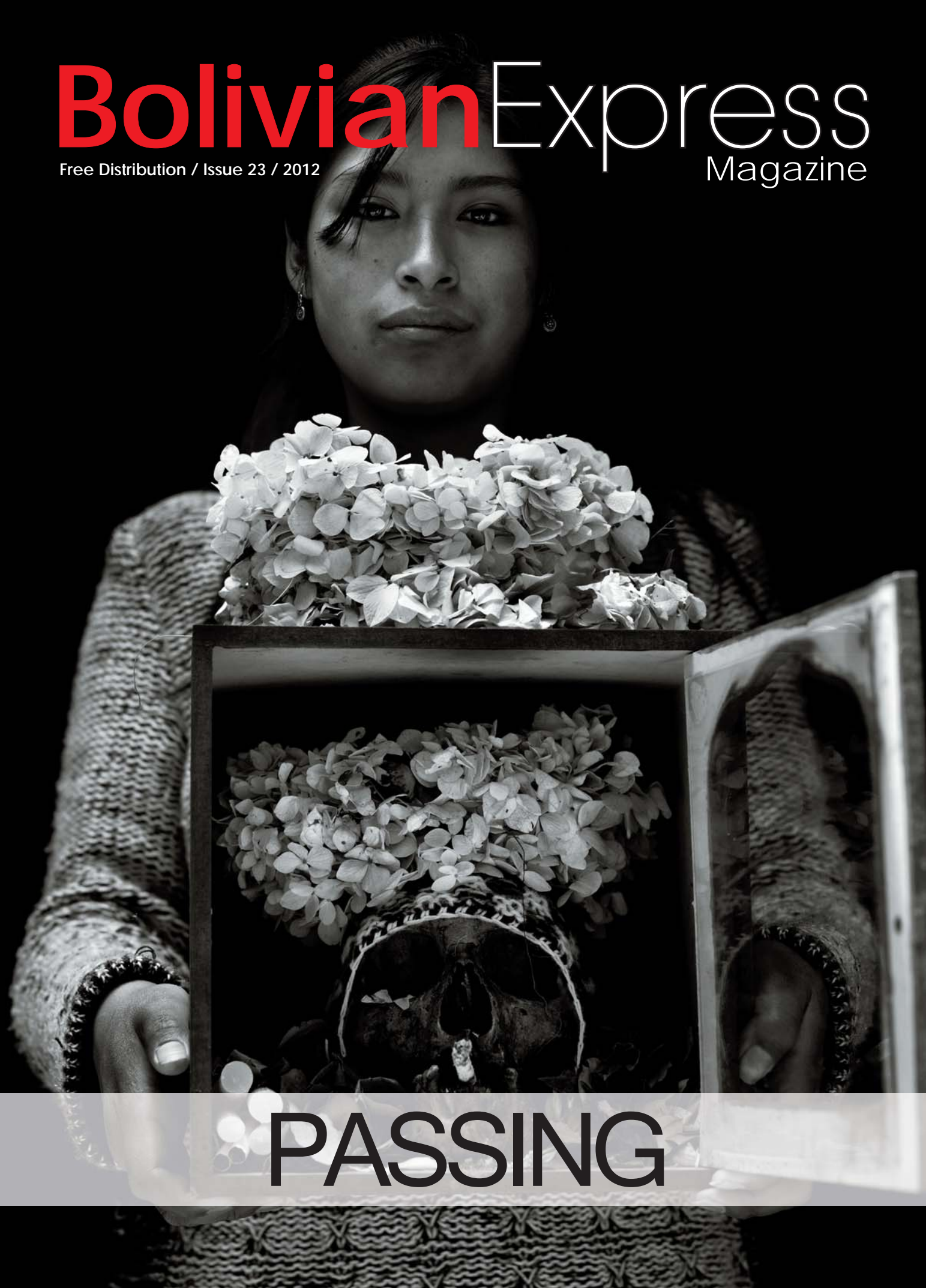


# BolivianExpress

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**PASSING**



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## GLOSSARY

CAMPOS	Rural area / countryside	LUTO	State of mourning
SUSPIROS	Traditional Todos Santos sweets	GENTE POPULAR	Working class people
ACULLICAR	To chew coca leaves	GENTE JAILONA	Derogatory term for the upper-class
EMPLEADA	Domestic servant	T'ANTA ACHACHIS	T'antawawas representing the elderly
FUNERARIA	Funeral parlor	APXATA	Colorful altar where offerings are made to the spirits of the dead.
MALLKU/JILAKATA	Aymara authority/elder	PADRES NUESTROS	'Our Fathers' (in reference to the Christian Catholic prayer)
AYLLU	Aymara social and political unit	CASERITAS	Term of endearment and familiarity for a small-commerce saleswoman
AJAYU	Soul	PURURAS	From a quechua word for flower, people who pray for the dead
NICHOS	Crypts	SEÑORIO	Aymara community that formed following the collapse of Tiahuanaco
MADURANDO	Maturing	COSMOVISIÓN	Shorthand for an andean way of viewing and understanding the world
MAESTRO PANADERO	Master baker	PRESTE	A large party hosted by a member of a community, often in honour of a saint
HORNOS	Ovens		
ALMITAS	Affectionate term for souls of the deceased		
PISCO	Peruvian grape liquor		
JOVEN	Young man		
NOVEDADES	Novelties		
DOLIENTES	Mourners		

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# SONGS FOR THE DEAD

Some of my first memories about death involve listening to the haunting sounds of a march booming out from some unknown location in my old neighbourhood of Tacagua. I was too young to have experienced a major death in my immediate family; maybe just fortunate enough. In any case, it was soon clear that someone in the audible vicinity had died, or so I was told by my cousin. During the years I lived in that house I heard those harrowing melodies several times, without ever knowing what they were called or why they had to be played for 14 continuous hours; the first thing you listened to when waking up, and the last one you heard before going to sleep - sometimes over two consecutive days. I discovered that, somewhat like the Bethlehem star, or more precisely like the legendary tune played by Hamelin's piper, this was a musical map. One only had to follow the melody to reach the site of an open-door wake. The songs functioned not only as an announcement, but as an open invitation for neighbours to come and pay their condolences.



