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Latino Social Spaces in Tokyo*

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ABSTRACT

Based upon my informants' conversations about food and music and re-making a home in Japan, in this article I show how owners, managers and customers organized Latino restaurants and clubs as social spaces and contributed to the (re)creation of a transnational Latino culture in Japan. Because the majority of these spaces have relied on generic Latin American tropical iconography, one focus of the article is to show how such tropicalizations serve as cultural capital that benefits club owners and other entrepreneurs, and at the same time has fostered a sense of commonalities and a shared identity within the Latino clientele.

Key Words: latin americans in Japan, latino social space, transnational latin american culture, transnationalism, minoritics in Japan

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid nineteen-nineties with increased immigration of Latin Americans and the popularization of Latin music in Japan following global trends, Latin restaurants and nightclubs became conspicuous in entertainment districts in the Tokyo metropolitan area.[1] Establishments

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1 The Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan includes the surrounding urban and industrial areas of both cities, including parts of Gunma and Saitama prefectures, where approximately

that offered Latin dance classes (salsa and merengue in particular) were particularly popular because they attracted a multinational clientele attentive to music and culinary trends. Some such businesses were started by Japanese or non-Latino entrepreneurs and advertised in the English and Japanese language media; others were owned or managed by Latinos, catered to a multinational clientele and advertised in Spanish, English and Japanese media.[2]

Most Latinos I interviewed while investigating the strategies they develop to adapt to Japanese society, noted that going to Latin restaurants and nightclubs played an important role in their social lives.[3] Some frequented one or more of these businesses several nights a week, usually in the company of co-workers and other fellow immigrants. For many, such outings were their only source of socializing and recreation, and in many cases, an opportunity for networking for jobs and housing.[4] For most, however, going out to these restaurants and clubs often involved a long and expensive commute. For Alberto Nakamura, a Peruvian of Japanese ancestry (Nikkei) who worked in a car manufacturing plant in suburban Tokyo for example, a trip to a central Tokyo Latin nightclub took nearly two hours by suburban train and subway at a cost of 800 Yen round-trip. In addition, many such establishments charged an entrance fee ($12 USD) and premium prices for food and drinks (average of $10 USD). Despite the expense, many of my informants frequented several Latin clubs on

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sixty percent of Latinos live and work. The entertainment districts with the highest concentration of Latin clubs at the time were Roppongi and Shibuya in Tokyo and Sakuraguicho in Yokohama.

2 The label Latino is widely used by Spanish speaking Latin American immigrants in Japan to refer to themselves and their imagined community. As with other identity labels, its usage is contextual and does not exclude alternative markers of nationality (i.e., Peruvian, Bolivian) or ethnicity like Nikkei (of Japanese ancestry). In this article, I will follow this usage unless otherwise noted. When referring to social and business networks that include Brazilians (the largest group of Latin American immigrants in Japan estimated at over 250,000) I will use the generic Latin American. In Japan, the term Latin is used to refer to businesses with a Latin American theme or clientele, and to music of Latin American origin. For further discussion of Japanese labeling of Latin American immigrants in Japan see Reyes-Ruiz (2001).

3 This is also noted in some of the literature on Latin Americans in Japan, particularly Chapter 5 of Daniel Linger's book (2001) on the Brazilian community near Nagoya, which partially inspired this article. See also my book chapter on Latino business ventures in Adachi(ed.) (2010), and Lesser(ed.) (2003), Tsuda (2003), and Roth (2002).

4 As I note elsewhere (2005a), despite changing and restrictive immigration legislation, an unstable job market, and social discrimination, Latinos accommodate to Japanese society relatively well thanks in part to the associations that they develop through formal and informal networks. For a general discussion of formal and informal networks and immigrant and minority groups see Portes (1995).

the same night, and, as I eventually found out, occasionally throughout the weekend.

