Latin London: Negotiating Invisibility among Latin Americans in London

Introduction
It has long been recognised that a multicultural city such as London comprises complex and dynamic cartographies underpinned by waves of migration that fashion the nature, function and boundaries of the city in economic, political, cultural and social ways. The ways in which those living in the city are at once visible and invisible are mutable. Global cities in particular both welcome and reject arrivals in ways that influence the visibility of new migrant groups (as well as more established ethnic minorities). This chapter explores the experiences of one of London’s newest and fastest growing migrant groups in the city. Although Latin Americans have been arriving for several decades, since 2000 they have emerged as an important new population that make-up a substantial element of ‘super-diverse’ London. The discussion engages with conceptualisations of visibility among migrants, in part because the research on which the chapter is based draws on a report entitled No Longer Invisible (McIlwaine et al., 2011), and also because visibility has become an important dimension of the nomenclature for migrants and ethnic minority groups in the city more widely. In particular, it examines the ambiguities surrounding the presence of Latin Americans where on the one hand, they need and demand to be recognised, yet on the other hand, it is often in their interests to remain invisible, especially in cases where they are irregular. It examines the ways in which the community has been constructed over time, as well as the range of invisibility practices developed from below by Latin Americans before concluding with a brief discussion of the ethnic recognition campaign.

Exploring (In)visibility and Migration in the City
It has long been acknowledged that the city has provided a home for the ‘unknowable’ and the ‘stranger’ who are often migrants or recent arrivals (Keith, 2005: 15). In turn, the notion of visibility has been attributed to migrant populations in various ways in different places and over time. In the British and North American contexts, invisibility was originally mainly linked with race relations debates and especially as a way of outlining patterns and processes of marginalisation among black populations (see Bryce-Laporte, 1972 on the US; Macdonald and Macdonald, 1972 on Great Britain). Subsequently, the term has broadened to include a wide range of nationality groups such as Italians in the UK (Fortier, 2006) and Syrians in Lebanon (Chalcraft, 2009) and groups of nationalities such as Arabs in the US (Naber, 2010). As well as immigration status and race, invisibility has also been used to describe female migrants in general (Kofman, 1999) and in specific situations (Ghorashi, 2010 on Islamic women in the Netherlands). In turn, invisible migrants have been denoted as ‘non-European refugees, European minority refugees (such as Roma), internally displaced persons, self-settled refugees, and urban refugees in Africa’ (Polzer and Hammond, 2008: 419).

Therefore, which migrants are invisible varies considerably according to nationality, race gender, sexuality and other intersecting social identities. Yet, certain migrants are invisible to some and not to others and in diverse ways depending on the context. It is thus important to ask why migrants have been cast as invisible and the role that such invisibility plays in their lives especially in relation to well-being. As such, visibility reflects not just a particular situation but rather is the result of a dynamic process whereby invisibility can be enforced from above or invoked from below in complex and intersecting ways. Indeed, drawing on Foucault’s notion of
disciplinary power exercised through invisibility, Polzer and Hammond (2008: 418) argue that power relations underpin invisibility because it is created and maintained by those who control resources in a given society. This means that visibility can be withheld by those with power for a range of reasons that might include visibility as threat where certain populations might be viewed as threatening the status quo or notions of racial or ethnic harmony by highlighting their presence (Keith, 2005: 78-9 on the black population in London). In addition, limiting visibility can also act to potentially reduce demands for services on those who control them. Accommodations around visibility can also be made between states and migrants in what Pugh (2011) in relation to Colombian refugees in Ecuador calls an ‘invisibility bargain’. This is where refugees are allowed to stay in the country in return for social and political invisibility, even if this effectively means that their rights are ignored.

The extent to which the invisible can claim some rights to visibility can also be seen through various resistance and protest strategies that have been important in ensuring recognition through a range of means, whether collective and/or individual. In relation to Palestinians, Feldman (2008) maps the creation of their ‘visibility field’ (p. 508) that comprises the evolution of material objects into symbols of visibility such as keys to houses still owned on Palestinian land from which they have been displaced that are then projected as powerful images during protest demonstrations and the use of humanitarian documents such as ration cards to mark visibility and also to make claims to nationhood. While these types of practices can be used to promote visibility in a positive way, they can also simultaneously exploit and bring shame to the invisible.

The ambivalence surrounding visibility is perhaps most clearly illustrated in terms of migrants with irregular immigration status. Not only is the categorisation of migrants according to how they have entered a country heavily contested, but those without official authorisation to reside are invariably criminalised and denied their rights (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). While terms used include ‘irregular’, ‘undocumented’, ‘illegal’ and ‘unauthorised’, a key dimension of descriptions of these types of migrants relates to visibility. Some terms imply invisibility such as ‘non-status’ (Goldring, Berinstein, and Bernhard, 2009), while others are more explicit such as Coutin’s (2000: 30) suggestion that these migrants live in a situation of ‘nonexistence’ that entails a social space of ‘forced invisibility, exclusion, subjugation, and repression’ (see also De Genova, 2002). For irregular migrants in particular, their invisibility is necessary and useful in order to ensure that they can not only enter a country but that they can continue to reside there under the radar of the authorities (McIlwaine, 2014).

