spend more money in the club. This was maintained through the entrance fee, which could range from ten to twelve pounds on Saturdays, in contrast to Latin nights, which started with free admission and then charged one pound. Despite this low cost, there were not many Latin Americans in this club during the week. It is worth noting that, first, the owners of Bar Rumba were not interested in attracting Latin Americans and second, that Latin nights were held on Tuesdays and not on Fridays or Saturdays, when most Latin Americans had the time to go out. Thus, for many Latin Americans it was often not possible to go to places like Bar Rumba during the week. Those who participated in creating the event in Bar Rumba did not necessarily include Barco Latino in their

routines. The opposite also happened, those who participated at Barco Latino would not necessarily include Bar Rumba in their routines.

This is an indication that there was not a unified salsa scene. In this example, Barco Latino was part of a different network of clubs to that of Bar Rumba. Barco Latino was frequented mainly by Colombians, and recalling the earlier section on Barco Latino I mentioned that this club had several problems with the licensing authorities and the police and was forced to close in February 1993 reopening with the proper licence on November of the same year. When closing and reopening the routines of those participating at Barco Latino were disrupted. But by then Barco Latino was operating half clandestine, and therefore included in a network of clubs different to those of Bar Rumba. Thus, although routines were disrupted, the movement of participants did not shift to Bar Rumba, but to other salsa clubs that were within similar social positions, often clandestine. It is in this way that those clubs with a short life, those constantly changing from venues, or those operating half clandestinely come to have an important role in disrupting and creating new routes for participants. Hence, continuity is established in different terms, usually through the disc jockeys playing, but most importantly through the recognition of and sharing in accumulated meaning. Thus, although participation is disrupted, a certain degree of continuity is guaranteed through the process by which participants are moving around certain salsa clubs and not others.

These routes and routines are not fixed and as such open for change. For example, I mentioned that when Barco Latino reopened the advertisement strategies and aims of the owner started to change. This included placing advertisements in magazines like Time Out, and starting dance lessons in order to attract a wider audience. Also, one of the disc jockeys at Barco Latino started D'jaying at Bar Rumba. This is an important element because the disc jockey playing was often taken into consideration when deciding which club to go and which not. Thus, disc jockeys are important because their routes can disrupt the routes and routines of participants.

There is not a unified salsa scene. Instead, the identities of the clubs and the routes and routines of dancers allowed different spatial patterns to develop which contributed to the creation of distinct salsa networks. Through the examples discussed above I have emphasised that dancers movements around salsa clubs in London were based on class differentiation, economic situation, working circumstances, ideas about national identities specifically Colombians, or cultural identities such as 'Latin', or in the sharing of accumulated meanings about clubs; all of which also played an important part in the construction of the identities of these clubs. These, however, are not the only issues that have an impact on dancers routes and routines. Nor is the identity of the clubs or dancers' routes and routines fixed. I also discussed other elements regarding club owners' promotional strategies and the monitoring of licensing authorities and that these contributed to disrupt dancers' routines and the identity of the clubs.

Up to now I have been discussing the spatial practices through which participants of salsa clubs in London created their routes and routines. However, disc jockeys used a different idea of routes and routines to the one I have already discussed. Disc jockeys were creating imaginary routes and routines as part of their 'playing practices'.

## **6.2 Musical routes and routines**

Musical routes were emphasised by almost all the disc jockeys interviewed in addition to their physical movement between the clubs. The physical routes were important for creating new routes and routines for dancers. As I mentioned, dancers create different routes and in doing so participate in various networks of clubs that do not necessarily coincide. Also, disc jockeys were sometimes mentioned as a reason for preferring one club over the other. Thus, disc jockeys were also developing routes outside each club through their physical movements around salsa clubs in London, whilst creating new possible routes for participants.

Musical routes, however, were explained by disc jockeys in terms of the cultural influences of the music they played. These routes were part of their routines of playing

music in any one night. Each disc jockey had different ways of explaining their musical routes and routines; either by emphasising geography, tempo of rhythms or story lines.

Byron, disc jockey for Bar Rumba and Down Mexico Way, described his musical routine on a night in the following way:

It is like a crescendo. I really start with a mid-tempo with the instrumental, ... I just play one or two records, I am setting the field. As time goes on, each record should be better and better, then gradually it should get more fiery, but into something tropical, something that will get everybody on the floor. The peak is salsa, then I stop and I go into merengue, soul, tropical mix, something else. I go around like in a circle, around the Caribbean.<sup>96</sup>

Musical routines are explained in terms of time and rhythms and this is related to the body movements on the dance floor. As night goes on the rhythms are faster, then slower and faster again. As is also hinted, these tempos and the rhythms on which the routes are based are also related to geographical routes, in terms of the cultural influences on the music he is playing. Dave Hucker, for example made a clearer connection between these two dimensions in explaining his music routines;

It is like a roller-coaster ride. Because I will play some very fast songs then I slow, like if you are going down hill, then you slow it at the bottom and play some slow ones, then medium pace as you go up, and then you peak with a fast one and put another fast merengue and then kind of slow it down. So it is a series of waves, say you have different levels of intensity with the music and the people, sometimes slower, other faster.<sup>97</sup>

He also spoke of his music routine as a journey in which he is taking the audience with him to wherever he wants to go; 'I mean you are moving from Africa to the Caribbean

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<sup>96</sup> Personal interview with Byron, 3 November 1993.

<sup>97</sup> Personal interview with Dave Hucker, 22 February 1994.

and South America and back to Africa; flipping over the Atlantic all the time, or even different parts of Africa'.<sup>98</sup>

In the case of Mambo Inn, the spatial distribution of the club allows for musical variety during the same night. In each room at Mambo Inn, DJs are also taking dancers metaphorically, as is explained by Gerry Lyseight, in 'a journey across the Atlantic to the Caribbean'.<sup>99</sup> These routes across the Atlantic were explained by Lyseight in terms of the relationship between time and rhythm and its roots. He explained these musical practices in which he linked routes and roots as a way of expressing the routes of Africans through the Atlantic.

In the above examples I have tried to demonstrate that musical routes and routines created by disc jockeys were established through different temporalities and spatialities; through different practices related to time, geography and rhythm.

As I mentioned earlier, disc jockeys move around different venues and in doing so they are building up a knowledge of the participants from what they have observed in the different salsa clubs in London. For example, Ara, a disc jockey for Salsa Palladium, mentioned that what he plays is influenced through building up a knowledge of the different audiences he has played to. He said it 'is built through what you think you know of them'.<sup>100</sup>

As another example, Gerry Lyseight, who is one of the disc jockeys at Mambo Inn, is aware of the different ethnic groups that participate at the club and takes this issue into account when d'jaying;

I used to find that the first people who used to come into the club were only African, and West Africans, so I played African music to start with, and it is easier to dance for English people as well. Because one of the

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<sup>98</sup> Personal interview with Dave Hucker, 22 February 1994.

<sup>99</sup> Personal interview with Gerry Lyseight, 23 February 1994.

<sup>100</sup> Personal interview with Ara, 31 August 1994.

troubles that a lot of English people have with Latin music is that they are used to a very solid drum form and in salsa you hardly have a bass drum. In salsa you got the timbales, congas, bongos and the bass player, they play all over the place. Generally speaking I find that English people need some help. When I first started playing salsa I brought my own clave and they will follow. I also play with the bass very high in salsa, so that for the English people it is easier to deal with. So, I start with African music because it is easier for anybody to dance.<sup>101</sup>

Gerry is not only aware of the ethnic background when D'jaying, but he is also emphasising certain rhythms rather than others by imposing leading instruments; something that is not present in salsa. This because salsa works in a different way to most Anglo music as explained earlier in this chapter. Thus, what Gerry plays and how he plays it is partially influenced by participants on the dance floor. However, he is also trying to lead participants in the dance floor towards particular body movements;

The other thing I used to do is based on aerobics, if you go to an aerobics class they will tell you to work on this part then work on this other. What you find in the club specially the English people are very vertical, dancing up and down and salsa is lateral. Right, so as soon as you hit zouk, they hit the Caribbean and that's where the lateral movements come in. If you stay in that area for long enough, even English people start to use their hips. ... So by the time you hit the Hispanic Caribbean it is like every part of their body is ready.<sup>102</sup>

This disc jockey explicitly connected his musical routes to the physical movement of bodies on the dance floor. Gerry linked music from particular geographical locations with certain types of body movements and used this to 'teach' audiences how to dance to salsa. He also related his musical route to the way in which dancing changes geographically, from the 'lateral' to the 'vertical' on the journey from Africa and the Caribbean to Europe. Following this interview, when visiting the club I paid particular attention to the relationship between the music he played and the movements on the

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101 Personal interview with Gerry Lyseight, 23 February 1994.

102 Personal interview with Gerry Lyseight, 23 February 1994.

dance floor and my observations confirmed his comments. This highlights the importance of the relationship between the body and music in dancing salsa.

In this section I have discussed some of the elements that are taken into consideration by disc jockeys, and those strategies that are used to establish a relationship with dancers. The relationship between disc jockeys and dancers was established through musical routes and routines, and through building up a knowledge of the dancers that participated at the different clubs. I also want to draw attention to the fact that it is through these musical routes and routines that dancers become involved in different body movements in the dance floor, an issue I will be discussing in the next chapter.

## **7. Summary**

In this chapter I started by tracing the routes of salsa into England and discussed how the London salsa scene was created from the connections between the 'global' practices of various people involved in the music industries and Latin Americans in other parts of the world interacting with the 'local' activities of musicians, Latin American immigrants, individual entrepreneurs, disc jockeys, boroughs and city councils in London. I emphasised that local activities in London were informed by spatial practices occurring across the city and moving out from London to other locations such as Miami, Colombia and New York.

I then discussed how the identities of the clubs were constructed and communicated through relations and practices involving commercial entrepreneurs, DJs, managers, local authorities and the movement of dancers. In doing this I discussed how owners, promoters, disc jockeys and dancers created and communicated a Latin identity and related this to the routes and routines developing from participating at these clubs. One of the points I stressed throughout this chapter is that the routes and routines of participants across the different salsa clubs in London were related to and contributed to the identity of the clubs. In this sense dancers' spatial practices are a constitutive part of the identity of places. I also referred to how places have accumulated meanings through time, and

that these meanings contributed to particular ideas of Latin identity which in turn influenced the routes and routines that people chose to adopt when moving across the salsa clubs in London. Thus, the identity of places was constructed and communicated through particular time-space practices.

In terms of my overall theoretical aims, what I have been discussing are the particular dynamics through which a power-geometry of salsa clubs can be identified. Concretely, this involved identifiable groups and individuals pursuing certain practices and not others in constructing and communicating the particular identities of the clubs. These practices involved relations of power in that in doing this owners, managers and disc jockeys were seeking to exclude and attract certain people and not others. I also tried to demonstrate that relations of power were also identifiable through dancers movements around certain clubs and not others. In the next chapter I take this discussion one step further by considering the construction of Latin bodies in dancing to salsa through gender relations and sexuality.

## CHAPTER V

### THE EMBODIMENT OF SALSA MUSIC AND LATIN IDENTITY

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter further examines the construction of Latin identities by introducing the body as a micro level of analysis. The embodiment of salsa refers to the ways in which body and music are articulated to communicate a particular Latin cultural identity in salsa music clubs in London. To pursue this I discuss different ways in which salsa music is embodied by participants: dancers, musicians and disc jockeys. I pay particular attention to the way in which body and music are informed by specific ideas of gender and sexuality. This way of approaching salsa music is an attempt to understand the interrelation between body and music in a specific setting. This approach takes me in two directions, one which considers the relationship between body and music, and one which considers the cultural construction of bodies in the sense in which bodies are not neutral biological essences.

#### 1.1 The relationship between music and bodies

The embodiment of salsa is approached as a two-fold process whereby bodies are experienced through music, when present, and whereby music (again, when present), is experienced through our bodies (Williams, 1965; McClary, 1991). In relation to this issue Raymond Williams has written that,

Rhythm is a way of transmitting a description of experience, in such a way that the experience is recreated in the person receiving it, not merely as an 'abstraction' or an 'emotion', but as a physical effect on the organism - on the blood, on the breathing, on the physical patterns of the brain (1965, 40).

Drawing on Williams, Susan McClary has argued that this way of understanding music considers the way in which 'sound waves are assembled in such a way as to resemble

physical gestures', and that, 'we as listeners are able to read or make sense of them, largely by means of our lifelong experiences as embodied creatures' (1991, 24). McClary has also argued that our bodies are experienced through music in the sense that emotions and feelings are often more acute through listening to music and the way music has the 'ability to make us experience our bodies in accordance with its gestures and rhythms' (1991, 23). As McClary has recognised, the interrelated experience of bodies and music is mediated through genre specific codes and through specific social contexts and other socially constructed meanings that are recognised by listeners.

This perspective is important for this research in that it demonstrates that musical sounds (melodies, rhythms etc.) are 'symbol systems' (Tagg, 1990) encoded in quite specific historical circumstances and are both deliberately encoded and decoded to produce social meanings (McClary, 1991). As McClary explains,

For music is not the universal language it has sometimes been cracked up to be: it changes over time, and it differs with respect to geographical locale. Even at any given moment in place, it is always constituted by several competing repertoires, distributed along the lines of gender, age, ethnic identity, educational background, or economic class (1991, 25).

Thus, the relationship between body and music is not exclusively related to corporal movements and rhythms, but to specific cultural practices and social meanings. As I have no musicological knowledge to study how specific tones, rhythms and timbres come to be related to the bodily experience of music, it is the cultural construction of the body in its relation to salsa in London that I am interested in exploring. In particular, how specific body practices come to be associated with notions of 'Latinness'.