While most of the Japanese-owned Latin restaurants and clubs opened early in the evening and closed at two or three in the morning, several of the immigrant-owned establishments stayed open all night. Alberto Nakamura and his friends usually chose Romina, a Peruvian restaurant and club in the vicinity of St. Ignatius Church in the Yotsuya district of Tokyo where many Latinos attend Sunday mass, because it opened around the clock on weekends and offered a breakfast menu. For Alberto and many others, immigrant-run businesses were usually the choice for meals as they often complained that they couldn't get used to Japanese versions of Latin American food. When I pointed out how expensive and time consuming this "everynight" life was ¬a comment I passed to most of my informants¬ the most frequent response I got was that Latin clubs were like a "home" where they could socialize with other Latinos, and most importantly relax from the fast ¬and for many¬ unfriendly rhythm of Japanese life.[5] Departing from informants conversations about food and music and re-making a home in Japan, in this article I show how owners, managers and customers organized Latino restaurants and clubs as social spaces and contributed to the (re)creation of a transnational Latino culture in Japan.[6] Because the majority of these spaces relied on generic Latin American tropical iconography one of the focus of the article will be to show how such tropicalizations served as cultural capital that benefited club owners and other entrepreneurs, and, at the same time, fostered a sense of commonalities and a shared identity with the Latino clientele.[7]

DEBATING AUTHENTICITY

In the summer of 2002, in the midst of the Soccer World Cup, which

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5 I am borrowing the concept of the "everynight life" ¬ the nightly social life of club goers as a site for cultural identity formation from Fraser-Delgado and Muñoz's (1997).

6 Elsewhere (2008), inspired by Arjun Appadurai's work, I propose to refer to the constellation of transnational flows related to the presence of Latin Americans in Japan, as the Latino Culturespace.

7 Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman (1997), influenced by Said's (1978) seminal work on orientalism, have called "tropicalizations", namely "a system of ideological fictions with which the dominant (Anglo and European) cultures trope Latin America and U.S. Latino/a identities and cultures". It is important to note, however, that such homogenizing strategies are determined by power asymmetries and therefore are not stable constructs.

Japan and Korea hosted, I met Alberto Nakamura, a forty-year old Peruvian Nikkei whom I had met in 1996 and Jorge Higa, one of his Bolivian roommates. I had not seen them since the spring of 1999 when we used to meet at least once a week at one of their favorite Latin hangouts, usually on the weekends. We met on a Saturday at seven in the evening when there were no soccer games scheduled at Romina, the restaurant where we had spent many an afternoon in the past. On the street, the same neon sign I remembered advertised Romina as a Peruvian restaurant with a menu attached below listing food and drinks in Spanish and Japanese.

When we entered there were several families at the tables and a few single men and women at the bar, all Latinos as far as I could see, including several Nikkei. After exchanging pleasantries with Antonio, the Peruvian owner, he reminded us that as usual he expected his regular customers late in the evening, and in the early morning. We settled in one of the tables near the window overlooking the street. The décor of posters of Peruvian cities and archeological sites, and several textile handicrafts on the walls was just as I remembered from years past. I had spent a great deal of time at Romina during my fieldwork since it was a favorite hangout for the after church crowd and the place where a lot of social networking took place. It was also five blocks away from Sophia University where I had an informal base for my research. When I remarked to my companions that the place was just as I had left it in 1999 and joked that I could prove it with the dozens of photographs I carried with my fieldnotes, they pointed to the new television screens in every corner, and at the ceiling, which was now adorned with flags from different Latin American countries.

The changes were more evident in the menus Antonio brought, which now had a whole new section for Colombian dishes and delicacies accompanied with photographs. He explained that his customers had requested the additions and the new look of the menu. He also mentioned that the flags were meant to add an international flavor, although he confessed that he got the idea from other Latin businesses in the city. The special that night was *sobrebarriga* (broiled beef cut) and *natilla* (a flan-like dessert), two traditional Colombian dishes. Antonio explained that a group of his regular Colombian customers were throwing a birthday party late that evening and had called the day before to make recommendations for the menu. Because of the specific requests, Carlos had hired a Colombian cook that evening to help out.