PHOTO: AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE

By pure chance, 20 years later I learned that these songs belong to a genre called *Bolero de Caballería*, which originated in Bolivia in the 1930s during the Chaco War against Paraguay. Jenny Cardenas, an expert on the boleros and their history, told me that while they are currently associated with wakes and death, boleros have a much larger and richer history.

'The bolero today effectively accompanies funerary rites of indigenous and popular sections of society. It is predominantly played in the marginal neighbourhoods of urban areas'. Cárdenas explains how it has both a functional role in announcing a death, as well as a traditional role which glorifies the deceased, as these are songs that were played to send-off and welcome the soldiers who fought in the Chaco War. 'The bolero implies that the person who died sacrificed themselves in some way; we can think of this person as a hero. The dead are thus sacralised, sanctified'. Yet the implied sacrifice is not only linked to this war, 'but to social protests and struggles against oppressive regimes, and honours miners, teachers, and unionised workers alike'.

While boleros are traditionally played at wakes, visiting the General Cemetery gives us a wider understanding of the music played for the dead throughout the year. Serafin Calisaya is one of the eight guitarists who work at the cemetery all year round, singing and playing for the 15-17 funerals which take place there every day, generally accompanying the family during the journey the coffin makes from chapel to grave. He tells me that him and his colleagues are most in demand by **gente popular**: '**gente jailona** don't tend to hire us. They just walk on in silence' (for more generalisations on jailones, many true, some possibly unfair, see p.8).