Thus, this chapter is concerned with the cultural construction of the body in relation to salsa; a body that is 'Latinised', and recognised as such by participants, through cultural practices informed by gender relations and discourses about sexuality.<sup>1</sup> As Jeffrey Weeks

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<sup>1</sup> The body as socially constructed has been addressed in, for examples, Chris Shilling, 1993; Mike Featherstone et. al., 1991; Pasi Falk, 1994. These books are part of a growing interest on the body as a

(1986, 1992) has argued, ideas about gender and sexuality do not correspond to any 'natural' biological essence (as was once thought) but to sexed bodies as these are culturally constructed.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Weeks argues that sex 'refers both to an act and to a category of person, to a practice and to a gender' (1986, 13) in the way in which specific physical characteristics associated with being female or male are often assumed to have a connection with specific erotic behaviours (1986). Thus, sexuality is as much a historical construction as it is a cultural construction (Weeks, 1986, 1992). In this sense then, gender refers to 'the social condition of being male or female, and sexuality, the cultural way of living out our bodily pleasures and desires' (Weeks, 1986, 45). Hence, there is no intrinsic relationship between sexed bodies, gender and sexuality, as these are culturally constructed, communicated and experienced.

One of the themes of this chapter is that of how Latin identities are realised through the construction and communication of ideas about sex and gender. Hence, this emphasis on the cultural construction of gendered and sexualised bodies also attempts to highlight that Latin is not a fixed category, but open to change and transformation, whilst acknowledging its continuity. This, because Latin American identities are heterogeneous and constituted out of the interaction between the different groups that came into contact through processes of colonisation (Chanady, 1994). This approach has implications for the argument about cultural identities and places, in that identities are not fixed, but are always in the process of formation and it is through this process that cultural identities are related to places. As salsa is remade in different parts of the world, so particular Latin identities are constructed and communicated in salsa clubs in London. As Stuart Hall (1995) has argued, it is through the processes whereby meanings are constructed that a relationship between cultural identities and places should be understood. Thus, even when a specific cultural identity develops in relation to specific places, such as the salsa clubs, an unfixing relationship between cultural identities and places can still be

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subject of study and its implications within different areas of study. As part of this interest a new journal, *Body and Society*, Ed. by Featherstone and Turner, started being published on March 1995.

<sup>2</sup> The work of Judith Butler (1990) has also contributed to this debate.

maintained due to the way in which Latin cultural practices are experienced in different ways across the world.

The argument that cultural identities are not fixed to a place of origin has more resonance when thinking of those who participate in dancing salsa, who may have no direct, or indirect, link with Latin America in terms of kinship or place of birth. In this respect ideas about Latin identity do not correspond to pre-given bodies in any essentialised way. Thus, this approach rejects the notion of a biologically inherited or 'natural' link between body and music, and proposes one which is constructed through specific practices. In this way, this part of my research contributes to Hall's argument about the construction of cultural identities and place in that it allows for understanding how different groups are contributing to transformations of the relationship between body and music. The interrelation between body and music is not something that transcends any historical discourse; however, in this chapter I only explore the relationship between body and music in a particular time in London.<sup>3</sup> It also contributes to an understanding of cultural identities as always in the process of formation, and as such not fixed.

In the following sections of this chapter I consider specific practices, such as dancing to salsa and musicians' performances. Dance teachers, dancers and musicians have been separated for the purpose of this discussion but I should stress that they are all participating in creating any 'Latin' event. I have separated participants in this way to describe the different practices through which the embodiment of salsa develops, but it is important to keep in mind their interrelations. The first part of this chapter, 'dancing to salsa', addresses the process whereby Latin bodies are constructed and then performed in the clubs. I focus on the relationship between corporal movements, gender relations and sexuality. In the second part I consider the relationship between body and salsa by

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<sup>3</sup> Historical research on the relationship between bodies and music has been discussed by Quintero Rivera (1996, forthcoming). His research explores the relationship between music, class and ethnicity in the Caribbean, with particular attention paid to Puerto Rico. In this book he includes a chapter on the body in which he explores historical-sociological material about dance etiquette and its relationship with class, race and gender.

focusing on the musicians. I also consider how musicians communicate with dancers through bodily expressions during live performances.

## **2. Dancing to salsa**

In this part I start with a general discussion about the relationship between corporal movement and rhythm. This is followed by a section on dance lessons in which I discuss the social significance of corporal movements. To pursue this I concentrate on how gender relations and sexuality are encoded by dance teachers, and in doing so communicating a particular idea of 'Latinness'. I follow this with a section on how the relationship between body and music is understood in terms of discourses of 'dancing naturally'. Then, I discuss how Latin identities are being performed in the event through dancing to salsa.

### **2.1 Learning how to dance salsa: Corporal movements and rhythms**

Dancing to salsa involves dancers in a process whereby their bodies are trained to move in correspondence with the rhythms of music. At the very beginning dancers can often not relate to nor follow the rhythm of the music with their steps. My first impressions as an observer, when I visited dance lessons for the first time, was that much of the dancing seemed systematic, too rigid and lacked spontaneity. The beginners were visibly counting 'tap, two, three, four' for each step. The students seemed to be too busy trying to recall the next step and didn't notice that the music had changed from a salsa to a merengue<sup>4</sup> until they realised that their steps did not match with the other dancers. The intermediate learners were also counting along with the rhythm, whilst advance dancers were recognisable due to the way that they were swinging without visibly counting, occasionally improvising and sometimes singing along with some of the musical sounds (although not necessarily the lyrics).

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<sup>4</sup> A Different type of music, based on a less syncopated rhythm that is danced faster and associated with Dominican Republic.

Learning how to dance to salsa requires listening to and understanding the rhythms and learning how to interpret these with the body. Dancing to salsa music involves making a correlation between corporal movement and rhythms in time-space. Body movements and speed should change according to the rhythmic variations of the music. In London most of the dance teachers adopted a technique of teaching salsa by separating the rhythms into four beats and each step into four 'tappings'. In doing this, dance teachers often feel that they are having to 'adapt' and 'modify' salsa for a London public. For example, Nelson Batista, a Cuban dance teacher, narrated the process through which he developed a technique for teaching salsa;

I developed my own style, but I still call it Cuban because the roots are still Cuban. The Cubans do not tap, they hold the step and then they go. Instead of tapping they hold the foot there for the beat and then they move forward, it is in that moment when I tap. By tapping I can improvise, it gives me the rhythm. If you get a good tap it automatically makes you be in rhythm. Also, I thought the tap would be something people will understand and for me explaining the step was easier. I couldn't say 'hold there for the beat and then move', because they don't know where the beat is, they don't know where to find it. But if they tap they are bound to catch that tap along with one tap of the percussion. So I did that, and then reshaped my movements, body wise. Once you get the basic step to any kind of music, the other part is how you interpret the rhythm, bodily wise. That is what I did, I gave them the basic step and then I began to teach them how to move the hips. I began to tell people, 'Well, it doesn't really look good that way, you have to increase the movement in your body, you have to let go and loosen up'. I began to use a lot of rumba movements, not steps but the movements. I use the rumba off-beat sound and beat to mark the body movement at that particular moment, dance wise. Then I began the turns. Many of the turns that people do in jazz and jive can be acquired and developed into salsa. So I took that, although Cubans dance using a lot of turns as well.<sup>5</sup>

As Nelson mentions, learning the basic step is just a starting point. The dancer should be able to interpret the overlapping rhythms simultaneously with other parts of the body. As

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<sup>5</sup> Personal interview with Nelson Batista, 30 August 1994. .

Nelson said, 'If you follow a rhythm with the whole of the body, then you are not going to be able to move one arm outside when the horn section comes in'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, dancing is about the movement of the body, about how the rhythms are interpreted with the whole of the body.

The tap that Nelson mentioned is used by most salsa dance teachers in London as a teaching technique. The styles being taught by most salsa dance teachers are not particularly different, but most of them tend to authenticate styles of dancing through their nationalities. For example, Nelson promotes his lessons as 'learn to dance the fiery Cuban style of salsa to the hottest Latin sounds around', with 'el cubanísimo Nelson Batista' (the most Cuban one, Nelson Batista).<sup>7</sup> Even when he had to change his style of dancing salsa, he still promotes the lessons as Cuban because as he said, 'the roots are still Cuban'. The Cuban element in Nelson's discourse involved him in demarcating national boundaries around a way of dancing, and in doing so the body is trained to fit the music in a 'Cuban way'. Thus the embodiment of salsa develops, not only through a process that involves learning to understand and interpret the rhythms with the body, but also through the way in which body movements are given a Latin identity through a national discourse.

José Polanco, a Colombian dance teacher, has a different approach to Nelson. José prefers not to count, but to start by associating the steps with the music. For him it is important to teach students to listen and to understand the music simultaneously with the steps;

For a student the most important thing is to teach them how to listen to the music, not to count because if they start counting they end counting. If they start with an instrument it is different. I always try to make the rhythm of the body consonant with the music. I do not teach only one rhythm of salsa; as you could have seen a lot of people tend to dance the

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<sup>6</sup> Personal interview with Nelson Batista, 30 August 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Promotional leaflet.

same rhythm. I emphasise that people must learn how to differentiate the music. Our Latin music is varied and there are many rhythms. The problem is that most people count, count and count and don't know which music is being played.<sup>8</sup>

José teaches salsa based on the student listening to the 'clave' 3/2, 2/3 pattern. He still needs to separate the steps, but he does it in a cross (+), whereby the middle is the base for starting and changing steps. This way of teaching salsa allows for rhythmic variations, not only in terms of the speed of the body and the steps, but in relation to salsa's composition. Even when he introduces a variation in teaching it, he maintains the clave as central to understanding musical rhythms in relation to the rhythms of the body. José's technique is a different way of interpreting the rhythms; different to other salsa dance teachers,<sup>9</sup> who tend to privilege the four beat interpretation for tuition purposes. From my observations, most dance teachers in London preferred to separate the steps in to four beats, whereby the tap is used as a way of giving impulse to the body. The foot that taps leads towards the next step and it allows the dancer to change steps according to the rhythmic variations. This tap is very distinctive in salsa clubs in London and it provides a way of interpreting the music and being able to dance to it.

Unlike Nelson, José approaches salsa by interpreting the rhythms of the music, and incorporates this into a wider discourse of 'Latin' music and Latin American dancing. In promotional leaflets, for example, José introduces his lessons as 'learn salsa and Latin American dance'.<sup>10</sup> In José's case the embodiment of salsa does not involve a national discourse, but a wider association with Latin American music.

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<sup>8</sup> Personal interview with José Polanco, Bar Tiempo, 24 March 1994. Interview held in Spanish, original follows: "Para un alumno lo más importante desde el principio es enseñarle a escuchar la música, no a contar porque si empieza contando termina contando. Ahora, si empieza con un instrumento es diferente. Siempre trato de hacer que el ritmo del cuerpo sea a como va la música. No a enseñar un solo ritmo de salsa, porque si ves mucha gente baila lo mismo. A eso voy yo, a que la gente aprenda a diferenciar la música. Nuestra música es muy variada, hay diferentes ritmos. El problema es que como cuentan, cuentan y cuentan no saben qué música está sonando."

<sup>9</sup> As I mentioned in the ethnography I visited salsa dance lessons held during that year at least once.

<sup>10</sup> Ramiro a Bolivian dance teacher also makes a 'Latin' association in his promotions: 'Dance Latin with Ramiro'.

With these examples I have tried to demonstrate different techniques through which salsa is embodied through dance and how these techniques are put into nationalistic discourses when referred to as Cuban, or a more general discourse which refers to dancing salsa as Latin American. Hence, bodies are trained to follow the rhythms in particular ways, either the Cuban or the Latin American way. Thus, through learning to dance to salsa people become involved in a process whereby bodies are trained in a particular style and in this process dancers are conveying particular identities.

## **2.2 Salsa dance: Gender relations and sexuality**

Salsa or 'Latin' dance involves a performance which is given a particular meaning through the encoding of specific gender relations and codes of sexuality. Dance teachers provide ways of understanding dance and argue that it is through this process that certain practices, movements and gestures communicate a particular idea of Latinness. Although this section mainly focuses on the dance lessons at the London School of Salsa, I also interviewed other dance teachers and attended other dance lessons. Thus, the information presented here derives from interviews with dance teachers, from my experience at the London School of Salsa, and from the conversations I had with those who, over a period of months, became my dance partners in the School as well as in London's salsa clubs. As I have not mentioned the London School of Salsa and as it was the site where most of the ethnographic research regarding dance lessons was carried out, I provide some details about the School.

The London School of Salsa was mainly a dance school located in a side street on the north side of Islington Green, but every now and then the people in charge (Xiomara on the dance lessons and Andy on the administration) would organise special nights when the place became a club with the name Latinos. At the beginning, the London School of Salsa was hired to other dance teachers who held their lessons there, and included many types of music such as sevillanas and tango. The venue also held Latin dance lessons for children. As a club it operated without a licence to sell liquor, and the following quote from an advertisement published in Time Out captures the temporary and transitory

status of being between a dance school and a salsa club: 'Latinos Salsa Locura. 9pm - 3am; Free before 10pm, then £4, £3 members. A Salsa dance school and club in the heart of Islington, where DJ Juan Carlos spins the latest Afro-Cuban and Latin grooves. Bring your own alcohol'.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the year this continued to be the case, however the advertisements stopped including 'bring your own alcohol' and a provisional bar was set up in the site. Although it had applied for a license, after leaving London I learned that Latinos never acquired the required licences to operate as a club, and when this was finally discovered by the police, during November 1994, the place had to be closed. As a school it ended around September 1994, as Xiomara was unsatisfied by the way in which the site was being transformed into a club without the proper arrangements.<sup>12</sup>

At the London School of Salsa Xiomara was in charge of four sessions a week, two on Thursdays and two on Fridays (an hour for the beginners followed by the intermediate/advanced for another hour). Xiomara was actively involved in organising and sponsoring other cultural activities among the Colombian community. She helped organise the celebration of the Colombian independence day,<sup>13</sup> and is a partner in 'Quintana Travel', a travel agency in Paddington, London.

Around twenty to thirty people regularly participated in Xiomara's lessons at the London School of Salsa, mainly Europeans (predominantly English, French, Spanish) although I also met individuals from Iran, Croatia and Israel. Most people I spoke to had university degrees or diplomas, and had occupations which included accountants, social workers and teachers, although a few were unemployed. Some were self employed, usually in publishing or advertising. Most participants were between the ages of twenty-three to

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<sup>11</sup> Time Out, London's weekly guide (October 6-13, 1993), Section clubs, under 'Other grooves and moves', page 56.

<sup>12</sup> Informal conversation with Xiomara, 31 March 1995, Latin Fiesta, Brixton Recreation Centre. Xiomara finished the deal and started dance lessons at other Latin clubs and at a community centre in Covent Garden.

