Salsa-dance as a metaphor of change
An ethnographic study among a Salsa-community in Hyderabad, India

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Abstract

This thesis is based on 6 months fieldwork in the city of Hyderabad, India, starting from January 2018. Engaging myself with the biggest Salsa community in Hyderabad, I was struck by the dancers “ease” while dancing so close with the opposite sex - thinking about what I had seen of the elsewise restraint physical relationship between men and women in public. Contrasting my informants “public” and “controlled” way of using the body with the “semi-private” and more “unbound” way of using the body in salsa-dance, this thesis shines light on how the body and dance can be a good tool for expression and self-reflection in a time of social change. Being torn between a world rooted in tradition and family life and a world connected to the modern and global, the Salsa-dancers find themselves in a phase of reorientation. The paper explores the way(s) these changes affect the dancers and the way(s) the dancers respond to them.
I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the beautiful Salsa dancers who gave me their time and invited me into their Salsa world as well as their life’s outside of it. A special thank you to Siddharth and Abhay who let me live with them over such a long time and who took good care of me.

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# Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

Identity as relational ....................................................................................................................... 2

Chapter 2 – Methods and reflections .............................................................................................. 7

Finding and defining the field ......................................................................................................... 9

“Sensing the world”: the challenge of understanding and describing non-verbal communication .......................................................................................................................... 9

Reflections on my fellow student’s influence on my field ............................................................... 10

Being female among males .............................................................................................................. 11

Chapter 3 – The city of Hyderabad .................................................................................................. 13

The roots of Salsa ............................................................................................................................ 17

How did Salsa come to Hyderabad? .............................................................................................. 19

Empirical description of a Salsa social and its confined space ...................................................... 21

Chapter 4 – “The Indian way of thinking”: Identity as heritage and custom .................................. 25

Chapter 5 – Modern influences ..................................................................................................... 33

Modern influences ......................................................................................................................... 33

Hyderabad - “The cosmopolitan city” ............................................................................................ 36

Arbitrary influences contributing in shaping the dancer’s way of thinking and perceiving .......... 37

“Middle-classness” as cultural performance .................................................................................. 39

The “modern Indian man” ............................................................................................................... 39

Dress as an expression of status .................................................................................................... 42

The identification of “world class citizen” through performance and performance of status symbols ......................................................................................................................... 43

Chapter 6 – Postcolonial identity in a changing society ............................................................... 46

Chapter 7 – .................................................................................................................................. 52
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Modernization processes and their impact on the individual's way of thinking and seeing the world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Technological advancements</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Anonymous social relations</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How the dancers dealt with the “anonymisation” of social relations</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Plurality of life-worlds</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Anxiety as a manifestation of freedom: “The cliff-walker”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The state of Euphoria</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When the world crumbles apart</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Chapter 8 –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Why exactly Salsa?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dance as a way of communication</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The body as a reflection of society</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Their reasons and motivations</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Salsa as a statement and affirmation of being a “world class citizen”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People’s reactions to the physical closeness of the dance form when taken out of the social context</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The “embodied” and visible apprehensive relationship between the sexes when out in public</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Salsa as an affirmation of being a “world class-citizen” through boundary making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deep-Players VS Shallow-Players</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>The semi-private-safe-space which makes it desirable to “consume” Salsa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The guidelines and dance-rules taught at STELLA</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Concluding remarks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>References</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1–

Introduction

After a 15 hours flight with stopovers first in Moskva and then Delhi, I finally landed in Hyderabad a late afternoon. I was feeling nervous and exited at the same time as I collected my suitcase from the baggage drop and queued up in front of the migration counter to get my visa approved. Outside the airport I could glimpse Siddharth standing by the grey Honda, which he had picked me up with during all my last visits to Hyderabad. We had not seen each other for 6 months and we almost felt estranged when we walked towards each other. I wanted to hug him for the amount of time we had not seen each other, but because of all the people around, some I noticed were staring at us, we only had a stiff embrace for 3 seconds. The physical restrictions in public between man and woman in India became my point of departure when I figured that I will spend the next 6 months with a group of Indian Salsa dancers.

The reason for my want to do fieldwork in exactly Hyderabad was because of Siddharth, now my ex-boyfriend. We had been together for 4 years, after meeting each other in England during our studies. He had been living back in India for two years already, and I tried to come and visit him whenever I had time and money. Knowing that I could spend time with him and have a safe place to stay, I decided to do my fieldwork in India, before I knew the topic of research. The reason for ending up studying people dancing Salsa in Hyderabad was based on a spontaneous decision, as my planned research project fell flat (see methodology chapter). That I ended up with Salsa, however, is not completely far-fetched as I personally feel very passionate about dance in general and in my years of studies in England, I had my first encounter with Salsa. When coming across Salsa in Hyderabad, I felt especially intrigued, as I started to think about the physical intimate nature of the dance which very much contrasts the Indian culture’s more conservative physical relationship between the sexes.
After googling myself to the biggest Salsa school in Hyderabad, which I will refer to as STELLA (pseudonym) throughout the text, I called up a guy named Rahul, the main instructor of the school and introduced myself and shared my interest for attaining classes and Salsa socials for the purpose of research. He was very friendly and positive towards me spending time with him and his students, the condition being that I would share my findings with him after my research is complete.

Taking a group of Hyderabadi Salsa dancers and their Salsa community as the departure of my research, I like to show how the study of any dance form, in this case Salsa, can lead to helpful discoveries about what is moving on the inside of the people studied, and what is moving on the outside; in society at large. I like to see my thesis as an example of the usefulness for the anthropological discipline to study dance and its implication in various contexts. As I will illustrate in the course of the following pages written, the motivation to start Salsa and the continuation of the practice among the Hyderabadi Salsaleros¹, can uncover a whole lot about what the dancers are facing in their life outside of the dancefloor and the ways these factors feed into what is happening on the dancefloor. At a more fundamental level, I would like to indicate how their involvement with Salsa is relevant to the question of identity, where I argue in favour of the theoretical approach of viewing identity as relational. This thesis is therefore also a contribution to identity studies within anthropology, supporting the theory of identity being relational and not a stable core or unity, but as constantly in the making, unstable and subject to change.

Identity as relational

In order to deliver the message of my thesis´s content clearly to the reader, I first need to define what I mean when I say that I am looking at identity as relational. My approach to identity rests on anthropologist Anthony Cohen´s work; Self consciousness; an alternative anthropology of identity. In this book Cohen (1994) highlights the importance of starting at the individual level when trying to figure out the complexity of social formations, culture, society and social relations. He critiques the earlier tendencies within the discipline of anthropology to look at individuals as merely “microversions” of the big social and cultural entities they inhibit on a daily basis, dealing with the complexities of the individuals by generalising their behaviour and turning them into one coherent whole (Cohen, 1994).

¹ Salsaleros is a term which I will use throughout the text to refer to the salsa dancers.
According to him, anthropologists should not be scared of the study of the self/subject and stop viewing the study of the self as standing in opposition to the analysis of social relations. By treating individuals either intentionally or unintentionally as socially and or culturally driven, anthropologists have ignored the “self-driven” part of individual behaviour, thereby describing “what a person does socially to the exclusion of who the person is” (Cohen, 1994 p. 7). Within the study of the self and identity in Indian cultural studies, scholars have largely written about the “Indian person” as seeing him or herself in relation to kin or caste membership, indicating that Indians do not have a “empirical self” (Morris, 1994). Scholars like Dumont and Sudhir Kakar have suggested that the Indian´man autonomy and personal identity is subordinated to the interest of the family and one´s caste and that the self is largely made sense of through the Hindu world view rooted in Vedantic concepts such as *Moksha, Karma and Dharma*². That the self is viewed differently within Hindu religion as compared to the Judeo-Christian tradition which generally has regarded the self as being a stable homogenous entity is rather evident. The empirical self is seen as weak and essentially material in Hinduism, associated with the body and the social. The “real” self instead is regarded as spiritual and as “pure consciousness”, as *Atman*- belonging to the eternal (Morris, 1994). The problem is that anthropological studies have let the hierarchical-collectivist definition of viewing the Indian person take overhand, implying that there does not exist much individual autonomy in the Indian society. This way of conceptualizing the “Indian self” can be a dangerous blind alley, as it views individuals as merely mechanical, trying to fit the subjects under study into the anthropologist`s theoretical frame (Cohen, 1994). The question of: “How are social groups possible?” can according to Cohen (1994) be resolved by starting with the individual. The problem lies in the assumed idea of individuality and socialness being contradictory (Cohen, 1994). “It is perhaps an irony that we have to approach the fundamental problem of social cohesion through its apparent opposite, selfhood and personal identity” (p. 8).

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² *Moksha* refers to the liberation from the cycle of rebirth and is the ultimate goal for Hindus. *Karma* means action and decides what you come back as in the next life. *Dharma* refers to the moral order of the universe and shows the “right way” of living based on law, duty and religion. [https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/dharma-hinduism](https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/dharma-hinduism)
There is no scope here to go into detail of conceptualizing the differences and meanings of self, person, selfhood, and identity which have been criticized and debated by various anthropologists. What I want to do in the next paragraphs is to put forward the idea of identity and self which I will use for conceptualizing my findings in this thesis. Criticizing anthropological studies for having been little concerned with the relationship between the self and identity, anthropologist Sökefeld (1999) argues for that in order for there to be identity there must be a self. What is the difference between self and identity then? Most anthropological accounts about identity in non-Western societies have viewed identity as the person’s identity with his cultural and social group, as in contrast to the psychological understanding of a person’s identity as a “bundle of features that distinguish her or him from others” (Sökefeld, 1999 p. 419). Criticizing “identity” in its traditional meaning, which sees identity as this stable and fixed “naturally constituted unity”, unchanged by history, Hall and Du (1996) argue for approaching the understanding of identity not as singular, but constructed through a number of different and many times opposed practices and/or positions. Identities exist not because of a stable, never changeable entity, but because they construct and reconstruct themselves in relation to “the other”, to what it is not. They are constructed through difference, and not in the absence of difference, and can therefore be described as relational in nature (Hall and Du, 1996). Taking a closer look at how cultural identity is constructed, Hall (1989) states that a cultural identity of a person “is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture” (p. 225). Identities come of course from some place as they have histories, however they are subjects of continuous change exactly because they are historical (Hall, 1989).

Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall, 1989 p. 225).

My informants, even though rooted in customs and traditions, are very much influenced by globalisation and modernization processes which have taken place over the last years. These changes have created a more distanced relationship to their heritage and traditional culture as they occupy varied territories and are clearly influenced by “the West” through the internet and media.
As identities are produced within discourse (dialogue) and not without, Hall goes on saying that in order for us to understand their creation, we need to see them in relation to “historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the processes of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity (...)” (cited in Hall and Du, 1996 p. 4). Being surrounded by city developments, bombarded with changing images and varied impressions through their workplace and the media, the cultural identity of the dancers finds itself in a state of instability and in opposition to what the dancers see as modern and global. Being placed within different surroundings and multiple influences, the dancers find themselves in a position where they have to re-orientate themselves with regards to themselves as well as to others, being in a state of confusion and apprehension in their place in-between the known in tradition and the unknown in the constantly more global India.

Before going into detail of the content of this thesis, I need to clarify the term “self” and how it fits in with the theoretical framework of my analysis. The self, according to Sökefeld (1999), is a person’s sense of a basic distinction between him/her and everything else. To manage and cope with all the different demands and different situations when going through life, we need something which is more stable, which somehow remains the “same” (p. 424). The selves of people around the world cannot be argued to be the same as the distinction between “me” and everything else is shaped by their life histories and culturally transmitted meanings. The culturally imprinted meanings can for example be connected to whether the self is viewed as an independent being with lots of agency, or as fundamentally dependent on others (Sökefeld, 1999). The importance however is that the basic difference will be there anyway. With agency Sökefeld (1999) means the ability to take initiative, to act without requiring instructions from others. The amount of agency varies of course and does not indicate that the individual is not constrained or that he/she acts without regards to others. The agency of the individual might in fact be seen as a burden, as being an obstacle, in a culture which heightens non-individuality and the displaying of non-agency (Sökefeld, 1999).
In a culture like India, where non-individuality is fostered over individuality, agency might rather be considered problematical for individuals as it contrasts with the pre-established cultural norms. The viewing of agency as something challenging, I will show, is the case of the Salsa-dancers. 

Being financially, socially, and physically distanced from their parents and the life they have known through them, and in addition finding their cultural identity unstable due to socio-economic changes in the constant more “global India”, the salsa dancers are standing in-between the “old” and the “new”. When being in such a situation, one can either go back and search for stability in the traditional, or one can go on exploring new and different territories where one can choose more freely how to be and behave. There can also be other responses to this type of situation, but I am arguing that the salsa dancers belong to the latter group. This thesis being about a group of single and/or non-married male Salsa dancers, belonging to a certain age group (23-33), who are in a phase of re-orientation. On one side feeling part of the global and “modern”, and on the other rooted in tradition encompassing religion, gender roles and customs. With a society and family very much dominated by tradition, the testing of new territories can be very frightening and if taken too far have major consequences. I will argue that the Salsa dancers are sensing their way through these new territories by doing it back-stage and not front-stage. Salsa socials\(^3\) provide such a back-stage, where new sides of oneself can be tested without sacrificing too much. The research question being; In what way(s) can the body be understood as a metaphor for the collective, for desire and subjectivity, and for socialisation and change?

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\(^3\) Socials are public dance nights happening in a bar/nightclub where a DJ is playing Latino music (in Hyderabad it was predominately Salsa and Bachata) and everyone is welcome to dance without being corrected, unlike in class.
Chapter 2 –

Methods and reflections

I gathered my data through participant observation (more participation) at Salsa socials and in classes, the conduct of formal and semi-structured interviews, and by hanging out with my interlocutors in malls, café’s, cinemas, restaurants and bars, as well as through paying a few home visits to some of them. 16 people were interviewed overall, wherefrom 5 were women and 11 men. The majority of the data is hence based on the male interlocutors and in particular on Nishant, Kumar, Nitin, Rai and Siddharth, who became my main informants. During the entire fieldwork I stayed together with Siddharth at his friend’s (Abhay) apartment in one of the big, gated communities, leaving Hyderabad only to attend a wedding in Siddharth’s hometown for 5 days and to visit my friend Sanjini in Bangalore for 5 days. The ethnographical accounts of my informant’s family life are for the most part based on those two visits. Yet, as I have been visiting Siddharth and his family regularly over the last 3 years, some of the previous experiences are interwoven in the descriptions.
Figure 1: This is the gated community Abhay, Siddharth, and I stayed in. Photo taken by author.
Finding and defining the field

Firstly, I need to state that my final dissertation deviates a little from my original project-description and what I set out to investigate. My original plan was to look at creative movement therapy (CMT) and why and how touch (physical touch) is used within the therapy form. I had already arrived in Hyderabad, India when I had to change my field due to ethical reasons. When I was “accepted” to do my fieldwork at STELLA, my research questions were the same as planned for my original subject of study, the focus of attention being touch. I was unclear about what exactly I wanted to investigate at STELLA, hence I went into studying Salsa guided by research questions concerning my informant’s relationship to touch, just in a different setting, come about by chance. The focus on my interlocutor’s relationship to touch and the in general restrained attitude towards touching the opposite sex within Indian society however turned out to be crucial for understanding the dancer’s engagement with the dance form.

“Sensing the world”: the challenge of understanding and describing non-verbal communication

Anthropologists Dyck and Archetti (2003) point out that the study of dance within the anthropological field brings about methodological challenges for the researcher because of the phenomenon’s non-verbal character. I tried the best I could to describe the bodily movements and the “mood” at socials, finding a spot in the room from where I could observe and note down the way the dancers were moving and the way they were communicating though their bodies. However, I found out really quickly that to try and grasp objectively what was going on the dance floor did not give me much insight into why the dancers where coming back to socials every week and the felt experiences they had while dancing. The best thing I could do was to use my own body as a methodological device to experience, and through experiencing better understand what moves inside the dancers. I strongly wanted to know how they feel, but I realized that even though I was doing the same thing, I was scared to represent their experiential reasons for dancing through me. My analysis is hence primarily based on statements from the dancers about why they dance and how Salsa effects their lives, as well as my interpretations of what they said and how they said it.
Talking about their experiences and why they dance many of the interviewees where fishing for the right words to use, and often I could only understand what they meant exactly because they were unable to find words for it. Some talked about their experiences on the dance floor as religious or spiritual in nature, and therefore hard to articulate in words. Social anthropologist Blacking talks about why it is almost more important to follow how narratives are developed, what metaphors are used and what sort of connections are made to other things when talking to one´s informants, because of the non-descriptive feature of dance experience (cited in Dyck and Archetti, 2003 p. 119). Following the footsteps of Blacking, most of my analysed data is drawn from interviews and conversations and to a limited extent from my interpretation of empirical descriptions on the dance floor. Anthropologist David Le Breton (2017) writes that every individual navigates him or herself in the world through their senses, but as everyone uses the senses differently, some might be better at taking the world in though smell, while others experience strong presence through touch, so are also the surroundings interpreted differently by each individual. I would have liked to bring better forth the subjective and psycho-physical aspect of Salsa and better explained the importance of the experience-based aspect for wanting to come back to Salsa socials. The focus of my thesis is hence on the bigger context for why exactly Salsa is attractive for the dancers, with the focal point of in what ways outside influences and the situation they find themselves in contribute to why they dance and how they behave within and outside the Salsa community. As Clifford Gertz has written; the anthropologist´s job is to produce a detailed description of the everyday life and activities of the people studied. More ever, a “thick description” is not only occupied with the behaviour of the people, but describes the context in which it happens, in order for the reader to get a better insight into why the people under study do as they do (Nelson, Lecture slides). My thesis could be said to have the primarily focus on the context in which Salsa dancing occurs and my interpretation of it. I have through my collected ethnographic data tried to make sense of why Salsa dancing and the dancer´s behaviour is of significance in relation to the situation they find themselves in.

**Reflections on my fellow student´s influence on my field**

After a few days into my fieldwork, I talked to Louise a co-student from the University of Oslo who set out to do her fieldwork in Nepal. When she told me that she is struggling with her project and drained by the cold temperatures and lack of heating at her residence, I proposed to come over to India and stay with me and Siddharth. A few days later we picked her up from the airport and for the next 5 months we were living together, her hanging out with me and the guys sometimes.
Her entrance into my field has overall been positive for my research as her involvement with the guys enabled me to observe the guys interaction with a girl from a more distanced stance. As she was single at the time, I was able to gain a lot of insight into the guys flirty side and their behaviour with a pretty foreign girl, which some of them wanted to impress.

**Being female among males**

Anthony Cohen writes that if we view the anthropologist more or less as a method himself, than the age, gender and the personality of the researcher will have an impact on what data is found (cited in Ellen, 1984 p. 221). Here I would like to highlight the point about the impact of gender, age and also add the aspect of ethnicity as these factors had quite a lot of impact on my findings. In my original project description, I wanted to focus on women and their relationship to touch. When I was “accepted” in the Salsa community I also thought that I want to investigate women’s relationship to touch in Salsa and outside the Salsa-context, however I ended up basing my findings on the male Salsa dancers. Being a white, western and young woman, men were automatically taking more initiative than the female dancers. The dance’s set up of male-female makes it naturally more available to talk to the opposite gender, however I felt that generally there was more curiosity and openness towards me coming from the men than the women. Right from the beginning several male dancers asked me what I am doing at Salsa socials, giving me the opportunity to introduce myself as well as my research. My boyfriend at that time (Siddharth) was not coming to socials on a regular basis due to some knee injury, and hence the guys I interacted with and danced with had the impression that I was “alone” in India and single. Several of the guys asked me to meet them or come and visit them in their “hometown” which for example could be Mumbai. When I conducted interviews with some of the guys in the beginning before I had gotten to know them better, I sometimes felt that the guy thought about the meeting as a date. Siddharth even warned me that I should be careful as Indian guys do not easily get to meet girls one on one without knowing each other for a while (either though relations of family or friends) and hence can misinterpret the situation. There is no need to get into specific events here, but at least in the beginning there was an aspect of romantic intention from some of the guys. I also believe that because my main informants got to know Louise after a while, who they knew was single in comparison to me, they were more motivated to spend their free time with us. In the course of the fieldwork two of my main informants expressed romantic feelings towards her and another one towards me.
Another factor, for getting to know my informants, and especially my main informants easier in comparison to the female dancers, is the fact that me being a naïve Norwegian woman, I was not taking as much security precautions as the other girls. Therefore, I was the one who often took initiative to go to a pub or club after the social had ended or on the weekends. Some of the girls would join too sometimes, but they were more careful with the alcohol units and the time. Louise and I on the other hand, had no time frame for when to get home, so we were “available” for socializing all evening. Me, predominantly hanging out with the guys was hence not only a choice of my informants, but also from my side, as I must admit that I enjoyed the attention and found it overall more fun to be around the guys as they were not bound by the safety constraints like the girls. If I would have gathered more data, encompassing the girls experience of Salsa and its place in relation to the bigger context of Indian society, surely a different perspective could have been added to the thesis. I have included data from interviews and encounters with the female dancers, however my analysis is based on data collected from the male dancers as I felt that my involvement with the girls’ lives was not sufficient enough for me to create any solid theoretical definitions.
Chapter 3 –

The city of Hyderabad

Located in Southern India, Hyderabad is the state capital of Telengana (a state formed in 2014) and has over the recent years become the centre for administration, industrialisation and commerce within the state. Founded in 1591 as a small town, the city has undergone rapid development over the past years, described as being one of India’s fastest growing metropolises (Das, 2015).