Playing a selection of huayños, boleros, and rancheras, their repertoire caters for most requests from **do-lientes**. Serafin tells me how making a living in this way has affected him spiritually. 'I no longer have a father

or a mother, so sometimes when people ask me to pray for their parents I also remember mine so I start to cry. But in order to cope I need to play different music on the weekends- happy melodies'. A slightly more upbeat guitarist called Fabian Luizaga tells me 'one time someone came up to me during a funeral and told me: "the son of the deceased hasn't cried a single time since the wake, can you play a song that will get to him?" So I went and played a song by Sandro called 'My Poor Dear Mother' [in which the songwriter remembers the times he found his mother in a corner crying, sad, and dejected] - it was pretty effective'. Fabian confesses that he likes to see people letting it all out: 'when I see mourners crying it makes me play more passionately to reach their souls through music. It's bad for these feelings to remain bottled up'.

The traditional activities around Todos Santos (All Saints day) provide a unique insight into the relation between music and death in La Paz and the Bolivian highlands. Todos Santos takes place on the 2nd of November of every year, though associated activities begin up to a week earlier with the baking of t'antawawas, and end a week later with the Fiesta de las Ñatitas. These festivities are focused on the souls who have recently passed away and who have yet to arrive or become fully 'socialised' into the land of the dead, *alma llajta*. On the main day of Todos Santos the cemetery is swarmed, not only with mourners, but with people -predominantly from rural areas- who have come to offer prayers and music in exchange for bread, fruit, sweets, and occasionally some Bolivianos.

Melancholy melodies and wailing prayers from **pururas** dominate the soundscape. As the ethnomusicologist Henry Stobart points out, the arrival of the souls of the dead in this region is closely identified with the sounds of huayño music, 'which the souls are said to constantly sing, play and dance to in *alma llajta*, "land of the souls"' (see p.24 for more on the metaphysics of death in the Bolivian highlands). Ceremonially, in this season huayño music is played using *alma pinkillos*, andean flutes made out of a bamboo tube with a knot in the middle of the instrument. The hoarse and weeping sounds that come out of these flutes are unmistakably linked to some of the deepest human sentiments, from loss and grief to romantic passion and longing.

Yet these are not the only songs played on these days. *Yaravis* (a genre which comes from the Incan 'harawi' rhythm), *tristes* (a creole genre with roots in pre-hispanic funerary rites) and *pasacalles* (a musical form originating in 17th Century Spain), are also audible in the background. It is precisely these melodies which Cárdenas argues came together in the 1930s, and which, combined with the Spanish boleros, amalgamated to form the boleros de caballería mentioned earlier. This musical melting pot continues bubbling away on Todos Santos; a prime example being a very popular local adaptation of Simon and Garfunkel's 'Sound of Silence' called 'Padre Nuestro' (Our Father), played at almost every grave.

Yet as soon as we leave the cemetery and head for Chamoco Chico, the mood changes - first subtly, and then rather more dramatically. **Apxatas** pepper the streets, where families huddled together share bread, food and alcohol (see p.14). The spirit is decidedly festive, though the dark clothes of the **luto** serve as a reminder that remains an occasion centred around the dead. In contrast with the tearful huayños of the cemetery, upbeat *cacharpayas* are played, sung and danced to, in a spirit reminiscent of the carnival season. This genre is traditionally played to send off the dead who return to *alma llajta* on the 2nd of November, after their 24 hour long visit to the living. Appropriately, it is also played to close a variety of celebrations including the carnival itself, ensuring it returns in full force the following year.

A week later we visit the cemetery once more to attend the Fiesta de Las Ñatitas (p. 21). If the festivities in Chamoco Chico had a celebratory feel, this event does exactly what it says on the tin - it's a full-blown fiesta, a party. Indeed, extravagant **prestes** are thrown for the forensic skulls around which this festivity is centred. The cemetery brims with brass bands and colourful flowers. Hired musicians are summoned to the cemetery to play a variety of songs, notably *morenadas* and *rancheras*, usually associated with neighbourhood parties where dancing and getting drunk are the norm. The party continues away from the cemetery in locales (venues for hire), late into the night.