<sup>13</sup> This celebration was held on the 24 of July 1994 at the Rocket. Various activities for children and adults were organised all throughout the day. Rosario Hernández whom I mentioned in Chapter four was also helping to organise this celebration.

forty-five years, although there were some exceptions including both men and women over sixty.<sup>14</sup> There were many motives and reasons for people to enrol in the dance lessons. Not every one started getting involved with salsa through dance lessons. Some came into contact with the music in a club and then started salsa dance lessons; some did not know what they were exposing themselves to, they wanted to do some dance lessons and salsa seemed to be rather 'exotic'; some just wanted to dance to salsa for the exercise; and for some it was the interest in the music that most stimulated them to learn how to dance to it.

The London School of Salsa was one of the places where people could learn to dance salsa from scratch, or it could also be the place where to 'warm up' before going to a club. But it could also be a place to practice new steps or to develop an exercise routine. Along with Xiomara's voice going 'one, two, three, tap' and the foot steps of the students matching the numbers, Tammy and Aladdin narrated their experience at the London School of Salsa. Although they had started visiting clubs, when I interviewed them they were just taking the lessons and preparing for competitions. They regularly came to the School and practised, and both had an emotional investment in the place. For Aladdin, the School was a place to exercise and practice. 'I use it as a place of exercising and relaxation, it is not a club where you have to dress up, and you see me here in my shorts, sweaty T-Shirts, carrying my T-shirt in the bag. It is a place where I can exercise and use it as an art and also a sport'.<sup>15</sup> For Tammy the School offered a place to dance salsa without the threats that might be experienced through being a female on her own in a club; 'I was a bit more old fashioned. I am not comfortable going to night clubs on my

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<sup>14</sup> I do not have exact figures on those who participated for various reasons. First, as I was participating in the dance lessons for a long period and interested in obtaining spontaneous answers from dancers I did not want to make my presence as a researcher obvious by distributing questionnaires. This would be intrusive. Also, the lessons were open to new members every week. Thus, although there were some people who would regularly participate in the lessons, every week different people would join. On Thursdays there were two lessons, the beginners and the advanced, in each approximately 40 students would participate at any one time. During the lessons we would practice the basic steps on our own for about 15 to 20 minutes, the rest of the time we would practice in couples. As salsa is to be danced in couples we were asked to change partners at least twice. Thus, I could speak to two different people during the lessons. As I came earlier and spent some time after the lessons, I was able to speak to people in groups.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interview with Tammy and Aladdin, 28 April 1994.

own, I can't be bothered to battle with all those men, I wanted to dance salsa. ... So, when Xiomara opened this place, which is basically pure salsa, I was in heaven. Also, because this place is just about dancing, it is not about standing at the bar and getting drunk'.<sup>16</sup>

It was in the London School of Salsa where I learned the codes of dancing to salsa. I learned the basic steps and that there is a correlation between steps and rhythm. But I also was being taught about sexuality, about female - male couples flirting and courting each other. I learned the conventions of gender relations in dancing salsa: It is leading and improvising for men, and it is following and being led for women; it is a dance in which men have the control and in which women dance for men.

Along with the simultaneous tapping of the students Xiomara would shout: 'The boy leads you' or 'with his hands he will let you know what to do'. Xiomara was passing on particular codes for dancing salsa. These phrases pinpoint how gender relations are embodied in salsa through dance. In dancing salsa men should have the control. For Rufus, an English man who was then teaching and D'jaying in salsa clubs, dancing to salsa 'is like being sweet and aggressive, it is never completely aggressive. Dance is aggressive, sharp, paranoid; men are afraid of being controlled'.<sup>17</sup> For Elder, a Colombian dance teacher, 'women always have to wait for my orders. The man is always leading the woman, salsa was not created for women to lead the men. It is a *machistas* dance'.<sup>18</sup> These were dominant narratives among dance teachers in London and privilege the idea of a 'heterosexual matrix'. The idea of 'heterosexual matrix' has been introduced by Judith Butler to 'designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised' (1990,151). Thus, the heterosexual matrix refers to

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<sup>16</sup> Personal interview with Tammy and Aladdin, 28 April 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Personal interview with Rufus Boulting, 1 December 1993. By the time of writing this part he had opened a club at Bar Sol in Covent Garden which would operate on Tuesday nights starting 11 April 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview with Elder Sánchez., 5 November 1993. The interview was held in Spanish, original follows: La muchacha tiene que esperar a que you la mande. El hombre siempre esta guiando a la mujer. La salsa no fue creada para que la mujer guie al hombre. Es un baile de machistas .

the ways in which bodies are thought of in their correspondence with gender and sex. That is, the way in which 'masculine expresses male and feminine expresses female' (Butler, 1990, 151).

These narratives privilege heterosexual behaviour in the sense that bodies which have been categorised as female and male should act out gendered roles, that of being feminine or masculine, and in this case also being women or men. These gendered roles, communicated by dance teachers, are also conveying meanings of sexuality in the way in which individuals are encouraged to embody cultural practices - that of being sexy - according to their sexed bodies and gendered roles. In the following part of this section I would like to concentrate on how practices informed by these ideas of gender relations and sexuality are part of how a Latin identity is constructed and communicated in the dance lessons.

During one of my first lessons in the School Adam, an English man who was my partner, told me how to prepare my hands for the turnings and to read the messages he was giving me. I recall that I was slightly confused; I did not know what he meant. I suppose that such confusion was reflected in my facial expression and so my partner, who had been attending the lessons for over a year whilst this was one of my first lessons, decided to explain patiently the turns he knew, in what order they would come, and the several steps which I could not follow. He emphasised that he would always lead and that I should know how to interpret his messages. I realised that there were certain hints that I was not aware of; like the male pressing on the woman's hand to make her come forward after a turn.<sup>19</sup> In salsa dance lessons males are encouraged to 'teach' females what to do; women are encouraged to follow men's instructions and be led.

Even when the man leads, dancing to salsa is not only about one dominating the other, but about interacting and communicating through corporal codes. As Xiomara expressed

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<sup>19</sup> After this experience I decided that pretending not to know what my partner wanted me to do could be a strategy for getting some information. I gathered some of the information in the dance lessons this way, but also through informal conversations with people before and after the lessons or through recorded interviews.

it when teaching: 'Yes, the woman dances for the man, but, he has to think of you while he is dancing, of how and when to do it. He has to think of you all the time'.<sup>20</sup> As it needs co-ordination between the two partners, dancing in couples involves a reciprocal communication that is established through an understanding of each other's steps and getting used to each other's corporal movements. Thus the man can lead, but he needs to know when the woman is prepared for the next step.

Despite this, in dance lessons it is common for a woman to be dancing with another woman as women often outnumber the men attending. Thus, the woman with more knowledge would lead and teach the other. Even when this is the case having control is associated with male acting - that of having control and leading. One of the women will be encouraged to assume the role of the man - 'who is the man?' one will be asked. The partner who is going to be the 'man' is decided before hand. In this sense, the leading role is still given to the 'man', but this gendered role does not correspond to the sexed body that it is associated with - that of a male body. Even when leading is given a 'gendered role' in dance lessons this does not necessarily have to correspond to a sexed body. Thus, ideas about gendered roles in dance lessons point to the way in which gendered activities do not correspond to sexed bodies (Butler, 1990). This ongoing process in dance lessons is important for understanding how gender relations unfold on the dance floor in the clubs.

In the clubs gender relations unfold in a similar way to dance lessons, but also visiting clubs give those who have learnt to dance the opportunity to display and communicate to others how much they know or have learnt. For example, on one occasion my partner took his time to get me to the raised area when dancing in Bar Rumba, then he looked for the least crowded corner of the dance floor. I recall from my observations that whilst dancing he kept on positioning himself in front of the mirror (which I had not noticed before) where he could look at his reflection. When I realised that he was looking in the

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<sup>20</sup> Xiomara at one of her lessons: 14 of April of 1994.

mirror I told him that he was doing fine. He replied, 'I need to know how I look because this is the only way to know how I look for others'.<sup>21</sup> This incident illustrated how dancers are also communicating to others how much they know and observing who the good dancers are.

One reason for watching others is to locate a compatible partner and this is related to the way in which gender relations unfold in the dance floor. Related to this issue, Gill, who together with Zé Indio run Club Brazil and Salsa Palacio, observed; 'I think that it is much more that they (women) really don't have the time to spend with somebody who does not know how to do it properly. Because after all, "I know and I am good. So, why spend my time with someone who is standing on my feet all the time. I am not going to be able to display my splendour".<sup>22</sup> To this comment Zé Indio, also a disc jockey and lambada dance teacher, added, 'If the man knows and the girl does not know, the male's position is to be dominant. So, that is all right, that is acceptable. It is like "look how nice I am, I teach you", that is okay for the male, but not for the girl'.<sup>23</sup> Similar observations were made by Gili, an advanced dancer, who I met at the London School of Salsa,

You tend to get choosy because as you improve you want to dance with people who know better, or whom you dance well with because they complement you. Rather than dance with people that don't know how to dance. In the beginning you actually stick to the ones that don't know how to dance too well, so that you don't feel too embarrassed.<sup>24</sup>

This issue of finding the right partner continually affects the way people make the transition from lesson to clubs, as I observed and experienced. It also points towards the way gender roles correspond to sexed bodies - leading, having control and teaching is related to male bodies, whilst following and being led is to female bodies.

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<sup>21</sup> From my participation at Bar Rumba, 22 March 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Personal interview with Gill and Zé Indio, 25 March 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Personal interview with Gill and Zé Indio, 25 March 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Personal interview with Gili, 2 May 1994.

After the dance lessons I would participate at Latinos, the club organised at the London School of Salsa. It was there where I experienced the first tense moment with one of my partners, a French man I met in the dance school. Whilst dancing he was not following the steps being taught. His movements were too spread out, scrolling over the dance floor with long steps. I recall from my observations that he was saying; 'you have to dance with passion, there is a moment when you have to stop thinking and counting ... I dance with my feelings, I do not like counting'. I felt that he was forcing me too much, thus I decided to put up some resistance, and told him 'I don't like being led that way'. To this he replied, 'If you are dancing Latin music you have to know that you have to be led by the man'. He continued, 'I cannot believe you can not dance this if you carry the feeling of the music in your veins, even Ivanka (a woman from Croatia) dances better than you'.<sup>25</sup> Here my 'Latin' identity became an issue when dancing. Me, the 'Latin' one, was complaining about being led, and could not even dance 'properly'. Many assumptions were contained in this statement: because of where I am from and because of my knowledge of salsa (he knew I was doing research on salsa) he assumed that I must be able to dance salsa and would not question male domination. These assumptions are about an embodied Latin identity in the sense that women should always follow and not question the male's leading role in dance; and, that Latin people should know how to dance.

On another occasion my partner was an English man of Jamaican parents, who was an advanced dancer. After noticing that I was not really following him, he said 'just relax, you are not relaxed, let me lead you'. I told him that I did not know exactly what to do, and asked him what he wanted me to do. 'How can I tell you what to do, I can't tell you what to do, just relax and follow me'. (I recall from my observations that at this moment I thought he was trying to impress on me how skilful he was, and also to impress those

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<sup>25</sup> Notes from observations, 24 February 1994.

watching him).<sup>26</sup> The clue was to follow him, to let him guide me; but also to perform for each other and for others.

I should point out that although dancing salsa is embodied within a 'heterosexual matrix' whereby women follow and dance for men, the issue of the man having control over the female partner when dancing can contradict some of the students' beliefs and other activities in their everyday lives. For example, Karen, an English woman who appeared in a television program on salsa dance lessons referred to this; 'Well the very nature of being led, actually it is a huge contradiction with the way I lead the rest of my life. I mean I often pondered why I enjoy being led so much on the dance floor'.<sup>27</sup>

The examples provided above suggest that in dancing to salsa individuals are expected to act feminine or masculine according to their sexed bodies, and through this process convey meanings of sexuality. In the way that sexuality refers to the 'cultural way of living bodily pleasures and desires' (Weeks, 1986, 45). Sexuality and being sexy is signified in dancing to salsa through body movements. Dance is not just about moving your legs, Xiomara would often emphasise; 'First learn the step and the way to move your hands, then play with your hair, play with your hips'. She encouraged women to flirt whilst dancing and added, 'don't dance only with your legs'.<sup>28</sup> Elder, another dance teacher emphasised the way of enacting sexuality by appealing to and attracting your partner, which is assumed to be of the opposite sex. Elder promoted his dance lessons as 'learn sexy salsa with Elder'. Elder emphasised how to be sexy when dancing salsa through short steps and slow hand and hip movements, this applied to both male and female. Elder would push the women against him whilst emphasising slow circular movements of the pelvis.

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<sup>26</sup> Notes from observations, 24 February 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Karen in *Metro land: Strictly Salsa*, Julia White, for Carlton TV, 6 September 1994, 7:30pm.

<sup>28</sup> Xiomara at one of her lessons: 14 of April of 1994.

Particular codes of sexuality were also encouraged through the adoption of dressing styles. Xiomara would usually wear black mini-skirts, a white or black shirt and medium heel shoes; José Polanco, a male teacher usually wore baggy trousers and printed pattern shirts; Nelson Batista and Elder Sánchez would wear tight jeans and t-shirts without sleeves, so tight that the contours of their bodies was demarcated in the cloth. Sexuality was emphasised through body movements and through wearing clothes which emphasised the build of their body.