Immigration status is also not the only form of social categorisation that influences which migrants are constructed as invisible or not. While it has long been acknowledged that such categories are socially constructed representations of a certain reality (Anthias, 1998), some migrants will be more visible than others depending on their gender, race, nationality, as noted above. In turn, it feeds into the politics of representation in terms of how data about migrants is constructed, how group claims are made and how the notion of community is manipulated (Polzer, 2008). Indeed, migrant communities which are themselves rarely homogenous and cohesive in themselves will unevenly exclude or invisibilise some potential members and include others from the same nationality or ethnic group. Such ethnic spaces comprising migrants with some shared characteristics therefore have porous boundaries and often high levels of discord within them (Werbner, 2002). These spaces and places will also have strangers in their midst who may be visible at some points in time or in some spaces and invisible in others (Calhoun, 2002).
These conceptualisations around invisibility as paradoxical are especially pertinent to the Latin American population in London. As a recent, yet fast-growing group, Latin Americans are emerging as an important population who are on the one hand, demanding visibility in a range of ways, yet on whom visibility has sometimes been imposed and sometimes been chosen. The discussion now turns to explore these issues in relation to the empirical realities of the population drawing on a range of sources and projects.¹

**Constructing a Latin American Community in London**

As noted briefly above, Latin Americans effectively represent one of London’s ‘new migrant groups’ who have contributed to London’s marked ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007). This super-diversity has been aptly characterised as resulting in a move away from large-scale migration from Commonwealth nations towards the migration of people from a more diverse range of countries. In turn, these migrants are usually ethnically and linguistically varied with diverse immigration statuses and often with few previous ties with the UK. They are also transnationally constituted through a wide array of financial, social and cultural ties back home (ibid.). Of particular importance in relation to Latin Americans is that as a group or community they are internally super-diverse in relation to nationality, year of arrival, immigration status and class position. This in turn, has created a stratified community with uneven patterns of cohesion and levels of integration, the latter conceptualised according to the British government’s notion of citizenship attainment and English language skills (McIlwaine, 2011).

Despite this internal diversity, Latin Americans as a group have slowly become a visible presence in the city, especially since the 1980s. However, the history of the Latin American population in the city has been much longer. At various historical junctures since the independence struggles in Spanish America, London has provided refuge for liberation leaders, diplomats, writers, artists, political exiles and commercial traders from many Latin American countries as well as a temporary home for the elites in pursuit of education and leisure (Decho and Diamond, 1998). But it was only from the 1970s onwards that Latin Americans, and specifically Colombians arrived in any numbers. The latter arrived to work in catering and cleaning, first with work permits and subsequently through a range of routes including family reunion, as students and claiming asylum as a result of the armed conflict that worsened markedly in the 1990s. Another important but smaller flow that was initiated in the 1970s comprised political exiles mainly from Chile, but also from Uruguay, Argentina, and Colombia. Although the proportion of exiles included in the research was limited, 7 per cent identified political factors as being the main reason they left Latin America. For example, the proportion leaving for political reasons is much lower (7 per cent) and is concentrated among Chileans, Colombians and Ecuadorians. For example, Consuela who was 61 years old and had been living in the UK for 34 years recalled:

> ‘I had a quiet life, I worked, I looked after my girls, I had a normal life until the military coup in Chile in 1973 when everything changed completely. After that my personal life

¹ The main project on which this chapter draws entailed a survey of 1041 questionnaires with a wide range of different Latin American nationalities from across the socio-economic spectrum as well as 50 in-depth interviews, 3 focus groups and a series of 15 interviews with community representatives. The project was conducted between 2009 and 2010 (McIlwaine et al., 2011). It also refers to an earlier project that comprised in-depth interviews conducted with 28 Colombians, 22 Ecuadorians and 20 Bolivians in London together with 3 focus groups and 10 interviews with community representatives between 2006 and 2007 (McIlwaine, 2007).
and that of my children and ex-husband changed completely and we had to come to England in 1975 to flee persecution.’

Since the 1990s, increasing numbers of Ecuadorians, Peruvians and Argentineans arrived and more recently since 2000, Bolivians and Brazilians. This was mainly for economic reasons, but was also linked with political and social factors. The closure of many routes to the United States after 9/11 in 2001 coupled with increasing levels of inequality and poverty linked with neoliberal economic policies across the region has also contributed to Latin Americans searching for alternative destinations. While those migrating for economic reasons are often concentrated in the lower socio-economic groups, there has also been an increase in student and professional migration, linked partly with the introduction of managed migration policies focused on skilled migration. Indeed, the main reasons cited in the survey research as to why Latin Americans left their homeland was lack of economic or professional opportunities at home and/or the prospect of better opportunities abroad (43 per cent). For example, Viviana, a 47 year-old from Colombia who had lived in London since 1978 working as a teacher complained that she could barely get by back home economically:

‘I worked three shifts as a teacher. I left my house at 6 in the morning and I got home at 11 at night, every day. The shifts were really hard and we also worked Saturdays. I did this because in every school that I worked they only paid the minimum … So I said to myself: “with my abilities in another country I will be paid a dignified wage and I’m going to live well and also not have to beg someone for a letter of recommendation”’.