An eerie childhood memory came to mind during the last of several trips I made with the BX team to the General Cemetery, and it seems befitting to end on this note. While walking through the cemetery's narrow alleyways shortly after the Christmas season, I remember hearing odd whimpering beeps coming from several graves. After some investigation I learned that people buy musical cards for the deceased, just as they do for the living, placing them in the allocated holes in mausolea along with flowers, cigarettes and miniature coke bottles. These cards play *Jingle Bells* and *Silent Night* day and night, until their batteries go. What starts off as a confusion of synthesised christmas jingles, after a few days, with batteries wearing out, aptly becomes a cacophony of dying sounds. Anthropologists and journalists of the future might one day take an interest in these curious evolving traditions; just a thought.

On this slightly kitsch note (a taster of our next number), we are reminded that in contrast to the sombre and austere monochrome palette which dominates this issue, death and its associated rites can be strangely lively and colourful. ■

By Amaru Villanueva Rance

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**N.B.** Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary

As we did in our previous issue on migration, we have prepared a playlist with some of the songs and rhythms mentioned above, which you can access by visiting <http://tinyurl.com/BXpassing>

# HALLOWEEN OR JAILONWEEN?

My Facebook newsfeed: awash with Paceña nightclub e-flyers featuring pumpkins, vampire bats and witches on broomsticks. A trip to the local supermarket and a giant skeleton dangles from the entrance alongside a temporarily erected section of rubber spiders, eyeball lollipops and fake cobwebs. Hardly something I expected in Bolivia.

TEXT: NIALL FLYNN  
ILLUSTRATION: ALDAIR ANDRA  
<http://tercerojoyasociados.blogspot.com>

October 31st arrives and the wind howls through the windowpanes of the 17th floor Bolivian Express flat. Thunder crashes and reverberates around the crater in which the magnificent city of La Paz lies; in the distance, lightning strikes the surrounding mountain peaks and the flashes illuminate El Alto and the hectically packed slopes below it. Straight out of the movies, we have the perfect conditions for a spooky Halloween party. And for Bolivians, this is exactly what Halloween is: straight out of the movies.

Fifteen years ago, the celebration of Halloween was solely restricted to the upper-class Jailon Paceños of the Zona Sur, the part of the city where a high proportion of the city's European and North American descendants reside. I met with Micaela, a student at the Zona Sur's Calvert American Cooperative School, who told me exactly what it was like for them.

'Halloween is little more than an excuse for a party', she started, 'Night-clubs hand out flyers and people go out, without really considering what the night is all about. It's completely commercial'. Having spent 7 months in the States studying, Micaela is one of few who are aware of the meaning of Halloween, but the days that follow expose its truly alien sentiment and lack of significance for the majority of Bolivians.

On November 1st, the Bolivian National Holiday of Todos Santos takes place, when it is believed the souls of passed loved ones will return at midday and remain with family for 24 hours before departing once again on Día de los Muertos. The complete contradiction of a night of sugar and fear induced on Halloween compared to the preparation of an immense altar of bread, fruit, alcohol, cigarettes and decorations to celebrate the return of passed loved ones, highlights that Halloween



'PARALLELS CAN BE FOUND BETWEEN TRICK-OR-TREATING AND THE CHILDREN FROM THE CAMPO VISITING THE CEMETERY DURING TODOS SANTOS'

can never truly be understood by Bolivians; nor should it be.

On November 2nd, entire families from the campo arrive at the cemetery alongside those from the city honouring their dead. The children from rural areas sing hymns and say prayers in return for *suspiros*, bread and fruit prepared by those there to mourn. At the end of the day, these families return to their communities carrying flour-sacks of food to share with their neighbours.

Parallels can be seen in trick-or-treating on Halloween and the children who visit the cemetery during Todos Santos. Yet rather than knocking on doors, sitting greedily and gorging on their haul of 'candy' and chocolate, the children visit *apxatas* and graves, praying throughout the day before sharing out the bread and fruit in their local village.