Figure 2: Map of Hyderabad. Photo taken from Hyderabad-India-Online.com
Since the 1990’s the city of Hyderabad has gone through major transformations in terms of its infrastructure and work-industry. Together with Bangalore, Hyderabad today is considered the leading city of India’s high-tech industry. It is linked to the global economy through international firms producing hardware’s and software’s, call centres which have connections to the US and Europe and through its universities and research institutions (Chacko, 2007). When passing through the financial district and HITEC city (Hyderabad Information Technology and Engineering Consultancy City), with all the big companies like Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Deloitte lined up next to each other, it does not feel much like India. Ashok, one informant who moved to Hyderabad for a job offer in an IT firm described it like this; “When I came to Kondapur (an area of the city where a lot of IT-workers reside), there was nothing much there. Maybe one or two restaurants... not even pubs... not much. But last few years... you get everything. So many malls have come up. Inorbit-mall came in 2006 or 2007, I think. Before there were no malls, no Starbucks.. no McDonald’s ”. At the time he arrived in Hyderabad, 15 years ago, many of the areas now full of skyscrapers, residential complexes and restaurants were only desert. With the IT boom and increased employment, lots of people from all over India, including some Westerners, started living around these areas, and many of my informants too have come to the city due to its work-opportunities. Because of new employment opportunities and ongoing flow of people, the population of the city has almost doubled over the last 10 years, with 9,8 million citizens today (Populationstat.com, 2019).

Only a 30-minute drive away from the New city, entering the Old city of Hyderabad one notices a clear change in architecture and lifestyle. Tall, modern buildings are replaced by mosques and Persian looking houses with ornamentations around the windows and doors. Compared to the New city, all life seems to happen in the streets, people cramming together in front of street shops and street food counters. The Old city of Hyderabad has been under Muslim rule since the fifteenth century, first lead by Qutb Shah, thereafter the Mughals and before Independence from the British in 1948, by the Nizams. Hyderabad has therefore a Muslim population of 43,45% (Census2011.co.in.2018), of which most live in the Old city. After independence from the British, a form of Hindu- right wing nationalism occurred, creating tensions between Hindus and Muslims as well as other religious groups across the country. This led to a lot of Muslims moving to the Old city in the hope to find belonging among Islamic values, resulting in a noticeable geographical divide between ethnical groups within the city (Phua, 2018 p. 154).
In contrast to the New City, with good facilities and new roads, the Old city has been paid little attention to by the State, leaving the Old city in a state of decline. There are several factors which have led to this, but the main reason has been the difficulty of cooperation between Muslim communities and the State. After independence from the British, Muslim communities have been labelled as “backward” and “unprogressive” among non-Muslim Indians as a lot of Muslims work in the informal sector and lack education. Muslim communities have therefore been viewed as standing in the way for state projects of nationalism and secularism, leading the State to prioritize Hindu dominated areas of the city for developmental projects (Phua, 2018). In contrast to the Old City, the New city has a more visible mixture of people, coming from diverse ethnical, religious and economic backgrounds, which as mentioned above is partly the result of the growing job marked. As people from different classes and occupational backgrounds are living in close proximity, the contrast/divide between the rich and the poor also becomes more noticeable. Shopping malls, fancy hotels and restaurants are only accessible for people who can afford the lifestyle, that being the middle to upper-class. The coexistence of modernity, in terms of infrastructure, international stores and technology, and a more conventional (customary) way of life taking place between the office buildings and residential complexes is found all over the New city.

While the IT workers and business employees are sitting at their desk inside the tall office buildings, people around the city are occupied with other type of work and activities. On the sides of the street one can see old ladies carrying heavy sandbags, balancing the heavy loads on their heads. A bunch of men with yellow plastic helmets are working at a construction side, wearing flip flops while walking among wires and heavy stones. The strong midday sun has made their skin dark and their t-shirts are soaking wet from sweat. Along the roads people are walking, standing, and sitting everywhere. A group of guys standing by the Chai-wallah (the guy who sells Chai-tea) enjoy their cigarettes, some of them holding today’s newspaper in their hand while sipping the hot tea from the white paper cup. Further up the road, a woman in a blue Saree is trying to sell corn from her little corn-wagon. Every minute or so she shouts; “Fresh corn!”. Next to her one can spot four ladies sitting on the ground, each behind their own blanket loaded with red chilis, potatoes, onions and other vegetables. On the road, hundreds of cars, trucks and rickshaw drivers honk each other’s ears full, eager to move forward in the endless traffic jam. A man, his wife and their two children, all squeezed on one motorbike try to find the best route through the crowed. In a slow tempo they zig zag between the cars while watching out for the street dogs and cows who can suddenly appear from behind the vehicles.
Many of the people in the streets share the same reality as the family on the bike, not able to afford a car which would provide enough space for everyone. Two different worlds have started to coexist in the city; the world in the streets and the world inside the malls and other secluded spaces. Only people who can afford the more expansive lifestyle, have the opportunity to enter in and out of these two worlds. These include the people coming to socials.
The roots of Salsa

Contemporary Salsa dance originated in Cuba and migrated to several places in the Americas in the 20th century. Due to migration of people and mediated communication it travelled to Puerto Rico, Columbia and La before it came to New York, and in the 1980’s it spread throughout the rest of the world. The debate about the dance-form’s “rightful” owner is still going on as various people within Latin-America as well the Americas consider Salsa as part of their cultural heritage (Pietrobruno, 2006 p. 1; Hutchinson, 2015 p. 5). Even though Salsa came into being through contact between people from various cultural heritages, the traits within contemporary salsa [are said to] primarily emerged from two different traditions- European and African (Carwile, 2017). The fusing of the two continents happened during the “the Atlantic slave trade” between the 1780’s and 1860’s, when a lot of slaves were shipped over to Cuba by the Americans and British (Pietrobruno, 2006 p. 32).

Susanne, one of the instructors at STELLA has read a lot about the history of Salsa and is fascinated by why Salsa was danced in the first place. Sitting inside CCD (Cafè coffee day), sipping her cold lemonade, she starts telling me what she has read about the history of Salsa: “Salsa has been danced by people who were not allowed to communicate verbally, they were slaves”. The slaves who were brought to Cuba came from diverse ethnic groups in Africa, all with their own religions and dance traditions (Pietrobruno, 2006). One of the strategies used within slavery was to put a diversity of people with different language backgrounds together so that they did not have the chance to communicate (Rivera and Quintero, 2007 p. 83). Susanne continues: “As they were not allowed to communicate or practice their religion under the enslavement, they used to pray in form of dancing, doing a lot of footwork. In order to hide that they were praying, they used to do something like the ballroom dancers, they would be facing each other, dancing like a couple dance, and in footwork they would do their own religious practices so that people don’t understand what is happening.”
Looking at creolization⁴, Cohen and Sheringham (2016) point to that contact zones such as islands and plantations are places where cultures fuse as well as get into conflict, often as a consequence of a dominant and sub dominant relation, like colonization or slave trade, and that under such conditions often a form of creativity arises which helps in dealing with unwanted circumstances. Taking the example of Batuque, one of the possible oldest forms of music in Cape Verde, originating on the island of Santiago, the authors explain that in the colonial time, especially under the Portuguese rule (1926-74), the music style was banned because of its “too African” texts and dance moves. However, in the more inner parts of the island, a space a bit separated from the governing authority, people continued practicing the music style, but in a modified way. As drums were forbidden, the women would use tangled clothes for beating. They created alternative solutions and with that adapted to their environment, while simultaneously showing resistance towards the colonizers attempt to repress. This led to a gradual evolution within the music style (Cohen and Sheringham 2016 p. 65-66). Similarly, the origins of Salsa dance can be said to have evolved somewhere in-between suppression and resistance against suppression, before it travelled to different destinations where people modified and/or added movements to the dance which gave it different styles and flavours. Salsa today is categorized into 7 different styles, making it easier to distinguish the various way’s the dance form can be practiced. The styles being; Columbian, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Miami, Casino Rueda, LA (Los Angeles), and New York style. At STELLA they taught a mix of LA and New York style, LA being more performance oriented and New York a more social style.

It is however important to mention that the dominating view of how Salsa dance developed, as I have put forward here, should be read in light of recent postcolonial theory and critique. Much of written literature has distorted reality because it has been based on interpretations of colonialism and post-colonialism from textual representations alone, which again are written by Western scholars (Loomba, 2005 p. 83). By doing so, many scholars blur the ideological with the actual and run the risk of aestheticizing colonialism (Loomba, 2005 p. 83). In other words, the portrayal of that slaves were able to dance might be a misrepresentation and a way to ennoble the gruesome mannerism of the western suppressors.

⁴ According to Cohen and Sheringham (2016) creole is the development of a shared language, people or culture. It is the voluntarily or involuntarily putting down of new roots and absorbing new influences (p. 17).
Today, Salsa has been taken out of its historical context, and because it is danced all over the world, it has become this global phenomenon, giving it a universal character (Skinner, 2007 p. 496). Boulila (2018) on the other hand criticizes Skinner for depicting Salsa solely as a global and universal dance practice, stating that the view of that Salsa practically can be performed by any individual, excludes the aspect that it requires admission to symbolic and material power systems, which not everyone has (p. 248). On one hand then, Salsa is represented as this universal, all-including practice, and on the other, it is accessible only for people who have access to these power systems. This twofold aspect of the practice is of importance for understanding why Salsa dancing in the Indian context serves as a status symbol among my interlocutors.

How did Salsa come to Hyderabad?

According to instructor Susanne, Salsa came to India approximately 20 years ago. Several Indians travelled abroad because of studies or work and learned the dance form, bringing it back to India some years later. Some of them started teaching it, but without having any proper training or teacher experience (which Susanne highlighted is a very wrong way of doing it). Some “instructors” started to invite professional teachers from abroad to come and teach the dance-form. One of them was Cuban-American Alex who came to the city of Bangalore. During his stay he fell in love with an Indian woman (now his wife) and decided to settle down in the city. He saw the potential for growth of Latino-dances in India and his passion for dance drove him to start his own dance company - STELLA in 2009, which today has dance schools in 4 different Indian cities. Anthropologist Lynne Hanna (1987) says that the exposure for dance diversity is bigger in urban areas than in rural. “(...) While all innovations are finally initiated by individuals, they arise from a cultural background which provides certain potential for innovation” (p. 203). Urban cities tend to have a diversity of people, providing the opportunity for a range of social networks and hence more possibilities for interaction among people from different cultures (Lynne Hanna, 1987). With the IT boom and the flux of people from different cultural backgrounds moving to the city, Hyderabad has become a city with such potential.
Continuing with the story, Susanne told me that it was instructor Rahul who started teaching and promoting Salsa in Hyderabad. He was a student of Alex in Bangalore and because of a job offer, he moved to Hyderabad 8-9 years ago. Missing dancing to Latin beats, Rahul wanted to find a place in Hyderabad offering Latino music. However, there was no such place. One night, he and his friend went to a Tapas bar and a Spanish song played in the background. Rahul got so excited hearing the song, he got up and moved. Some minutes later he and his friend had cleared the tables and chairs and were dancing across the restaurant. He described the experience like this; “It felt like I had come home”. The manager of the restaurant who was Argentinian came over and told them that there was a proper space for dancing next to the bar. Rahul asked the manager if it would be possible to host Salsa socials in the restaurant on a regular basis, something which the manager happily agreed to. From that night on, they arranged Salsa socials weekly, promoting the events through the website meetup.com. However, only 3-4 people came on a regular basis and after some observation, Rahul figured that people did not know how to dance. In order for people to enjoy the social nights he understood that he needed to teach people the dance form. STELLA-Hyderabad was launched in December 2009. Today the school has the largest number of students compared to other schools in Hyderabad, with around 150-200 active dancers.

Since the last 2-3 years, the school also offers Bachata classes which is a couple’s dance originating in the Dominican Republic. It is made up of 3 basic steps with a hip motion on the 4th beat. It can be danced in close-hold or open hold, but in comparison to Salsa it can be described as more sensual and intimate. It was required to have taken classes in Salsa before learning Bachata at STELLA. Rahul explained that this is because Salsa is not as intimate as Bachata, and therefore a gentler introduction into couples dancing. Many of the dancers had learned Bachata too and were dancing it at socials, but many were also just sticking to Salsa and took a break whenever a Bachata song was played. As compared to Salsa, which demands faster steps and movements because of its upbeat music, Bachata music has a more sensual feel to it as it is slow-paced, encouraging slower dancing. Before the 90’s Bachata music primarily consisted of acoustic guitar play, accompanied by bongo drums and maracas. Today, the guitar play is still at the centre of the music, however, many artists have replaced the guitar sound with synthesizers and use mixers to get a better sound (Stavans, 2014).
The texts in the songs predominately contain statements about love and romance, which also can be felt by people who do not understand the language, because of the vocalist(s) impassioned way of singing. Salsa in contrast, has a totally different feel. The Clave\(^5\) is the basis of the music and its distinct sound and rhythm makes a salsa song easy to recognize. The main pattern of the music is built on what is called *son montuno*, which is the recurrent change between chorus and soloist (Duany, 1984). The many instruments which accompany this pattern (trumpets, Congo drums, cow bells etc) lends the music an energetic and cheerful feeling. The music then, very clearly guides the nature of the two different dance forms; Salsa being more about fast changing moves and quick steps, and Bachata being guided by the more sensual feel of the music, giving the dancers the opportunity to “slow down” and “rest” more into the steps, allowing for a bit more intimacy with the partner than in Salsa. As all of my main informants could dance Salsa and only a few Bachata, I have focused on Salsa in this text. Nevertheless, as some informants shared their experience with Bachata, I have included a few of those accounts too.

**Empirical description of a Salsa social and its confined space**

It is 9 pm and pitch dark outside. Only the weak lampposts and the lights from the many cars on the street are making the roads visible. Nishant has been inside the car for 1 hour now, driving all the way from his work location to jubilee hills, to attend the Thursday Salsa *social*. After passing some of the big branded stores with huge posters of their new clothing collection hanging next to the entrance, Nishant drives up a small, dark alley which ultimately leads him to a boom gate where he needs to stop. A man in dark uniform with a neon yellow waistcoat is making some movements with his hands. Judging from his gestures, Nishant understands that the guy wants him to open the car trunk. Right next to where the *social* happens lies a 4-star hotel, so checking if guests bring with them any illegal materials like knives or guns is standard protocol. After checking the trunk, the guy waves his arms repeatedly, indicating that Nishant is free to drive ahead. The barrier in front goes up and Nishant drives on the parking lot.

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\(^5\) Clave is an instrument consisting of two sticks, most commonly made out of wood, used as hand percussions.
The entrance to the venue is a bit hidden, placed inside the parking garage on the ground floor. 2 muscular security guys in black t-shirts and trousers are sitting behind a small desk, watching who is entering in and out. The guy behind the counter knows Nishant very well as he comes regularly. He greets him with a smile and then the two shake hands and give each other a short shoulder to shoulder hug. Nishant walks inside the elevator and presses the button with the number 8. Once entering out of the elevator, Salsa music can be heard in the distance. Some meters ahead another guy in black clothes is standing outside a door, opening it once he sees Nishant walking towards him. The sound of the music is now thrice as powerful to the ear as when entering out of the elevator. In the middle of the room is a round bar with inbuilt lights, making the bar look like a hyper modern white -glowing- spaceship. On the left side of the room, as well as in the right corner are tables and chairs for people to have dinner and drinks. As the venue is on the 8th floor, one has an amazing view over the city. On one side looking over the city through glass windows ranging from top till bottom, and on the other, an open space solution without any windows between, making it possible for the guests to take in fresh air, as well as smoke. The view over the city with the many lights from the buildings and the moon in the distance is breath-taking. Dim lights, minimalist-style furniture and chandeliers hanging from the ceiling gives the venue a modern look. There is not much free space for dancing, except right next to the bar. All the dancers are therefore gathered in close proximity, cramming together on a space of approximately 15 square meters. Nishant walks straight to the bar and orders a beer for himself. Right next to him, 5-6 other guys are standing by the bar with each their drink, watching the dancers on the floor. As the majority of the crowd are guys, some always have to wait until a girl is available for them to dance with.

It is now 9:30 pm and more and more people are entering through the door. Many of them carry with them big rucksacks or laptop bags as many come straight from office. The guys are dressed pretty casually, some in t-shirts and jeans and some in long sleeve shirts and jeans and sneakers or leather shoes. Nishant goes to the side and sits down on a chair in order to change from his Converse to jazz shoes which several guys at socials use as dancing shoes. Most of the ladies are also changing their shoes, the majority taking out proper ballroom shoes with high heels. As most people come direct from office, the dress code on Thursdays is more casual as compared to Saturdays where people have more time and put more effort into their outfit. Some have brought change with them and are getting dressed inside the bathroom, among them; Chandra and Shilpa, who have been gone for over 30 minutes. Chandra comes out wearing a black miniskirt and a red velvet top with black glittery salsa shoes, whereas Shilpa only changed her top, now wearing a black tank top and tight high waste jeans with red salsa shoes.
I have already been at the social for over 1 hour, standing by the bar while observing all the dancers. I can see that Rai has just arrived, and he walks straight over to me. We greet with a stiff hug, him asking me how I have been. The next song is known to both of us. It has been played on the socials for several weeks now. With an enthusiastic voice he says; “I love this song! Do you want to dance to this song? I know it is Bachata... but we can try.”. I nod my head and smile; “sure”. However, inside I do not feel enthusiastic at all. Rai joined the Salsa Level 1 class on a later point, when I was doing my Level 2 course. I have been dancing with him a lot because we are friends and I want to be nice to him, however, I do not enjoy dancing with him much as he is stiff and never in rhythm with the music. Even so, I put on a smile for him while dancing, veiling the struggle and irritation going on inside me. Then he starts talking. Telling me that he likes dancing with me as he feels that I am having fun and that this fact makes dancing with me comfortable for him. Him talking to me and me having to answer him while at the same time trying to follow his lead, which is hard in itself, makes the entire experience even more unbearable. He tells me he has learned a new step on YouTube which he wants to try out with me. Every 40 seconds or so, he turns me around and then pulls me back into close-hold, proudly saying that the name of this step is called “double inside turn”. I, on the other hand, am screaming inside, hoping that the song soon will be over so that I do not have to do this move again.