Education and language acquisition were also important in that more than one-fifth left Latin America for educational reasons (22 per cent), either to learn English or to pursue further studies, and was especially related with those who worked in professional and managerial jobs. In addition, social or family reasons prompted 16 per cent to migrate, mainly to join other family members or to join friends or relatives who had already migrated but also due to family conflict. For example, Serafina, 40 years old and from Ecuador had lived in London since 1996. Although Serafina’s parents had migrated to England in 1990 for economic reasons, she never planned to leave Ecuador. However, she and her husband began to have marital problems and she saw migration as a way of dealing with their personal problems (McIlwaine et al., 2011).

Onward migration of Latin Americans moving from other southern European countries has also been extremely important since 2008 as a result of the global economic downturn that has markedly affected these nations’ economies. More than a third (36.5 per cent) of Latin Americans had previous experience of migration before arriving in the UK, with most arriving from Spain (38 per cent). This was especially important for Ecuadorian and Colombian migrants; almost three-quarters of Ecuadorians and half of Colombians who had resided elsewhere before travelling to the UK had previously lived in Spain. This reflects wider migration processes in Spain which has a very large Latin American migrant population, a large proportion of whom have become EU citizens through length of residency as well as a series of regularisation programmes throughout the 2000s. While flows from Spain to the UK were firmly established before the economic downturn, they accelerated markedly as the crisis led to unemployment and widespread dissatisfaction with working conditions in construction and agriculture for men and care work and domestic service for women which in turn, was further exacerbated by a perception of racism against Latin Americans. For instance, Ana from Ecuador noted:

‘In Spain if you are latino, if you are foreign you are excluded a little more; they don’t look at the quality of your work, but rather the appearance of it. I think that there, it’s
hard for *latinos* to get on; the majority work in construction and cleaning and it’s very hard to work in an office or a bank. There is too much discrimination.’

Migration via Italy was also an important gateway to the UK, especially for Brazilians and Argentinians who could apply for European passports on the basis of their Italian ancestry (which is relatively easy to establish). Yaritza, for example, was 45 and arrived in London in 2008 after spending 3 months in Italy applying for an Italian passport. She was not keen to stay in Italy as there were few job opportunities and she was not interested in having to learn Italian; instead, she wanted to learn English which she felt was more useful. She had been working as a cleaner earning the minimum wage since she arrived (see McIlwaine 2012 for further discussion; also below).

While these flows effectively created the Latin American population in London, the issue of visibility and size has been more contested. From the mid-2000s onwards, a series of estimates about the size of the community were published, few of which were based on empirical reality. Instead, a series of guesses initially identified by community activists who were keen to ensure that Latin Americans were recognised as an important population became enshrined in more official documents. For example, a Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO, 2007: 5) report that suggested that there were between 700,000 and 1,000,000 was based on an online article by an oral historian who openly admitted that she was guessing the numbers (McIlwaine 2007). According to the census, there were just over 4,000 Latin Americans in England and Wales in 1951 with an increase to 17,000 in 1991 (Miller, 1998: 8). In 2001, there were 46,325 and by 2011, a total of 138,197 were recorded of which 82,771 or 60 per cent were living in London. While this shows a clear growth in the population, it is also widely acknowledged that the census is an under-estimate of the actual size mainly on the basis of under-recording of irregular populations, albeit not to the extent suggested by the FCO and acknowledging that the 2001 officially accounts for those without regular status. Related with this, the *No Longer Invisible* report attempted the first robust estimate that included regular, irregular and second generation Latin Americans in London. Based on the Annual Population Survey for 2008, this identified 113,578 Latin Americans in London including 17,100 irregular migrants and 17,182 second generation based on 2008 figures. This made them roughly the same size as the Polish and ethnic Chinese in London at the time and represents 61 per cent of the British Latin American population as a whole which was estimated at 186,500 (McIlwaine et al. 2011: 15).