In addition to how salsa is taught and promoted, dancers also referred to salsa as a dance that embodies a particular type of 'sexiness' and sexuality. As an example, in an article published in The Guardian the news reporter wrote of salsa; 'whether fast and wild or seriously slow this is love-making with your clothes on' (Barr, 1995). Related to this issue Gili said,

I'm not crazy for exercises or aerobics... but this is good aerobics and you're still having fun, and the flirtation of dance, oh I love it! ... because it is safe sex. Yes, because I am a flirter, I am a bad flirter, I just love it, and that is acceptable, you do it in the dance floor and you don't have to see the guy ever again. But it is all these movements and sexuality that goes along in the dance floor, I love that. You can mess around and it is OK. I love it!<sup>29</sup>

Katherine, an advanced salsa dancer, also thought salsa was a sexy dance. In a television programme on salsa she said; '... you can't be wooden if you are dancing to salsa. It is all about moving, specially about moving your hips and your shoulders. It is terribly sexy'.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, dancers tend to associate these ideas of sexuality with broader ideas of 'Latinness'. For example, in an article published in The Independent the news reporter, described Elder (the dance teacher) in the following way; 'Elder is Colombian, and

<sup>29</sup> Personal interview with Gili, 2 May 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Katherine, social worker, in Metro land: Strictly Salsa, Julia White, for Carlton TV, 6 September 1994, 7:30pm.

profoundly Latin: skin the colour of burnished bronze, cropped black Afro hair offset by strikingly elegant Roman features and a look in his eyes that threatens to possess your soul in five seconds flat' (Lewis, 1994, 11). In this sense sexuality is not just related to the movement of the body or to specific dressing codes but to a whole set of physical characteristics which this news reporter identified as being 'profoundly Latin'. What I want to highlight from this example is that sexuality here is linked to wider conceptions of Latinness. The way that salsa is perceived, and experienced by participants, as 'sexy' contributes to the embodiment of a particular Latin identity.

Throughout this section I have argued that dancing to salsa in London's salsa clubs should be understood as a process through which particular cultural practices which are informed by specific gender relations and conventions of sexuality contribute to communicate a Latin identity. However, the process through which this occurs is different for Latin Americans and non-Latin Americans, as this has developed through different social relations. It is this issue which I will address now.

### 2.3 Latin identity and dancing salsa

In dancing to salsa people work towards and convey an identity. Dancers often explicitly refer to the way in which they attempt to embody a 'Latin' identity through dancing salsa. For example, Emily Barr in an article published in [The Guardian](#) narrated her experience at [Bar Tiempo \(La Finca\)](#) in the following way;

Now, after a two-hour lesson followed by free dancing at [La Finca](#), ... we do our best to swivel our hips, throw back our heads and look Latin American. We don't quite succeed and end up hanging on to our partners for dear life, frowning with concentration. ... Our inspirations and role models are the beautiful people who twist, twirl and swing their hips around the dance floor making it look effortless and elegant. Almost invariably they are South Americans; the women wear little dresses, the men T-shirts and braces and they all look stunning. ... In fact you spend whole evenings in the arms of strangers learning an immensely satisfying - and show-offable skill (Barr, 1995).

'Carlos', a Colombian dancer, explained the embodiment of a Latin identity in a different way; 'I am very shy, but on the dance floor I just take over. When I first came to England there were few places where you could dance salsa. I still remember how proud of being Latin I felt when I was dancing salsa. People would watch me and it was then when I danced best'.<sup>31</sup>

These two examples point to the embodiment of a Latin identity through dance. For the news reporter it was related to the specific body movements and dressing codes which she associated with South American people. Whilst for Carlos it was part of how he embodied the proudness of being Latin and being able to dance in England. In dancing to salsa, participants are communicating a 'Latin' identity in the sense that dancing is directly linked with a music that is identified with Latin American people. Thus, 'looking Latin American' or 'being Latin' refers to a different way of embodying a Latin identity. Enacting Latin identities on the dance floor is part of salsa's embodiment. Thus, dancing is also about enacting an identity through the body. However, as I have attempted to explain this process occurs in a different way and through different social and cultural practices for Latin American and non-Latin Americans.

I would like to give some examples in which I take account of this process in relation to the children of a first generation of Latin Americans in London. The first example is from a private birthday party to which I was invited. The children in the house were between two and four years old and some were being taught how to dance by their parents. There was a point when they encouraged the children to dance in couples. When dancing children were given hints on what to do next by adults. What most drew my attention was when the mother of a three year old girl reminded her daughter to do something with her hair. She said, 'now with your hair, what should you do'. The tiny girl took one hand to her hair to provoke a simultaneous movement of hair and head, whilst throwing her head slightly backwards. The boys were incited to turn the little girls, 'now the turn, you know

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<sup>31</sup> Carlos at Club Bahia, 25 March 1994. 'Yo soy muy tímido, pero cuando bailo me quiero quedar con el piso. Cuando llegué acá no habian muchos sitios para bailar salsa. Todavía recuerdo lo orgulloso que me sentía de ser Latino cuando bailaba. Pues la gente me miraba y era cuando mejor lo hacia'.

the one', one mother asked her son. What I want to highlight with this example is that for the Latin Americans who visited the clubs dancing is a very important part of a cultural repertoire, and it is often learnt and experienced within the more private context of the family. Thus, in the case of these Latin Americans the relation between body and music is learnt, given meaning and it develops through different social relations.

The second example I want to draw attention to was during the celebration of the Colombian Independence day at the Rocket during July 1994. This celebration was a family event organised for an entire day which extended in to the night. During the day many families went with their children, most of whom had their faces painted with colours of the Colombian flag. One of the things that most interested me was observing that children of about four to six years old were being taught how to dance by their parents in a corner or in the centre of the club. For these children the relationship between body and music was developing in a specific context - that of a national celebration in a club attended by families and dancers of various ages.

The point I want to make from these examples is that dancing is a learning process that occurs in different ways and settings for different social groups. Thus, the relationship between masculine and feminine forms of sexuality - that is, the relation of body and music - is learned and developed through different social relations; usually within the context of the family, a national celebration or through formal commercial lessons. In the next section I follow this up by exploring how the process through which Latin identity is understood is mediated through narratives in which cultural practices are naturalised.

#### 2.4 'Dancing naturally': narrating the relationship between bodies, music and dance

Although dancing to salsa is a learning process, amongst participants of salsa clubs there was a tendency to refer to dancing as being 'natural' to Latin Americans. There was also another tendency whereby participants recognised dancing as a learning process but would often refer to 'dancing naturally'. Although different, these two tendencies refer to a 'natural' interpretation of rhythms by bodies. However, these are not clearly delineated amongst participants but are often mixed-up in their narratives. It is these issues, as they have been expressed by dancers, which I address in this section. I argue that what is often referred to as being a 'natural response' of the body is part of a learning process. Thus I treat dancing as a process and as such culturally constructed. This way of approaching dance allows for an understanding of the idea of 'dancing naturally' as a way of constructing Latin bodies; a perspective that acknowledges that 'dancing naturally' is given meaning through specific cultural practices and as such open to transformations.

When learning to dance salsa, Simon Thornton, an English man who appeared in a television program on salsa dance lessons, said,

The first time you get a step and you don't have to think about it and it comes automatically, is a great feeling, as though my feet almost do it for themselves and they get it right most of the time. You are too busy looking at your own feet trying to work out what you are doing to worry about what the couple next to you is doing.<sup>32</sup>

Mark, an English man with whom I was dancing at a dance lesson, said, 'I was so concentrated on what to do next that there was a moment when I stopped listening to the music'. As dancers improve so corporal movements and rhythms begin to correspond without the need to count. It is then when 'dancing naturally' is often used by participants to refer to the way in which dancers are able to follow the rhythm without the need to count. For example, Tami, an advance dancer said; 'I hear the music and my feet start to

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<sup>32</sup> Simon Thornton in *Metro land: Strictly Salsa*, Julia White, for Carlton TV, 6 September 1994, 7:30pm

dance and when I start to dance I hear the music'.<sup>33</sup> Gili, also an advanced dancer, expresses; 'My body hears salsa and my body starts moving'.<sup>34</sup> As these examples highlight the embodiment of salsa as natural is best understood in the way that dance and music are interconnected, one does not exist without the other. However, this is achieved through constant practice and through an understanding of the music.

For example, Steph, an English woman who I met at the London School of Salsa, referred to her ability of 'dancing naturally' as an achievement, 'I can get the steps, but when dancing I am still thinking of the steps. At this moment I still can not dance it naturally, I am still counting the steps. I don't flow because I am thinking of the steps'.<sup>35</sup> Dancing naturally is often perceived as an achievement gained through constant practice, as part of a learning process. However, it is not something that finishes once achieved, but which keeps developing. Dancing for many participants is an unfinished process, and like salsa as a musical form it is open to multiple variations and interpretations. Advanced dancers I talked to kept attending dance lessons as a way of learning new steps and of learning how to improvise. Usually they would go to different lessons, as dance teachers have different styles and were constantly providing new steps for advanced dancers.

It is when the body synchronises along with the rhythms that dancing to salsa is referred to as being 'natural'. What is being referred to by participants as being 'natural' was often not clear and usually confused with ideas about having 'a natural sense of the rhythm' - usually described in terms of 'inherited' abilities, biological metaphors or cultural background. For example, Alberto a Cuban man said,

I still believe that some people can do it by imitating, but they don't feel it. They just don't feel the power. It doesn't matter if it is black or white,

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<sup>33</sup> Personal interview with Tami, 28 April 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Personal interview with Gili, 2 May 1994.

<sup>35</sup> From observations at Xiomara's wedding, which was held at the London School of Salsa. Students were invited to the wedding after 10:00 PM. 18 February 1994.

let me tell you that is a taboo. When I see a good dancer it could be black or white, and when I see a bad one it could be in both. But it is not natural in Europeans, they can learn it, but the deepest thing is in the heart and not many people have got that.<sup>36</sup>

In the above quote Alberto acknowledged that Latin, black or white people could have or could not have a 'natural' sense of the rhythm and referred to the myths surrounding such statements. However, he used a 'biological/ affectionate' metaphor, like 'the deepest thing is in the heart', or 'they don't feel it', to describe a relationship between body and music in terms of a 'naturalness' that he could not perceive in Europeans. At the same time he used this metaphor to suggest that ways of dancing do not correspond to any ethnic group.

This relationship between body and music as natural was also described by some participants as an 'inherited ability' - as biologically natural to some individuals. For example, Gili, an advanced dancer I met at the London School of Salsa said, when talking about the dance teacher who is Colombian; 'She doesn't think that some people are not as natural dancers as her, and they have not been dancing for as long as her. ... Her mom was a dancer, she was dancing in her belly, she came out dancing'.<sup>37</sup> This statement also highlights how the cultural is transformed into a discourse of the natural.

The body's responses to rhythms is often referred to as natural to some individuals. For example, for Simon Thornton not having 'a natural sense of the rhythm' was presented as a problem when learning to dance to salsa;

I love Latin American music. ... It is just that I have never had the ability. I am naturally so shy. The problem is that as an English man you don't have the music in your blood. It is a different culture and it is not

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<sup>36</sup> Informal conversation with Alberto, 20 August 1994.

<sup>37</sup> Personal interview with Gili, 2 May 1994.

something you are brought up with. It is not something you have had since you are tiny.<sup>38</sup>

Simon established a relationship between what he perceived as a cultural and a 'national' body. However, he also mixed this with a biological metaphor, 'having the music in the blood'.

This relationship between dancing and nationality was also referred to by Rufus, a dancer before he started as a salsa disc jockey, who mentioned that for him,

Dancing is letting out what is inside you. Your feelings are buried, you become afraid to experience it. Dance is the only way to get that out, and this is alien to English culture. Most of the English people use nothing but their heads, you are not using all the body, just part of it and to me that is very English. They feel ashamed of being a natural human being. Physically they can do sports, but dancing is for homosexuals. English have football as the only way of expressing their feelings.<sup>39</sup>

Rufus is an English man, but he sometimes excluded himself from his narrative on English people. He linked the national with cultural in the sense that English people have a particular way of expressing emotions with the body usually through sports and not dance. This touches on how bodies are understood through discourses about English people as inhibited and emotionally restrained which is often contrasted with discourses about Latins as spontaneous, uninhibited and emotionally expressive. Although I do not deal with the issue of Englishness in detail here, the point I wish to stress is that in both of these examples the cultural was transformed and narrated as the natural in relation to Latin American bodies.

Thus, dancing as natural was narrated through two tendencies. One which often refers to an intrinsic relation between bodies and music - such as being Latin and therefore 'having a natural sense of the rhythm'. The other, 'dancing naturally', often involves a

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<sup>38</sup> Simon Thornton in *Metro land: Strictly Salsa*, Julia White, for Carlton TV, 6 September 1994, 7:30pm.

<sup>39</sup> Personal interview with Rufus, 1 December 1993.

discourse which recognises dance as a learning process. Thus, 'dancing naturally', refers to the process whereby people learn how to dance to a specific rhythm and in this process come to embody a Latin identity. Both of these tendencies point to the process whereby cultural identities - in this case Latin identities - are transformed into discourses of the natural in different ways.

What I want to draw attention to from this discussion is that these discourses of national and cultural bodies are part of the way in which people tend to understand cultural identities in relation to places. Thus, even when there is no intrinsic relationship between cultural identities and places, people tend to think of these as placed (Hall, 1995). In this sense I suggest that one way of understanding the process whereby cultural identities are thought of as placed is by examining the way in which cultural practices are naturalised through people's discourses about the body.

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Throughout the first part of this chapter I have discussed the process whereby people learn how to dance salsa. This I discuss in relation to the embodiment of Latin identities through dance related practices which are, at the same time, part of dance teachers' and dancers' participation in creating the event. It is through the process of learning how to dance and through participants' interaction at the clubs that dance related practices communicate a Latin identity. I have attempted to demonstrate how gender relations and sexuality are central to the way in which salsa is embodied whilst communicating a Latin identity.

I have presented various examples which suggest that the relationship between body, music and dancing is partly understood through a process whereby cultural practices are continually transformed into a discourse of the natural. This 'naturalness', however, I have tried to argue, is part of a process whereby bodies are being 'Latinised' through a specific practice, that of dancing salsa in London. It is through this process that a specific

Latin cultural identity is being made and re-made in dance lessons and on dance floors in salsa music clubs in London.

### **3. Musicians embodying salsa: Instruments and the performance of a Latin style and identity**

In this section I want to extend this discussion by considering the relationship between body and salsa through instruments and the performance of musicians. I am particularly interested in how salsa signifies a particular sense of Latinness through instrumentation and musicians' performance. In the first place I explore the discourses through which musicians thought of instruments in terms of certain ethnic characteristics. I also pay particular attention to how musical identities are embodied during musicians' performance through the use of Spanish and the use of the voice. I highlight how such ideas operate to construct a particularly gendered and sexualised musical Latin performance. Finally, I shall note how the musicians' actions involve an interaction with the dancers during which particular codes and conventions of performance style are drawn on as signifiers of salsa and Latinness.