After our dance, we go back to the bar. He orders himself a whiskey, and we both watch Chandra and another guy dancing. All the steps they do look so smooth and easy. Rai whispers in my ear: “I feel a bit intimidated by her as she is such a good dancer. I feel like she is bored when she dances with me”. Nishant comes over and says; “Johanna, Dance?!”, reaching out his hand towards me. I gladly accept, and he leads me out on the floor. As the floor is crowded with people moving all over, I, from time to time bump into someone, or someone steps on my foot. Nishant smiles at me whenever this happens, and then he leads me a bit more to the right or to the left, wherever he can spot more space. The song is a Salsa song: “Vivir mi vida”. It is a feel-good song and it is impossible to not sing along. Nishant has heard it many times before and he looks confident in his moves and his lead. He looks me in the eyes and smiles from time to time. In between, he looks at the dancers around him, checking if there is enough space between us and the couples next to us. His hand is securely placed between my shoulder blades and his lead is easy to follow. He is in sync with the rhythm, and his transitions from one step to the next are smooth and effortless.
Because of his skills in leading, and his ability to make the girl feel good and confident while dancing, he has become one of the guys who is in high demand. While still dancing, Devika, who is dancing with a guy next to us, taps him on the shoulder saying; “Nishant! next dance Bachata”. Nishant nods his head and gives me a look with a glimpse of proudness in his eyes. Right on the last beat, he dips me and lifts me up again, in exact sync with the music. We smile and high ten each other, synchronously saying; “thank you!”.
Taking Ramanujan’s (1989) explanation of Indians context-sensitive way of thinking as point of departure, I will in this chapter try to convey the ways traditional culture and the family have impacted the dancer’s behaviour and their understanding of themselves and the world. Being brought up seeing their parent’s involvement and practices of Hindu religion, as well as their family’s strong rootedness in customs and cultural traditions, the way they see themselves is very much formed by and linked to their family life. As the factors that feed into how our idea of ourselves and our identity is constructed in our upbringing are complex and many, the following account must be read with the notion of the limited ability to include all aspects. The point here is to highlight that the strong presence of customs, religion and traditions which my informants grew up with, have marked them deeply and are (more) firmly rooted in them as compared to individuals where religious values and traditional customs are not as steadily present. Because of limited space, I have predominantly included empirical data from one of my main informants; Siddharth. The thoroughgoing account about his family and his involvement in it, is supposed to represent the voices of the others too and show that the family and my interlocutors place within the family has been, and still is a major part of shaping their cultural identity.

When a newspaper did a survey asking some Indian intellectuals about the character of Indians some years back, the newspaper stated that the nature of all Indians is hypocrisy; “Indians do not mean what they say and say different things at different times” (Ramanujan, 1989 p. 44). The text takes some examples from old religious texts and the Vedas, describing how Indians are used to contextualisation of rules and laws compared to the more universal oriented western religious and philosophical texts, and how these patterns of contextualisation still prevails in the way of thinking among Indians.
Ramanujan (1989) distinguishes between context-free and context-sensitive thinking among cultures, saying that India belongs to the latter one. He states that all societies have context-sensitive rules, but the Context-free model idealises egalitarianism where every man is thought of as equal regardless of his age, gender, class etc. The context-sensitive model on the other hand derives meaning and comprehension of the nature of things because everything is context-specific and must be understood in relation to other things (Ramanujan, 1989). To show from where the Indians have derived their context-sensitive way of thinking he gives the example of “The laws of Manu” (Manu-smriti) who appear in the Vedas, the sacred texts of Hinduism. Part of Manu’s law states that; “A king who knows the sacred law, must imagine into the laws of caste (játi), of districts, of guilds, and of families, and (thus) settle the peculiar law of each” (cited in Ramanujan, 1989 p. 47).

Looking at several of the Hindu writings, Ramanujan (1989) points out that there is not much of a universal law left, as the texts convey a favouritism of differences and diversity (p. 47). This way of thinking in terms of particularities and contextualisation also prevails in the way time and space are portrayed in texts, how diseases are diagnosed, and the way medicines are prepared. Time for example is not believed to be made up of uniform units but thought of as relational. “Certain hours of the day and certain days of the week are seen as auspicious and inauspicious (ráhukála) (...)”, believed to affect people’s life and the outcome of situations or actions (Ramanujan, 1989 p. 51). For example, Siddharth’s family believes he is cursed because it is written in his horoscope and confirmed by an astrologer which the family regularly visits. In order for him to break the curse the astrologer has told him and his family to do certain things such as; not to wear yellow on Tuesdays, and not to eat bananas on Thursdays. He himself does not believe that these actions will make his life better in any way, but because his parents believe in it, he does it for them, to calm them down. Similarly, Nitin, a guy from Delhi who moved to Hyderabad because of a position at Microsoft, explained to me how superstitious his mother is, and that she denies him to get a haircut or cut his nails on Tuesdays and Saturdays as this would bring bad luck. He defined himself as an atheist, but as it satisfies his mother, he does everything she tells him to do when it comes to religion.

Furthermore, the context-sensitive way of thinking is also present in the Hindu traditional family system. Seymour describes the Indian traditional family not as one coherent whole, but as being build-up of hierarchical relationships, which are based on a person’s relation/position towards his/her other members, as well as his/her gender (cited in Chowdhury and Patnaik, 2013 p. 60). This system holds traditional cultural value and it is normally the job of the elderly women of the house to tell and explain to the young why these cultural values are important.
Ideals/values such as solidarity with one’s family and compassion, are meant to equip the young to better face obstacles which can arise later in life. These are normally recited from Hindu mythologies such as the “Mahabaraht”, meant to be applied in different situations and to a variety of relationships (Chowdhury and Patnaik, 2013).

Zouka, a guy from Amritsar (India), lived in India for 18 years, before he moved to Argentina for his studies, now living and working there. He came to a social one night where I met him. He was just in town for 3 weeks, visiting his family, before going back to Argentina. He openly told me that he could not bear to stay in India because he was not able to fit in with society’s norms and expectations. “Most people are just living a big lie, because they are so afraid of what other people might say”. He told me about this phrase in Hindi which people in India are taught from childhood on and which one will hear a lot from one’s family throughout life; “Log kya kahenge?”, meaning; “What will people say?”. As people are so occupied with having a good reputation within the society they live in, among their neighbours and their extended family, the children are raised in ways they can be representable and uplift the family’s reputation even more.

Kumar, a 32 year old guy who has been coming to socials on and off for the last 3 years, trying to establish a manufacturing business of his own, similarly explained how occupied Indian families are with how others view them; “Indian families are like; pride, they want to be known for having discipline in the family. Eh, doing the right things, having their kids very well educated. Some families who have a lot of money or are into politics- they care even more about their reputation, but also small families. Especially if a girl makes a mistake; people will talk about it; “look at her, is the father not able to discipline her…”. Arranged marriage is still a thing. Most families still do not accept love marriages, the same with inter-caste marriages. They want to marry within the group”.

A good reputation/status for men of middle-upper class is achieved by earning well (means you are able to take care of the family), having a good education (ideally from a reputed university) and by showing you are “cultured”. Of course, there are variations and differences of opinions to what a good reputation means for various families and it probably differs between the genders too, but here I am talking about what people I encountered told me about what their family considers as good reputation. By “cultured” is meant; acting and behaving in accordance with what the religion as well as the family says. For example, respecting and obeying one’s elders is highly valued within the family.
When I was staying at Siddharth’s parents’ house for 5 days because of a wedding we wanted to attend, I was witnessing the ritual of greeting and parting between him and the elders of the house. Every time Siddharth or his parents would leave or enter the house, he would bend down and touch the feet of his parents as well as his grandmother’s. His grandfather passed away some years ago and that is why his mother’s mother moved in with them\(^6\). The touching of the feet was followed by him putting his hand on his heart or forehead. While he was bending down, the elders would lay their hand/s on his head, giving him blessings. In one of the Hindu scripts it is written that one obtains blessings (good wishes) from any elderly person by touching their feet. If one does not bend down and touch the elder’s feet in any encounter with family friends or family, one is considered rude and people would in most cases say something or talk about it to others (informant Siddharth). Among friends, this “formality” is not practised, but within the family context the practice is part of maintaining the hierarchical relations: The elders being on top, having the last say, and the youngsters on the bottom, having to obey.

Zouka further explained; “I first realized when I had my distance from my family who I am. When I was living in India, I was what my father told me I should be, or how the neighbours thought I was. First when I got away from all of that, I felt I could figure out what I want to do and who I am”. Zouka moved out of India at the age of 18 and has not come back since then, which makes him a special case compared to the other dancers. Most of the male dancers I encountered had moved out from home, but at a much later age than 18. Since none of the male dancers are married, they are in the position to focus on themselves and their career for now. However, as the Hindu tradition and custom says, the guy’s role and responsibility within the family is to take care of his elders, and it is hence the norm within Hindu families that the son after marriage moves into his parents’ house together with his wife. In many cases the parents also move in with their son and daughter in law, if the son has moved out before. Today, some couples also live without the parents, however, that being the minority.

\(^6\) It is not normal that the parents of the woman are allowed to live together with her and her husband, as the parents of the husband are already living in the household. However, in some families, like Siddarth’s, once one of the parents become widowed, and with the permission of the man, the woman’s father or mother might move in with their daughter.
Parthsarthy's talks about how from early on in childhood particular roles and expectations are ascribed to the children within the Indian home. Work within the household is for example based on what are considered feminine and what masculine tasks. The girls are expected to do most of the work within the domestic, whereas the boys are assigned “masculine” work which normally is connected to tasks outside of the home (cited in Chowdhury and Patnaik, 2013). These assigned roles are connected to and shape the person’s identity as “identity draws on the grammar of everyday life” (Banerjee, 2005 p. 4). The roles and “positions” which come with certain expected behaviour or actions, and which one learns throughout childhood and early adult life, are ingrained into the individual and become part of what Bourdieu calls “habitus”. Habitus refers to all the unconscious ways a person “naturally” reacts, thinks, talks, walks, feels and understands the world around. These forms of orientating oneself in the world are embodied and internalized and acquired through the persons socialization processes. Bourdieu was the opinion that the “dispositions” (with that he meant our tendencies) “which we acquire during childhood in the field of the family, and which ‘implanted’ a primary habitus in us, are ‘longer lasting’ and more decisive” (Asimaki, 2014 p. 125). He states that different experiences in other social environments also mark and influences the individual with different habitus, but instead of erasing the primary habitus, the other habitus(es) acquired through for example school is added, perhaps restructuring the primary one, but never erasing it. New and different experiences may alter certain aspects; however, our tendencies tend to be long-lasting (Asimaki, 2014). “This is because they are internalized, embodied and deeply ‘implanted’ (...), with the result that they resist change, defining in this way a certain ‘continuation’, course and way of life” (Asimaki, 2014 p. 126). Hence, the practices of the elders, religious customs and cultural etiquettes learned and observed within the family have laid the ground for how to orient oneself in the word. Being brought up with strong traditions and Hindu values and a more or less fixed role within a family structure, my informants’ sense of self seemed to have been strongly shaped by their family and their position/role within it.

During my stay, Siddharth had been trying to find a job in Hyderabad for over a year, living with his friend Abhay who owns a flat in one of the big gated communities in the city. Siddharth had gone to around 20 job-interviews over the last months, but never made it to the final round (the interviews are normally in several rounds as there are many applicants, leading to high competition). Even though he has a bachelor’s in computer engineering, he was struggling to get a good paid job with good working conditions as he failed his masters and the hiring firms were questioning his working endurance.
He is trying hard to make up for the Master’s, currently enrolled in two online Nanodegrees, hoping that these degrees will give him a better chance at succeeding. Every day, his father would call him from home asking him solely about how his studies and work-prospects are getting on. His father recently retired and now there is more pressure for Siddharth to start providing financial support for his parents. Whenever Siddharth talked to his father on the phone, his tone of voice became so different from how he normally talked. His tone was more reassuring, and he sounded very convinced of all he was saying. It was as if he was putting on a show, giving his father the impression that he has huge success in what he is doing. He explained that the two courses he is doing are very advanced and that they will give him good job-opportunities later in life as Nanodegrees are in demand by companies. He would also lie about the salary the firms are providing per month, adding 30000-50000 rupees to the sum. His father has discouraged him to take on badly paid jobs in the past, leading Siddharth to lie about the salary in order for his father to consider the job.

Inspired by Goffman’s opinion that all social life can be understood as a series of performances, Schechner (2006) explains how “performance” in every-day life can be as good as unnoticeable. In order for a person to impress someone else, he only needs to make small adjustments in his presentation of self, like changing clothes or changing the tone of voice (p. 206). In the case of Siddharth and his father, Siddharth is viewed by his father as being a smart son who has control of his life, at least that is the image Siddharth is trying to portray with his “performance”. However, the way he talks and acts in front of his father is so ingrained that he himself seems unaware of his behaviour. If he would be aware whenever stepping in and out of the role of “the successful son”, it would be exhausting, as he consciously would have to put an effort into “acting”. “A person’s sense of self is very much tied to her ability to believe in the roles she plays” (Schechner, 2006 p. 217). The diverse roles which are played by a person are not played by a stable self, but the self is being shaped by the roles while playing them (p. 217). In Siddharth’s case, his to me “changing” behaviour when talking to his father, is not a conscious act as he has done it for such a long time (probably forever). His behaviour towards his father is internalized, or as Schechner describes it; part of his self.
When I asked him why he cannot tell his father about his financial situation, he said that he does not know for sure how his father would react if he would tell the truth, and that he is not willing to take that risk. As his parents, like most other parents of that generation, are occupied with family status and recognition from extended family members as well as society members, he is afraid that he will disappoint them, and more so, put them in a situation where they have to defend their son. He himself has told that his parents are quite openminded and understanding, but that the people around and especially the rest of the family members have strong opinions and like to gossip and how that impacts his parents. He is 32 years old and not married yet, which according to Indian standards is quite late. However, for a guy it is not as bad as for a girl. His younger sister (27) is also not married, even though their parents have tried to find a good match for her on matrimonial sites for 4 years now. His sister, as well as his parents are super stressed and exhausted from not getting the marriage fixed. The sister has fallen into depression as she is getting a lot of comments from family members and family friends as to why she is not married yet, making her feel inadequate and worthless because people constantly ask: “What is wrong with her?, does no one want her?”. Siddharth has tried to explain to both his sister and his parents that coming out of the depression is more important than getting her married as soon as possible. However, their stress and worries are so high that they do not want to listen to him. His mother comes back from work at 7 pm every day, makes the dinner ready and then she spends the rest of the evening searching matrimonial sites or phoning families.

Even though the parents might have an understanding for their children’s stress and wishes, the pressure from outside, such as extended family members constantly asking when their son and daughter will get married, is too much, leading them to take action. With all this going on at the same time, Siddharth explained that he does not want to make his parents worry more, and that is partly also why he keeps his problems to himself. In addition, his identity is very much linked to the family and his position/role as the older brother and only son of the house. Breaking out of that role and the responsibilities which follow with it would be a betrayal against the family and is something Siddharth would never want to do. Instead of signing out or cause upheaval, Siddharth has learned to find ways to cope with pressures and demands from his family, be it through not telling the whole truth or lying about certain things.
Due to changes caused by globalization and the spread of Western culture in the past years, several scholars have argued that developing countries, among them India, are undergoing shifts regarding family life (Sooryamoorthy, 2012). It is not my task to go into detail here, however it is important to mention that transformations are happening as my informants are part of them. Anthony Giddens identifies several factors which are contributing to the shifts regarding marriage traditions, selection of partners, roles expectations and increased equality between family members. Factors which have contributed to these gradual changes are; migration from rural to urban areas, increased western influence, the increase in work opportunities (often far from the hometown) and the governments implanted policies meant to reduce the family size (cited in Sooryamoorthy, 2012 p. 5). Nitin, Siddharth, Kumar, Ashok, Nishant, and Rai had all left their family homes in other states or cities in pursue of better work opportunities. Nishant, at the time of my fieldwork living with his parents, has now moved to Delhi because of a job offer, all living alone, having to manage their family life over the phone or through visits. Chowdhury and Patnaik (2013) point out that as a consequence of these shifts and gradual transformations, women and men today face the challenge of coping with their role within family life and their role in their occupational life. The workplace is most often one isolated domain, and the family another, but they impact each other through a conflict come about by often opposing role demands in each domain. I will discuss this further on the next pages.

I have in this chapter highlighted how characterized my interlocutors are from the strong family traditions and customs, as well the ways their roles and positions within the family and the behaviour attached to those are strongly present even though far away from “home”. However, as times are changing, what is considered right and natural for their parents does not come as natural to them as they also are involved in a changing world outside of the “home”. Caught in-between the world of their “habitus” and the world outside of the family in the increasingly global India, there is a confusion about identity and the dancers place in society.
Chapter 5 –

Modern influences

In this chapter I will look at how outside forces such as city development, migration flows (talked about in the first chapter), advertisements and media are contributing in creating a social imaginary of “world class citizen”, a term borrowed from anthropologist Brosius, among young urban middle-class citizen, and which the Salsa dancers have come to aspire to. The socio-economic changes happening in big cities like Hyderabad over the last years, together with the young middle-classes constant exposure to visual representations and texts through media, have led to new ways of viewing status and reputation, ways that oppose what they have seen and learned from their families. The anxiety which derives from the thought of not being part of the rising, urban middle-class who according to the media will be the leaders of the “new” and changing India, drives the dancers to the edge, where they through their behaviour and performances must reassure for themselves and others, that they still are “in the game”. The anxiety coming from the fear of being “left behind” serves as a driving force which keeps the dancers on their toes, pushing them into certain ways of being. The underlying fear of failing to convince, and the multiple ways of combatting that fear, makes “middle-classness” in Liechty’s terms, a “cultural performance”, a culture which needs doing and redoing, in order to not crumble apart. With reference to examples I will highlight the multiple ways the dancers “performed” as “world-class citizen”, and what techniques they used for keeping this identity alive. In comparison to the “familiar” way of being, taught and seen by their family members, rooted in strong traditions, outside factors such as city development and the media are more unpredictable and fast changing. The changes happening around them are in a way forced upon them, as they are not in their control. This chapter will therefore explore how the environment and its unpredictable forms are part of constructing what the dancers want to be identified with. What happens outside of themselves is not in their choosing, and hence, their way of being is to a certain extend a consequence of what has been pushed on them.
Before starting the discussion of how the social imaginary of “world class citizen” has come to existence and how it is acted out by the dancers, it is important to make the concept of “social imaginary” understandable to the reader. Social imaginaries in social sciences has been and still is a flexible term as its definition and understanding has been used differently in various disciplines, evolving up until the present day. Cornelius Castoriadis was the first who coined the term in his publication *The imaginary institution of society*, published in 1975. Social imaginary as understood by Castoriadis is the way or ways a given set of society imagine their social life. These imaginations legitimize actions and practices conducted within the society, as well as form how these should be played out. He comprehends social imaginaries as the fusion of the perceived, the rational, and the imaginary. The imaginary component can be understood as persons creative process of acquiring things which do not exist, in the sense that they have never been given or perceived through anything concrete (Castoriadis cited in Kavoulakos, 2006 p. 203). “That imaginary which, in the end, transcends every particular subjective representation, and is essentially social in character, is an “original social institution” and takes on its most characteristic form in those significations that do not refer to anything existent” (Castoriadis cited in Kavoulakos, 2006 p. 203).