In terms of the geographies of invisibility as to where Latin Americans live in London, residence tends to be dispersed despite concentrations in Southwark, Lambeth and Haringey. Indeed, Latin Americans in London are effectively a ‘community without propinquity’ (Webber 1964 cited in Zelinsky and Lee, 1998: 288) characterised by heterolocalism (ibid; Winders, 2012). This affects their visibility in that they do not congregate overwhelmingly in a specific ethnic neighbourhood, a situation not uncommon in London where multicultural communities are more likely the norm (Keith, 2004). None the less, Latin Americans have increasingly created a series of institutions, spaces and services that specifically serve their community and which often have marked physical presences in the boroughs mentioned above. However, it is also important to recognise that the construction of a community among Latin American has been complex and contested. As noted above, Latin Americans comprise a stratified and super-diverse group who at times represent a unified front in relation to such issues as ethnic recognition, while at others emerge as a community riven with divisions and conflicts. Yet despite not being universally homogenous or cohesive, they can still be referred to as a community in terms of comprising people who originate from the same continent, share a language (with the exception of Brazilians) and a loose set of cultural and social affinities (see Kivisto, 2001 for a conceptual discussion).
As an emergent ethnic group, Latin Americans have constructed what Cock (2011) in relation to the Colombian community in London refers to as a series of ‘ethnic publics’ which are effectively ethnic spaces that often but not always translate as territory and locality but which are predominantly predicated on social networks and relations (Werbner, 2002). For instance, from the 1980s onwards, a range of civil society organisations serving Latin Americans emerged. Although most current migrant organisations were first established to campaign against military dictatorships in Latin America they have subsequently evolved into service-providers for those residing in London. These included the Campaign Against Repression in Latin American which became Carila Latin American Welfare Group, the Chile Democrático group that became Indo-American Migrant and Refugee Organisation (IRMO), the Latin American Women’s Rights Service as well as the Latin American Advisory Committee which was important in the creation of Latin American House (Cock, 2009). At the same time, other spaces also emerged such as the football pitch in Clapham Common, which became a meeting point for the community.

Nightclubs, cafes and shops were increasingly established and became more common during in this period and into the 1990s (McIlwaine et al., 2011).

Since then, Latin American organisations, businesses, media and events have burgeoned in London. Today there are commercial hubs for Brazilians in the Willesden area and for Spanish speaking Latin Americans in Elephant and Castle and in Seven Sisters (even if both of the latter are under threat from developers). There are several media outlets in the form of newspapers in both Spanish (Express News, Extra) and Portuguese (Brazilian News, Leros) and large scale events such as the Carnaval del Pueblo which is a Latin summer carnival held in Burgess Park in South London and which is reported to be the largest Latin American festival in Europe which has been running for 16 years. Arguably these places, spaces and institutions have been central in the creation of the Latin American community especially in terms of encouraging the emergence of an ethnic discourse and identity as well as establishing the visibility of the community in the urban landscape.

Yet, these spaces are often zones of conflict and ambivalence as well as support, again highlighting the contradictions inherent in processes of visibilising a migrant community. For example, although there is widespread participation in Latin American cultural events such as carnivals with almost two-thirds attending the summer carnivals such as the Carnaval del Pueblo (63 per cent), they tended to be more likely to be attended by those lower down the socio-economic ladder (see also McIlwaine and Bermudez, 2011). In addition, levels of use of commercial spaces was very high (85 per cent) with most accessing cafes or restaurants, buying food and ingredients, sending money home or using hairdressers. Consuela from Chile said that these places were really important for people: ‘Well, it’s important for the community to maintain their products, their customs’. This is reflected in the fact that shopping centres also played a social function for Latin Americans with community meetings and events being held there. Yet others held much more ambivalent perspectives in terms of fearing the risk of exposure to deportation among irregular migrants or being subject to gossip (see also below). For example, Rosa from Bolivia stated:

I don’t go to Latin places because I’m afraid that they’ll do something to me. I never go to Latin restaurants or clubs, I practically don’t leave my house except to go shopping … Places like Elephant and Castle are full of immigration these days and they are detaining and deporting people who go there … I’ve had very bad experiences with Latin people because of envy, people trying to take my job, they like to gossip about illegals.
Thus people related to these spaces and places with varying levels of intensity and approbation that was dependent on social identity and immigration status in particular. While Rosa’s words highlight the plight of irregular migrants, those from higher social class positions were often disparaging about the ‘popular’ characteristics of many commercial spaces and engaged only sporadically and instrumentally with them (Cock, 2011). Nationality also played a part with some spaces more associated with certain nationalities more than others. While Colombians and Ecuadorians often vied for control over some spaces as two most numerous Spanish-speaking nationality groups, Brazilians often disassociated themselves from being Latin Americans in the first place. For example, only 44 per cent of Brazilians identified as Latin American, compared with over 70 per cent among all Spanish-speaking nationalities. They were also the least likely to celebrate any of the cultural activities with only one-third attending summer carnivals. This is also reflected in the fact that there tends to be different organisations serving each set of language groups and different commercial and cultural outlets. In a focus group of six Brazilians, one person noted:

‘I don’t know if I feel [like a Latin American], I also think it is more to do with accepting it than feeling it. For instance, if I have to tick a box about my profile and I see ‘British’ and all the others, and also ‘Latino’, then I’ll tick this box, but I think it is important to note that I have let this happen to me, I know very little about the countries in South America, I have never visited, I feel there is little integration amongst us’.

Other Brazilians stated that they felt that Latin American was a derogatory term, as noted by Sandra: ‘it is because of the status of the region, when you talk about Latin American the first thing that always comes to my mind is Colombia, yes I think of their dress, the ponchos, the hats’. Indeed, Brazilian women in particular were more likely to reject their Latin American identity and assert being Brazilian, partly because they were more likely to be working in professional occupations than their male counterparts who accepted their marginalised status more readily (Datta and McIlwaine, 2014).