#### **3.1 Identities and instruments**

Instruments are used in completely different ways in different types of music; not only in producing melodies or rhythms, but in the ways in which instruments are used as part of musicians performance. The way in which, for example, the bass guitar is played in rock is different to the way in which it is played in salsa. The rock bass sound sticks to the beat, whilst in salsa it 'swings across' the bars of the music and has been described as the 'anticipated bass' (Manuel, 1985). The bass guitar is also used differently during the performance. For example, the movements and performance of the bass player in rock music is completely different to that of the bass player in salsa music. The exaggerated jumping movements of the rock bass player across the stage makes the salsa bass player seem steady and calm in comparison, which is not necessarily the case. I am only using this contrast as an extreme example to demonstrate how instruments are used to perform

different musical styles and in doing so musicians are enacting particular cultural identities.

Although it seems an obvious statement, playing an instrument requires a body for it to be played, and to play musical instruments certain bodily positions and postures need to be learnt (McClary, 1991). This raises a number of issues connected to the presence of culturally constructed bodies and the way the performance of instruments are not only connected to 'genre' specific codes and musical skills, but also to wider discussions about the way in which cultural identities are actually made and remade in relation to particular practices and places.

Playing salsa is a learning process that requires a great deal of musical perception and practice. Salsa is based on a 3/2 or 2/3 rhythmic pattern that is called 'la clave', which is the basic 'matrix' under which all rhythms interweave. The instruments are not necessarily played on the bars of each beat as in rock music and this particular way of playing music is ethnicised in the way it is often attributed to African related musics, and contrasted with European notation.<sup>40</sup> However, as Philip Tagg (1989) has argued distinctions between African and European music are often based on essentialist ideas about music and people and often racist stereotypes and assumptions. Paul Gilroy (1993) has also made reference to this issue when pointing out that racism has often resulted in blacks being thought of as more 'authentic' in terms of musical and sexual expression of the body, whilst Europeans have often been associated more with the mind and less spontaneous types of musical performance. In a similar way Latin Americans, in this research, were often referred to as more natural as performers and musicians skills. Salsa is particularly interesting here because as a musical form it combines elements which, according to musicological research, derive equally from African rhythms and European melodic patterns (Roberts, 1985; Boggs, 1992; Alvarez, 1992). Because of this, salsa has been portrayed as a 'flexible' musical style that can be accommodated to a range of other

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<sup>40</sup> Different styles of popular music have sometimes been discussed in terms of distinctions between 'Afrocentric' and 'Eurocentric' styles e.g. Stephens, G (1991).

musical practices and forms. Yet, in playing salsa, as in dancing, the rhythms have to be learnt. For example, Kay, an English trumpet player for Salsa y Aché, explained,

I did a lot of the transcriptions from the original recording and first of all I was writing them down in the wrong time signature; I was writing them in 2/4 and then I learned it was in 4/4. I had to learn about the rhythms and how that actually applies to Latin music in general. It was a matter of playing more and more and playing with other musicians and getting into the style. This music is quite new to me. I have been in this band for five years and that is the time I have been playing salsa. So I did not grow up with it, as Oscar for instance.<sup>41</sup>

Playing music, as Kay mentioned, is part of a learning process. Although she first tried to approach the rhythms in terms of her formal training in classical European notation, she had to learn how the rhythms actually worked by practising and listening to the music. However, Oscar, a Colombian timbale player for Salsa y Aché, whom Kay mentioned as 'growing up with the rhythm', commented on his learning process;

It started when I was a kid. My family was here (England) and they sent me a radio to Colombia when I was about nine years. I was fiddling around and that is how I found the sound, what is called salsa, Latin music. I started to listen. ... Slowly this fever grew into me and I wanted to be a musician. When I was sixteen I came to London, and ... I said that I wanted to dedicate my self to be a musician. About a year after I bought some bongos, went to see Roberto Pla. When I saw him I was so impressed by him, and I said I was going to play the timbales. I bought a very cheap second hand one, I started to ask people how to play. From Colombia I had some knowledge about the sounds because I used to see the local band. But I did not know the names for how they were used, which concepts they used for different types of music. So, I started to learn all that slowly. Basically, I started to play with small groups. But I did not know much and every one started to push me aside because I did not know as much as them. I did not let that put me down. I always kept persisting. ... I kept on asking and bothering people to teach me. The more

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<sup>41</sup> Personal interview with Kay, 27 April 1995.

I was playing the better I was getting and I still practice a lot with my sticks.<sup>42</sup>

Oscar does not have a formal preparation in music like most of the English musicians. His training has been different and he has learned how to play salsa here in England, not in Colombia. I have quoted him extensively because he challenges the myth around being 'Latin' and having a natural sense of the rhythm. Both these musicians have approached salsa in a similar way, but from different standpoints; Kay had a formal preparation and started understanding, translating and playing the rhythms, and Oscar was first exposed to the music, then started understanding the rhythms through listening and practising.

Mark, an English piano player for Picante Band who was trained for classical music explained that,

there is a myth that musicians with certain training can not play properly other rhythms, but it is a matter of training. I would like to see those things breaking down. ... I learned how to play Latin music by listening to records, assimilating a lot and then by playing. ... There are elements in notation that you can not notate, actually something similar happens to European music. Rhythms are different because they are phrased in a different way.<sup>43</sup>

Although it is acknowledged that playing salsa is a learning process for both Latin Americans and English, still this association between instruments, rhythms and ethnicity persists. The ethnic background of musicians is usually considered among musicians in terms of the instruments they play. The percussion instruments are used in salsa to create rhythm whilst the brass sections are used more for creating melodies. Among the musicians I spoke to informally and interviewed it was often pointed out that those playing the percussion instruments, creating the rhythms, were usually Latin Americans, whilst the English would usually play the instruments creating melodies. For example,

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<sup>42</sup> Personal interview with Oscar, 27 April 1995.

<sup>43</sup> Personal interview with Mark Donlon, 16 December 1993.

Kay said, 'it tends to be that most of the horn players are English and the rhythm players are Latin and the singers are Latin. So there aren't many Latin horn players'.<sup>44</sup> Nina, the saxophone player for *Salsa y Aché*, also supported this comment; 'you tend to get percussion players and singers who are Latin. There is a trumpet player who is Cuban and he is very good, but most of them are percussion players'.<sup>45</sup> These statements demonstrate a tendency to 'ethnicise' certain rhythms and instruments around certain 'myths' about musical and cultural characteristics.

However, during the period of this research there were at least three ways in which this division - that of certain instruments considered to be more 'Latin' than others - was gradually being broken down, whilst contributing to the re-making of a 'Latin musical identity'. First, there were British musicians playing percussion instruments. Second, economic aspects and practical considerations were having an impact on some of the bands' instrumentation. And, third, whilst non-Latin American musicians were learning to play Latin music, so Latin musicians were also having to adapt their playing to perform in a different place outside of Latin America.

In the first place I mentioned that British musicians were also playing percussion instruments. For example Dave, an English musician, plays the bongo for La Clave, Hamish, of Scottish background, plays the congas for *Salsa y Aché* and Mark is the piano player for Picante band (the piano in salsa is used firstly for rhythm and only for melody as a secondary aspect). These three musicians rejected the notion of a relationship between ethnicity and instruments.

Dave, who spent a year in New York, mentioned that in England his ethnic background was less of a problem because there are not that many salsa players, but of playing in New York he said;

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<sup>44</sup> Personal interview with Kay, 27 April 1995.

<sup>45</sup> Personal interview with Nina, 27 April 1995.

Over there, because there are so many Latin musicians, it is more difficult to be accepted. I mean, it is just that people are not used to hearing or seeing non Latin people playing that kind of music. Of course they don't believe that is possible. ... That was not a problem here because there is not that many Latin musicians, so at that level any musician playing that kind of music was going to be accepted.<sup>46</sup>

For Hamish, who has been playing congas for over ten years, there is no relationship between ethnic background and being able to play certain instruments or music, although he accepted that these preconceptions exist; 'It is harder to be accepted if you are playing African or Latin music if you are not from that culture, I have come across that certain times. But most of the time it is your capabilities regardless of your ethnic background. ... Some people have preconceptions but I try to ignore that and do the best I can'.<sup>47</sup>

Mark for example, accepted that such ideas might have come about as a result of cultural exposure and upbringing, but explained that, as in language, there is no fixed relationship between ethnicity and playing music;

I think that with a lots of things, like linguistic things, which I think a lot of the phraseology in music has a similarity with, I suspect that it is largely environmental. Say, in other words, if you are to take somebody from China at birth and bring them up in Cuba, well they grow up talking Spanish with a Cuban accent or a Cuban way and if they become musicians they will undoubtedly play that way. They would not mysteriously grow up playing Chinese music. I think that is like the whole question of race, I think we tend to overestimate its importance. It does get overestimated. I don't think the pigment in your skin really make a lot of difference to how you phrase music, its more likely to be with whom you have been playing, like who have you been listening to will affect the way you speak. If you have been speaking Spanish all your life and you come to England and live in east London you would undoubtedly acquire English that has elements of east London way of talking, and people do.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Personal interview with Dave Pattman, 27 April 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview with Hamish, 27 April 1995.

<sup>48</sup> Personal interview with Mark Donlon, 16 December 1993.

These three musicians, but particularly Mark, were making reference to the relationship between music, playing certain instruments and ethnic background as one that is culturally constructed. This is an issue that they have had to reflect on as a result of their experience of playing Latin music as non-Latin people. Also, these three musicians are breaking beliefs that those instruments used to create rhythms can only be played by Latin Americans.

The second aspect influencing the re-making of salsa music in London that was mentioned by musicians was related to economic issues and to the practicalities of playing salsa in London. Playing music involves dealing with a number of economic constraints and practical considerations, as has been pointed out in previous ethnographic studies of jazz musicians (Becker, 1966; White, 1987). These have often been written about from the perspective of how these constraints limit the musicians' performance, here I want to stress the way they result in the transformation and re-making of a Latin musical identity. One of the most notable economic constraints I found was related to the payment of musicians, particularly because salsa bands can usually have between six and twelve musicians. As Kinacho, a Colombian trumpet player, said about this:

A salsa band needs a minimum of five people in the rhythm section, three or four in the brass, the singer and any other. Then, you are talking about eleven or twelve people and who is going to pay for that now? We are six or seven and we have a good sound. We can charge more or less enough and still pay the musicians well. The cost of living here is high. ...

Technology is there and I use it. Some people criticise us because of the machines, but I go for technology and believe in it. ... As I told you before we have to pay rent, insurance and petrol. For that reason I welcome technology.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Personal interview with Fernando (Kinacho) Suárez, 1 July 1994. 'Nosotros nos apoyamos en la electrónica, en la tecnología. Podemos prescindir de ciertos elementos de la banda. Para tener una banda de salsa mínimo se necesitan cinco personas en lo que llaman el rhythm session, tres o cuatro personas en el brass, el cantante y otro. Entonces ya estas hablando de unas once o doce personas y quién va a pagar eso ahora. Nosotros somos seis o siete y sonamos bien. Podemos cobrar más o menos y pagarle a la gente bien. La vida aquí se ha puesto muy costosa. ... La tecnología está ahí y yo la uso. Hay gente que nos critica, 'ah que máquinas'. Yo voy con la tecnología, yo creo en la tecnología. ... Como dijimos antes hay que pagar renta, seguro y gasolina. Por eso que viva la tecnología'.

Kinacho made reference to the number of musicians as a constraint for gaining work in clubs where the costs for the owners were higher due to the number of musicians. One way he found to get around this was to use 'the technology', by this he means the electronic synthesisers and drum machines that can simulate very closely the sound of other instruments both alone and playing together. This has been a controversial issue amongst many musicians since these instruments have become widely available at a low cost. Although simulating the sounds of other instruments they are changing the character of musical performance. By using this type of technological device, bands of six to eleven musicians, such as Palenque, could also perform as trios, with a 'big band sound'<sup>50</sup>. These not only guaranteed constant work for some of the musicians of the band, but a change in the character of live performance.

A third way in which musicians have challenged beliefs about a natural Latin musical performance and contributed to the re-making of Latin music in a different place is through the way that Latin American musicians have had to change their musical style to deal with different local circumstances. Here I shall give the example of Roberto Pla, a timbale player who during the year of the research directed his band, Roberto Pla's Latin Jazz Ensemble. He was a professional musician in Colombia, where he played for ten years with Lucho Bermudez's band. When he first arrived in Britain, in 1978, he did not start playing as a musician straight away but a year and a half later. He mentioned that he first had to deal with the 'cultural shock' of the new surroundings.<sup>51</sup> As part of that process of adaptation Roberto Pla used to see a local salsa band of English musicians called Cayenne, one of the first Latin bands in London. Out of his interaction with the musicians he started playing with them. However, this did not just happen spontaneously, as he narrated,

I had a very limited knowledge of English, and those guys were stars. I never had the break for a dialogue with them, until this one day when they

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<sup>50</sup> Personal interview with Fernando (Kinacho) Suárez, 1 July 1994.