While we were ordering, a couple from Ecuador I that I had met earlier that week at another Latin restaurant joined us for a drink. They

were planning to spend all night at Romina as they did from time to time when they came to the city from the eastern suburbs nearly two hours away. As they joined our survey of the menu, our guests mentioned that of all the Latin restaurants they knew in the metropolitan area, only a few employed Latino/a cooks. My companions echoed the complaint giving examples of restaurants that advertised as Latin but offered dishes they could not recognize, or that were not prepared well. They also pointed out that many of the new so called "Latin sport bars", which opened throughout the metropolitan area riding on the popularity of soccer in Japan and which they occasionally frequented because their coverage of South American tournaments only served "Japanese style tacos and enchiladas". The latter reference was meant to be critical of Japanese versions of Tex-Mex food and its association to Latin themed businesses in Tokyo given that the overwhelming majority of Latinos in Japan are from South American countries.

Antonio agreed that there was a shortage of Latino cooks – and authentic Latino cuisine at Japanese owned Latino restaurants and thanked the couple for what he and my companions took as indirect praise. He went on to say that the most difficult part of his business was keeping his customers happy with the food. He added that apart from the Colombians and other Latin Americans that requested special dishes, he also had to prepare a special lunch menu for the Japanese customers that came during the day. Magali, Carlos's sister who worked as the main cook, joined the conversation,

> I try to cook as I do back in Lima. The Japanese and Peruvian menus are easy to prepare. It is just a matter of quantity and spice. I mean, the Japanese don't like picante (spicy) or the thick sauces so I just make them thinner and bland. We also use less meat and potatoes because they like their portions smaller and with more rice. What's difficult is cooking for Colombians because they are picky with the ingredients. And then you have the Bolivians, Argentines and even some Mexicans! But I don't mix things up like some other cooks do here in Japan. If I don't know how to make a dish, I just ask. The other trick it's where to get all the ingredients [⋯].

Although my companions nodded in agreement, Alberto noted that it all depended on what was being mixed and who was doing the cooking. His roommates jokingly pointed out that Alberto was an expert at "mixing" because when it was his turn to cook, everything came out with a "Peruvian flavor." The Ecuadorian woman agreed that mixing things up was good,

especially when it came using new sauces and spices for everyday dishes. She also reminded us that most of the immigrant-owned Latino restaurants offered dishes that combined different styles, spices and condiments.

Magali clarified that that she didn't mix things up the way Japanese cooks did when preparing Latino dishes, using the same spices and condiments for everything − a statement that met with general approval. I had heard similar conversations at other Latin restaurants or clubs in the context of discussions on Japanese refashioning of Latin American cultural products, including food and music. While many of my informants conceded that it was possible for Japanese Latin bands −as in the case of Orquesta de la Luz− to get a "Latin flavor", none of my informants agreed that the same could happen with restaurants.[8] For most, the main issue, in Alberto words, was how the food tasted and who prepared the meal. On many occasions Alberto and many of my informants would articulate this concern with cultural authenticity by asking the owner or manager of restaurants we visited about the nationality of the cooks. A related issue as Magali noted was getting the proper ingredients, which implied knowing Latino stores and supermarkets where imported or locally processed foodstuffs for particular dishes could be obtained.

Another point Antonio raised was related to cultural ownership. He explained with a story:

> Sometime ago, a couple of Japanese businessmen asked me if I wanted to be partners in a Latin restaurant and nightclub. When we were discussing the details I realized that their "concept" would not work with Latinos. The music was supposed to be the latest from New York but there was a lot of rap (Puerto Rican and Dominican New York based hip hop) and other English language stuff I never heard of. I don't think it would go well with Latinos here, at least not with the kind of customers I have. The food they wanted was also strange. They wanted something Latino but for Japanese. I just couldn't see myself doing anything so fake so I told them no. I was angry because they were telling me what was Latino.[9]

Later on, Antonio added that one the Japanese entrepreneurs had tried to convince him by arguing that their proposal was based on a popular

8 Elsewhere (2005b), I discuss the introduction and creative adaptations of Latin music in Japan. Orquesta de la Luz, a salsa band created in 1988 in Tokyo, broke out of the small Latin club scene into the Japanese music mainstream with performances at music festivals and with professional recordings. Their prominence in Japan attracted the attention of the international salsa scene, and they were invited to perform and record in Japan, the United States, and Latin America.