All these ambiguities serve to highlight the contested nature of the community and also how the visibility of migrant groups in the city can be negotiated and played out in different, often contradictory ways. This is especially marked when entering the country in the first instance and through in regularisation practices to which the chapter now turns.

**Practising Invisibility through Entry and Settlement**

Reflecting Polzer and Hammond’s (2007) point about invisibility being both imposed from above and emerging from below with gains and losses accrued to those in control and to the powerless, for some migrants invisibility provides a useful way of manipulating increasingly punitive migration regimes. In the case of the UK, immigration policy has been restrictive since the 1960s as attempts were made to curb Commonwealth immigration even if the reality has been relatively large scale migration, permitted mainly due to labour shortages. More recently though, ever more draconian measures have been put in place which have also led to an increase in irregular migration to the UK (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011; Wills et al., 2010). As noted above, irregular migrants are not only invisible in national accounting and statistics, but such migrants themselves negotiate their invisibility as a means to enter and to remain in the country in complex ways. However, as I have argued elsewhere (McIlwaine, 2014), this negotiation entails the creation of webs of regularity and irregularity that challenge binary and hierarchical understandings of legality that are underpinned by invisibility. Migrants can move in and out of regularity, sometimes because of impositions from above in terms of changing immigration legislation but also because of complex practices enacted by migrants themselves in ways that
reflect the exercise of their agency (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010). These practices or ‘tactics’ act as mechanisms to avoid risk and/or deal with exclusion (Datta et al. 2007) as well as reflecting forms of resistance and protest (Ellerman 2010). While much research to date has focused on the practices of irregular migrants in particular (Broeders and Engbersen 2007), it is important to include migrants across the spectrum of regularity for the reasons relating to the dynamism and complexity of what being irregular really means. Drawing on a typology I have outlined elsewhere (McIlwaine, 2014), I argue that entry and regularisation of migrants revolve around a series of spatial, economic and social invisibility practices. Although I have previously foregrounded the mutability of immigration status and the creation of webs over hierarchies, here, I highlight the role of invisibility as foundational for how these practices function in the case of Latin Americans in London or what I refer to as ‘practising invisibility’.

Practising Invisible Entry
Among Latin Americans in the London, the vast majority (97 per cent) entered the UK with valid documentation. Almost two-thirds entered with a tourist or student visa or their home country passport and no visa. One-fifth entered with papers that allowed them to settle, such as EU passports (17 per cent). Importantly in relation to the notion of super-diversity noted above, there were marked variations by country of birth in how people entered. For instance, Bolivians were the most likely to enter as tourists or visitors (75 per cent), whereas Colombians were the most likely to arrive with student visas (32 per cent). In turn, Brazilians and Ecuadorians were the most likely to enter the UK with EU passports (a quarter in each case). In terms of actual immigration status, 19 per cent admitted to having no valid documents with a quarter having British passports, and another 19 per cent holding EU passports. Again, this varied according to nationality with Brazilians and Bolivians being the most likely to be irregular (38 per cent and 36.5 per cent) while Colombians were the least likely (6 per cent). In addition, Peruvians and Colombians were most likely to hold British passports (38 per cent and 37 per cent) while Brazilians had the highest levels of EU passport ownership (31 per cent). There were also important gender differences in immigration status in that women were more to have British citizenship (30 per cent of all women compared with 20 per cent of men) whereas men were more likely than women to be irregular (22 per cent of men compared with 16 per cent of women) (McIlwaine et al., 2011; also McIlwaine, 2010 on gender issues).

It is therefore clear that negotiating immigration status as well as visibility is strongly differentiated by nationality among Latin Americans. This also intersects with the histories and geographies of the migration regime in the UK which has over time gradually introduced visa restrictions as the government recognised the arrival of significant flows from particular countries, as well as with a range of other social identities. From an historical perspective, the issue of visibility in the 1970s and 1980s pertained mainly to the fact that Latin Americans were a small population group with a very low profile in the city. The majority entered legally with work permits or through asylum claims and it was only in the 1990s that visibility and invisibility became an issue for the community. On the one hand, they became more visible through their burgeoning presence (see above), but on the other, the channels of entry that were possible to transform relatively easily into settlement declined dramatically requiring migrants to develop practices of invisibility and concealment.

Indeed, in relation to the latter, migrants often had to literally learn how to practice invisibility as their own immigration status changed, often over relatively short time periods. For example, Juliana was 50 years old and from Bolivia. She had migrated to London in 2005 with her husband in order to provide for their six children’s education. After being advised by a travel agency in Bolivia to go to London, they arrived with tourist visas after which Juliana’s husband
secured a student visa that permitted her to be his dependent. However, in 2007, the government tightened entry requirements for migrants in general preventing entry on tourist visas and conversion into student permits, with entry visas for Bolivians specifically being imposed in 2009. As a result of these processes, Juliana and her husband became overstayers and therefore irregular. From 2007 onwards, they had to live and work (as cleaners) illegally and ultimately invisibly.