Although, Dawney (2011) in her article, demonstrates through two case studies how social imaginaries are also material, as they come into existence through practices and bodily interaction with texts and symbols, and hence are not opposed to the real. “The notion of imaginary existence is not, as in many theories of the imagination, to be contrasted with the real, but rather to be taken as a condition for there being a real for us” (Lennon cited in Dawney, 2011 p. 537). Dawney (2011) argues that social imaginaries come into existence and become part of what is considered real for the persons “imagining”, through the engagement between physical bodies and the worlds these bodies meet. Imaginaries are both social and material according to her, as the imaginary understandings are “(…) ‘materialised’ through the forms of embodiment to which those constructions give rise” (Gatens and Lloyd cited in Dawney, 2011 p. 542). Texts, symbols, images and institutions are contributors to the production of social imaginaries, and the ongoing contact between these and bodies who sense and feel, feed the ongoing flow of these (Dawney, 2011). It is this approach to understanding how social imaginaries come into being which I find useful for making sense of the dancer’s imaginary of “world class citizen” and their need to identify themselves with this image.
Constant exposure to advertisements, new trends and international TV and fashion, pushes the dancers into either riding the wave of “the changing India” or withdraw from it and with that fall back to what they are used to from their elders, and to ways of being and being seen which they want to separate themselves from. What is important to classify from the beginning, is that the need for being identified as “world-class citizen” is of relevance for a certain segment of society; which we can call “the new social intermediaries”. An intermediary, according to the dictionary, is a person who acts as a mediator, standing between two parts. “The new social intermediaries” in Hyderabad, including the dancers, are the ones who are in the middle, the new middle class, sandwiched between the working-class and the upper-class. The aristocrats and working-class people are not as occupied to participate in the innovation and re-shaping of themselves, as their class belonging is stable over several generation, either with huge materialistic resources, or very few. The extreme split in the distribution of resources puts the people who benefit most or less from them automatically into a category of class. Bourdieu (1986) in his publication *The forms of capital* nicely deciphers that class fractions are determined by the varying degrees of cultural, social and economic capital people possess. Not only does the economic background of an individual’s family have a say in the individual’s future prospects and accumulation of wealth, but also which cultural capital is transmitted to him as well as social capital, the latter standing for the social network the individual operates in. Unlike economic capital, which can be passed on in form of property or materialistic possessions to the next generation, cultural capital is acquired over time, inherited from the people who raised you, involving how to eat, how to communicate and present yourself. Cultural capital is part of a person’s *habitus*, what Bourdieu described to be an individual’s ingrained and often unconscious habits and skills. These habits and skills are normally shared by people coming from the same or similar educational, ethnical, religious, professional and social class background, and are to a big extend influencing the way the individual perceives and reacts to the world around him, as well as which opportunities, in terms of job, spouse (family) and social relations, he will get (Bourdieu, 1986). The different types of capital, in either objectified or embodied forms, have a tendency to not change the content over a long period of time, and are hence perceived as natural and given, coded into the body and mind of the individual. The composition of the different types of capital represents the inherent structure of people’s social world and its functioning, making things more attainable or unattainable for different groups (Bourdieu, 1986).
Late capitalism and globalization processes are therefore felt and dealt with differently among the diverse classes worldwide. The striving for being “a world class-citizen” is hence sociologically not a homogeneous process or condition and applies most strongly to the middle-class who are sandwiched between the rich and poor. Many of the citizens in Hyderabad do not even notice the changes, or only get glimpses of them, as they are socially, physically, and/or financially distanced from them.

**Hyderabad - “The cosmopolitan city”**

Brosius (2010) argues that with the start of neoliberalism in the 90’s and the flood of foreign goods and exposer to images of western lifestyle, urban cities in India, have through symbolic mediums transformed into an image of world class, cosmopolitan cities. This image has come to existence in people’s imagination mainly through visual representations and texts conveyed through advertisements and media, created by real estate developers and advertisers who target wishful middle-class youth, trying to turn them into consumers of pleasurable activities, such as buying a modern flat in one of the best and safest neighbourhoods or paying a visit to the beauty parlour for a pedicure or a massage, all for the purpose of strengthening India’s economic growth (Brosius, 2010). Prior to India’s economic liberalization in 1991, goods from abroad where mainly accessible for upper class citizen who had the money to go to foreign countries and bring commodities back with them. However, with the changes taken place after the liberalization, and the idea of “(...) abroad is now in India, (...) signifies the potential realization of middle-class aspirations of consumption, a realization that can now take place within India’s borders” (Fernandes, 2006 p. 41).

Appadurai (1996) on the other hand, criticizes what scholars often describe as “the modern moment”, referred to as the one/single moment where modernization in a given society has happened. He argues that this “momentum” of modernization creates a break between past and present and tradition and modernity and by that distorts the meaning of change. Modernization processes can according to him not be explained by giving prominence to the nation state but are as much shaped by diasporic flows and the imaginative forces made possible by electronic media (cinema, television, telephones). Media and migration, according to him, are the two major causes for shaping the “imagination” of modern subjectivity. Because of the rapid speed and continuous flow of electronic media, it has become a source for that self-imagining can take place at each minute (Appadurai, 1996).
It is difficult, arguably impossible to understand in which way and how social imaginaries come into being, as neither images nor viewers fit into a shape that can be placed “within local, national or regional spaces” (Appadurai, 1996 p. 4).

The transformation of everyday subjectivities through electronic mass mediation and the work of the imagination, is not only a cultural fact. It is deeply connected to the politics, through the new ways in which individual attachments, interests and aspirations increasingly crosscut those of the nation state. They are part of the cultural dynamic of urban life in most countries and continents, in which migration and mass mediation co constitute a new sense of the global as modern and the modern as global (Appadurai, 1996 p. 10).

The Salsa practitioners watch a lot of Hollywood movies on Netflix and listen to Cuban, Spanish and African music at socials, being an example of how moving images and sounds meet people who are not part of the “world” in which they were produced (Appadurai, 1996).

**Arbitrary influences contributing in shaping the dancer’s way of thinking and perceiving**

Thinking about the different and diverse places the dancers inhibit on a daily basis, be it on twitter, or their workplace, the dancers have to deal with new ways of thinking and living, which are basically pushed on them. What I mean by pushed on them, is that regardless of their own choosing, most of what they will be exposed to lies outside of their control. Taking the work place as an example; even though, they are the ones who choose which job they would like to take on, the jobs with the best futuristic prospects (good salary, good working environment) being the positions at big and international firms, like Dell or Google, for whom many of the dancers work for, their work environment and things happening at work are certainly leaving a mark on them. Rajit, a 32-year-old, extremely tall guy for Indian standards, who works for Microsoft, has to take on many international clients. He explained that now a days in comparison to some years back, people do not just interact with people from the same state, but across states and across national borders. His team consists of Indians from 15 different states and they are only 25 in total. He further told me that due to the exposure to people who behave and think differently than oneself, one develops respect and acceptance towards other cultures, body types and colours too. One time a guy in his team made a comment on a work colleague, saying that he comes “rolling into office”, thereby indicating that he is fat. The comment was unsurprisingly not received nicely by his colleague.
Because of such incidences the company conducts tests yearly to measure the work-health index, and if the results are not as wanted, the firm employs external personnel to help in creating more cultural respect and mutual trust among its employees. These companies work hard for keeping a good working environment between the diversity of people working for them, because if not it would be bad business for the companies too. Hence, in order to work and continue working, a certain level of open-mindedness is demanded of the employees, as well as the ability to absorb and engage in new ideas. How, and how much their interaction with international clients and the flows of ideas and different ways of thinking affect them is impossible to know. However, what is definite, is that it has an impact on the dancers. It certainly challenges and adds to their already existing ways of making sense of things.

Brosius (2010) specifically shows how metaphors and notions such as “world-class” and “world citizen” are used by the Indian media to affect people’s imagination and subjectivities. Such metaphors have come to be deployed in various marketing strategies to convey that India’s economic liberation and rapid growth, has opened the door for new ways of living and consuming cities. Big cities such as Hyderabad are symbolically (through marketing, advertisements, Tollywood Industry⁷) transformed into the image of a cosmopolitan city where self-realisation and freedom can be turned into reality (Brosius, 2010). On one side, these images and aspirations of the city as a place for opportunities and change puts people absorbing these images in a state of optimism, while on the other, lends them with fear of not being able to follow up with the new lifestyles, and hence be left behind (Brosius, 2010).

During an interview inside the pub where the socials happen, Nishant told me the following; “Some people from the outside think of me as a spoiled brat. They think that I am arrogant and that I flirt a lot. But I am not controllable, I do not care. I do not have to justify anything. I am exploring myself”. Rai, another male dancer put it like that; “In Scandinavia equality is real, here it is not. Unless people take responsibility for themselves here, equality will not be here. If I would have a girlfriend, I would encourage her to go to socials. To get a different perspective. What is the point with only one perspective? We don’t live in 15-century anymore, we are in 21st century. I like exploring. You become a better person”.

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⁷ Tollywood stands for the movie industry in Hyderabad, producing Telugu speaking movies
The utterances of the two dancers convey in a direct and forward manner their desire to explore new territories for the purpose of self-development and growth, and the need to move away from hurdles which possibly could prevent their self-exploration and their participation in the “changing India”. In order to uphold and make themselves into citizen of the “world-class” in a country which is so diverse and where people from various classes and backgrounds live in such close proximity, they need to through their practices show that they are unmistakable distinct from the lower classes which carry the image of backwardness and chaos.

“Middle-classness” as cultural performance

Liechty looks at being part of the middle-class as a cultural practice which needs to be kept alive and performed, meaning that middle class culture, in his terms “middle-classness” is a process, which needs doing and redoing, rather than something which people simply possess or are. He describes how the mixture of “competing cultural assets, consumer demands and media (...)” effect the cultural life of the middle class, the culture being one that needs continuously redoing, because of its complexity, unpredictability and instability (Liechty cited in Brosius, 2010 p. 265).

Consumption of goods and commodities in late capitalist societies has become a symbol and expression of status and modernity, as well as a means to make a statement about one’s identity (Brosius, 2010).

The “modern Indian man”

Looking at young middle-class men in Delhi, Philip (2017) argues that young men living in urban areas today have started to enjoy going to bars, dating, hitting the gym and “hanging out” in the recently build shopping malls, which makes their life very different from what their parents and the older generations are used to. This “outside of the home” life is new and exciting and stands in opposition to what is taught about “respected behaviour” at home by family members. These men are therefore standing in-between the “new” and the “old”, trying to find “their” place in these changing circumstances. What the older generations think of as “outlawed” activities, (clubbing, dating, smoking, drinking etc) have become a symbol of status among young men in the now increasing global and liberalizing India (Philip, 2017).
With the socio-economic changes taking place, also new ideas about how the “new Indian man” should act have come to exist. The “new Indian man” being a man of consumption- who drinks, who shops and who takes care of his body and looks, as well as enjoys sexual freedom (Philip, 2017). Smoking, drinking and having girlfriends has always existed in India, however the difference is that before it was looked down on, while now it is validated (Philip, 2017). However, simply buying and consuming commodities is not enough for attaining status, one also has to know how to use them, which again requires knowledge and skills (Brosius, 2010). Not doing things “the proper way” can quickly downgrade a person’s status (Brosius, 2010). In other words, a lot is at stake for the “middle-classer’s” (salsa-dancers) who aspire to be part of the social imaginary of “the world class”.

Thorstein Veblen (1899), looking at how leisure and consumption of goods are ways to indicate one’s wealth and reputation in position to others, says that; in order for a person to turn wealth into status and reputation, the person needs to signal his wealth. He looks at two possible ways to do this; the first being the act of conspicuous leisure, and the second; conspicuous consumption. The former, first and foremost appeals to societies where materialistic goods are not available and where leisure is easier to access for showing wealth and status, as is the case in “primitive” societies. Once a society advances, a shift from conspicuous leisure to conspicuous consumption takes place. In smaller and “primitive” societies people know each other and what they are doing and therefore notice whenever a person executes conspicuous leisure (Veblen, 1899). In the cities and more developed societies a larger circle of similar people exists to whom individuals want to signal status to, and hence the most visible way of doing this is through consumption of materialistic things, and through dress and style (Veblen, 1899). What is important to note is that the distinction between conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption is a bit blurrier today than how Veblen depicted it many years back. Being able to afford more leisure time is one way many people try to symbolize their status, and that was the case with the dancers too. While some people engage in conspicuous consumption through buying and displaying their materialistic possessions; jewellery, clothes, cars, etc., others make a point of being able to afford time off from work to travel to very distant places. In the latter case, money is converted into time and even though it is a type of leisure, it symbolizes the ability to consume. The dancer’s ability to take part in both; conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure was clearly visible on their social media.
From a personal interest level, Instagram seemed to be the media platform the dancers were most intrigued by. In contrast to Facebook, where many had some of their family members in their friend list, Instagram provided a space for a bit more intimacy. Intimacy in the form of fewer and more carefully chosen contacts. Both Siddharth and Nishant told me stories about being tagged in pictures on Facebook which had created upheaval for them in the past. These were pictures in where they hold around a girl’s waist while posing for the camera, or in which they are depicted dancing Salsa or Bachata with a girl. The pictures were seen by friends or family members, and they had to untag themselves from them due to comments and concerns they received about their “harmful” lifestyle. None of the guys showed much of their private life on Facebook, instead they used Instagram to show their interests and what they are occupied with in daily life. Their mothers and fathers and older members of the family have no acquaintance with Instagram, making it a space where their “modern” and “traditional” selves do not collide. Kumar uses Instagram to further enhance an image of him as being rich and fashionable. He recently bought a red Jaguar, or I assume it was his father who bought it for him. His last 5-6 post are all of him inside or in front of the Jaguar, wearing pilot glasses and Tommy Hilfiger shirts, and sometimes, his newly bought puppy, named Beagle, sits on his lap or next to him in the front seat. In addition, he has a second Instagram account where he promotes his manufacturing business. In those pictures he also poses with his car, but wearing shirts and jackets made out of the fabric he is trying to sell. He uses his stylised look and materialistic possessions in the hope of reaching out to people with money who would like to invest in his business. The pictures from his personal account are however very much alike those for his business, and so it seems that he not only uses his seemingly posh lifestyle as a marketing strategy, but really strives to leave the impression of a “fashionable classy guy” among all his Instagram followers. Except from a lot of posing car pictures, his account contains traveling pictures from Goa, shots from inside fancy nightclubs and expensive hotels, a bottle “Johnnie Walker- scotch whiskey”, as well as a few posts of Hindu traditional festivals such as Holi\(^8\). The pictures are aesthetically beautiful to look at, and they all convey a lifestyle of “fun”, which would not be possible without some serious money spending.

\(^8\) *Holi* is the festival of colors which from ancient Hindu times celebrated the arrival of spring and harvest.
Nishant on the other hand, does not have pictures of posh hotels and clubs. Instead, he has many pictures of him where he poses with various people, especially girls. Some pictures are of him dancing Salsa with girls, some with people he has met at Indian Salsa congresses, many are of him and his female best friend, and in some he poses with his friends from kickboxing. Looking at his pictures, one gets the impression that he has a variety of friends, that he is fond of Salsa, and that he knows quite a few girls. Both Kumar and Nishant seem to feel free to post whatever is of their interest as there are no consequences involved. No family member nags about their consumption of alcohol or provoking pictures with girls, simply because they are not part of their world on Instagram. It seems like Instagram helps them with creating a clear-cut line between who they are with their family, and who they are when not with their family. Knowing that there is no one who could interfere with their life shown on Instagram, makes social media perhaps especially appealing, and helps them to better draw a line between the “traditional” and “modern” side of themselves. To keep a clear line between the life with one’s family and one’s life “out there”, is not as easy in countries where modernization is practiced more directly, where agents of the traditional (parents, teachers, grandparents, priests, teachers etc) come to see and interact with the young adults while they engage with the “modern” world. When the “modern self” is restricted majorly to media consumption, it makes it perhaps easier to handle the situation they are in?

**Dress as an expression of status**

In his chapter *Dress as an expression of the pecuniary culture*, Veblen (1899) explains how dress and the type of clothes a person wears are the easiest of all methods to show status and wealth, as it is what we encounter at first glance when we see a person. Both, the male and female dancers would turn up with a new set of clothes at each social. Supposedly the dancers reused their outfits several times, but I never noticed any girl wearing the exact same outfit twice. For the guys, the selection of clothes is a bit more limited, but the male dancers too were varied in their dressing style. If someone was wearing a dress or top, they had worn before, it was with a new combination of wearables, like a different jacket or earrings. Consuming clothes like that, signalling one’s participation in conspicuous waste, is effective in itself, as it shows social worth. However, Veblen (1899) takes it further by saying that the consumption of dress and the displaying of it is more far reaching than making a statement about being in the position to afford such consumption. To further enhance the social worth of a person, the wearer’s clothes should make visible to the people around that he or she is not engaged in any type of productive labour (Veblen, 1899).
By wearing jewellery, high heels and elegant dresses, the salsa dancers suggest that they are not in a position to do any form of practical work and with that marking their participation in leisure and detachment from the working classes. They are consumers, exempt from the need to produce.

The identification of “world class citizen” through performance and performance of status symbols

Kumar himself said that he wants to be respected by the people he meets, and respect according to him is gained by having money, looking good and hanging out with people who have these attributes. Having a good reputation and high status was important to him and that image he tried to uphold through certain actions and certain behaviours. In order to preserve people’s image of him, he slipped into different characters and these characters were shaped and reshaped by him in order for them to not die. In The presentation of Self in everyday life Goffman (1992) says that the best way to understand human action in social spheres is to look at people as actors on a social stage who try to influence the audience’s view of them. He uses the term “act” to describe all the activities a person performs in a period of time while being together with a group of people. The people who have to be there in order for the “act” to happen he calls “audience”. Further he uses the term “facade” (appearance) to describe the diverse expressive tools (clothing style, use of language etc) a person utilizes, consciously or unconsciously to present himself in a certain way under “the act” (p. 27).

Kumar always wanted to be viewed as an ambitious and hardworking guy who is financially well off. When asking him if he will come to a social or a night out, he would often reply that he needs to do a lot of work as his work demands so much time of him. The next day however we often got to know through his girlfriend that they had spent the evening together and that he had not been working. When I visited him at his office one night, which is also the place where he lives, some of his co-workers were still there. It was 8 pm when I arrived and Kumar and another lady were still working, sitting around the table with each their Mac open. Kumar was sitting very upright in the chair with wireless earphones in his ears, talking to someone on the phone. He had his white long sleeve shirt on and torn light blue jeans with sneakers. He was more serious, and calmer compared to when we all were out together in a bigger group. He also did not crack any jokes as he usually did.
After getting off the conversation on the phone, he gave me a half-hearted side hug and apologised for talking on the phone. Then he introduced me to the woman sitting at the table. He did not say anything about what job she does or what his relation to her is, he only introduced her by her name. First after he had dismissed her, he told me she is his assistant who does everything he tells her to do in terms of computer related stuff- like making the website for his business. He had just come back from a fashion show in Delhi where he got to show-case his “Demin collection” and the two of them were now busy with putting the pictures from the show on the website. Another guy whom he addressed as “runner” was also there at the office. He is responsible to take care of everything needed outside the house, running errands for Kumar. Another guy was also there, who is his cook. The cook makes breakfast and lunch for him every day (having a cook and housekeepers is standard for people from the middle-class and up). Kumar asked me several times if I wanted to eat something or if I wanted something from outside, telling me that he could arrange for everything I wanted or needed. After politely declining all his offers of diverse food and beverages he could arrange for me, he asked “the runner” to go and get a Bubble tea for me from the shop downstairs.

By being the meddler and showing that he can make everything happen with his “helpers” and his money he was depicting an image of power and importance, whether intentionally or unintentionally. His need to show his importance and high status became very clear through story’s he would tell. The story’s would mostly evolve around rich people or persons with some type of power position in Hyderabad. Whenever he talked about these people, one could hear a tone of admiration in his voice, a desire to be a symbol of importance himself. Most of the times he would bring up these people with reference to situations he personally had experienced, situations where he was in trouble and where his connections to people with high status or power had helped him out of these.

“My dad is very reputed and known, and I asked him for help when someone was blackmailing me. He knows a lot of powerful people, so he took me to the Police-chief of the state, and I met her. She was very friendly to me, so any issues I tell her name and then they change things. Just show her phone number and they’ll be on my side. I lost my passport and I went to the police asking for a complaint-letter. He told me I will not get it. Telling me my story did not sound right. Then I showed her number and he immediately took me inside to see the Police-officer, even though he was in a meeting”.
His connection to the police and powerful people in the city would come up quite often during conversations, especially if there was a situation where one possibly could need his contacts. He would take pride in talking about his important contacts and convey that as we are with him there is nothing to worry about, as he could get us out of trouble in a blink of an eye.
Chapter 6 –

Postcolonial identity in a changing society

As described above, the Salsa dancers had their ways of stating that they belong to the segments of society part of the “world class”, ways of being which very much contrasts with what they have been taught by their families. In what follows, I will to the contrary show the ways the Salsa dancers very much associated themselves with Indian traditional values and customs, picked up from their families and other spheres of society. Antonymous to feeling connected to the wider world and their identity as “world class citizen”, the dancers were expressing proudness and a longing for their traditional roots, their “Indianness”, and “the old India”. In certain situations, and moments, the dancers expressed a nostalgia connected to the pre-colonial period of the Indian-nation, and a need to show that India is unique and differentiated from the West and rest. It was first in 1947 India became its own, independent nation, and the fear of being reigned and dominated by outsiders, seemed to still prevail in the minds of the dancers. They seemed to be emotionally attached to the food coming from the region they grew up, Indian music, traditional, as well as the newer Bollywood music and Indian movies with strong moral messages or with historical content, depicting India in ancient times. Several movies released in Indian cinemas the recent years evolve around myths of ancient India, founded upon Hindu philosophy, and these have also gained international interest.