9 This episode is also discussed in Reyes-Ruiz (2005b; 2005c).

Los Angeles Latin club that had a proven track record in attracting a multinational clientele. Despite this argument, Antonio declined the offer once again, arguing that Latinos in Japan would not find the concept appealing. Antonio's decision was informed by his own experiences as a Latino, born and raised in Latin America, now living in Japan, illustrating the contested boundaries of Latinidad. Arlene Davila (2001, 166-167) notes an opposite phenomenon in the United Sates, where representations of Latinidad tend to exclude English-speaking Latinos.

Many of my Latino informants complained that there were many new Latin business that had little to do with Latinos or Latin America, and which Alberto dubbed as "fake" Latin, giving the example of an exclusive (i.e., expensive) club in central Tokyo that advertised itself as a Latin but that was decorated with "plastic palm trees and animal masks, and where the waitresses wore stringy hula skirts and Hawaiian-style outfits". Most of the other customers had never heard of fake Latin clubs, but they concurred that many Japanese they knew had distorted perceptions of Latin American cultures.

Returning to the issue of Japanese Latin restaurants, Alberto commented on the presentation and atmosphere,

> I have gone to Latino restaurants owned by Japanese and I find the ambiance (el ambiente) wrong. It has to do with something more that the food. The music is one thing: generally they don't have a clue. It's either "La Bamba" kind of music or stuff in English (referring to U.S. Latino hip-hop). But there is more. Language is important, and the way they treat you even more. When you go to a Latin restaurant owned by Japanese somebody comes out and shouts: "Irashai imasu" (welcome to our establishment), and then the whole evening goes Japanese style. Going to an authentic Latino restaurant owned by Peruvians, Colombians or Argentines is different because they treat you more like a person, I mean they make you feel like you belong. I stay even if the food is not so good because I feel at ease.

Alberto's comments on authenticity and a sense of belonging were grounded on several factors including food, music and social etiquette. The conventional greeting at the door indicated a Japanese cultural boundary that he was not eager to cross. Many of my informants expressed similar misgivings with Japanese owned Latin restaurants, particularly in relation to the food.

Moreover, when pursuing the topic, many expressed an unwillingness to go to Japanese establishments in general. Apart from food and social etiquette, the main reason mentioned was a sense of being discriminated

against by staff or management. Alberto for example, mentioned restaurants and clubs where he was turned down at the entrance or where he had to wait too long for a table, and of instances when Japanese staff would claim not to understand his requests and had him repeat them in English because of his accent. These incidents were particularly bothersome for Alberto and other Nikkei because of the implicit reproach to their perceived lack of familiarity with Japanese language and culture.

NEGOTIATING ENTERTAINMENT

Although Peruvians I met at Romina were comfortable the diversity of the menu, the musical entertainment was a different matter. Antonio explained,

> Many Peruvians customers complain that there are too many non-Peruvian things going on at my restaurant, like the music. Take the mariachi show for example. At first many (Peruvians) were saying that they didn't want it; that I should have a Peruvian musica criolla show instead.[10] But you have to look at the financial side. A lot of the customers ‒Peruvians, Colombians, whatever‒ like musica criolla but the times we had it, people just watched the show and left. With the mariachi singer, a lot of people get nostalgic, order drinks and stay longer.