Some Latin Americans developed entry practices of concealment of identity that took on two main forms linked with onward or ‘transit migration’ (Collyer, Düvell and De Haas 2010). At a general level, the large and growing flows arriving with EU passports, mainly from Spain but also from Italy and Portugal mean that it is increasingly difficult to identify Latin Americans unless they state their country of birth because they arrive as European citizens. Many arrived legally through legitimate regularisation programmes while others arrived in a more clandestine manner. In terms of the former, 47 year old Ronaldo from Ecuador had lived in Spain for 10 years before moving to London in 2008. He first left Ecuador because he separated from his wife entering Spain with a tourist visa and subsequently living in an irregular situation. However, the boss of the factory where he worked in Zaragoza sorted out his regularisation papers and he managed to obtain a Spanish passport which he then used to move to London.

Others arrived through a range of illegitimate networks as part of the ‘foggy social structures’ that facilitate entry of migrants without detection and rendering them invisible (Broeders and Engbersen 2007). This entailed purchasing false passports for between US$800 and $2000 and were those of naturalised Latin Americans which allowed people to ‘manipulate their identity’ (Engbersen 2001). Sometimes, passports were bought permanently, at others they were ‘rented’ for one entry only. For example, Manolo who was 42 and from Colombia bought a false Spanish passport during a two-week stay in Madrid on his way to London. He noted how he bought it from an Ecuadorian in Barcelona who gave him the passport and bus tickets that took him to Belgium after which he arrived in the UK on the Eurostar train.

A smaller but important minority were more explicitly smuggled into the country, arriving completely invisibly. Clara from Colombia recalled how although she managed to enter the UK with a false Spanish passport, her boyfriend was queried trying to use one at Madrid airport after which he panicked and fled the airport. After waiting for two months in Spain, he paid a smuggler who arranged for his entry in the back of a lorry via France: ‘he was smuggled in. He said it was horrible, he could hear the police sniffer dogs outside the lorry. When he got here he cried from happiness and from nerves’.

Also important is that visibility is mutable and intersects closely with changes in immigration status. As such, some migrants might arrive in an invisible manner but they become more visible as they negotiate their settlement and regularisation. Edilma from Colombia, for example, discussed how she and her husband recruited a smuggler in Bogotá after they had their visa applications turned down and who sold them false passports which facilitated their entry via Spain. While their entry was concealed and invisible, they had managed to become British citizens via making an asylum claim that was eventually granted through the family amnesty in

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2 Confusion and obfuscation between country of birth and nationality is exacerbated by the fact that some official statistics such as the International Passenger Survey and the Labour Force Survey use nationality to denote origin while the census and the Annual Population Survey use country of birth (and nationality in the case of the census) (McIlwaine, et al., 2011).
with the help of a migrant organisation. Indeed, negotiating regularity in some form and hence practising invisibility was experienced by a large proportion of Latin Americans. For instance, although 43 per cent entered on a tourist visa, only 20 (2 per cent) reported having one at the time of survey. Similarly, while only 3 per cent entered without valid documents, 19 per cent ended up without them.

Practising Invisible Settlement
Both regular and irregular migrants negotiate various forms of isolation, invisibility and identity manipulation after they enter and attempt to settle through a series of ‘residence strategies’ (Engbersen, 2001). These entail various forms of ‘everyday politics of mystification’ (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007) and ‘identity-stripping’ (Ellerman, 2010) that revolve around spatial, economic and social invisibility practices.

For Latin Americans in London, the main invisibility practice adopted by irregular migrants was to limit spatial mobility in order to maintain a low profile by the immigration authorities. These invariably involved staying close to home, limiting use of public transport, and avoiding places where the authorities were known to frequent such as the various markets (Elephant and Castle and Seven Sisters) (see also Román-Velásquez, 2009). Alba’s case illustrates this; she arrived in London from Bolivia in 2005 with a tourist visa for herself and her two children to join her husband who migrated a year before (he had already obtained British citizenship). Alba’s tourist visa expired leaving her and her children in an irregular position. This has severe psycho-social effects as she commented: ‘I am ill from nerves, I’m very stressed, everything gets to me, and unfortunately I can’t go to the doctor because I’m illegal … I’m so scared that I’ll be caught and arrested and deported’. As a result, Alba was too afraid to travel anywhere beyond her children’s local primary school, she never used public transport and said she felt like a prisoner in her home which was a hostel room.

Economic invisibility practices were mobilised among irregular migrants in order to access the labour market. A host of unorthodox mechanisms were developed to negotiate an increasingly restrictive labour market. These included the purchase of false working visas or passports and false National Insurance (social security) numbers which could be purchased, borrowed or rented. In addition, irregular migrants sometimes worked under the names of regular workers who had since left employment, with deals often done around sharing bank accounts (see also Datta, 2012). These economic invisibility practices also reflect how irregularity is functional to the wider economy in that such processes maintain a flexible, low-paid labour force that underpins what has been identified as the ‘migrant division of labour’ (Wills et al. 2010) where migrants end-up being concentrated in the lower echelons of the labour market in jobs that others are unwilling to do. Furthermore, these invisible irregular migrants also invariably contribute tax and National Insurance as they work in the formal economy despite being unrecognised (three-quarters of all Latin Americans pay tax and National Insurance regardless of their immigration status).