This humble idea of sharing and honouring passed loved ones on Todos Santos now lives alongside the westernisation that has resulted in the arrival of Halloween. The sheer commercial aspect dictates that Halloween is extending to wider parts of the population and is no longer restricted to the 'Jailones'. From street vendors in El Alto to clubs and restaurants in the centre of La Paz, extensive Halloween merchandising means that it can no longer be merely seen as 'Jailonween'.

Yet in true Bolivian fashion, the traditions of Todos Santos and Halloween will continue to exist alongside each other for years to come. While it may be a 'calendrical coincidence' (see p.24) that these festivities take place side by side, there are parallels that are initially difficult to spot but once discovered are hard to ignore. One rite involves children going house by house asking strangers for sweets, the other involves them going grave by grave asking strangers for bread and *suspiros*; one group offers extravagant costumes in return, the other offers prayers. Maybe it's no coincidence after all. ■

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# MORIR EN LA PAZ

THE JOURNEY THE LIVING MUST MAKE FOR THE DEAD

TEXT: KATA KNEZOVIC  
PHOTO: MILA ARAOZ

ary arrangements. While I felt somewhat insensitive doing this—especially when I realized the couple in front of us was planning the funeral of their eight-year-old son—it showed me how Bolivians say goodbye to those they love.

Only being familiar with festivities associated with dying, I was interested in discovering what, exactly, happens when someone dies in La Paz. Having talked to some locals, including my Spanish instructor Roxana, I learnt that on the day that someone dies, a loved one washes the body, then dresses it in the deceased's best outfit. The body remains at home in bed while friends and family pay their respects. Throughout the night, loved ones talk amongst themselves, praising and remembering the deceased. Coca leaves, alcohol, cigarettes, and flowers are placed near the body as talismans and the family begin to **acullicar**—chewing each coca leaf while giving the departed a compliment or speaking of a fond memory. This frequently goes late into the night; the mourners kept alert and awake by the coca leaves.

The General Cemetery is a neighbourhood all to its own. Outside its walls are flower markets, funeral homes and tombstone shops—just about everything needed for a funeral. Plaques can be personalized and tombs ordered. Prices range widely depending on quality of materials. There's heavy marble in princess pink for those with a little extra cash and basic glass covers to decorate the graves of those less wealthy.

In the cemetery itself, there are gorgeous mausolea with ostentatious sculptures next to shoebox-sized graves with cement tombstones. The cemetery is currently divided into three sections which include cuarte-

les, pavillions, mausolea, sarcophagi and tombs. The variety in social class is laid bare in this anthropological library of the dead, in which innumerable bodies are stacked together. Occasional vacancies can indicate that someone's family is no longer able to pay rent for a plot, making room for the new dead. Indeed, when one considers how ancient and packed the cemetery currently is, it's natural to ask where the new dead bodies end up. As Jaime Saenz pondered in his seminal *Imágenes Paceñas*: 'Why doesn't the cemetery get any bigger?'. The municipality's figures indicate that 95.6% of the cemetery is currently occupied, and that there are 15-17 daily burials. In 2008 there was room for 106,681 'inhabitants', 25,330 places of which had been sold in perpetuity.

We walked into the cemetery's administration office and asked the attendant the price of a burial plot. After giving us several brochures and price lists, the man explained how we could pay. To purchase a plot in perpetuity would cost 11,000 Bolivianos (US\$1,570), or over 10 times the minimum monthly wage in the country. We were also offered the option to rent out a plot until the expected death of our *empleada's* mother.

We made our way down to Avenida Busch, the Fifth Avenue of funeral homes in La Paz, the most famous of which is probably **Funeraria** Valdivia. As we stood outside and discussed our game plan, a man greeted us and politely asked if we needed help, so we proceeded to explain our situation. He led us into the funeral home and up a small flight of stairs to a room full of coffins. He had a distinctive used-car dealer's hustle, a likely indication that we were dealing with a highly competitive market. The man's routine involved walking around opening

the coffins and their viewing windows built into the lids. I learnt that the purpose of these was to allow mourners to look upon the dead during the wake, as well as seconds before the coffin descends underground, or into one of the countless **nichos** in the cemetery. With a coffin purchase, the funeral home would pick up the body from wherever it may be (at hospital, at home), then bring it to the desired venue for a proper ceremony. Then, a bus would be provided to transport the funeral party to whichever cemetery was chosen by the family. The staff could even make the arrangements for the burial plot as part of a fully inclusive package.