The show consisted of a Colombian mariachi singer and guitar player performing old mariachi songs, particularly rancheras, and bolero standards supplemented by a Karaoke soundtrack. Like some of the new items in the menu, it had followed requests by customers for whom mariachi shows were part of their everynight experiences back home. Carlos Puentes, one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the show observed that he and most of the people he grew up with in Colombia used mariachi music as part of the entertainment at important dates such as birthdays and engagement parties. Many of my Peruvian informants had a similar affinity for mariachi music and noted that it was also quite popular in Peru. But for the Peruvians who complained to Antonio, a mariachi show at Romina didn't meet their expectations of Peruvianess.

10 The word Mariachi is used to refer to a style of regional Mexican music from the State of Jalisco and to the musicians who perform it. Through the process of state formation it came to be known as Mexico's national music. See Mulholland (2007). Musica criolla, a broad genre of African, Spanish and central European origins is known as the quintessential sound of Peru. See Llorens (1987).

A Peruvian couple I met one afternoon after the mariachi show agreed that Romina should promote Peruvian musical traditions. They admitted not being fans of musica criolla, noting that it was no longer the most popular sound in Peru. They suggested instead a show of Andean music or of Afro-Peruvian rhythms, which in their view got little attention form Peruvian business owners in Japan. Other Peruvians at Romina suggested including (Peruvian) techno-cumbia dance music, pointing to the dominance of salsa and merengue in the evenings, when Romina turned into a dance club. Many of the Latino restaurants I visited throughout my fieldwork (1996-2009) experienced a similar transformation of social space in the evenings, shifting the emphasis of socialization around food to one around music and dancing.[11]

Antonio replied,

> What people have to realize is that we have a downtown location. In the evenings we have to be more international and play salsa and merengue. That's what Peruvians, Colombians and Bolivians who come here ask for and expect. I always tell people who want authentic Peruvian to check the Peruvian consulate for a calendar of cultural events (chuckle). But, everybody knows that the most of the other Peruvian restaurants, like the ones in Tsurumi and Atsugui (suburban municipalities of Yokohama) have lots of authentic Peruvian music.

As Antonio noted, his decision on musical entertainment was based on a financial consideration rather on a concern for what some took as authentic Peruvianness. Furthermore, his advice to customers to check the Peruvian embassy's cultural calendar ‒ as his chuckle, which we took as sarcastic, pointed to a divide between notions of Peruvian culture promoted by the Peruvian diplomatic mission and Peruvian business people and entrepreneurs who, like himself, operated according to their knowledge and perception of the local market.

To Antonio, Romina's downtown location meant taking into consideration requests from a mixed clientele of Peruvians, Colombian and other Latinos. Consequently, any decisions on the menu and the musical entertainment had to be in tune with other Latin clubs in the central districts that catered to Latinos, Japanese and non-Latinos. Because the globalization of Latin music in the 1990s favored "tropical" rhythms,

11 Elsewhere (2005b), I briefly discuss the importance of music and dancing within the Latino community in Tokyo. For a further discussion of the role music and dance in the creation of national and transnational cultures and identities in Latin/o America, see Fraser Delgado and Munoz(eds.) (1997).

most Latin clubs in central Tokyo played salsa and merengue and other music of Caribbean provenance and seldom ventured into other Latin genres. Antonio's choices therefore followed financial, and demographic and cultural considerations framed within the context of globalizing forces.

Peruvian restaurants outside of central Tokyo I visited, like Antonio noted, had a more Peruvian orientation in terms of food and entertainment. However, while many of these establishments had occasional live shows of Andean or Afro-Peruvian music, they mostly played other genres, including Latin pop, Rock en Español, tropical rhythms such as salsa and merengue in addition to occasional Portuguese and English language pop, reflecting the eclectic preferences of the mostly Peruvian clientele. In terms of entertainment therefore, suburban Peruvian restaurants were more international ―even more Latin― than Romina.