Indeed, the notion of visibility is important for all Latin Americans in London in relation to their important economic contributions more widely. Not only do they have very high rates of employment (85 per cent) which is much higher than for the population as a whole or for the

3 The Family Amnesty programme of 2002 gave asylum claimants with at least one dependent child in the UK and who had claimed before 2 October 2002 the right to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain subsequently giving them full rights to remain and work in the UK.
foreign-born population as a whole, but almost half of all working Latin American migrants work in elementary occupations (47 per cent) such as in cleaning, catering, hotels and as security guards. This often reflects a process of dramatic downward occupational mobility in that a very small proportion of Latin Americans worked in elementary jobs in their home countries, yet on arrival, 70 per cent ended up employed in such activities. This was also linked with the fact that Latin Americans are very well-educated with 70 per cent having achieved some form of education beyond secondary level. Therefore, their education and qualifications invariably remain invisible to employers because of immigration status or lack of English language proficiency.

The nature of the work that many Latin Americans undertake in London’s labour market is also highly invisible, especially among those working in the cleaning sector. Many worked on a part-time basis (one-third overall but half of those in personal service and cleaning). Moreover, Latin Americans are effectively an invisible workforce in that cleaners in particular usually work for 3-4 hours at a time and at unsociable hours in the early morning and evenings. Wilson from Ecuador, for example, had three cleaning jobs – one for three hours 4-7am, another full-time job 9-5 and another in the evening from 7-10pm, all in office cleaning. Wilson spoke of having to travel for up to an hour on the bus between jobs although he said that this allowed him to catch-up on his sleep. While being invisible in this way was useful for some such as irregular migrants, for others, it reflected a deep neglect and lack of recognition of their contribution to the functioning of London’s economy.

Social invisibility practices were also enacted in a range of ways by regular and irregular Latin Americans and which intersected with various spatial and economic mechanisms discussed above. Social relations and trust among Latin Americans were somewhat ambivalent in that on one hand, social networks were crucial for facilitating various types of assistance, yet on the other hand, many spoke of social isolation and mistrust (see also Menjívar’s 2006 ‘mistrustful solidarity’). The survey evidence highlights that more than half (53 per cent) of Latin Americans trusted their compatriots. This trust was linked with assistance on first arrival in terms of accommodation and finding jobs. For example, Soraya, a 28 year-old from Bolivia who worked as a cleaner stated:

‘When there is a problem, people communicate by text message and tell someone else trying to find help for them. I’m not sure what happens with Ecuadorians and Colombians, but in the Bolivians case if someone needs something or they are suffering in some way, we try and contact someone to help either economically or with other support.’

Among the 47 per cent who stated that Latin Americans did not trust one another the most important issue was a sense of individualism (identified by 27 per cent) or envy (cited by 24 per cent). As well as competition in accessing jobs, immigration status emerged as one of the most significant factors that created resentments. In some cases, this involved denouncements to the Home Office as a form of control and power within disputes among friends, neighbours and even between husband and wife. Associated with this were small friendship circles dominated by their own nationality or other Latin Americans. One of the most common statements in relation to friendships was: ‘no soy muy amiguera/o’ (I’m not a very friendly person) due mainly to a fear of gossip as Ximena from Colombia noted: ‘I’m not very friendly, I like to be alone, I don’t have people knocking on my door ... I like to prevent any gossip’. However, social fragmentation appeared to be changing as the community matured and social networks were built in more sustainable ways over time. Patricio from Peru who arrived in 1992 noted:
‘I think the community is united and it’s getting more united every day, it’s getting much better. There seems to be more understanding now than before ... I like Latin American places, they’re really nice, and they remind me of my culture’.

In turn, religion provided an important, if paradoxical, form of social glue for Latin Americans. Almost 70 per cent attended church services every week (35.5 per cent) or sometimes (31.5 per cent), with most attending Roma Catholic services (67 per cent) yet with more than a quarter going to Evangelical Protestant services. Churches provide essential access to a range of welfare advice as well as spiritual guidance. They also provide essential social and psychological support to help people to cope with life in London. For instance, 44-year-old Francisco from Bolivia who went to a Catholic church noted: ‘I go to church every Sunday and I go to prayer groups. I think the church helps us to keep going and it gives us strength to deal with what we need to do here, our work, loneliness’. By the same token, others were antagonistic towards the churches, mainly because of the demands for economic donations of around 10 per cent of their incomes. Edilberto from Colombia actively did not attend church for this reason: ‘I think it’s very false to make people give money and then tell them – I will help you if you are a brother, I will help you if you donate, I will only help you if you are in my church.’

On balance, however, social relations among Latin Americans are fairly robust in the sense of creating a range of ‘ethnic publics’ as indicated above. While not everyone engages with other Latin Americans or with organisations or commercial spaces in sustained and consistent ways, there is a general sense that people are part of some wider collective, albeit in somewhat ambivalent ways. However, the issue of invisibility in wider London society is also significant in that several people complained that Latin Americans were introverted as a community and needed to integrate more explicitly and fully as Reynaldo from Colombia noted: ‘They close themselves in the Latin community, they only go to Latin places, they only eat Latin food, they only read Latin newspapers, they are not interested in learning about the new culture’.