The funeraria agent spoke quickly, trying to persuade us to take the deal, as if he were narrating a commercial for some type of 'as-seen-on-TV' household gadget. We went downstairs to see the modern funeral parlour and he continued with his pitch. Mid-sentence, he asked us how old our *empleada's* mother was. "Seventy-three," my friend said, thinking on his feet, "she's convalescing at home... so that's where you can plan to pick her up."

At the end, we were given business cards as we walked out the door and we said that we'd call later that afternoon. Whilst it felt uncomfortable at times to make up a story to understand this process, it gave me a good insight.

A walk through the cemetery shows how alive these dead people really are. Flowers decorate the graves, along with some of the deceased's favorite objects. The graves of children are decorated with candies and the elder deceased have things like candles, miniature Coca-Cola bottles, and cigarettes. It is as if the person were only sleeping, not gone forever. ■

Okay, so you just stay quiet because we don't want them to find out you're a gringo', my friend ordered me as we walked into the main office of the cemetery. While one can learn much from the

mourning rites which immediately follow the death of a loved one, I was keenly aware that this was but part of a much larger process which unfolds over weeks, even years. I set out to investigate which steps a family in La Paz has to follow after a wake. Learning about such things presents all sorts

of challenges given the sensitive nature of the topic; people don't readily offer this kind of information to people who are merely curious. In order to get closer to the topic, a friend and I decided to act as if the mother of his *empleada* was on her deathbed and we were trying to help with the funer-



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# BAKING FOR THE DEAD

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MILA ARAOZ



**T**odos Santos, a tradition in which the living welcome and share with the dead, has existed in some form or another since the beginning of the Spanish Conquest. The **apxata** is prepared using traditional foods, fruit, sugar cane, onions and photographs of the loved one. T'antawawas, anthropomorphic bread representing the deceased, are one of the central offerings given to the dead on this day. At midday on the 1st of November, the almas visit the house of their loved ones and feast on the goods that have been laid out in their honour, leaving 24 hours later. Families receive the spirits with prayers and offer them the food and drink they enjoyed during their lives. Yet this tradition does much more than simply honour the dead; baking t'antawawas and giving them away in exchange for prayers brings these communities together.

It's less than a week before Todos Santos - walking through the Max Paredes commercial district of La Paz, one immediately notices the thousands of brightly-coloured t'antawawa masks on display in street stalls. The ceramic eyes of t'anta achachis, horses, babies, cats, cholitas, and llamas stare vacantly at potential customers. As the lady at the stall says 'cada mascarita tiene su significado': each mask has its own meaning.

Doña Lucy and her husband have been making t'antawawa masks for decades. She explains how baby-shaped masks mark the death of an infant, whereas the figure of a hatless man represents a **joven**. It is said that horse masks are essential as they accompany the spirits on their journeys; 'ellos llevan todo lo que se reza' - they take back with them all the prayers for the dead. For Doña Lucy, the production of t'antawawa masks is not simply

a way of making a living, it is also an important family tradition. Her husband's mother did so before he was born, and it is clear that this ritual will continue: 'I work with my children in everything I do'.

The artisan mentions how the masks 'used to be clay-white but now they are painted in a flesh-like colour'. In the last decade, **novedades** such as Shrek, Teletubbies, and Chavo del Ocho (a Mexican show popular across Latin America) have become a sensation, catering for parents keen to engage their children in this tradition. In order to survive it is necessary for traditions such as these to make certain concessions. In her account of Todos Santos, the journalist Cristina Ugidos mentions that traditional masks are the ones left over at the end of the season, while the ones of Shrek are the first to run out. I found scant evidence to support claims that the custom of making t'antawawas is dy-

in recent years; if anything they've gone up'.