The choice of mariachi music for afternoon entertainment at Romina was also contested by a Japanese customer who apart from expressing surprise that Mexican music was part of the theme of a Peruvian restaurant, also commented that the show lacked the flair of the mariachi bands he had seen at Mexican restaurants in Tokyo. Mariachi bands had been a common feature at the many Mexican and Tex-Mex restaurants in Tokyo since the early 1990s. A Paraguayan manager of a branch of a well-known Tex-Mex franchise in central Tokyo told me that they contracted a mariachi band from Mexico ―usually through the Mexican embassy― or hired Latino immigrant musicians, but added that the band was only meant to present or accompany the food and therefore the emphasis was on the music and not the songs. Because mariachi music had long been popularized in Latin American through the Mexican culture industries, particularly cinema and television, Latino customers at Romina expected to hear a variety of familiar songs and genres in mariachi style that they recognized and could sing along with.

Moreover, as Antonio suggested, the songs and the performance itself were linked to feeling nostalgic. Antonio who was also a fan of rancheras in mariachi style explained this nostalgia as a recalling of memories of romance and heartbreak, being back home with friends, and, particularly with drinking socially. Although these themes also resonated with other Latinos I met at Romina, many said that they looked forward to the show because it was a time to meet fellow immigrants who liked mariachi style music. Alberto who had returned to Peru a couple of times between jobs commented that whenever he heard mariachi music in Peru he thought of his friends in Tokyo. In this sense the mariachi show triggered a nostalgia of back home as well as one related to the common experience

of immigration and (re)making a home in Japan.

VISIBLE DIFFERENCES

Apart from Romina, the most popular hangout for many of my informants was Café Latino, a nightclub, which opened in the summer of 2000 and was located in the Roppongi entertainment district. When I visited it with Alberto and some other Latino friends, I learned that the manager and co-owner was Ricardo X, a Mexican acquaintance I had met a few years back when he was working at Salsa Sudada, also a popular Latin club, a few blocks away. Like Salsa Sudada and a handful of other Latin businesses in the neighborhood, Café Latino was primarily a dance club although they served some entrees and snacks prepared in a small kitchen behind the bar.

Consisting of two floors, each with its own bar and dance floor, Café Latino was larger than any other Latin club in central Tokyo, and perhaps the most popular with Latino immigrants at the time; it ran advertisements in Spanish, English and Japanese publications and websites. Like at Romina, the space was decorated using Latin American crafts and folk art, as well as a number of photographs of what I learned were regular customers (Latinos and Japanese), posters of Latin American and Latino celebrities such pop music icons like Shakira, Jennifer Lopez and Ricky Martin, promotional pictures of famous tourist landmarks in South America, and flags of Latin American countries.

Most striking, however, were the mural paintings in the basement floor depicting an ancient Mayan city, with several pyramids and other edifices with groups of people around them, which faded into a drawing of world map with American continent from the Pacific side, and including Japan, with a caption reading "Mundo Latino as of 2001". When I asked about the paintings, it turned out that they were done by another former acquaintance and informant, Francisco Diaz, a Mexican painter who also used to work at a nearby nightclub but had since –like many Latinos I met in Japan– migrated to the United States. During the time I knew Francisco he had painted a Caribbean beach scene at Salsa Sudada and a typical Andean town scene in primitivista style for another Roppongi Latin club – but nothing as extensive and elaborate as the ones at Café Latino.

After we selected a corner table in the basement, perused and ordered from the menu of tropical drinks (margaritas, fruit daiquiris, piña coladas

and such), my companions and I discussed Francisco's murals. Nakamura took the lead speaking highly of the paintings and arguing that they helped Latinos "remember their cultural roots and showed the Japanese people an idea of the sophistication of pre-Columbian civilizations". My other companions also praised the paintings, although some confessed that they had not thought about it much. Jorge Higa noted that such décor was standard of Latin restaurants clubs everywhere, citing as an example the paintings of old Mexican towns at a Japanese-owned Tex-Mex restaurant around the corner.