Arguably, this self-imposed invisibility is linked with wider processes of exclusion and discrimination. Indeed, it is significant that almost 70 per cent identified some form of discrimination, especially in the workplace and in relation to stereotyping. The latter was especially marked among Colombians as Luis reported: ‘There is a stigmatisation of those of Latin American origin. They think that we are not capable of some things. In addition, they think that Colombians sell and grow drugs’. Indeed, this led some Colombians to tell British people that they were Spanish, regardless of their immigration status and whether they held a Spanish passport.

Therefore, while some practices are negotiated by Latin Americans in order to maintain invisibility for their benefit, other forms of invisibility are imposed from above and favour the wider society or economy more widely as in the case of their economic contributions. Moreover, it is important to remember that many Latin Americans experience widespread marginalisation such that maintaining their ‘community’ as invisible can act as a buttress against exclusion. However, on the whole there has been a marked shift towards engendering greater recognition of the role of Latin Americans in London and the UK more generally, evidenced not only by the No Longer Invisible research, but also by the ethnic recognition campaign.

Ethnic Recognition and Political Visibility
One of the key recommendations from the No Longer Invisible report was the need for ethnic

‘to include a ‘Latin American’ category as well as improving recording of other large ethnic communities in the capital. This is particularly important for the Greater
London Authority, other London-wide public agencies and local and health authorities with significant Latin American communities, in order to support their inclusion in relevant policies, strategies and in service planning and delivery’ (McIlwaine et al. 2011: 132).

This recommendation (among others) has been taken forward by the Coalition of Latin American Organisations in the UK (CLAUK) and draws on an earlier history of mobilising through the Ibero-American Alliance (who focus on Spanish and Portuguese language and extend beyond Latin America) and the Latin American Recognition Campaign (who were formed in response to the former in order to re-focus on Latin America alone). With Latin Americans often only able to identify as ‘other’ in ethnic monitoring, CLAUK argues that information on specific Latin American ethnicity will allow local authorities to improve services, address exclusion and distribute resources more fairly. To date, only two local boroughs with large concentrations have recognised Latin Americans in their ethnic monitoring forms: Southwark (in 2012) and Lambeth (2013). This is an explicit attempt to put Latin Americans on the political map and to explicitly address their invisibility. However, returning to the issue of community building, it is also about creation a collective endeavour around which people can mobilise and around which the super-diversity within the population can overcome their internal differences. Indeed, it is telling that in the survey, only 17 per cent identified as Latin American, with 40 per cent stating their racial and ethnic origin as *mestizo* (mixed race) and 29 per cent as white. However, among the 52 second generation Latin Americans, 44 per cent stated they were British Latino suggesting a move towards a collective identity over time. The importance of ethnic recognition is especially important for this generation as Felipe, who was 17 years old and at college, and of Colombian descent stated:

‘When I’m asked what ethnicity I am, there is no box. It seems that there are not enough Latin Americans to make a box, this is wrong. We do not have political leaders. I feel I have an identity crisis. I feel British Colombian. Before I had more in common with blacks, but now I have more in common with whites’.

Therefore, rather than the individual negotiations over visibility discussed above whereby invisibility was often sought and valued as a way of facilitating entry and settlement for migrants, ethnic recognition was a positive and collective endeavour for Latin Americans to ensure that their needs as a population were met and also that their presence and contributions were recognised.

**Conclusion**

Drawing on a conceptualisation of invisibility as being important for migrant groups as they incrementally secure their place in the nation in general and in the city in particular, this chapter has traced the emergence and settlement of one of London’s fastest growing new migrant populations. In outlining how the ‘community’ has been created, especially since the 1970s, it has highlighted not only the super-diversity within the population, especially on grounds of nationality, but also the ambiguities surrounding their presence (and absence) from various spaces and places in the city. By arguing that the notion of visibility for migrants is deeply imbued with power relations, the chapter shows how visibility can be a powerful tool of negotiation for some migrants in their quest for entry into the UK as well as in their settlement practices. As such, the creation of entry as well as spatial, economic and social invisibility

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practices among Latin Americans accords them a degree of agency in the context of an increasingly restrictive immigration regime. However, it also highlights that invisibility can also mean neglect, exploitation and discrimination, especially for those with irregular immigration status, by those with power and control over resources in wider society. In the face of the latter, the chapter has shown that it is necessary to mobilise collectively in ways which call for recognition, which in this case, entails an ethnic recognition campaign.

London comprises many invisible groups, whether they be migrants from a specific nationality group or set of nationalities or those identified by a range of specific social identities. Many are involved in the contested visibility processes identified here in relation to Latin Americans as they build their communities. As such, it is hoped that this chapter has shed some light on the increasingly more visible Latin American community in London and how their (in)visibilities have emerged in ambiguous ways over time and space, but also that the notion of invisibility practices will be useful in analysing other marginalised population groups in the city.

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