One of the most seen movies in Indian cinema is “Baahubali- the beginning” which was released in 2015. The story takes place in the ancient kingdom of Mahishmati, a city which in present day is situated in central India, in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Together with the follow-up “Baahubali 2- the conclusion”, the two movies were made on a budget of 66 million USD, making 20 USD in the US alone (Upadhyaya, 2017). The plot revolves around battles between kingdoms, strong family relations and romantic love, including several moral messages conveyed trough dramatized and emotionally loaded dialogues. Siddharth, Abhay and I went to see “Baahubali 2-the conclusion”, and the days after the movie, they played songs from the movie every morning.
They brought up the movie again and again, discussing how it would have been like to live during that time (around 900 years ago), fascinated by the beautiful sceneries, the strong bonds of the families, and the aspiration of pride and honour among the male characters. Both of them enthusiastically talked about how rich India is because of its history, religion and cultural diversity. The movie did seem to touch them deeply because the outer world (the movie) and their inner world were melted together. The movie reminded them of their heritage, and the messages and moral of the story was in correspondence with what they have learned of customs and Hindu teachings from their own families. Perhaps especially because of the fast pace changes happening with Western influence, the dancers seemed to have a strong urge to cut themselves off from this international chain and define their “Indiannes” and idiosyncrasy of their country. The overly confident way of talking about their country and the pride they would express in certain situations, was a shock to me at times, maybe because I am half German and raised in such a way to not show any pride or love for my country. Despite the many types of cuisines available to them, Indian food was considered to be the best in the world. Indian food came up quite often in conversations, and the dancers would take pride in talking about both local and national dishes, telling me everything I need to try during my stay. Devika was shocked during our interview, when she found out that I had not been to her hometown Kolkata. She looked at me with an angry expression and then she repeatedly explained that it is worth visiting her city only for the food. I promised her that I will try to come, because if I had not, she would have continued insisting the entire night.

One evening, I was invited over to Rajit’s and Asha’s house. Rajit is a friend of Abhay and they got to know each other through their work at Microsoft. Rajit loves to dance and has taken Salsa classes before, but as his wife Asha prefers none choreographed dancing, he has stopped practicing Salsa and instead joins her with freestyle dancing on a night out here and there. They had recently bought themselves an apartment which was only a 5-minute drive from where Abhay and Siddharth stayed, so we were visiting each other quite often. I do not remember how the subject came up, but that evening, we had a long conversation about how the colonisation by the British has influenced the way Indians have and are still viewing beauty in terms of skin color. Asha and Rajit explained that especially in the 80’s and 90’s, being fair was a must in India in order to have a main role in a movie. If you were not fair enough you would only get a side role. First in the course of the last 10 years, actors who are not typically fair have been labelled as “sexy” by Indian media and magazines.
“Indians never had racism... it was the West who brought it upon. Black supermodels were not there in the West some years back and still there are few. After colonization by the British, Indians also thought that whiteness is something superior. Even now if a guy goes out to hunt a girl, the criteria is often that she should be fair. It is a bonus that the guy or the girl is tall also. Being educated is on top of the list. I find it hypocritical...if you read the media. Why should people be white in a country where the sun is shining every day!? Maybe today the British are not racist anymore, but in the course of ruling for 200 years you are bound to have these thought processes included in society, where white skin is considered superior and beautiful and all. And after 200 years, after leaving the country, you cannot expect people to forget everything right. 200 years are 5 generations or more... Maybe four lifetimes of people. So, all they knew was that fair skin is good. Now it is taking a positive direction.”

Asha’s statement nicely shows that the process of “decolonization” is still going on, and that slowly over the last years people have been able to see the still present influence of the colonial time, and with that awareness are taking a step back from earlier given and blindly followed believes. Together with the realisation of haven taken on (involuntary) norms implanted by a foreign country, which to a certain extend are still practiced today, the need to define what “Indiannes” is can become intensified. Naturally, feelings of unfairness and despair against the colonizers can act as a driving force to protect one’s culture from more “invaders” (outside influences) and foster a sense of national identity (Loomba, 2005).

I remember really well a discussion I had with Siddharth about nationalism and my feeling of annoyance towards him because I could not understand his way of thinking at all. Every time you go to a movie theatre in India, before the main movie starts, the national anthem is played and the Indian flag with its orange, green and white stripes is shown on the screen. Everyone stands up, normally with the right hand on the chest, while singing the national anthem out loud. After going through this experience a couple of times, I addressed this custom, asking Siddharth why the government has implemented this policy in the cinemas. Maybe it was my underlying scepticisms in the tone of my voice which triggered him, because the next minutes in a slight aggressive attitude, he rambled on about how the national anthem is important for the nation as it reminds people that Indian’s stand together, in spite of the land’s division by hundreds of languages, multiple religions and classes and castes. He then said, in an even more aggressive tone, that he will kick everyone’s butt who disrespects the national anthem and does not get up on their feet when it is played.
I understood and could agree with the point about the positive effect of using the national anthem as a way to foster unity, but his willingness to kick someone in the name of the nation, I found an exaggeration. If he actually would be capable of doing what he said is something different, but his statement showed a strong dedication to keep the country together, as well as his fear that the nation might get split even more. Siddharth’s nationalistic feelings, connected to the fear of losing a sense of a united “Indianness” and national distinctiveness, could arguably be linked to a colonial memory and post-colonial identity.

Indian literary scholar Ania Loomba (2005) cites novelist George Lamming who describes how the experience of colonialism resides in people’s consciousness a long time after the actual colonisation. Loomba looks at the diverse ways colonialism is dealt with by the people colonised during the colonisation period and after, challenging the idea of colonial resistance predominately being politically driven, by shining light on how colonial injustice and resistance towards it can be dealt with and expressed on an individual and emotional level. Looking at the history of Indian nationalism, Chatterjee makes “a distinction between nationalism as a political movement which challenges the colonial state, and nationalism as a cultural construct which enables the colonised to posit their autonomy” (cited in Loomba, 2005 p. 159). He claims that before nationalistic political movements were organised against the colonial rule, people created their own anti-colonial nationalism by dividing the world/society into two domains. An outer world, which encompasses materialism, economy, technology and science, and an inner world, considered to be the core of Indian culture, including spiritualism, religion, customs and the family. The latter is considered to be the soul of Indian culture, and the more the West influences the outer world, the stronger the need becomes to protect the inner (Loomba, 2005 p. 159). “The (…) inner core central to the construction of anti-colonial national identities is seen to be shaped by a shared national past or a cultural essence which in turn becomes synonymous with a religious or racial identity” (Loomba, 2005 p. 163). The movie Baahubali can be seen as symbolising a shared past. It highlights the cultural essence of India by conveying morals through ancient stories and religious texts, and depicting great, heroic men who fought for their kingdom in the name of their ancestors and Gods.
In the course of my fieldwork, I came to understand that Baahubali had become a legend among Indians. Walking down the streets, or when sharing a rickshaw with others, his name was often mentioned. I did not understand what exactly was said about the hero or the movie, but that there was pride and admiration attached to Baahubali was clear. Benedict Anderson⁹ has talked about how essential imagination is in order for there to be an understanding of a nation. According to him, the national community lies in the head of people (imagined), as its members do not know each other personally, but think that they have a shared connection. Movies such as Baahubali, can bring forth that feeling of connection, as the plot centres around Indian mythology, traditions, and Hindu religion, which makes people forget about the country’s huge diversity for a moment and sense and think about a shared common past, about their roots, which crosscut current religious, political, and cultural divisions. On one end then, Siddharth’s and Abhay’s expression of nationalistic pride and India’s unique characteristics can be connected to a post-colonial (national) identity. However, fear seems to also have a play in this and can be seen as a catalyst for forming such an identity. In a time where outside influences and changes happening within Indian culture threaten traditional values, taught from family members, it seems almost instinctual to try and find ways to augment them. When we try to make sense of things, we usually use past experiences as a map to orient ourselves on (Cohen, 1989). When we fail to calculate and convert the unknown into a form known to us, fear normally sneaks in (p. 99).

Cohen (1989) further says that it however would be a mistake to define reminiscence and nostalgia attached to a past culture and tradition as simply “traditionalistic”, believing that the given society is unable to deal with present circumstances. Rather he points out that the past is used actively, as a resource to better take on the present. The past is selected carefully to fit into the picture of present day influences, whereof myths and folk histories are especially efficient as they are “beyond time”, unable to be affected by critical examination of historians and other scholars who might question their historiographical believability (Cohen, 1989). Symbols of the past, such as strong family bonds and a society firmly rooted in religion, as shown in Baahubali, together with timelessness, Cohen (1989) argues; “attain particular effectiveness during periods of intensive social change when communities have to drop their heaviest cultural anchors in order to resist the currents of transformation” (p. 102).

Siddharth’s and Abhay’s extreme enthusiasm for and involvement with Baahubali can be seen as a need to anchor themselves, an attempt to reconnect to the traditional aspects of themselves. However, the need to connect with their heritage and identity connected to traditional and religious values is not random, but is happening in a time where “traditional Indian culture” is tested and formed by influences from other cultures and countries. The post-colonial identity has in a way always been present, but as a consequence of the changes happening around (and within), the post-colonial national identity becomes intensified due to the fear of a future without a solid anchor.
Chapter 7 –

Betwixt and between

With support of Jean-Paul Sartre’s work *Being and Nothingness* and his concept of *Vertigo*, I will in this chapter show that the Indian Salsa practitioners are experiencing a type of identity crisis. For the first time in their life they have the freedom to create a life of their own. Distanced from family and with less social obligations, the world lies in front of their feet, waiting to be grasped. Moreover, with the modernization processes taking place in India, opening up for increased exposure to new and various people, ideas, and viewpoints, the dancers are facing a set of new challenges regarding their identity. With support of Berger, Berger, and Kellner’s concept of *The Homeless Mind*, I will in this chapter explain how modernization processes contribute in creating changes in the individual’s consciousness, and that these changes ultimately lead to questions of the individual’s identity and existence. I am arguing that; in addition to a more distanced relationship to the family, modernization processes are contributing to the experience of unstable identities among the dancers, driving them into a state of confusion and psychological apprehension. The salsa participants are first and foremost afraid of themselves and their freedom, as for the first time in their life they are free to do whatever. They have what Sartre describes as *freedom-anxiety*. And this *freedom-anxiety* has to a big extend come about as a consequence of modernization processes which they find themselves part of.
Over half of the Salsa dancers I encountered at socials had moved to Hyderabad for job purpose only, many of them leaving their parents behind in their hometown, and a few taking their parents with them. As many are on their own for the first time over a long time, they experience more freedom in creating their everyday life as compared to at their parents’ home where their conduct is bound to their familial-self. Nitin, a 23-year-old guy from the outskirts of Delhi with a BA in computational engineering came to Hyderabad 1 year ago as he was offered a job at Microsoft. Before moving to Hyderabad and during his education he stayed with his parents and was financially supported by his father who is an accountant. Living with one’s parents up to after graduation is the case for almost all middle-class children in India, as the government does not provide much support for higher education, making the family the primary sponsor for students.

Among the main informants, Kumar, Nitin, Nishant, Siddharth, and Rai, Rai, Nitin and Siddharth had all come from different parts in India in order to start a new job or search for one. Among Kumar and Nishant, who both were born and raised in Hyderabad, only Nishant was living with his parents. Kumar had left his father’s house and moved into his office place, a rented flat where he for 2 years ago established his own business of textile manufacturing. Not married, without a family of their own and physically as well as financially detached from their parents, the dancers are in a position to focus on themselves without interferences, for most of them for the first time in their life. “It is not that people coming to salsa are very rich. But there is one factor. Young people nowadays do not have any family burden. We waste the money on ourselves. In my father’s generation it was different. He had to take care of his siblings and send money back home. Whoever comes to salsa, their parents are well established, and they are not married. You can use the money for your own skill or interest” (informant Somya).

10 By the ‘familial self’ Roland means; “a basic inner psychological organization that enables women and men to function well with the hierarchical intimacy relationships of the extended family, community, and other groups” (cited in Kopf, 1990 p. 2).
Looking at technocrats working for a US based IT firm in New Delhi, India, Gupta and Panda (2003) have looked at the traits of collectivism and individualism, studying how an elementary collectivistic society like India can change to a more individualistic one through a variety of modernization processes. Even though the study of individualism and collectivism is multidimensional, it has been revealed that traditional collectivistic societies have become more individualistic because of modernization processes entailing; economic growth of the country, the utilisation of modern technologies, market capitalism, increased settlement of the middle-class in cities, higher competition, and the constant exposure to mass media (p. 3). As a result of these changes, people of the educated middle-class moving to the city or living in the city with a decent monthly salary, have the capacity to think about themselves and what they want to spend their money on.

For my informants, living alone and managing finances on their own was viewed as a marker for independence and freedom. Having the family members at a distance and increased self-regulation when it comes to how to spend one’s money, it is as if a whole new world of possibilities and choices has opened up. Financial independence, resulting in increased mobility and with that exposure to more possibilities has given the dancers the option to freely choose what they want to do and in what way to go about it. This major transition, from having a rather bounded place within a network of social relations (within the family home) and being restricted in some ways, to being more or less on your own, experiencing a feeling of unboundedness, seemed to have set in motion a state of both; overwhelmingness and thrill among the dancers. On one end; “going out there”, exploring new territory is exciting and inspiring, while on the other, it can be frightening and ground shaking. Also, other factors such as changes happening within the city as a consequence of modernization processes, discussed previously, are contributing to shifts taking place in the dancer’s way of perceiving themselves as well as their surroundings. With the idea of the homeless mind, developed by Berger et al., I will now try to make understandable how changes in the surroundings and modernization processes taking place within Hyderabad, and Indian cities at large, have, and still are impacting the dancer’s identity and the way they view themselves.
Modernization processes and their impact on the individual’s way of thinking and seeing the world

1. Technological advancements

Berger et al. (1974) have looked at three major factors of modernization, which in their view are impacting the individual’s way of thinking and which are likely to change the individual’s view of his identity. The first aspect of the modernization process which brings about change in thinking about oneself and the society one lives in, is the technological production. The authors state that economic growth of a society which is brought about by technological advancements, has created new ways of doing things, and that these ways of doing carry over to the way of thinking in everyday life. Using car factory workers as an example, the authors talk about the concept of Componentiality, and how this concept is carried over into the workers everyday thought process. Componentiality, from a technological perspective describes the breaking up of the final product into different components. In order for the car to become a final product, it has to undergo different stages, and each worker, even though just doing one or two of the components, knows this. He/she understands that objects and things can be made sense of or accomplished by looking at the separate components which make up the whole (Wilson, 1996). Despite the segregation of the workplace and private life, the ways of thinking derived from the workplace are transmitted to the individual’s everyday life. “What is carried over, of course, is not specific items of knowledge but the general cognitive style that pertains to this type of knowledge” (Berger et al, 1974 p. 30). They argue that the transfer of the cognitive style (way of thinking) developed from a technological standpoint into the personal life of the individual is a problem of modern consciousness. When the worker figures out that the problem-solving attitude used when trying to fix a technical problem of a machine does not work in other spheres of life, a feeling of confusion or unease may arise. As a consequence of such experience, the individual might develop strong, defensive reactions, leading him or her to for example take up a hobby as kayaking, deriving from the urgent need of being closer to nature and away from the otherwise “technocratic” life (Berger et al, 1974).
2. Anonymous social relations

Another consequence of the modernization processes which derives from the technological production, and which I find very relevant in the Indian context, is the concept of *anonymous social relations*. In the setting of a factory, or in the case of my informants who work in IT companies such as Microsoft, co-workers are inscribed into the consciousness as both; unique individuals and *anonymous functionaries* (Berger et al, 1974 p. 34). Each worker is specialised in a certain skill, making him unique in his way, and at the same time he knows he could be replaced at any time by someone else who has the same or similar qualifications. As long as the end product is the same, it does not matter by whom it was made, and this understanding lessens peoples more personal relation to others in society according to the authors (Wilson, 1996). They further state that this more anonymous way of looking at others also applies to the experience of oneself. The *componential* aspect which is essential for the process of technological production, and which is carried over to social relationships, thus also effects the way the individual experiences his/her own identity. The individual experiences himself now in two different ways; one being that of a unique individual, having specific qualities, and the other being the more anonymous self. This dichotomy in the experience of one’s identity creates a space for the individual to look at himself from a distance, reflecting on certain features of his identity (Berger et al, 1974. p. 34). In some cases, the individual might not be able to connect with some of the components of his identity, for example with the anonymous self in the work context, leaving him to feel alienated and confused, adding to the feeling of what the authors refer to as *homelessness*. In the case of my informants, this lessened personal touch of viewing social relations stands very much in opposition to the more particular and context-sensitive way of viewing the world which they are used to within the family context. Separated from their *familial-self* and experiencing this more anonymous existence within society, Nitin, Nishant, as well as some of the other Salsa dancers showed a need for being considered important and unique, and this desire was saturated through their strong identification with their workplace.
How the dancers dealt with the “anonymisation” of social relations

One night, like the many other nights, a little crew of Salsa dancers went for an afterparty at Novotel after the Salsa social was over. Novotel is one of the few places in Hyderabad which serves alcohol and is open after 12 am, hence, most of the crowd which wants to continue partying until late gathers there. We were all sitting in the corner of the sofa, each having a beer in our hand, when Nitin and Anay started a discussion with two of the girls; Somita and Deepika. I do not know how the conversation started, but suddenly both the guys and the girls started to raise their voices. The boys, working for Microsoft were coming up with several arguments for why it is better to work for Microsoft than Google. The girls on the other hand, both working for Google started arguing against, listing all the reasons for why Google is the best place to work at. One of the many reasons they brought up was the point of the much better tasting food their canteen is providing as compared to Microsoft. The boys then fired back with telling about all the international dishes their canteen is serving. The conversation lasted for about 10 minutes, with both parts firing comments at each other until they finally agreed to disagree. Even though the discussion had a humoristic aspect to it, sometimes it was the girls who smiled or laughed, and sometimes the boys, both “teams” were fully committed to their standpoints, giving the impression that they were serious about their utterances. Working for an international and good reputed company such as Google or Microsoft, visibly evoked some sort of pride in them, and was something they gladly identified themselves with. Similarly, also Nishant wanted to be identified with the work he does and his place within the IT-company he works for. If the conversation was not about girls, Nishant liked talking about how much needed he is at the IT firm he works for, proudly explaining that once in a while his boss or co-workers phone him on Sundays, which normally is his day off, asking him to come to the office in order to fix a software problem. It happened several times that he wrote me on messenger or called me from his workplace, solely to recount for how much he is valued in the office because of his great skills. One Sunday afternoon he phoned me up saying; “Johanna! I am calling from the office. They needed me to come today, even though it is raining. I had to go all the way from home on a Sunday, just because they need me to fix the problems. They can’t do it without me, haha.”
This incidence, as well as the other one described above, makes visible a sort of resistance to the changing processes and feeling of homelessness the dancers are experiencing. Late capitalism has changed the working conditions of many companies, and this has a huge effect on the consciousness of the workers (Sennet cited in Ortner, 2005 p. 43). High instability, partly because of inflated competition, and the practices of “downsizing” and “reengineering” (p. 43), which contributes to an increased feeling of insecurity, is dealt with by the dancers by clinging even more to their position and role within the workplace.