Jorge's comments triggered a discussion on the merits of paintings and decorations at different Latin clubs in the city. Alvaro Rios, himself a painter, and who had painstakingly done scenes of Andean and Caribbean towns in primitivista style in the walls of his own restaurant in another district in central Tokyo, argued that it was important to differentiate between "commercial and ready-made", and "artistic and political" paintings and décor. He praised Francisco's murals for their technical quality and suggested them as a manifestation of "Latinismo", a term he often used in conversation, which he explained as the "political consciousness of progressive minded Latin Americans". He disagreed with Alberto,

> What we see here is not just about cultural achievements such as the pyramids and temples but [···] the course of Latin American history itself. When I see these scenes of people around the pyramids busy with trading and other activities, I am reminded that all of that almost completely disappeared with European colonialism. And, that things have not changed much with the United States influence in Latin America.

And turning to Jorge,

> The paintings at the Tex-Mex restaurant around the corner have little merit because they don't show any social life [···] not to mention any painting skills. They are just ready-made background décor.

These exchanges between Alvaro and the others illustrated different readings or decodings of the murals. While Alberto linked his appreciation of them as an affirmation of cultural identity and a source of recognition, Alvaro comments suggested the work as a critique of different forms colonialism. Apart from ideological differences, however, Alberto's later comments pointed to the influence of transnational cultural flows and market forces in the concept, layout and the type of entertainment of Latin clubs in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

TROPICALIZING SOCIAL SPACE

Many other Latino club goers I met preferred to go to establishments that were "up-to-date", mentioning music, dance, décor, location and general ambiance as the main factors. A group of young Latinos I met at Café Latino for example, pointed out that they "could afford to be picky with clubs because managers and owners made an effort to keep them happy".

Indeed, Latin club owners and managers I talked to were keenly aware of the competitiveness in the Latin club scene and spoke of their efforts to keep up with the competition and of trying to improve their establishments to attract more customers. Ricardo X, Café Latino's manager, for example,

> Nowadays you have to be very "tropical" if you want your (Latin) club to succeed. We decided to commission the big mural downstairs because we noticed that customers, especially the Japanese were talking about how much they liked the paintings at some of the other clubs nearby. In other clubs I managed (in the Suburbs) that had more Latino customers than Japanese, the décor was not a big deal: a few banners and flags or a few handicrafts would be enough – but here in Roppongi you have a lot of young Japanese customers, and they want a more authentic tropical experience; they pay attention to the detail and appreciate an effort to create a good ambiance. We are lucky to have some fully bilingual staff here (two of the Japanese waitresses spoke Spanish fluently) who pay attention to what the customers say. In terms of music, of course, we tend to listen to what Latinos request because some of them are newcomers and know what's hot in Latin America at the moment.

While for Ricardo a tropical theme was a starting point to attract Japanese and Latino customers for other Latino owners or managers of Latin restaurants, it represented a change. A Peruvian couple who owned one of the oldest Peruvian restaurants and clubs in the metropolitan area, for example, decided to change the name of their restaurant to Barrio Latino and extend its opening hours until six in the morning on weekends to cater to Latinos in the area who would otherwise go to the Latin clubs in central Tokyo.

Clubs like Bodeguita, which opened in 1986 and was perhaps the first Latin club in Tokyo, had also made adjustments to their "concept", including moving to a larger location in Roppongi, and decorating the interior in a style similar to other Latin clubs in the area with flags, banners, posters of Latino and Latin American pop stars, as well as murals of Latino themes. The main adjustment, however, consisted in a permanent

schedule of live music functions and danced classes. Bodeguita had in fact pioneered décor and musical entertainment, albeit moving from a generic Latino look to one more focused on Cuba. Up to the mid 1990s Bodeguita's Cuban Nikkei owners had adapted to the demographic changes in the Latino community, adding new items to their original Cuban menu to cater to Peruvians and other Latinos. Although they had featured Cuban music and musicians in the past, the prominence of Cuban music in the Latin and World Music scenes during those years helped Bodeguita turn more Cuban. Starting in 1999 Bodeguita had a twice weekly live music show they advertised as "authentic" Cuban music, featuring the Buena Vista Social Club, a Japanese trio that played as it main repertoire the very songs that won the Cuban group of the same name the Grammy award (also in 1999).