<sup>51</sup> Personal interview with Roberto Pla, 16 November 1993.

were playing at the Royal Free Hospital. That day I had drunk a few beers and said to myself 'I am going to play with these people'. They were playing an incredible jam (improvisation) session. I was talking to this woman next to me, her name is Linda Taylor and she is a famous singer, but I did not know that at the time, and I started to simulate a drum 'solo' with my mouth. And this woman said; 'hey, you can do that, why don't you get there and play'. So, I had another pint and then I said to her, 'well I am going to play for you'. I left to the stage, I went to the timbale player and said to him 'please lend me your instrument. Can I play?', he says 'no, ask the leader'. So, I asked the leader. 'Can I play the timbales?' He says 'no'. But he looked at me and he said 'play the maracas'. So I picked up the maracas and started playing the maracas and they all smiled. I said, Bingo. So, I went back to the timbales and asked him 'can I play the timbales' and he was 'no, no, no'. And I basically took the stick and started playing and then everyone started smiling, you know. Then I took a solo, ... and the next day I was offered a place in the band. I did not have drums. They bought them for me, and my life changed.<sup>52</sup>

When he started playing with Cayenne he had to change his style, as he recalled;

I had to change my style in order to survive. It was an education. In the process I was learning to play percussion in the way that they can digest it. I had to adapt to what they were doing, just to work. I enjoyed it because the music is interesting, but at the same time I was thinking about what I must do to play what is really close to my heart. Eventually we formed a band and came to work in a rhythm section. Today I am really proud of my education, playing next to Cayenne because these guys are really good, they are professional musicians.<sup>53</sup>

The process of re-making Latin music in London was signified in the name of one of the first bands that Roberto Pla founded, which was called 'Sonido de Londres' (The London

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<sup>52</sup> Personal interview with Roberto Pla, 16 November 1993. The first part of this fragment was in Spanish, when he introduces the voice of the singer he continues in English. Part in Spanish follows: 'El inglés mío era limitado y los muchachos en verdad son estrellas. Nunca hubo un 'breaquesito' para tener un diálogo. Hasta que un día estaban tocando en Royal Free Hospital, y ese día me tomé un par de cervezas y dije yo voy a tocar con esta gente. Ellos estaban tocando un jam session increíble. Había una muchacha que se llama Linda Taylor que es una cantante famosa y no lo sabía y yo estaba hablando con ella y comencé a hacer un solo de tambores con la boca (simula) y la muchacha dice: 'hey, you can do that, ...'

<sup>53</sup> Personal interview with Roberto Pla, 16 November 1993.

Sound). Whilst Roberto found it enjoyable and developed a new style to the one he was used to, as he indicated, at first the change was forced on to him 'to survive'. This type of constraint (the need to please audiences and hence employers and maintain work) is not always thought of in such positive terms. In Becker's (1966) study of dance musicians in the United States in the 1950s he pointed out how musicians resented the way that their freedom to follow their favourite styles and patterns of performance was constrained by the expectations of audiences and requirements of owners. This was sometimes mentioned to me by those musicians who wanted to play music that was more than something to dance to. For example, when talking about composing music for the Palenque Band, Kinacho said;

We try to do commercial music, music to dance. We are thinking of the dancers. Our compositions are for the English public rather than the Latin one. It is difficult to get into the English medium, if you are singing in another language. ... To achieve a recording here it is very difficult, and competing with bands from Colombia and Puerto Rico is almost impossible. For now we focus on working commercially and in stimulating people to dance. ... The music is for the feet, for the head very little. There are interesting lyrics, but most of them are superficial and simple. The people are interested in a simple thing that they can dance and move to. ... We are in a country in which the cost of life is high, we have to pay rent, insurance, petrol. Then we have to sell out making that music.<sup>54</sup>

Kinacho mentioned language as a constraint in that it would be a waste of effort to compose a poetic song because the lyrics would not communicate as these would be in Spanish, which most people do not understand.

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<sup>54</sup> Personal interview with Fernando (Kinacho) Suárez, 1 July 1994. 'Tratamos de hacer música comercial que sea música para bailar. Estamos pensando en el bailador. Nuestras composiciones son un poco, demasiado creo pensadas en el público inglés que en el público latino. Es difícil meterse en el medio inglés, cantando en otro idioma. ... Lograr una grabación aquí es muy difícil y muy remota y competir con las bandas de Colombia o Puerto Rico es casi imposible. Nosotros, por ahora nos dedicamos comercialmente a trabajar y a hacer bailar a la gente. ... La música es dedicada para los pies, la cabeza muy poco. Hay letras interesantes, pero la mayoría de las letras son muy banales, muy sencillas. A la gente le interesa una cosa sencilla para bailar y poderse mover. ... Estamos en un país en donde la vida cuesta, hay que pagar renta, hay que pagar seguro, gasolina. Entonces nos toca vendernos haciendo esa música

These examples, discussed above, show the different responses of musicians to constraints - some feeling that there are new opportunities for new styles, some feeling that what they produced was being compromised by economic constraints and the language. However, in both cases the economic constraints have led to the creation of different musical styles and performances, in the case of Kinacho by introducing technological devices that allowed him to perform with a small band, and in the case of Roberto in developing a Latin-jazz fusion style. In both cases the changes were also adopted because they would appeal to English audiences.

These last points raise two issues that I will discuss in the next section. First, the way that bands interact with dancers. Second, most of the musicians introduced in this section were male, and here a further dimension is added by the way that discourses of gender have an impact on musical performance.

### **3.2 Body, voice and language in creating a Latin musical performance**

In this section I pay particular attention to the way in which a gendered and sexualised Latin musical identity is being performed by musicians. One of the ways in which a Latin musical identity is established is through the use of Spanish language. However, as English audiences might not always understand the language, the lead singers need to develop particular ways of interacting with participants at these clubs. In this section I will be discussing how a particular Latin identity is established through the use of the voice and through musical performances.

Salsa music has an improvisation session which is called the 'soneo'. The composer of salsa knows this and takes it into consideration when composing by allowing for improvisation (Quintero-Rivera, 1996). Thus, musicians can improvise for as long as they can maintain it, and as long as they can come back and join with the rhythm of the band. Whilst musicians improvise dancers are encouraged to improvise. However, this does not simply involve the dancers responding to the musicians. It also involves musicians responding to dancers reactions. During these prominent interactions a

relationship is established and maintained through dance movements, verbal expressions and visual gestures made by dancers and musicians. This interaction between bands and dancers took a particular characteristic and dynamic in London, as the language used by the lead singer was Spanish.

Dance is an important element in salsa clubs, either for live performances or the recorded performances of disc jockeys. Dominique, a salsa disc jockey who provides advice for HQ, said that she suggested dance lessons in the clubs because,

To me you have to have dancers, you have to have people that dance salsa. For me there is no point in doing it; if someone is going to play music and promote it to people who can't really appreciate it; you feel it has been a failure, even if the place is packed. If no one dances, it just does not feel right.<sup>55</sup>

For Dominique dance is part of learning how to 'appreciate' the music and also important for the continuation of salsa clubs.

In live performances in London musicians expect to have dancers and not spectators. For example Kinacho mentioned, 'For me, as a musician on the stage, the most important thing is to see people dancing, and dancing it as it should be danced'.<sup>56</sup> One of the ways in which the interaction between musicians and dancers is established is through dance. However, the level of activity varies greatly depending on the different clubs and particular situations at any given night. One way in which this relationship is established is by dancing with the audience. For example, Kinacho often maintains the interactive relationship with the audience by dancing with them. When recalling one of his first performances in London's Latin clubs Kinacho said; 'First people used to come to watch the band. ... I used to stop playing and go to the dance floor and start to dance with

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<sup>55</sup> Personal interview with Dominique, 16 November 1993.

<sup>56</sup> Personal interview with Kinacho, 1 July 1994. 'Para mí como músico en el escenario lo más importante es ver la gente bailando, y bailando bien como se debe bailar'.

someone ... Even now, last week when playing in Cuba Libre I danced'.<sup>57</sup> One way of interacting is by dancing with the audience as in the case of Kinacho. I also observed that some bands, usually those coming from abroad, would often leave the stage and integrate people into clapping or moving in a chain around the dance floor.

When no one was dancing the lead singer would often ask people to dance. When this was the case the lead singer would address the audience in English, though Spanish was the language usually used to address dancers. As an example, I recall from my observations at Club Bahía, when Lino Rocha, on that day the lead singer for La Explosión, said after the first number to which no one danced to; 'well now you have seen what the band looks like, now you can dance', then 'well we have seen couples numbers one and two, now we want to see couples three, four, five and six and so on'.<sup>58</sup> The relationship between dancers and musicians is established from the very beginning of the performance. However, the lead singers rarely talk in English, unless they need to make people dance. The lyrics of the songs will always be in Spanish and it was usually during the improvisation that the singer would address dancers in Spanish. Lino Rocha commented on how he feels about this particular issue when he is on stage;

It depends on the people, if they give me more I give them more. As most of the public is English, I don't know, but sometimes it is difficult for me to think that they can feel the music because they can not understand the language. Can you imagine, singing salsa in Spanish in an English speaking country. However, I have heard and people have told me that they can feel the music and that it has nothing to do with the language but with what they capture of me. In this sense it has to do with how I feel it with my heart and how I express it with my face and body. ... Also,

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<sup>57</sup> Personal interview with Kinacho, 1 July 1994. 'Primero la gente venia a ver... Yo dejaba de tocar, me bajaba y me ponía a bailar con alguien ... Inclusive todavía, la semana pasada salí a bailar en el Cuba Libre'.

<sup>58</sup> From observations, Club Bahía, whilst playing for La Explosión band, 18 March 1994. Lino Rocha a Venezuelan singer officially for La Clave, unofficially for La Explosión, Pa'lante, Tumbaito and any other band who needs a singer temporarily.

people tell me that they like the way I sing because I have a bit of 'soul' in my voice.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, even when, most of the time, the language used is Spanish, as Lino mentioned, his gestures and body movements are an important component of his performances as these are, in some instances, the signs through which people understand the music. Whilst language cannot be quickly learnt, an understanding of the visual and musical codes of various types of music has been encouraged by the distribution of videos and television broadcasts and by touring musicians. Thus, body movements and gestures are as important in the interaction between dancers and musicians and, as with language, these signify Latin in the way in which these body movements and expressions are part of the performance of a salsa band and at the same time performed by a Latin American person. Lino points to another issue, that is, the use of the voice as in soul music.

This last issue relates to how people recognise, associate and identify a genre specific sound, such as soul, through the voice of the singer. In a recent article, Simon Frith (1995) has pointed out the importance of the voice for musicians and audiences in either creating, interpreting or challenging genre specific codes. In reflecting on 'electronic voices' he highlights the importance of the voice as the 'sound of a body'. In relation to this he states that even when voices are heard through a telephone, radio or recording,

... we assign them bodies, we imagine their physical production. And this is not just a matter of sex and gender, but involves the other basic attributes as well: age, race, ethnicity, class; everything that is necessary to put together a person to go with a voice. And the point to stress here is that when it comes to the singing voice all such readings have as much to do with conventional as with 'natural' expression, with the ways in which

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<sup>59</sup> Personal interview with Lino Rocha 25 March 1994. 'Depende de la gente. La gente me da más y yo le doy más. No sé, es que la mayor parte del público son ingleses y a veces creo que es difícil que ellos sientan la música porque no entienden la lengua. Imagínate, cantando salsa en español en un país que es inglés. Según lo que he oído y me han comentado ellos de todas maneras lo sienten, que no tiene nada que ver con la lengua sino con lo que ellos captan de mí. En el sentido de cómo lo siento con el corazón y como lo expreso en la cara y el cuerpo. ... También me dicen que les gusta mi manera de cantar porque tengo un poco de 'soul' en la voz

in particular genre singing voices are coded not just female, but also young black, middle class, etcetera (1995, 6).

Frith addresses the importance of the voice for popular music, not only in terms of genre specific codes but specifically in relation to age, race, ethnicity, class and gender. This leads me to discuss the use of the voice in salsa music as it was mentioned by the musicians interviewed. In what follows I will be referring to the voice as it signifies 'Latin' and as gendered, as these were the issues that the musicians interviewed mentioned as having an impact on salsa music performances.

The lead singer occupies a prominent position in salsa bands and as the lyrics of salsa are in Spanish the language ability of a singer is an important consideration when a band is contracting singers. Singing and improvising in Spanish were considered important signifiers of a 'Latin' musical identity. As I have already mentioned, salsa bands in London have both Latin American and English musicians. However, bands often seek a Latin American lead singer. For example Daniela, who is an English female musician, narrated her experience when auditioning to be the lead singer for one of the salsa bands in London;

When I did that audition, ... one of the things they were worried about was my ability to improvise in Spanish. They wanted a Latin person, although my Spanish was not bad. I am sure there were those prejudices. ... My Spanish is quite good, and you don't have to say that much with improvisation, when you think about it, it is always the same line.<sup>60</sup>

Daniela, who then formed the band Salsa y Aché, thought language was a strong influence for her not to be accepted as the lead singer, even when she had been learning Spanish for over eight years and considered herself to be fluent in Spanish.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Personal interview with Daniela, 27 April 1995.

<sup>61</sup> Personal interview with Daniela, 27 April 1995.

The use of the voice was mentioned as an important element for salsa musicians in London, not only in terms of being able to sing in Spanish, but in having the intonation. For example Kay, a trumpet player for Salsa y Aché, who together with the other horn players sing the choruses to their songs commented; 'as far as the singing goes, I studied some Spanish so I know what I am singing about most of the time; but I have had to work on the accents and getting the intonation'.<sup>62</sup> On this particular subject Daniela added, 'I think the melody is important, if you can sing a diverse amount of melodies, then the words do not matter so much. I think it is the musical aspect that matters more'.<sup>63</sup> Spanish language and the use of the voice are important elements through which 'Latinness' is conveyed, thus, contributing to a Latin musical identity.

The use of the voice in salsa was also referred to through a gendered discourse. In general salsa has been mainly dominated by males and this was mentioned as having consequences for how voices were being used in the music.<sup>64</sup> Most musicians and singers are males, and as Daniela pointed out 'most of the salsa voices are high register male voices. I think they prefer hearing that, than a women singing. There is a shortage of singers. There seems to be more women singers than men, but it seems to be that it is the men who are called'.<sup>65</sup> During the year of the research, for example, Lino Rocha was also the lead singer for La Clave, Tumbaito and Pa'lante confirming what Daniela referred to as a male voice preference in salsa music.

In relation to the choruses of Salsa y Aché, Kay commented, 'This band is quite different because we all sing the chorus as well, which is all female voices. That is quite unusual and most of the songs we do the chorus of are male voices, so sometimes getting the keys

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<sup>62</sup> Personal interview with Kay, 27 April 1995.

<sup>63</sup> Personal interview with Daniela, 27 April 1995.

<sup>64</sup> Vernon Boggs acknowledges that salsa has been dominated by males. However, in his edited book Salsiology (1992) he writes a chapter in which he discuss the influence and participation of women in salsa bands.

<sup>65</sup> Personal interview with Daniela, 27 April 1995.

is quite difficult. But we are getting used to it'.<sup>66</sup> From what these female musicians mentioned, salsa has also been gendered through being associated with male voices, although over the last years more females are starting to play salsa.