3. Plurality of life-worlds

The third and last major aspect of modernization processes contributing to the feeling of homelessness is the pluralization of life-worlds. The life in the modern world is normally disjointed, in the sense that there are several compartments in the individual´s life, which all relate in a different way to the individual (Berger et al, 1974). Through modern technology and mass communication, people of a society are introduced to new ideas and viewpoints, making them put a question mark behind former unquestioned beliefs (Berger et al, 1974). The salsa dancers are bombarded with new and diverse information through movies (international as well as local), TV, the internet, and social media on a daily basis, broadening their minds and simultaneously weakening their integrity of their “home world” (Berger et al, 1974 p. 67).

Staying at a friend’s place in Bangalore for a couple of days, the contrast of “home world” versus the more segmented world the salsa dancers encounter when working, meeting friends and dancing, revealed itself very clearly. Like most other Indian families, Sanjini’s family has their own Hindu temple for worship in their house. Every morning the grandmother plays Puja music (prayer music) while kneeling and praying for minimum one hour in front of the God’s and Goddesses who inhabit the temple in form of decorated statues. Within Hinduism, being vegetarian is advocated in some of the influential scriptures and as Sanjini’s grandmother is highly religious, she follows vegetarianism, including the non-consumption of eggs.

11 Sanjini was not an informant but a friend who I knew from my previous visits to India. We did a dance-therapy course together in Delhi in 2017.
During one of the days of my stay with her family, Sanjini took me out for a lunch date. As there was so much food left after finishing eating, we asked the waiter to parcel the leftovers for us. What we had forgotten was that one of the dishes contained eggs. In the evening of the same day, Sanjini told me over dinner that her mother had found the eggs in the fringe and told her that this mistake could not happen again, as it makes her grandmother very upset. Her grandmother had also talked to her, scolding her and telling her; "What you did today is shameful!". Sanjini explained to me that her grandmother got offended as bringing eggs inside the house is according to her considered disrespectful towards the God’s. Sanjini further explained that she and her parents eat eggs, but that they out of respect for her grandmother’s believes do it outside of the house.

Figure 4: One example of how a temple can look like inside a home. This photo was taken inside Nitin’s apartment in Hyderabad and is an “inbuilt” temple. Photo taken by author.
Unlike Sanjini who is much more exposed to a variety of components of Indian society, and more involved in “the modern world”, the various sectors of life of her grandmother are bound together by her religion, giving meaning to everything. The reality for Sanjini is however completely different, as she is not religious, she does not experience the same degree of integration within society as her grandmother and parents do through their religious beliefs. “Because of the plurality of social worlds in modern society, the structures of each particular world are experienced as relatively unstable and unreliable, [and] consequently the institutional order undergoes a certain loss of reality” (Berger et al, 1974 p. 77). Knowing that one’s need for stability cannot be found in the diverse compartments and social “life-worlds” one inhibits on a daily basis, the individual now tries to find stability within himself. “On one hand, modern identity is open-ended, transitory, liable to ongoing change. On the other hand, a subjective realm of identity is the individual’s main foothold in reality” (Berger et al, 1974 p. 78). Put in other words; the individual’s identity, which is undergoing constant change, is at the same time subject to the search for stability. It is then perhaps not shocking that “modern men and women”, find themselves in a state of constant confusion and insecurity (Berger et al, 1974).

Anxiety as a manifestation of freedom: “The cliff-walker”

In his book *Being and nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes the character of the Cliff-walker, who like the Salsa dancers finds himself insecure about his identity. Walking along a dangerous and steep path, the “cliff-walker” feels scared, almost anxious, but not because he has calculated all the things which possible could go wrong; like slipping on a stone or getting knocked to the side by a strong wind, leading him to fall down the cliff. He is scared because in that moment he does not trust himself nor his actions, realizing that he could willingly throw himself off the cliff (Wang, 2018). It is precisely this in-between state; of being on the edge of a cliff, torn between the desire to jump and the fear of death, my informants find themselves in. The cliff-walker’s fear partly arises from the external forces which are not in his control (as described in the previous chapter), however the main cause is his distrust towards himself. Sartre uses the term *Vertigo* to describe a form of anguish, by anguish referring to the fear of oneself in comparison to fear of outside forces and circumstances. In other words, *Vertigo* describes the distrusts the man has towards himself and the fear which arises out of his realization that he would be willing to take the chance and jump. In that moment he realizes that he is completely free to do whatever he wants, and that is what scares him (Wang, 2018).
The “cliff-walker” is a very particular example, but what Sartre wants to convey is that our confidence in what we think we are and how we think we will act, in other words, our identity, can suddenly tremble (Wang, 2018). The state of vertigo can arise in all types of situations, making us realize that the ability to change lies in our own hands. Usually, people like to go forward steady and secure, resting on the idea that; “this is who I am, and this is how I do it”. However, when we realize that our identity is unstable and changeable, we might want to be someone else or do something completely different (Wang, 2018). Sartre criticizes “deterministic excuses” which he explains as being excuses resting on the idea that everything in life is predetermined and not in one’s own control. He does not deny the fact that certain parts of our identity are pre-given and non-changeable, as our self is determined by several factors which we have not chosen ourselves, like our culture or birthplace (Wang, 2018). But what he means, according to Wang (2018) is that; even though “essential” aspects of being human exist, we also possess the ability to go beyond our identity. We identify with our thoughts and feelings and our surroundings, but simultaneously we can become conscious of these, and thus look at ourselves more objectively, from a distance (Wang, 2018). In these moments we realize that our identity is changeable and has to be created or recreated by ourselves in order to continue existing (Wang, 2018). The realization of our agency and active role in shaping our self is what according to Sartre brings us the feeling of anguish (Wang, 2018).

Some people may be thrilled by this experience, enjoying the feeling of total freedom and becoming euphoric because of all the possible options which are there, while others, may find themselves being terrified by this revelation, feeling that everything they have “build up” and thought of themselves comes crashing down. With reference to repetitious episodes from the field, I will show that my informants stand in the middle, getting pulled to each end, experiencing both euphoria and anxiousness. Testing the territory on one end, but then going back to the other, staying in that in-between phase, instead of taking a risk. I am of course not in any position to say anything about what feelings my informants are experiencing, as these are individual and subjective. What I am attempting to do here is to affirm my analytical theory by referring to their actions and behaviour I got to observe in the course of the fieldwork.
First, I will highlight the ways in which the guys would express their excitement and euphoria of being free to do whatever they want. Within the Salsa social context, as well as in other settings, they would express this through the actions of flirting with girls, drinking, and partying. These attributes of their behaviour could best be described as typical teenage behaviour, testing new territories and enjoying these to the fullest.

**The state of Euphoria**

Generally, when Nishant, Kumar, Nitin, Rai, Louise, and I were together, the atmosphere would always be light and filled with lots of sarcasm, laughter and flirting. One evening, we took a trip to the old town in order to try Haleem, which is a famous dish made out of lamb, very popular during Ramadan. The restaurant we went to was packed with families, all having their dinner between 10 and 11 pm. Kumar had ordered a pink milkshake-looking drink with fruits and yoghurt inside, which he wanted us all to try. When Louise put her spoon inside the glass in order to taste, he said; “How deep do you go?” Then every time someone put their spoon inside the drink, he repeated the same thing, everyone laughing at this silly, filthy humour. It was impossible to take him seriously as he would either flirt or crack jokes, hardly saying anything in a serious manner. Whenever being with the guys, it felt like we were all teenagers, just fooling around and not taking life too seriously. Kumar would always come in his Mercedes to socials (bought by his father), or whenever we went out clubbing. After the night was over, he would ask if we (Louise and I) would like a lift home, which we normally happily agreed to. Usually, he had been drinking, but he himself was never bothered by that fact and still wanted to drive. One of the nights, after a Thursday social, Louise, I, and the guys were standing in the parking lot, debating if we should let Kumar drive his car or order a cab instead. The security guys were telling Kumar and Nishant that the police are checking for drunk driving right outside of the gate (this happens on most nights around 12 am as most clubs are shutting then and everyone goes home), so everyone was a bit afraid that Kumar might get caught. Kumar had the opinion that if we wait out for a while till the police is gone, he could drive us home. Louise and I were giggling and laughing nervously, as we were insecure about whether to get in the car or not. Our excitement, as well as our and nervous behaviour, the guys found enjoyable, teasing us and making fun of our scepticism. Once inside the car, Louise was playing the DJ, sitting next to Kumar who had a big smile on his face.
To show off, he would press the accelerator now and then, going up to the maximum speed. Whenever he did this, me and Louise would scream out loud and tell him to slow down. The street was almost completely car free as it was 1 am, but still we were feeling anxious as he was driving really fast. We had to shout at him several times and tell him to stop before he finally took it to his heart and slowed the car down.

Flirting, and “chasing” girls was another prime activity among the guys. Nishant for example had the opinion that “Indian girls like to be chased” and therefore he would not give up easily and be persistent when trying to hit on a girl. One strategy he had was to dance as much as he can with the girl he was trying to hit on, asking her for several dances in the course of the evening. Whenever the girl had a break from dancing he would try to go and talk to her, asking her a lot of questions to check if she likes him back. Sometimes he came back happy after talking to her, saying that she seems into him, and sometimes he came back abashed, saying that she is taken or not interested. Regardless of having success or not, he really seemed to love “chasing” the girls, as whenever he talked about it, his face lit up and he was full of excitement. At the salsa socials the guys were a bit more discrete in showing their interest in girls, as crossing the line with a girl in the Salsa-community could have consequences for one’s reputation. Whenever we went out for clubbing on the other hand, the guys were “full on” flirt modus. Kumar would often bump into a group of people he knows as he usually goes to the same clubs and makes friends with other regulars.

On one of the nights out, Nishant, Kumar, Ashish (a friend of Nishant), Louise and I went to a club called Artistry. The club is part of Novotel, however compared to Novotel which only possesses a cosy bar, Artistry is a proper club with superb sound system and disco lightning. As it is one of the few places which stays open until 3 am, the entry fee is quite high. While waiting in the queue to get in, Kumar noticed a girl he knows in a different group. He shouted at her; “Sabeena, Sabeena!”.

The girl, walking towards us, was dressed in a pink mini skirt with black high heels, and her face was covered in foundation and a rouge which made her cheeks glow. While she walked towards our group, all the guys looked at her as if they wanted a piece of her. Kumar immediately went into his flirt mode; Saying; “You have the sexiest body. You look like a model”. She responded to his compliments with a hysterical laughter which sounded a bit forced. She then told him to shut up, nervously striking her fingers through her hair, as if she wanted to comb it.
During the course of the night, Sabeena would go back and forth between her friend group and ours, and whenever she came over, Kumar would bombard her with compliments and then wait out her reaction. After the club had closed, we wanted to continue the party and as Ashish was in Hyderabad for business and staying at a nice 5-star hotel which his firm paid for, we decided to go to his hotel room. At 3 am Kumar called up Sabeena in front of all of us, asking her if she wants to come over to his studio (where he also lives) to have a photoshoot with him. Nishant who listened to the entire conversation in the background passed the comment; “I can do the lighting!”. It was obvious that Kumar only wanted to show off in front of the guy’s, coming across like a “player” who can phone up a pretty girl just like that and ask her to come over. The entire conversation sounded like a big joke and completely unserious from his side. Him repeatedly saying things like; “I love you Sabeena! I need to see you Sabeena! You know, now a day’s love goes really fast”.

Especially the last sentence is interesting as it reflects some of the ideas and images Kumar holds about how modern love looks like and how it is supposed to operate. As he believes love in today’s modern society is happening fast, he tries to through his actions show that he is a modern man who knows how to behave with girls. Going back to Sartre’s understanding of anguish being a manifestation of freedom, the guys like to play with the identity of “the laid-back guy who is popular among girls”. However, as they understand that the identity is subject to change and not stable, they know they have to reaffirm this identity though their actions. Sartre talks about the concepts of “me” and “essence” as the aspect of a person’s identity which is formed by the past and which is historical in its content. Once the historical content of “me” is recognised by the individual, the historical content needs to either be rejected, affirmed or adjusted (Wang, 2018). Hence, the characteristics of a person’s identity according to Sartre are shaped by the actions the individual freely chooses to conduct at each moment. The cliff-walker’s choice to continue living and not jump from the cliff will persist only if he conserves his choice at each step (Wang, 2018). The guys are therefore obligated to continuously remake the “me” they want to preserve, and in their case, they want to embody what they consider as being a modern, free man who does whatever he desires for.
Figure 5: This is a spot we used to go to when we wanted some quietness. Here, Abhay is gazing over the city, not clearly visible because of all the pollution and fog. Photo taken by author.
Contrary to the euphoric behaviour of experiencing freedom, the guys also showed signs of what Sartre refers to as *freedom-anxiety* which individuals experience as a form for anguish. Sartre says that there are many ways in which a person after experiencing anguish can avoid the responsibility, he has for shaping himself (Wang, 2018). Siddharth for example has moved away from his parents’ home in order to find time to build himself up professionally. His parents do not understand the amount of work which is demanded of him to create websites and mobile applications, as for them the nature of his work as a software developer is unknown. Whenever he is at home at his parents’ house in Bhopal, his parents are asking him for a lot of favours such as going to the bank to deposit money or fixing some internet issue. On top of that, his extended family is also asking for favours and demand of him to come and visit them regularly. Living in the same flat as Siddharth for the 6 months of my fieldwork, I witnessed how hard he tried to work and get jobs as a freelancer. Having failed his Master’s, and not having a solid income as he is unemployed, has given him the feeling of being inadequate. Within the family, as the oldest and only son of the house he has a certain social position and with that position several responsibilities follows. Being away from his fixed role within the family which while he is at home is reaffirmed everyday by his actions (helping out, running errands etc), as well as those of his family (asking him for help, waiting for him to finish certain tasks), he tries to find an identity within his career. He always talked about all the plans he has for his future work life, listing all the things he wants to accomplish and create. He was very occupied with making a change for this world and especially for his country, saying that he wants to become famous and make a name for himself.

Every day he sat in his office chair working on his Mac for about 12 hours, doing nothing else except going to the gym in the morning or evening. As he did not have a stable income, he was always short of money, sometimes borrowing money from friends in order to have enough for food and cigarettes for the month. Sitting inside all day and not leaving the house as he just wanted to focus on work, seemed a bit depressing and he himself told me that he is slightly depressed and lacks self-esteem. There were a few days where he would honestly tell about how he is feeling inside, but these days were few in comparison to the days where he would have his fight mode on.
Instead of taking on one client at a time or doing one online course at the time, he would take all the jobs he could and enrol in 2-3 software courses online, thinking that he would be able to finish all of them on time. This did not happen however, and he was often forced to call up his clients to extend the deadline, or the clients would themselves cancel the project as they were not satisfied with his work. On top of that, he failed in his online Nanodegree twice, leaving him to ask for deadline extensions several times. He sees himself as someone who after hard work can become something great and someone who will create changes for society and people around. Instead of taking on a less paid job, which would give him a regular salary, he sacrifices time and money for the vision of himself as being someone who will be influential and rich in the future. He clings onto a future created identity of him as a guy who will have lots of success, thereby ignoring and postponing the challenges he is facing in the present. He wants to hold onto certain identities, because if he is neither this nor that, he would have nothing to lean on and be forced to really face in Sartre’s words; his freedom-anxiety.

He also liked to strongly identify with being needed by his family members. On a regular basis he complained about his nephew who would call him up to ask him for help with his CV. His sister would also ask him for help several times and he would go through her CV and job application, sitting up all night to correct her papers. He complained quite a lot about people taking up his time and that this has consequences for his own work. Some days it was so bad that he hardly got anything of his work done, leading him to be irritated and tense. I tried to tell him that he has the right to tell his friends and family that he cannot do as much for them at the moment because he has too much going on himself, whereupon he responded with; “They need me. I am the only one who can calm my sister down. And I am the only one who can help my father with the bank. This is how I am. I am a nice guy, so people come to me with their problems”. It came across like he wants and needs to feel needed by others, as the help others ask of him gives him some sort of confidence in that he is important and that his presence matters. In his fear of losing the feeling of being of value, he does not want to reject someone or leave them hanging, as if he would do so, his role of “the kind- smart-helper” which he identifies with might crumple apart. Hence, in order to maintain that identity, he affirms it through his actions of helping and supporting the one’s around him, and through the constant inquires by the ones he helps, he gets the confirmation that he is exactly what he ought’s to be. It is not like he is not needed by his friends and family, but he likes to think they need him a bit more than perhaps is true in reality, in particular when it comes to practicalities. When Siddharth was in UK for his Master’s for 3 years, his family managed fine without him, either doing things themselves or asking someone else for help when needed.
There are several ways in which the individual can try to avoid responsibility for himself and Sartre labels this trying as *self-deception*. One out of many types of self-deception is *sincerity*, which is the trying of matching our outside life with our inner world (Wang, 2018). A person who is caught up in *sincerity* wants to suit his actions with his assumed identity. He basically excuses his actions by saying; “this is who I am”, not wanting to admit to himself the power and agency he has to influence his choices and behaviour and with that his identity (Wang, 2018). By referring to his role as “the kind-helpful son and friend”, Siddharth has a reason to act in a particular way, a way which matches that identity. Sartre says that the list of our sincerity towards certain characteristics of our identities is long and extensive as the individual tries to also identify himself with his morals, emotions, public role, attitudes etc (Wang, 2018). What is important according to Sartre, is that we freely choose to refer to our identities, and that they do not put any constrains on us as we at any time could break out of them and change them (Wang, 2018). In Siddharth’s case it is therefore a choice of him to strongly cling onto certain identities, as he is scared of what might happen if he would let go of these.
Chapter 8 –

Why exactly Salsa?

I have in the previous chapter outlined the ways the dancers expressed the ambivalence felt as a consequence of the situation they find themselves in. However, the important question still remains; What has Salsa dance to do with all this?

Dance as a way of communication

As Lynne Hanna (1987) conveys; “Dance is a conceptual natural language with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, a system of physical movements, and interrelated rules guiding performance in different social situations” (p. 5). On one end, dance has universal characteristics which can be found across all societies, and on the other end, dance is situational and unique and needs to be understood in the context and the specific society in which it is practiced (Lynne Hanna, 1987). As dance is both private and public, individual and collective, universal and situational, dance can be a good resource to draw upon when being in a confusing situation. The dancer’s rootedness in customs and tradition on one side, and their connection to the global and modern on the other, makes Salsa dancing and salsa socials a good platform for articulating, through the body, the ambivalence felt in a time of reorientation and identity formation. “Just as humans reflect upon themselves through different forms of creativity (…), they also reflect upon themselves through dance” (Lynne Hanna, 1987 p. 5). She furthermore describes dance as being communicative, a physical instrument through which one can express feelings and thoughts. Dance can even be a more efficient tool in communicating desires and/or needs than verbally, especially with regards to things which cannot (yet) be talked about (cited in Dyck and Archetti, 2003 p. 116).
The body as a reflection of society

Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1982) describes the human body as being a reflection of society. By that meaning that the society and culture we grew up in determines how we use and perceive our physical body. The body is always a symbol of the social as all the different actions and behaviours we conduct are embedded in the ways we learned how to eat, to move, to behave sexually, and so forth (p. 65). The way we use the body is hence to a large extend determined by the limit’s society places on it (p. 67-70). Further, she makes the distinction between two types of society concerning the body, saying that bodily control is more common in societies which are hierarchical and where formality and defined roles are highly valued. Whereas a more “unbound body” subsists in societies which are more individualistic, where there are less formalities, and room for more intimacy (p. 71).