Bodeguita's return to Cuban roots played well to Japanese customers but had a different effect with Latinos. The Peruvian bartender and DJ explained:

> Many of the new customers are actually (Japanese) jazz fans who have followed the Buena Vista boom. They have dinner and drinks, watch the performances and then leave. They are not interested in the dancing. We have also been getting more Europeans and North Americans, also jazz fans, who now follow Cuban music. On the other hand, we have lost most of our Latino customers, although a few still come later on to check what's going on after the live show is over.

Alberto, his roommates and Alvaro who had patronized Bodeguita for many years, explained that the Buena Vista Social Club theme had disappointed many Latinos because the show "was too formal", and there was no dancing during the performances. Alvaro, who had informally advised many Japanese Latin musicians, including band members of Orquesta de la Luz, the famous Japanese salsa band complained that the performances were "just imitations" of the Buena Vista album and "didn't bring anything new to the audience". Despite their complaints, however, Alberto and many of his friends still considered the dancing scene at Bodeguita (after the live performances), as part of their everynight lives.

The last two examples notwithstanding and in contrast with my fieldwork in the late 1990s when Latin restaurants and clubs were known for their unique national style decor, nearly all of these businesses in 2009 had either adopted generic tropical themes or redecorated in that style, as in the case of the Peruvian and Argentine businesses I mentioned above.

As I noted earlier most of these businesses had already incorporated non-national menu items and musical entertainment to their offerings to cater to the diversity of the Latino community. The decorative changes were therefore ‒like changes in menu items and music I discussed earlier‒ both driven by demand from within the community and as result of market dynamics (a competitive Latin club scene) and globalizing forces that have increased the visibility, or put in Bourdieu's (1984) terms, the cultural capital of Latino music, food, and images in global markets.

CONCLUSION

The restaurants and nightclubs I discussed in this article illustrate the process by which Latino business owners and customers negotiate and (re)create Latino social spaces as part of their socialization and adaptation to life in Japan. Although the majority of restaurants clubs that my informants patronized catered almost exclusively to Latinos, many of them functioned like contact zones that allowed for intercultural exchange with Japanese and other foreign residents in Japan. However, the most important impact these clubs had was in the socializing strategies of Latin American patrons. By deploying transnational Latin American themes in their decoration, food offerings and musical selections, these businesses provided a common ground, a social space, where cultural similarities and differences could be negotiated. The conversations and discussions amongst patrons and business owners about authenticity and cultural ownership in regards to culinary and entertaining offerings, as well as the décor, illustrate this process, and indicate a degree of awareness of issues of representation within the Latino community. While decisions to tropicalize these social spaces are for the most part pragmatic adjustments, they are also part of the re articulations and reformulations of Latin American cultures in a transnational context.[12] In this context, Latino restaurant and club owners in their efforts to promote their businesses through customer service, décor, and selections in food and entertainment, acted as cultural brokers.

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12 With increased population, cultural, and financial flows between Latin America and the rest of the world, a transnational Latin American discourse constitutes an important common ground between scholars of Latin America and those focusing on U.S. Latino culture and communities. This dialogue has involved scholars from different disciplinary traditions throughout the continent, some of whom regularly participate in public forums, work in common projects and translate and introduce each other's work to their national and regional audiences. For a discussion and survey of the literature see Cabán (1998).

Most immigrant business owners and customers I interviewed often referred to Latin restaurants and clubs and their Latin American clientele as Latino, and in explaining their answers often made statements that suggested an identity construct such as "Latinos come here because this is a Latino club". Japanese owners or managers similarly used the word Latin or Latino to describe their businesses but when asked to elaborate, owners and managers spoke of a Latin or Latino theme or concept, alluding to a business strategy more specifically, pointing to the degree to which Latinidad has come to be signified by formats and practices formalized by the market economy.

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