I want to draw attention to the fact that all the examples discussed above came from female musicians and this highlights another issue, that of gender in musical performances. As in the case of the voice, gender became, and was experienced as an issue for female musicians and not for males. Although in London women were playing salsa and creating a space to perform, their gender was emphasised as part of the identity of a band. To discuss this issue I will focus on Salsa y Aché, a band of eleven members of whom six are women.

Daniela published an advert in City Limits to form a band, what later became Salsa y Aché. Most of the respondents were women, even when the advert did not specify any particular sex. The fact that most of the respondent were women, as Daniela acknowledged, indicated that there were women musicians interested in playing salsa, and who had simply not had the opportunity. After a year of rehearsing, Salsa y Aché started to perform and they built on the fact that most band members were women and made that part of the identity of the band.<sup>67</sup>

Salsa y Aché promote themselves as an 'eleven piece Latin dance extravaganza with an all-women horn section' in promotional leaflets and in magazine advertisements. As Kay mentioned, 'this band has a woman brass horn section and we always put that on the publicity. I don't know whether that is a good thing or not, I do not know what people expect by that. ... I think they expect you to be sexy'.<sup>68</sup> The women in Salsa y Aché dressed in miniskirts and initially attempted to move the 'all-women horn section' to the front of the stage, in contrast to other salsa bands where it is conventionally at the back.

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<sup>66</sup> Personal interview with Kay, 27 April 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Personal interview with Nina, 27 April 1995.

<sup>68</sup> Personal interview with Kay, 27 April 1995.

Musically, this did not work and they discontinued it.<sup>69</sup> In this case sexuality and gender are linked in that a particular act is expected from a gendered body and this affected the band's performance. First, as it was unusual to have so many women in a salsa band this aspect was emphasised by presenting the women in the foreground. This was then stopped for musical reasons. Second, and related to this, women were expected to be 'sexy' in addition to playing instruments, which again affected the presentation of the band's performance.

Related to this issue, Luz Elena, the director of Conjunto Sabroso, a band which started performing in November 1994, criticised the fact that in most salsa bands women were expected to dress in miniskirts. She said that if a band is to have women then the sexual aspect comes into it and it is almost impossible to get away from the miniskirts and what she called the 'sexy performances' required in some bands.<sup>70</sup>

It was often the case that some of the male dominated bands, when inviting any women, required that they perform as dancers or singers in the chorus. Whilst women are often found in this position in African-American and Anglo-American popular music (Steward, S & S. Garratt, 1984) these practices are also informed by Latin 'machismo'. As Eldin Villafañe has written; 'This complex of values known as machismo above all speaks of a family structure where authority is vested in the male head of the family, and where a particular definition of masculinity emphasises physical and sexual prowess' (1994, 157).

Hence, in these bands women were mainly there to be sexy. For example, the female vocalist performing with Robin Jones' King Salsa at Smollensky's, a Hotel lounge bar in The Strand, was dressed in a black lycra set tight to her body. This particular way of being 'sexy' was further demarcated by the way in which she waved and used her long black hair. The point here is that in musical performances women are expected to be sexy

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<sup>69</sup> From observations at Bar Tiempo, 5 November 1993. When I met the band I mentioned this incident to corroborate my observations.

<sup>70</sup> Informal conversation with Luz Elena, 27 April 1995.

through dressing codes and through the movement of the whole of the body and to display a particular 'Latin' type of female sexiness.

Although Luz Elena formed Conjunto Sabroso in an attempt to change these expectations of gender and sexuality, what I want to highlight from these examples is that in the performance of salsa music gender is linked to sexuality in terms of what is expected from female musicians. On this issue, I would also like to discuss the case of Dominique, the only female disc jockey, for whom gender was also mentioned as an issue that affected her performance at the clubs.

In the previous chapter I discussed how disc jockeys established a relationship with the audience through the routes and routines of their music playing practices. I used this metaphor of routes and routines to highlight how an imaginary sense of place is created by disc jockeys, but also mentioned that this was related to the way in which disc jockeys engaged dancers in specific body movements. As in the case of musicians, no other male disc jockey mentioned their sexed body as an issue that affected this interaction. Male disc jockeys talked about their techniques of d'jaying, and none of the disc jockeys interviewed reflected on how their sexed and gendered body affected their musical performance or interaction with the audience. Being a female disc jockey, however, became an issue in the case of the only woman disc jockey, who felt that this affected her relationship with dancers.

During the year I was doing the ethnographic research Dominique was the only female disc jockey, and in considering gender I draw on her discourse as she was the only one who reflected on how gender had influenced her development as a disc jockey and her relationship with dancers. After finishing a degree in art management Dominique started working as a music programmer for Bass Clef in 1985, at the time the only venue that gave a space for live salsa bands. She worked for that club until 1992. During a period of seven years at Bass Clef Dominique also worked as a disc jockey and since then has been building up her music collection. After leaving Bass Clef Dominique established her own promotion company, Salsa Boogie Productions, which she operates from her house

through computer networks, fax and telephone. At the time of my research Dominique was the disc jockey for Down Mexico Way, Bar Rumba and HQ. In the particular case of HQ she is also employed as an entertainment consultant. Through Salsa Boogie and in joint production with Tropicana Productions, another independent promotion company led by Ramiro Zapata, they organised the concert of Oscar D'León, a salsa band from Venezuela on 24 of April 1994 and they also organised the concert of the Puerto Rican Power band on the 8 of October 1995.

Hence, Dominique has built up her career as a disc jockey and entertainment manager over a period of ten years from 1985. Across the salsa clubs she is respected for her work. However, Dominique said that being a woman had been mentioned by club owners as a reason for asking her to D'jay in their clubs; 'They (club owners) say they like me because I make women dance'.<sup>71</sup> It is not that Dominique has a special technique to make women dance as the club owners might suggest, but as she added, 'maybe yes, maybe some women are fascinated by seeing me, and they say "wow" and they can just break; but some men are fascinated too, but they are for different reasons'.<sup>72</sup> In this statement Dominique refers to how her sexed body was an object of gaze for men and women, but for different reasons. She first explained that because the salsa club scene was dominated by male disc jockeys women might be amazed to see her, and second how her sexed body was the focus for male gaze according to sexual preferences. The point I want to highlight here is that male disc jockeys are not exempted from being the object of male or female gaze, however, none of the male disc jockeys I interviewed referred to their relationship with dancers in these terms.

Dominique also reflected on how she has had to negotiate her space into the clubs according to the position of the booth in the clubs and how this affected the way she dresses.

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<sup>71</sup> Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November 1993.

<sup>72</sup> Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November 1993.

At the HQ I don't get any bother at all, because I am on stage I am very well separated from the audience. OK, people come and ask me what I am playing and request and people hang around a bit, but I am not vulnerable. But at Down Mexico Way I am, because I am on the same level as the dance floor, surrounded by this little booth around me, which in a way attracts more attention to me than if I was in a corner. I do find that men tend to get a bit fascinated by me, specially if they are drunk, they want to stare at me, and talk to me. I try to deal with it just by completely ignoring them. At the beginning I used to find myself pissed off. But then it just creates antagonism, so I just tend to ignore them. It's funny, in HQ I like to dress in a way I feel good and look attractive, because I am protected from the audience by the stage. But in Down Mexico Way, because I am at the same level, I tend to dress down, I wear loose clothes and I wear neutral colours, so that people see me more for the music I play than for the way I look, and leave me alone. ... Although I don't dress like a dream woman, or anything like that.<sup>73</sup>

Dominique makes reference to how her sexed body and positioning within the club influenced what she decides to wear. She also reflected on how the location of the booth and her sexed and gendered body affected her interaction with the audience;

Well, it is good to be at the same level of the audience because there is no distance, that is good, but it is only this aspect of being a bit of attention for men. It is a bit of a drag at that particular venue (Down Mexico Way)... In HQ I am on the stage, I am very far away from the audience. ... I am above them and they can't hassle me, but they can in Down Mexico Way. Although, in Down Mexico Way I have actually built up a little circle of friends, which I have not really done in HQ, amongst the public I mean.<sup>74</sup>

In Dominique's case gender became an issue in her interaction with the audience. It also became an issue when her role as a disc jockey was questioned by male disc jockeys. For example, a male disc jockey, whose name I prefer to keep in anonymity, mentioned that

<sup>73</sup> Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November 1993. At the time of the interview Dominique was only D'jaying at these two clubs, she did not start to D'jay at Bar Rumba until January 1994.

<sup>74</sup> Personal interview with Dominique Roome, 16 November 1993.

'She is very manly, businesslike. She is not an English woman. Her friends are men, she becomes like a man. She is not respected as a woman, but because of the way she does her job. She has "been a man" and that's why they respect her'.<sup>75</sup> For this person Dominique can only be respected and have individuality because of acting 'manly' and being a 'man'. Dominique's sexed and gendered body is negated, but a cultural construction of 'male' attitude is imposed.

The point I want to make with these examples is that women have had to deal with and confront issues of sexuality more than men. Whilst it is important to stress that this male domination in music is not particular to salsa but to other popular musics, I have attempted to demonstrate that relations of gender and sexuality contribute to the construction of a particular 'sexy' female body as an expectation and as part of a 'Latin' musical identity.

#### 4. Summary

This chapter has dealt with the embodiment of salsa. I have attempted to demonstrate that the body is important for understanding how a Latin identity is constructed and communicated at these clubs. Throughout this chapter I explored participants' narratives on the relationship between body and music to discuss the making of a particular Latin identity in London's salsa clubs. Particularly important to this discussion were issues of gender and sexuality.

I suggested that dancing is a process that allows for an understanding of the relationship between body and music as culturally constructed and culturally specific in the way that dancing to salsa can be learned and experienced in London. At the same time there is no intrinsic or necessary relationship between being Latin American and knowing how to dance salsa. Hence, the bodily experience of music is directly related to the way in which music has become connected to particular social meanings at any given moment in place.

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<sup>75</sup> 1 December 1993.

Throughout the second part of this chapter I have discussed how musicians embody salsa through specific practices related to musical performance. I paid particular attention to how instruments are being ethnicised, and also explained how such beliefs were challenged by musicians. These were challenged in three ways. First, by the involvement of non-Latin musicians in playing salsa. Second, through the participation of Latin American musicians and the fusion of styles developing from the interaction between musicians; and finally through the use of technological devices. This, I explained, was contributing to the remaking of a Latin music performance and identity. I then moved on to consider the use of the voice and language with specific reference to gender and sexuality and discussed how these issues were contributing to a particular type of 'Latin' meaning being given to musical performance.

Throughout these narratives gender and sexuality became an issue for women, precisely because men did not reflect at all on these issues. Here I suggest that this is partly due to men's consciousness of their activities and positions across salsa clubs in London in relation to a broader dynamics of gender and sexuality. This relates to Massey's argument (1993b) when suggesting that places are gendered and that the identity of places, which develops through specific social and cultural practices, can constrain the movement of women around the city. Although women are found dancing in all salsa clubs, there are clear constraints involved for women who might wish to visit clubs alone and who are dependent upon public transport. In this chapter I have focused on the performance and participation of dancers, musicians and disc jockeys in a micro setting of the club itself to show how a woman's place in salsa clubs has to be negotiated in relation to what is expected from sexed bodies. This leads me to suggest that a power-geometry of salsa clubs in London is further experienced and embodied through gender relations and sexuality in terms of a micro politics of the body.

## CHAPTER VI

### FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Through out this thesis and with a focus on salsa clubs in London I have discussed the construction and communication of Latin identities through three different levels of analysis, that of nation and migration, the identity of places and the performing body. This approach, as I will explain, has implications for theoretical discussions on the relationship between cultural identities and places. This in turn served to interrogate discussions about globalisation process. This thesis does not interrogate debates of globalisation process in general, it only does by addressing those issues relevant for discussing the implications of globalisation for cultural identities and places.

The construction and communication of Latin identities was addressed in Chapter Three by linking spatial practices to the identity of places, which I firstly approached through a discussion of the relationship between nation and migration. Space, I argued, is politically regulated, thus the movement of people across the world is regulated through nation-states' immigration regulations. I explained how these regulations had implications for the movement of some Latin Americans across London, and in turn for the visible presence of Latin American cultural practices in very specific parts of London. I discussed how Latin Americans developed a specific sense of identification through, for example, the transformation and then social interaction at Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common. I explained that the movement of Latin Americans across London and the transformation of these places were also related to the social and economic context in which specific cultural practices developed. I explained how a number of Latin Americans who have settled in Britain interact with the local circumstances so as to construct Latin places. In this sense, the present economic situation has provided a space for those Latin Americans with little economic capital to invest in areas of the city where it is economically feasible for them. Thus, the transformation of places and the routes adopted by Latin Americans in London are actively related to both the nation-state's regulations and to economic contingencies.

Through these examples I have highlighted how the identity of places was constructed through positive interactions across place, but without neglecting the role of the nation state in regulating its borders and how these regulations can constrain the movements of Latin Americans across the city. This discussion has implications for debates on the relationship between cultural identities and places in that Latin Americans were actively establishing new social relationships with these places by actively transforming them. Thus, places here were not just the context in which participation occurred, but part of the way that Latin Americans established a sense of identity in the process of transforming and then using these.

Hence, the examples of the Elephant and Castle shopping centre and Clapham Common, showed that there was a relation between cultural identities and places. This relationship develops in two interrelated ways; first by constructing places with a particular Latin identity and by participating at these sites (through particular cultural practices). This could be understood as the material and symbolic way in which cultural identities are related to places. However, this does not mean that there is an essential relationship between place and cultural identities, but a relationship that is established through the actual appropriation, transformation of, and participation at places. Latin Americans are delineating boundaries on places, transforming and using these for specific cultural practices; and in this process London is also changing.

Exploring the relationship between nation and migration was a useful way in to discussing the process through which cultural identities are related to places. This in turn served to interrogate discussions about globalisation processes. An examination of the relationship between nation and migration was useful to discuss the particular ways in which the policing of national borders has an impact on the visible presence of Latin Americans and Latin cultural practices across the city. In relation to globalisation processes this chapter suggests that boundaries are not eroded but different boundaries are created in very specific ways through the nation-state's attempts to regulate national boundaries.