As there is a correlation between the social reality and the bodily forms of control, the body becomes a sort of symbol and representation of the society one lives in. Hence, in order to be able to abandon control of the body, the social system needs to reduce its control on the individual (p. 81). By placing restraints on self-expression and following conventions, one declares that one accepts the limits ascribed on the body. But by “playing” with the body and “body practices”, one challenges the collective and expresses individuality. In the case of the Salsa dancers, society, represented by certain others (grandmother, parents, priest, brothers, etc.) can discipline the body, while the dance floor is an arena characterized to some extent by a license, where these disciplinary agents cannot reach the dancers. On the dance floor the dancers can report back, “respond”, and confront the collective. Using Lynne Hanna´s and Douglas´s theories about dance being a physical language and the body a reflection of the social and collective, I will on the following pages bring forth how of a unique platform Salsa and Salsa socials are with reference to the dancer’s situation.
Their reasons and motivations

The reasons and motivation to start learning Salsa were many and varied. Some of my interlocutors said that Salsa is easy to learn in comparison to many other dance forms, like hip hop, or Indian traditional dance, where a lot of practice and concentration is demanded. The fact that Salsa builds on a few basic steps was therefore one motivational feature to start a completely new dance form. The social aspect of salsa classes and especially socials, was another factor. As mentioned earlier, around half of the dancers coming to socials have immigrated to Hyderabad mainly due to job opportunities. Coming alone to the city and establishing a network has been difficult for many, so Salsa has been a great help to make friends or at least have a place to spend one’s Saturday evening at. One major reason to start learning Salsa for the guys was the wish to have a platform to interact with girls and possibly find a girlfriend. Rai, having moved all the way from Chennai 3 years back, was honest and straightforward regarding his motivation; “There are no other motivations. Salsa is the best way to meet some new girls, that is the smart way. I wanted to learn salsa 3 years before, when I lived in Chennai. But back then I had lots of distractions, I could visit my friends. But in Hyderabad I am a newcomer, so I get bored every weekend, there is nothing to do”. Even though, not all the guys mentioned that they started learning Salsa with the hope to meet a girl, I believe that Rai’s statement mirrors the motivation of many others. Several of the dancers mentioned that before starting to dance, they were very shy, and that they hardly asked a girl to dance in the beginning, only coming to watch the others dance. It took them several months to feel confident to ask girls and to not get disappointed when being rejected.

Many also emphasized the importance of “connection” in the dance. Although, “connection” was not felt with everyone, and for most it happened very rarely in fact, it was the number one driving force to keep on dancing. The dancers described the feeling of “connection” as being in a state of “flow” where everything feels completely effortless and relaxed. Nishant mentioned the importance of having connection in several of our conversations; “From my 2 years of experience with salsa, there should be connection. The most important is connection. If you want the dance to look good and feel smooth, there must be connection. If you don’t have connection...I did not know until I experienced. How this connection is developed I tried to figure out. There is eye contact, touch, negotiation with the person you dance with”. How connection is experienced by each individual and why this connection enters into the dance between two individuals is not possible to understand, but from what the dancers explained to me and I experienced of “connection”, it is an extremely good feeling which drives you to want to dance more.
With some individuals you experience this “connection” more frequently than with others, and that also explains why some preferred dancing with certain people, asking some of the dancers more often for a dance in comparison to others.

Salsa as a statement and affirmation of being a “world class citizen”

I have put forward some of the motivations to start the dance form in the first place and the reasons for continuously coming back to the dance experience. None of the motivations mentioned above are unique in any way, and they do not stand out from many of the other anthropological studies about why people start dancing Salsa. However, one startling aspect which lends the dance form uniqueness in the Indian context is the physical interaction the dance requires between the sexes. This, I think, is a very important aspect which deserves some extra attention. In the following chapter I will therefore demonstrate how of a unique platform Salsa is in terms of interacting and establishing social relations with the opposite sex in a safe environment, and how that openness for difference and especially the openness for a “new and modern” way of interacting and touching the opposite sex makes the Salsaleros stand out from the rest of the middle-classers, feeding and shaping their identity of “world class-citizen”. I will use Cohen’s argumentation about community being symbolically constructed to show that the want to dance Salsa is not random, but a form of expression which is symbolic as it stands for other things; things which the dancers like to be identified with. Furthermore, socials allow the practitioners to explore the dance and themselves within a safe framework. The semi-private and “protected” space of the socials makes the practice attractive, allowing the dancers freedom and fun without consequences for their daily life. In order to make understandable the uniqueness Salsa provides for establishing relations to the opposite sex and the open-mindedness the dancers possess for dancing Salsa, I will describe some incidents I encountered when taking Salsa outside the social context and into public places inhibited by non-salsa dancers.
People’s reactions to the physical closeness of the dance form when taken out of the social context

One incident which describes the stark contrast between how non-salsa dancers view the dancing between a man and a woman versus salsa-dancers, was when a group of us started dancing Salsa and Bachata at a after-party at a hotel. Somita, Anay, and Aditi (who know each other from Google), as well as Nitin, Nishant and I, had been going to a club for drinks earlier and arrived at Novotel, where the afterparty was supposed to happen, at 12:30 am. Outside of the hotel there were two queues, the left for girls, and the right for guys. High security protocols have been implemented in hotels and malls after 2008 where several people were left dead due to a terrorist attack on two luxury hotels in Mumbai. Several hotel chains in India are now equipped with trace detectors and x-ray scanners, used for checking people for explosives and weapons (Traveller, 2017).

Girls and guys are always separated into two queues as the girls are taken into a box for body scanning, being more protected from public display in comparison to the guys who are being scanned publicly. After our purses had been checked by the x-ray machine, like the ones at airports, we were good to enter the hotel. Inside the hotel bar there was a small stage and a band of 5 guys playing old Bollywood songs, some of the crowd singing along. Nishant immediately reached out his hand and asked me for a dance. He led me to the middle of the dance floor and started with Salsa steps. Some of the people around were standing, but most were sitting in sofas or around tables, sipping their drinks and watching the band and people on the dance floor. It had become a thing among Nishant, Nitin, Kumar and I to dance Salsa and Bachata outside of socials, in clubs or at concerts. Whenever we did this, people around would notice us and look at us. That night too, a lot of people were watching us, giving me and Nishant looks which were suggesting that we were having something romantic going on. After our first dance was over, a couple at one of the tables started to talk to us, telling us that we were dancing very nicely. It seemed like they were fascinated by the style of dance and both me and Nishant felt confident and happy about that people are able to appreciate our dancing.
After Nishant and I had danced both Salsa and Bachata to a couple of songs, Nishant asked another girl, Darsha (a girl he had met some weeks ago at a social and which coincidently was there that night) for a dance. 2-3 minutes into their dance, 3 guys of the same age as Nishant walked towards them and started to say provoking things. They were saying that he should decide which girl he wants and that he cannot fool around like he does. Nishant got annoyed and told them to mind their own business, but Darsha told him to not get into a fight. Nothing more happened, but judging from this incident, the 3 guys seemed to not know so much about the nature of Salsa dance, or they were just looking for an excuse to start an argument. Either way, the guys seemingly did not like to see one guy dancing closely with more than one girl, as this is something they are not used to and something which according to them defies “proper” behaviour. As this incident shows, once Salsa dancing and Bachata was taken out of the Salsa-social context and applied in other public dance places, both positive and negative reactions from people were noticeable. As men and women are never seen dancing or being in close proximity in public in India, it is not surprising that people who are not familiar with Salsa or other couple dances will have a strong reaction the first time they see a man and woman dancing so close.

The “embodied” and visible apprehensive relationship between the sexes when out in public

The general dynamic between guys and girls in pubs and clubs was noticeable different and not as friendly and relaxed as at socials. Once in public, both the men and the women were more alert and careful and more conscious about their behaviour and interaction with the opposite sex. One evening, the social ended a bit earlier than usual as there was some technical problem with the speakers. Deepika and her husband Arjun, who I knew through salsa classes, asked if we wanted to join them for a club called Lal street, close to where the social was happening. Nitin and some friends of him whom he works out with at the gym, Nishant, Deepika, her cousin, Arjun, and I, all joined in. Before leaving, I went to Devika and Ashok to ask if they wanted to come along with us. Ashok said they will come, but Devika looked sceptical and was unable to decide, saying that she only had heard bad things about the club - that the crowd is not good. When the rest of us were leaving, we saw Devika and Ashok sitting in the pub, one floor down from where the social was happening. Devika clearly did not feel comfortable enough to go to the club with us and hence Ashok had to join her, since leaving her alone would be very un-gentlemanly done.
At Lal street (the club) we paid a cover charge of 2000 rupees (approximately 200 kr) for all of us. First, we were not allowed inside as it was couple entry only and we were too many guys and only two girls. But after some back and forth and after paying for the extra guys in the group, they led us in. We got a table on the terrace outside and ordered some food and drinks. Nitin and his friends were eager to dance, but as guys usually are not allowed to dance on the dancefloor without girls in the group, and this was also the case in this club, they had to wait for us to come and join them. We all were dancing and having fun, and then I saw something I reacted to. Deepika enjoyed her dancing (as in making some cool moves and doing some Bhangra), and then Arjun tapped her on her shoulder, signalling to her to “calm down” by moving both his hands down several times. She nodded with her head, indicating that she had understood his message, and for the rest of the night she did not go fully out as before, standing next to him the entire time and doing smaller, less startling moves. For me, her husband’s behaviour felt provoking in the moment, as I did not understand why he would be so controlling and kill the fun she was having. The next day I addressed my observations with Siddharth. He was the opinion that Arjun must have seen some guys in the club who were misbehaving and that he probably only tried to look out for her. He then started to talk about a news case which happened some years back, concerning a girl named Jessica who was shot right in the head by a guy in a club because she refused to dance with him. “Nowadays it is not easy to take guns or knives inside places because of security, so guys throw acid at girls instead. There are some fucked up guys who think they are better than girls, believing that girls are inferior to them. So, if guys look around and feel the crowd is not that good, they might give the girls some warning to be careful”.

Gender inequalities and lack of safety for women has been a big problem in Indian society and an issue which both the male and the female Salsa-practitioners were very much aware of. Sexual harassment, also referred to as “Eve-teasing”, has been and still prevails a huge problem in India. A study of women in Delhi showed that over 90% of the women ranging from 16 to 49 years had experienced some form of sexual assaults in public (Zietz and Das, 2017). The reasons for these big numbers of sexual violence against women are hard to pin down, however, the misbehaviour of men against women can partly be linked to the still prevailing patriarchal system, where boys are raised in a way which gives them more power, mobility and autonomy than girls. From childhood onwards, the boys are been shown by their fathers and other male members of the family that a “real man” should be confident, earn his respect, and be courageous (Verma and Mahendra cited in Zietz and Das, 2017 p. 1231). The girls on the other hand are trained to disguise their bodies and to make their presence less noticeable in public, in order to prevent any provocation (Narayan, 2018).
Social scientist Deepa Narayan, in her book *Chup*, breaks the silence about the oppression India’s women suffer from and in a direct manner puts forward the many way’s girls have been programmed to behave so that they become non-threatening to the public. One of the strategies to make women less threatening, according to her, is by denying that girls have a body at all (Narayan, 2018). She points to several cultural practices which she means are strongly contributing to the denial of girl’s bodies, one of them being to disguise the body. This is done by; “looking down or hanging one’s head, contracting and hunching one’s upper body, and wearing loose, sedate clothing. These practices are meant to delude women into thinking that if they somehow become invisible to men, they will be safe from their unasked-for aggression” (Narayan, 2018 p. 27).

Other factors which contribute to the imbalance in autonomy and freedom between the genders is the issue that kids and young adults hardly are exposed to the opposite sex due to the fact that most government schools provide single-gender education (Mantri, 2016). It is however essential to mention that private institutions have in the recent years provided cross-gender education and most of the country’s universities are gender mixed. Still, many kids are not (if at all) exposed to the opposite gender until secondary school or university, meaning that many have not had the chance to develop a “natural” relationship to the other sex before they are adults. Additionally, “little or no sex education and limited modelling of male-female relationships (…)” contribute to relationships of insecurity between men and women (Zietz and Das, 2017 p. 1231).

With a population so big and varied as in India, and Hyderabad having 23% of its population under the poverty limit (Suares, 2017), it is not surprising that criminal acts and violence is common in everyday life. Because such a large amount of Hyderabad’s population lives in poverty and without education, and many of them, as well as others share different views on how the opposite genders should behave in public, the Salsa dancers have learned how to adjust and respect the many views different people hold. Because most of the informants grew up with servants and cooks in their home, they know that people from lower caste and class have a whole different perspective on what “right and appropriate” behaviour is. Having the cultural differences in the back of their minds, and knowing that provoking behaviour (for girls; wearing too revealing clothes, or for a guy and a girl to hold hands or hug too long) could potentially put them in a dangerous situation, the salsa dancers follow the “public rules” when not at socials.
The women in particular have acquired varied methods for staying out of trouble when being in public and among unfamiliar people. Chandra, one of the women who has come to every social for the last 1 year, explained me the precautions she takes when going out clubbing; “When we go to a club and start dancing, we go in a group and we dance only with the people we know, we do not get to dance with others, even if we wish. Because being a girl or a guy it is not secure at all, right. In India, what happens, if a girl is dancing with a guy, the guy thinks she is open for everything. So, we do not feel like going to others. We will stick together, and if someone wants to join us, we do not allow them”.

There was a visible difference between how the guys and girls acted when out in the streets and clubs and when at socials. The switching between “public” and “private” behaviour seemed to come natural to the dancers as they have learned how to adjust to the multiple environments they find themselves in at all times. However, for me, not being habituated to this “switching” between behaviours in the different contexts, Siddharth had to teach me certain etiquettes which I tried to follow for the rest of my stay. I believe I got to feel the cultural difference of touch between the sexes so deeply because I was in a relationship with Siddharth. My habits of showing my affection to my boyfriend through touch and physical contact I had to completely shut down, which was hard and also hurtful at times. We were never physically close when out in public. Even at home (in the apartment we lived in) we kept our physical distance when other people were around us, whether it was friends, the housekeeper, or cook. It was only me who became so conscious of our physical relationship because it was so differed from what I am used to. For him, in my terms “distant physical relationship”, first entered his awareness and became a topic of discussion when I addressed the subject. There were several situations where I needed physical nourishment and support from him, and were I felt hurt because he was not able to give me what I desired due to the public environment we were in. One of the evenings we went to the cinema to watch “Padmavati”, a movie which is based on texts from medieval India, talking about an exceptional beautiful queen. The movie was blown up tremendously in the media due to protests from thousands of people demanding retraction of the movie because of its “inappropriate” content. The debates and violent protests happening after the movie was released, nicely reflects people’s diverse views about physical intimacy. The queen Padmavati has become a legend in India and as she belonged to the caste of Rajputs (warriors), the Rajputs of today still think very highly of her and take pride in having the same descendants as the queen.
Only one day after the movie was released, I watched the news where they depicted violent videos of groups hitting and beating each other, as well as the police, because the protestors meant that “their” queen had been depicted as impure, asking the central board of film certification (CBFC) to withhold the movie, because of a scene where the queen is being intimate with her king. There is no point in going further into this political event, but this incident nicely shines light on the rather conservative attitude many people hold with regards to the female body and the physical interaction between men and women. At the end of the movie, Padmavati walks into a huge fire together with 16000 other women as a traditional act to symbolize her solidarity towards her husband who was killed. The ritual practice of burning the wife together with the husband (Sati) was practiced for many years in India, until it was abolished in 1829 (India Today, 2018). The end scene where Padmavati walks into the fire with a fearless expression on her face, having thousands of other women behind her who follow her into the flames, was such a touching moment for me that I could not hold back my tears. I think I cried for about 5 minutes. What I needed was for Siddharth to just lay his arm around me, or to take my hand while walking out of the theatre, but that did not happen. Once we sat inside the car, he turned towards me and explained that he felt like hugging me inside the cinema but that he did not do it because he spotted 3 older ladies (aunties) sitting right behind us. If he would have dated an Indian girl, I believe, he would not have felt the necessity to explain his choice of action in the car, as both would share the same understanding of how to behave as a couple in public.

None of the dancers I asked, had seen their parents or any other of their family members kiss, hold hands, or hug in front of them. Abhay, the guy whom was living off and on with me and Siddharth explained how their parents’ generation are not used to showing public affection. Seeing a couple cuddling or holding hands would hence make them feel uncomfortable. He did not know exactly why this is the case, but one of his explanations was that Indians have a big family which is always present in the house, making it difficult to get private space outside of the bedroom. Another reason he came up with, which he thought could explain the carefulness of physical interaction between men and women in public, is India’s extreme diversity of cultures and viewpoints due to the caste system. “People have such a diversity in upbringing and traditions, so people are not on the same level of thinking”. When asking the dancers if their parents knew about them dancing Salsa and Bachata, most said that their parents know they are dancing, but not what type of dance. The argument for not explaining or showing what Salsa is, was that they would not understand and hence judge.
Instructor Susanne explained that she observes lots of thoughts running through people’s minds the first times she asks her students to get into close-hold. “The guys might be thinking; OK is it ok to hold her. And the ladies might be thinking; I do not know, what is his intention? But when you grow into the dance-form you forget about the physical connection, rather this physical connection becomes a way of communication, that’s when you get into the real essence of Salsa”. At the initial phase of learning the dance form, most of the Indian students must overcome the blockages they have in relation to touching the opposite sex. For many, the Salsa class and the socials is a first-time encounter of physical contact with the opposite gender. The practitioners who go on with the classes and who keep showing up to socials and with that gradually overcome the awkwardness and discomfort they experience in the initial phase are driven by something; why else would they put themselves through the discomforts? Every dance form and other practice requires discipline and will power, as no one becomes perfectly skilled just after the first try. But here I am occupied with the uniqueness of Salsa. What sort of label does the practice of Salsa bring with it? What is it particularly about Salsa the Hyderabadi dancers want to identify themselves with?

My argumentation rests on Judith Lynne Hanna’s example of Mitchell’s analysis of the Bisa tribesmen’s kalela dance in Zambia, stating that in a time of changes, people find new ways of moving and expressing themselves as a response to the need of role differentiation in a confusing situation. Mitchell came to conclude that the kalela dance reflects the two most vital aspects of social relationships in the multiracial culture of Zambia, which is; “the degree of westernization and tribal membership” (cited in Lynne Hanna, 1987 p. 217). The modern dresses they wear and the European titles they use shows the adaptation and importance of European lifestyle, and most importantly are reflections of which social position people hold. The eagerness to participate in the kalela performance reflects the eagerness of the dancers to “vicariously be part of the westernized upper levels of the African society from which most are excluded due to lack of such qualifications as wealth and education” (p. 217). The kalela dance expresses the western values the Zambian society has taken on, and although they do not belong to the upper classes of African society, their participation in the dance makes them, at least for a moment, feel like they do. Such as the changes coming from the westernization of Zambian culture has led people to seek participation in the kalela dance, the Salsa dancers will to learn Salsa can similarly be seen as reflecting the need for acquiring a stronger identification with the characteristics they ascribe to a “modern-world class citizen”.

79
By investing money, time, and energy into Salsa, they declare that they belong to the segment of society open for changes and part of the global, and by doing so, the gap between the lower segments of society, as well as the other middle-classers who do not dance Salsa widens, giving the dancers more reason to identify themselves as modern “world class citizens”.

Salsa as an affirmation of being a “world class-citizen” through boundary making

Dancing salsa is hence not only a statement of belonging to the new middle-class, but more importantly it separates the dancers from their parents’ generation and other middle-classers in society which are more conventional. Cohen (1989) argues that; while a community may not have the same features which we link to social movements, a community might fulfill a similar use. By trying to define what a community is and how it should be viewed for theoretical analysis, Cohen steps away from defining a lexical definition and rather looks at the use and function a community serves, namely that the people of the group share some commonalities with each other, which at the same time distinguishes them from other people and members of other groups. Community hence entails the aspect of both; similarity and difference, and this relational concept between the two makes the element of “boundary” central to the notion of community (Cohen, 1989). The boundaries which are marked, and which keeps the community separated from other groups of people, are more often than not symbolic in nature and are created in the minds of its members. Boundaries are expressed differently, for example physically, like the posher location of the Salsa socials, but many are also just thought of and therefore perceived differently by its own people. Cohen (1989) argues that; “boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished” (p. 12). The need to identify with and assert one’s relation to a community, may in some cases come less from the individual’s commitment to the characteristics and content of the community, “but, rather, from the felt need to discriminate it from some other entity” (p. 109).
In the case of the Salsaleros, they encounter a huge variety of people during their day; from the Chai-wallah guy at the corner of their office where they get their fresh hot tea every morning before going to work, their working colleagues whom they see in the office, to their families. Cohen (1989) mentions that the content of the community and its distinctiveness is not as important as the need to display it. In other words, the boundaries the dancers create between themselves and other groups of people, is a way to strengthen their individual identity. The community with its “objective” boundaries, such as the physical space, the location, the codes of communication learned by the dancers, as well as the boundaries created individually in their heads, serve as a compass for their identity, becoming more clear by delimiting similarities to others and what one is not, as much as what one is (Cohen, 1989).