Then, I discussed how Latin identities were constructed across salsa clubs in London by further exploring the relationship between the identity of places and spatial practices. First, by considering the various elements at play in the construction of particular Latin identities in some of London's salsa clubs. I discussed how the geographical locations of the clubs, advertising strategies, club owners' practices and the monitoring of licensing authorities played an important part on the identity of the clubs. I related these to a discussion of the routes and routines adopted by participants of salsa clubs, to demonstrate how these routes were contributing to further elaborate in creating the identity of the clubs. Through the idea of routes and routines I discussed how these spatial practices through the city and the cultural practices developing from them are more complex than they appear to be at simple glance. Thus, in order to understand the presence (and therefore also the absence) of those who participate at salsa clubs in London it is important to consider those elements from outside the clubs but in relation to the clubs. The idea of routes and routines developed as a way of addressing both presence and absences and allowed for understanding the particular dynamics through which places are constituted out of interactions from without the clubs.

Through a focus on the identity of salsa clubs I suggested that the identity of places is established through a combination of both the representation of Latin identities and through material and imaginary spatial practices. Discussing the identity of places required a detailed description and explanation of the physicality of the clubs, the practices of club owners and promoters, and the routes and routines of dancers and disc jockeys. This extended discussion was necessary to explain how the identity of places was constructed out of these very specific practices, whilst also relevant to discuss how spatial practices were also informed by a shared notion about the identity of the clubs. By focusing on different clubs I stressed the contrasting and different Latin identities constructed and communicated at salsa clubs. The aim was not to emphasise the multiplicity of Latin identities, but to politicise these through an examination of the relations of power involved in creating the identity of salsa clubs. Thus, I have developed a 'thick description' and multi-levelled explanation to elaborate how these relations of power unfolded across salsa clubs in London.

The theoretical implications of this approach is that the spatial practices developing from participation at salsa clubs in London is constituted out of different and ongoing relations of power across the different levels of analysis that this thesis has been working at. In discussing the identity of places and by examining the relations of power across places this chapter contributed to further interrogate discussions about globalisation processes.

Finally, I focused on the 'micro-politics' of the body and discussed how a 'Latin' identity was embodied in dancing to salsa and through musicians performances and highlighted the importance of gender and sexuality to this process. Here I followed Hall's argument in that cultural identities are not fixed but always in the process of transformation. I explained how participants' narratives about the performing body as 'natural' could provide a way of understanding the process through which cultural identities are thought of as placed. The discussion about the construction of Latin bodies suggested the need for understanding and further exploring the relations of power that developed from the way in which these embodied practices are related to wider politics of gender and sexuality.

Throughout this thesis I approached spatial practices through Massey's idea of 'power-geometry' as a way of understanding the construction of cultural identities in the clubs in relation to broader processes and practices occurring without the clubs. This led me to develop three distinct levels of analysis (from the very macro to the most micro) through which power relations could be understood. Hence, I have attempted to demonstrate that relationships exist amongst the nation-state, the identity of places and the performing body.

I suggest that an understanding of these three levels of analysis is important to discuss how for example particular spatial practices, whether Britain's policing of its territorial borders or participants' routes and routines, are actually enabling and simultaneously constraining the movement of people around the world and across particular localities. This in turn has an impact on the visible presence of Latin American cultural practices across London and on the experience of cultural identities at salsa clubs in London.

The different levels overlap in the construction and communication of Latin identities in relation to salsa clubs in London. State, economic entrepreneurs and social actors are involved in relations of power through their practices. When considering their relationships, these relations of power can operate in an exclusionary way as I tried to demonstrate when discussing the relation between nation and migration and also through positive interactions as these unfold across places, as was the case of Elephant and Castle shopping centre.

One of the implications of my discussion of the construction and communication of Latin identities is that the formation and transformation of cultural identities unfold through identifiable relations of power across the three levels of analysis. For a Latin American woman or man whose visa has expired, who has been working long hours, and who relies on public transport, the unequal relations of power across these levels of analysis are more acute, than it would be for another woman or man (whether Latin American or non-Latin American) whose status has been defined as legal, with a better paid job and who perhaps owns a vehicle. The implications of this discussion go further if one is to consider the relationships between women and men in similar circumstances, or in relation to commercial entrepreneurs. The key point here is that the nation-state, economic divisions and gender play an important part in the construction and communication of cultural identities, and each have different impacts on different groups. Thus, this research suggests the need for a multi-dimensional approach to the study of cultural identities; one which simultaneously explore issues of national identity, class and gender. It also suggest the need to further explore how these unfold through relations of power at any given moment.

In stressing the impact of the nation-state's regulations, existing unequal economic divisions and gender relations I want to highlight the unequal relations of power developing across the levels introduced in this thesis. These three levels are understood through everyday interactions of people and a concrete analysis of social relations. It is in this sense that I introduced the activities of participants through the idea of routes and

routines. However, in stressing unequal relations of power I do not want to imply that there is no possibility for change. For example, if on one side the state is regulating and monitoring public space; on the other it is also creating the conditions for movement, change and exchange. This is the case with Lambeth City council who have sponsored events like the 'Gran Gran Fiesta' and supporting the organisation of major Latin events involving the participants of salsa clubs in London. In these events, mainly organised at Brixton recreation centre, most of the salsa dance teachers, disc jockeys and bands have come together under the same event<sup>1</sup>.

As I was writing this thesis I learned about gay and lesbian salsa dance lessons. This provides further possibilities for change. The codes and conventions of dancing salsa privileged a heterosexual behaviour, in that it is assumed that dancing salsa requires a heterosexual couple. However, in gay and lesbian dance lessons most of these codes and conventions could be challenged in the way in which gendered activities do not correspond anymore to sexed bodies. Even when leading is given a 'gendered role' - that of acting a female or male role - this does not necessarily have to correspond to a sexed body - that of male or female bodies as these have been associated with reproductive organs. Thus, ideas about sexuality in gay and lesbian dance lessons points to the way in which gendered activities do not correspond anymore to sexed bodies.

As I have stressed, places are transformed through positive interactions and in this process possibilities for change are also occurring. However, the implication of my research is that the construction and communication of Latin identities involves more than issues of representation and more than culture travelling or flowing across the world. Latin identities in London are articulated through varied cultural practices. These are being mediated through everyday life, cultural and commercial practices. Latin identities are also mediated by different groups or individuals. Some of these groups or individuals might have a clearly commercial or cultural agenda, however, many of these Latin identities are built up

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<sup>1</sup> I attended the first of these events which was held on the 31 March 1995 (after the year in which this research was carried out).

through participating at different cultural practices in London, or by its exclusion. Thus, my research also suggests that there are many narratives, experiences and meanings of Latin identities always in the process of formation. In this sense, then, there are multiple Latin identities.

However, not everyone participates of (in) all Latin expressions in London, or is exposed to them in the same degree or even experiences them in the same way. This, because some of these expressions are not visible for everyone, they are visible within and for certain groups. There are many elements interacting within the whole scene; however, this does not mean that everyone is exposed to all the variety of Latin identities in London. Although I acknowledge the multiplicity and variety of Latin identities in London, my intention has not been to privilege or celebrate this multiplicity, but to stress that each of these Latin identities indicates how different groups are occupying different positions and how certain cultural practices are positioned in terms of power relations in the city of London. Thus, I stress that multiple Latin identities are realised through specific relations of power at particular time-places.

This approach was useful in that it directed this research into exploring the relations of power across spatial practices in the construction of Latin identities. However, here I should stress that this emphasis on power-geometry also limited this research. Although I was able to politicise the multiplicity of cultural identities through the issue of 'power-geometry', this research ended with multiple relations of power, and it is questions around power (i.e. is power too diffused in such an approach?; or is that its strength?; are all power relations of the same strength or impact?) which I think need to be addressed. This research, thus, raises some questions which might be useful to consider in further research: Are any of these relations of power more dominant than others? At what point in time-place? Through which processes do they become dominant? How is control over relations of power realised? Which are the social and political mechanisms, institutions and structures through which these relations of power are maintained? It is these issues that power-geometry tends to leave unresolved. This thesis is an exploratory venture in to

addressing the relationship between cultural identities and places. Whilst addressing issues in a novel manner, this thesis also leaves many questions unresolved. However, it is after the work is done and after reflecting about it that these questions could be formulated, and as with most social research, a different agenda opens up.

Although ambitious in its aims this thesis is nevertheless a limited study of Latin identity construction across salsa clubs in London and in no way an attempt to propose a fixed model of analysis for exploring the relationship between cultural identities and places. As I have also explained theoretical explanation is not divorced from the ethnographic research, but both play an active role in explaining the processes through which a relationship between cultural identities and places developed. Thus, I hope this thesis draws attention to the need of multi-dimensional analysis and of ethnographic research for addressing debates about globalisation processes, cultural identities and places.

Tables  
and  
Appendices

Table 1

PLACES	TYPE											DAYS							
	REGULARS	Bar Rest.	Tapas Bar	Live	Record	Both	Owned	Rented	Hired	Month	Week	Special	M	T	W	TH	F	S	\$
BAR CUBA		x				x	?				x		x		x				
BAR RUMBA			x		x			?			x			x					x
BAR TIEMPO	x					x	x				x				x	x	x	x	x
BARCO LATINO		x				x	x				x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
BEACHUMBR	x			x				?			x						x	x	x
BRAHAMS & LISZI		x		x				?			x			x					
CHANGO																x	x		
CHICAGOS	x				x				x		x							x	x
COCORNA	x				x				x		x								x
DWN. MEX. WAY		x			x			?			x					x	x	x	
LA GUAPA	x				x				x		x					x			
LATINOS						x		?			x						x	x	
LOUGH. HOTEL	x				x				x		x					x	x	x	x
MAMBO LOCO	x				x				x		x								x
OXYGEN	x				x				x		x								x
PODIUM	x						?		?		x						x	x	
ROCKET	x				x				x		x				x				
SALSA FUSION	x				x			?			x								x

PLACES	TYPE											DAYS								
	Bar	Bar Rest.	Tapas Bar	Live	Record	Both	Owned	Rented	Hired	Month	Week	Special	M	T	W	TH	F	S	S	
LIVE NOT REG. *																				
CLUB BAHIA	X			X			X				X						X		X	
HQ'S		X		X				X			X								X	
BASS CLEF WATERMAN ARTS CTR.		X		X			X				X						X			
				X					X										X	

\* Live not regular refers to those clubs who have different bands every week. The clubs are regular in terms of days, this is each week on the days specified, however the bands booked are different each week. Regulars then, refers to those with resident bands every week in the club, also to regular recorded nights.

PLACES	TYPE											DAYS								
	Bar	Bar Rest.	Tapas Bar	Live	Record	Both	Owned	Rented	Hired	Month	Week	Special	M	T	W	TH	F	S	S	
MAINLY RESTS.																				
CUBA LIBRE		X		X			?				X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
NACHOS REST.		X			X			?			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SALSA		X		X				?			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

APPENDIX 1

ACCEPTANCES FOR SETTLEMENT BY NATIONALITY, 1982 - 1992<sup>1</sup>

COUNTRY	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	TOTAL
Argentina	80	80	40	50	50	40	50	30	40	50	70	580
Brazil	140	140	190	170	160	160	190	130	250	260	320	2,110
Chile	160	120	60	70	40	40	60	40	50	60	70	770
Colombia	180	180	140	170	140	160	220	180	220	270	230	2,090
Cuba	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Mexico	60	70	70	70	60	80	60	40	90	90	90	780
Peru	60	50	60	80	50	50	60	60	60	100	70	700
Uruguay	20	+	+	10	+	+	10	10	+	10	10	70
Venezuela	60	70	50	50	40	40	40	40	50	30	40	510
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>7,610</b>

<sup>1</sup> This information was taken from Extract from Control Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom, (1992), Ref.: CM2368. From Table 6.5 op page 98.

APPENDIX 2

COUNTRY OF BIRTH<sup>1</sup>  
GREAT BRITAIN

Country of Birth >	Caribbean *	Central America **	Brazil	Colombia	Other South America ***	TOTAL
England	2356	4062	9122	5529	17599	38668
Wales	49	138	179	40	399	805
Scotland	99	249	452	113	1163	2076
<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>2504</b>	<b>4449</b>	<b>9753</b>	<b>5682</b>	<b>19161</b>	<b>41549</b>

\* The category Caribbean I am drawing from includes other than Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, other independent states (old commonwealth), Caribbean dependent territories (new commonwealth), West Indies (so stated), as in the 1991 Census.

\*\* According to the Census of 1991 Central America does not include Belize.

\*\*\* From the 10683 of South Americans residents of Inner London, 3,182 (1,430 males; 1,752 females) are Brazilians; and 2,945 (1,132 males; 1,813 females) are Colombians. According to the Census the category of South America does not include Falklands Islands and Guyana.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Census 1991, Ethnic group and country of birth, vol. 1, Table 1, pp 24-135.



**APPENDIX 4**  
**Percentage of Latin Americans according to total of population 1**

Boroughs	Total of population	Total of Latin Americans	% of non-Latin Americans	% of Latin American
City of London	4,230	10	99.76	.24
Camden	165,274	1295	99.25	.78
Hackney	162,772	613	99.62	.38
Hammersmith & Fulham	137,720	1032	99.25	.75
Haringey	186,490	645	99.65	.35
Islington	154,873	684	99.56	.44
Kensington & Chelsea	126,285	2004	98.41	1.59
Lambeth	220,252	1333	99.39	.61
Lewisham	215,483	456	99.79	.21
Newham	200,678	243	99.88	.12
Southwark	198,916	806	99.59	.41
Tower Hamlets	153,255	256	99.83	.17
Wandsworth	239,162	1100	99.54	.46
City of Westminster	177,743	1850	98.96	1.04
<b>Inner London</b>	<b>2,343,133</b>	<b>12,327</b>	<b>99.47%</b>	<b>.53%</b>

In terms of percentage (proportional to the total of population of boroughs the highest impact of Latin Americans are in the boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea with 1.59%; Westminster with 1.04%; Camden with .78% and Hammersmith and Fulham with .75%.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Census 1991, County Regions: Inner London part 1, vol. 2, Table B, pp 387.  
Total of Latin Americans from Table 7 vol. 1 of Inner London, pp 113-127 or refer to table Country of birth.

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48. María, Dancer, 26 February 1995, her flat.
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50. Oscar. Musician, 27 April 1995, Mosquito Coast, Leicester.
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