During several of the interviews with both males and females, the topic would evolve around the distinction between “them” and “others”- who do not understand the dance form. Talking downgrading about the people who are not part of the community and the thoughts they have about Salsa, was a way of setting themselves apart from people who represented attributes which they do not wished to be associated with. By highlighting the backwardness and lack of open-mindedness people have whom they encounter on a daily basis, they in an indirect manner conveyed that they possess attributes the “others” lack, and because of that are different. “The people who know the dance, whatever dance form it is, they understand if he/she is in rhythm, if he/she dances good, they understand. But people in my office don’t, they think I am only there for girls... They don’t think of it as dance, but as something sensual”. Nishant’s statement about the people in his office who do not have the ability to see and understand Salsa purely as a dance form, indirectly states that they lack openness and a modern understanding of couple’s dance, which again he possesses, as he is part of the community. Rai explained it like that: “When I say; “I am learning Salsa” to my colleagues, they think it is cool, that I am doing some kind of adventure. It is exotic. Salsa here is exotic. You are a cool person. In office I used to have this reputation as a very formal guy. People think I am kind of tough and strict. When they heard I am dancing, they were like; “oohh... wow, you dance Salsa”. There are 200 persons, but as far as I know, no one except me is dancing Salsa”. In Rai’s case, his work colleagues knowledge about him dancing Salsa and their admiration of the dance-form, as well as their inhibitions of trying it out themselves, lends Rai with the feeling of being a cool and relaxed guy who has the braveness to try something new and different, thereby blending out from the rest of the crowd who are not that open for trying out something very different from what they know and are used to.
His colleagues’ reactions to him dancing Salsa gives him the affirmation of being different and in a way “special” from the rest, which contributes in strengthening his perception of himself as belonging to the segments of society who are open and receptive for difference and change. By dancing Salsa and attending *socials*, the Salsaleros make a statement of being a few steps ahead of other Indians, as they break with the “Indian way” of thinking and acting. Here I am referring in particular to the aspect of touching the opposite sex and dancing in close hold, which according to Indian cultural norms is far from normative, and from their parent’s standpoint would even be considered obscene. Thus, people part of the Salsa community make a direct or indirect statement about standing out from the majority of the population, doing something different and “new”, breaking away from the norms and moralities associated with their parents’ generation. The dancers told me that they know of no traditional Indian dance forms where women and men dance closely, face each other, or are in any form of physical contact. Dance forms exist where the opposite sexes communicate with each other and tell a story, but that communication solely happens through the eyes and facial expressions. The dancers participation in the Salsa-community can hence be seen as a place for shaping and strengthening their identity of “world class citizen”, as the community gives them the eligibility to choose what they want to be associated with, and maybe more importantly, with what they do not. Salsa can hence be described as a symbol as it serves as a reference to other things the dancers want to be associated with. Cohen (1994) explains that the whole point of symbols is that they are used to refer to other things. Salsa then is used by the dancers to make an indirect connection to other things, such as open mindedness, modern, global etc., which they want to be identified with. By dancing, they convey these attributes in an indirect manner. Yet, if one aspect of dancing is that one distinguishes oneself from others in society, what about within the Salsa community? Is there a difference among the dancers in their engagement with the dance form? How serious are they about the practice and their belonging in the community?

**Deep-Players VS Shallow-Players**

Without going too much into detail, I believe it is important to shine light on that there clearly exists differences in the degree of the importance of dancing and belonging to the community. Many of the dancers come and go, and some I witnessed turned up two-three times and then never came back. Clearly there is a difference of attachment and identification with Salsa and the scene among the dancers. Nishant, being a dedicated dancer for 2 years, told me how he really feels about some of the other dancers when I addressed the topic one evening.
As it was Siddharth’s birthday, Nishant and Rai convinced us to go and eat Kulfi ice cream at one of the street shops as a small birthday celebration. While walking towards the car on our way back, I mentioned that people I interview seem to not want to talk about others in the community as they do not want to kiss and tell. Nishant responded; “Of course.. they will never tell you one to one... they talk in groups”. I told him people are afraid of saying what they really mean in an interview, and that no one tells me any gossip. He then replied: “You never asked me about gossip. I tell you!”. He almost seemed angry. He had an aggressive energy coming over him, and then he just spitted out a lot of things, talking super-fast.

Me: “it seems like guy’s in Salsa do not like each other that much”.

Him; “No, its not that.. its that I am one of the few who come with a pure intention... just for the dance”.

Me: “What about Ashok? He seems like a nice guy.”

Him: “I tell you about Ashok! Ashok Whatsapps all the girls, asking; “Are you coming to socials?.. Will you come on friday?” Has he whatsapped you?

Me: “Not much... he called me once”

Him: “Ha..(hahaha) that is because he did not have your whatsapp. Did he ask for your whatsapp?”

Me; “Yeah., like the last days of his stay.”
Him; “Hahahah, see!”

It was like an explosion of thoughts and opinions who had been longing to come out. It felt refreshing to hear what was really going on in his mind.

Him; “He is trying with every girl from Salsa. He tries, he fails, he tries, he fails haha. Johanna... you should understand the Indian guy’s mentality. Salsa is corrupt! Ehhh not corrupt... worse. It’s the worse... Everyone is talking about each other. People gossip in the groups. You know Shishant and them... they talk about everyone, you also, and they don’t even spare me”.

Nishant’s “outburst” shows his annoyance with some of the other dancers, who in his eyes do not come with pure intentions. He is cross with the guys who “ruin” the Salsa community for those who actually are serious, who come for the dance. Perhaps his annoyance is partly a result of a felt unfairness or jealously about how easy “these” guys approach girls, and how they with that stand in the way for his chances with the girls, however, that is not my say. Employing Geertz’s examination of “The Balinese Cockfight” and his distinction of deep-players and shallow-players, Nishant refers to himself as a deep-player, distinguishing himself from the shallow-players in the community. Analysing the Balinese social event of cockfighting, Geertz (2005) describes how this activity, which is valued so highly by the men who let their cocks fight each other, serves a much bigger purpose than pleasure. Other than the money, which both the audience and the players bet on the cocks, what is at stake is something symbolically, something more profound than the materialistic loss or gain of the game- namely a man’s honour, esteem, respect and status (Geertz, 2005). Here the difference between shallow-players and deep-players comes into the picture. The first, being the men who enjoy the game merely for the sake of the money, and therefore also normally bet smaller amounts, and the latter the men who usually bet larger amounts of money, but where the huge amount of money and potentially the loss of it, is a reflection of all the other attributes which are on line for the men (Geertz, 2005).
Even though the fighting is only “real” for the cocks, and the loss or win of a man’s cock does not influence the hierarchical relations between people or a man’s status in everyday life, it symbolically presents themes of masculinity, rage, chance etc which are felt on the inside by the men. The cockfight is a metaphor, an image, a form of expression for how the men view themselves (Geertz, 2005). For Susanne, Rahul, Nishant and some others, the dance and the community has really grown on them and become part of who they are, part of their identity. The cost of not being able to dance anymore would be high as they would lose part of themselves. While for the shallow-players, not so much is at stake. They could turn their back on the community at any time and not suffer from the consequences.

Rahul said it very beautifully: “The ones who come with the wrong motive, wrong motive meaning that they do not come to learn the dance but they think that Salsa is an opportunity to come close to anyone, women, they will sooner or later be disappointed to not find what they came for and leave. For others, the dance changes them. They fall in love with the dance itself, and they change as a person, they no longer look for something in the dance”. However, the intentions of each individual are not (always) visible on the outside, and if the deep-players discover shallow-players, some frustration might arise as a consequence of being identified as being like them.

The semi - private - safe - space which makes it desirable to “consume” Salsa

As mentioned earlier in the text, being different and doing something different from the rest of the population, helps the dancers to see themselves as part of a global and diverse India. However, Boulila (2018) makes an important point by saying that strangeness or difference is only attractive when it can be safely consumed. Salsa socials can be described as being such a safe place, a semi-private place for the dancers to execute what Gluckman terms “ritual license”. They have become a place where the participants feel they can explore themselves, as well as their relationship to the opposite sex, without the prohibitions present in everyday life. The physical-social space provides opportunities for exploration and play with the new and unknown, which could not be carried out any other place because of the consequences that could follow.
Looking at the customs of rituals among several African tribes, anthropologist Max Gluckman (1956) found that many of the tribal people he encountered organise rituals where the normally established social order of the group is broken and roles are reversed. These “rituals of rebellion”, as Gluckman terms them, “can be described as institutionalized departures from every day-practice, norms for special occasions that oppose year-around norms” (cited in Norbeck, 1963 p. 1255). The role reversals and the acting out of social conflicts happens between the sexes, between superiors and inferiors, social and political groups, kin groups, and any other persons who have the need to express their hostility to one another. For example, in the ritual of rebellion between the sexes, the women behave in a completely different way than what is normally expected of them. The women lose their clothes, walk around naked and sing insulting songs to the men. They become louder and feistier and take on activities and tasks the men normally are responsible for, like herding the cows (Norbeck, 1963). In these “rituals of rebellion”, the women get to act as the men, the peasants get the permission to behave as headmen and the headmen are seen and treated as inferiors and not superiors, criticized and made fun of in front of the entire group (Gluckman, 1956). All the activities and behaviour which in everyday life would create chaos and disrupt the well-established order in society, are fully accepted and allowed within the frames of the rituals. In a similar way do Salsa-socals provide a safe space, where normal, everyday constraints and social hierarchies are put aside, and divergent behaviour is tolerated. The men and women get to dance with the opposite sex without being stared at or shamed by someone. The girls get to wear clothes which they could never wear in their parents’ home or out in the daylight, and behaviour like; smoking and drinking alcohol which in many other situations/places would be met with discontent (especially in the case of girls) is fully accepted and shared with like-minded people. Nitin who completed both level 1 and 2 classes with me commented on his positive first encounter with salsa socals; “The first and last thing I thought on my first social was that I have never seen girls being so polite anywhere in a club. It makes sense to stay hesitant to someone you do not know. I am used to this, but at socals, I was surprised that girls just dance with you and are so nice and polite”. Socals are then an exception from all other public spheres where strangers of both sexes meet. The girl’s politeness and friendliness as compared to their scepticism and more frosty behaviour towards guys in other public places (as described earlier), shows that the (girl) dancers drop their shoulders and are able to put their guard down.
Because of the safe space *socials* provide, the dancers also have the opportunity to experiment with eroticism and their masculine and feminine identities, which in the otherwise conservative society where eroticism and desire are considered taboos, would create consequences (Chang, 2015 p. 3). Because of the semi-private space and the pre-established rules of behaviour (taught in class), the *socials* can be viewed as a playing field where the risk is low. Women and men can flirt and show off their sex appeal, because it is set within the specific context. Is it likely that the practitioners would continue dancing Salsa if there was a risk involved? I believe not. In order for the dancers to enjoy themselves, couples dancing is transformed into a sort of game-logic (Chang, 2015). Even though the dance is a sort of performance and role play as it is set in a physical boundary and encompassing certain “rules” of behaviour, the dance at the same time gives the opportunity for the practitioners to experiment with flirtation and eroticism in a way they cannot do anywhere else. Hence, within the *socials*, there is an aspect of both performance and reality. The important notion is that the real experimentation with eroticism could not take place without the performative aspect of the dance (Chang, 2015).

The space in which the *socials* happen is an area which “(…) imposes its own rules, possibilities and restrictions on communication”, and these are of common knowledge by the dancers (Blommaert, 2013 p. 32). Blommaert (2013) says that space serves as a social actor as there are certain expectations of how to behave in certain places. Like crossing a street, a salsa *social* is “(…) an act of ordered and localized communication, in which bodies interact in an orderly fashion with regulatory signs and with other participants in that space” (p. 35). He talks about the *enskilled historical body* which has been trained in how to behave and communicate in an orderly manner within a particular historical *microspace*, and how this conduct is activated as soon as the *enskilled* body occupies that space (p. 36). The engagement of the dancers within a *social*, gets their bodies automatically into a mode where certain acts of communication are expected and wanted while others are viewed as wrong and offensive (Blommaert, 2013). The dancers know these codes of communication and desired behaviour as they have been *enskilled* in them through Salsa classes.
The guidelines and dance-rules taught at STELLA

A dance starts with a guy asking the girl for a dance. If she says yes, he normally takes her hand and leads her to an available space on the dance floor. As he is the leader, he is the one who has to start the dance, stepping with his left leg forward on the count of 1 in the music (he has to first figure out where in the music the count of 1 comes, which he can recognize through the rhythm of the Clave). When he steps his left leg forward on the count of 1, the girl steps her right leg back. The rhythm which is followed (suggested by the music) is “quick quick slow, quick quick slow”, and the counts are 123, 567. On the count of 2, the guy goes one step back with his right leg, followed by his left leg on the count of 3, followed by a small pause. On the count of 5, he puts his right leg back and on 6, the left leg goes back, followed by the right leg again on count 7. These are the basic steps in Salsa and can be performed in various variations. Except from following the basic steps and sticking to the rhythm of the music, the guy can freely and intuitively decide what else he wants to do, but that again depends on his skills and how many turns and variations he has learned. He can for example indicate a right turn, followed by a cross-body lead, followed by a ribcage-turn etc. As the guy’s intention is solely conveyed through body-language, both the dancers must have learned what the message means. The guy (the message sender) has to know how to convey the message, and the girl (the message receiver) has to understand his “codes”. Once the part of the song comes where there is a lot of instrumental play (solo), the guy normally let’s go of the girl and the couple do their own individual steps. This section of the dance is called shine-section, as each person is allowed to shine, basically showing off his/her improvisation skills. In this section one is free to do anything, also incorporating non-salsa and personal movements and steps. The “individual” section lasts until the guy takes the girl’s hand again and resumes to partner-hold position.
The instructors at STELLA were not only occupied with teaching the content of the dance, but they also kept reinforcing how to respect the partner and what the doe’s and don’t’s are on the dance floor. Because of the in general estranged relationship between men and women outside the family and friend circle, touch was introduced very slowly in Salsa class. In the first couple of classes the partners only had to hold each other’s pinkie fingers. First in the 8th week when the comfort level among the students had increased, the close-hold was introduced. With a mix of humour and seriousness, Susanne and Rahul would keep on reinforcing which body parts are allowed to touch and in which way they should and should not be touched. That the guy should always be polite when asking a girl for a dance and that the girl should be friendly too, especially if she declines a dance. To the girls in class, they would explain the importance of interrupting the dance if one feels uncomfortable, as well as trusting one’s gut feeling, regardless of if the guy is dancing in the “right” way. The “right” way meaning; following the framework and rules taught in class.

They would also demonstrate a variety of tricks both the sexes could use when feeling trapped or uncomfortable while dancing with a partner. One way for the girl to physically show she needs more space while being in close-hold is to place her thumb on the guy’s shoulder bone and press the thumb into his bone, so that he feels a slight pain. The pressure on his bone will automatically cause him to step back a little. Another option for showing one’s need for physical distance from the partner, accessible to both guys and girls, is to start doing shines, described above. The established codes of behaviour and communication taught in class hence help with making the dance, and the socials benignant and non-threatening. Also, the “windows” which can be used to escape an uncomfortable experience, “de-harms” the physical closeness of the dance. The dance can hence be executed as a (semi) public performance where the dancers communicate their physical closeness with their partner, the crucial part being that it is done within a controlled framework. Also, the desire for physical contact and the instinctive curiosity for the opposite sex are socially accepted as these desires can hide behind the rhythm, music, and steps, turning what potentially could be an indication of unacceptable urges into justifiable ones.
Devika, in her answer to if her family knows about her involvement with couples dance, had her own way of downgrading aspects of the dance form which possibly could be viewed as unacceptable or shameful by her own moral police; “If somebody sees us dance Bachata they would feel; ‘these people are dancing so close, they must be very intimate’. Because Bachata hold is like that. You are always in touch with each other. People who are dancing Bachata they can feel intimacy, but with the song. They don’t build a passion with each other. The passion is there only for the song. So little difficult to explain to other people. It is not just about the parents. If you go and tell a friend; Ki.. I dance this dance.. and he is not a social dancer, he would be like; ‘What type of thing is this!? What kind of thing is this!? ’”. By stating that she, as well as the other dancers feel intimacy with the song and build passion with the song and not the partner, she shifts the attention over to something which in a way defends her involvement with a dance form which goes against the cultural moral principles she has been taught. By doing so, she does not need to justify or explain possible other intentions or her own desire for exploration with the opposite sex. Her way of turning aspects of the dance, which could possibly be seen as erotic or sexually driven, into something more harmless, can be explained through what Freud referred to as sublimation, a process which operates at the unconscious level.

Sublimation, according to Sigmund Freund’s psychoanalytical theory is the process of transforming one’s sexual drive (libido) into socially acceptable and useful actions, often leading to the engagement with artistic or intellectual hobby’s. From childhood onwards, humans have basic needs like water, food and sex, which are there to help survival (Cherry, 2018). These instinctual urges and the fulfilling of these needs he called “the pleasure-principle”. However, ones we grow older, these needs cannot be met as quickly as when we were small, because child-like behaviour, such as snitching the water bottle out of the mother’s hand when thirsty, or crying out loud when hungry, is not socially acceptable at a certain age (Cherry, 2018). Hence, in the course of maturity we develop mechanisms which help us satisfy our needs, but in ways which are acceptable in the real-world (Cherry, 2018). The usage of these mechanisms, Freud called “the reality-principle”, the opposing force of the pleasure-principle, which seeks immediate gratification. The reality-principle helps the ego to find a path which is socially acceptable and realistic, while at the same time making sure that the needs are met (Cherry, 2018). In the case of Devika, and several of the other dancers, the interest for experimenting with one’s more sensual side, and the feelings and “unacceptable” urges which might arise in the close encounter between man and woman, can hide behind such defence.
Concluding remarks

I have in the last chapter highlighted the ways Salsa *socials* are attractive for the dancers with particular focus on the secure frames *socials* provide in order for the dancers to show and experiment with a different side of themselves, as well as testing and exploring their relation to the opposite sex and physical touch. Pointing back to my comparison between the salsa *social* and Gluckman’s theory of “ritual as rebellion”, the case of the Salsaleros differs very much from the functions the ritual of rebellion served among the tribes Gluckman studied. Gluckman saw the “rituals of rebellion” as having the purpose of strengthening the else wise social hierarchies and political structures in everyday life. He argued that “rituals of rebellion” were there to shed light on the absurdness and chaos which would fill the life of the tribes if what happens within the rituals would become normalised outside of them. Among the people Gluckman studied, the rituals were used to strengthen the reasonableness of the everyday order of society, reflecting the correctness of the prevailing social and political structure (Gluckman, 1956). Similar to “rituals of rebellion”, the Salsaleros create a contrast to what they are used to from their everyday world. They use the dance and the salsa scene to show themselves from a different side, to be someone who they cannot be outside of the setting. The difference is; their participation in the salsa-community does not contribute to the strengthening of the norms and customs they know from “traditional life” but might add even more to the already existing ambivalence.

Starting from something as fundamental as the body, I have in this thesis shown how Salsa-dance can be seen as a reflection of what “movements” are happening in the dancers lives, and the way(s) the dance, through the body, can be used as a medium to report back to these “movements”. In the case of my interlocutors, who are standing in-between, drawn towards on one end; the more familiar and predictable, and on the other; the more unknown and “new”, their engagement with Salsa can be seen as both a reflection on and expression of their situation. Not wanting to directly revolt against the “restraints” put down by society, and at the same time wanting to separate themselves from “agents of the traditional”, having the need to explore themselves and defining their individuality, the Salsa-community and their engagement with the dance can be said to heal this gap.
I have shown that in time of change, the body is the most instant available device to re-orientate oneself with. As explored through the practices and actions of the Salsa dancers, the body can be seen as 1: a reflection of the social world it inhabits, 2: a tool for negotiating between the needs of the individual and the conventions of society, 3: a medium for expressing and showing oneself to the world and 4: a device for understanding this world, and others in it.
References


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