## MASAS AL HORNO

We walk into a room filled with families - the smell of fresh bread hits you as the heavy door opens. With this sweet smell come heat and chaos; sounds of music, children and laughter. We enter a dark hot room where, in turn, dough is stacked on shelves. There are two lots - the trays where the masa is **madurando**, and another with dough ready to be baked. At the end of the room is a small metal door which hides the hellish amber glow of the oven. Once opened by the **maestro panadero**, a wave of heat rushes out. Bread is taken out, unceremoniously thrown into baskets, and carried away while raw dough is shoved in. The door is shut. The heat of the oven makes the stay bearable only for a short while.

We use the following ingredients to make our t'antawawas: 25 pounds of flour, 10 eggs, 2.5 pounds of vegetable fat, water, aniseed and yeast, which together yield around 30 pounds of bread. A taxi driver told us that people sometimes offer the maestro panadero a crate of beer for the dough to be brought to the front of the queue during this busy period, especially for large quantities. It is evident that the whole economy in the ovens works in this way. For instance, the person kneading receives bread for his troubles, while the people putting dough on trays receive bottles of Coke or Fanta. In order to bake in the ovens, knowing the recipe and having the ingredients doesn't suffice - you have to understand the social and economic norms that determine the inner workings of this hive.

I meet Doña Ascencia, who had visited these ovens for the past 6 years following the deaths of two of her children who died in tragic circumstances. Despite this tragedy, Ascencia is adamant that the spirits of her two children take good care of her and her family; things are going well in her business; she has a spot in a new de-

velopment in El Alto which promises to be the largest commercial centre of its kind in the area. It's easy to see her commercial success; her son's 2009 Hummer is parked outside the oven's main entrance. Baking t'antawawas is her way of taking care of these spirits just as they take care of her. It is said that the almas of the people who die before their time roam the earth for several years looking for peace, making it all the more important to adequately mourn for them.

## DAY OF THE SAINTS

Standing at the entrance of the General Cemetery of La Paz on the 2nd of November, exposed to the bitter wind under the heavy clouds, it is surprising to encounter such a good turnout. Thousands of people roam the vast cemetery and its surroundings; from city men in suits to children and women from the campo, some wearing no shoes.

Some have come to mourn for their dead, others have come to pray and sing for them in exchange for anything from bread to a few Bolivianos. While it is customary not to pay for songs and prayers in cash, many bands demand monetary payment. Nonetheless, this economic and social exchange comes full-circle with the bread baked and offerings being collected by the hundreds of rural families who have come to pray and play music - many leave with several sacks of food to share with their communities. In exchange for the t'antawawas we baked, two boys recite a few **padres nuestros** for the grandparents of a friend.

Visiting the **hornos** and cemetery underlined that t'antawawas are much more than a tradition, they are an expression of a cultural practice based on reciprocity. The music, colour and festive atmosphere at Chamoco Chico heightens the celebratory spirit; people come together and remember the past lives of loved ones among alcohol, laughter and t'antawawas. It's beautiful to see how baking for the dead brings the living together. ■



# 'PARA MORIR NO SEPRECISA MAS QUE ESTAR VIVO'

ALL IT TAKES TO DIE IS BEING ALIVE' SAYS ONE OF THE CHARACTERS IN BORGES' STORY 'MAN ON THE PINK CORNER'. MARTHA WATMOUGH SET OUT TO INVESTIGATE THE DEATHS OF NOTABLE BOLIVIAN RESIDENTS SOME OF WHICH HAVE ALMOST BECOME AS LEGENDARY AS THE LIVES WHICH LED UP TO THEM.

TEXT: MARTHA WATMOUGH



## MARIANO MELGAREJO

Bolivia's most predictably unpredictable President, Melgarejo's incompetence and volatility are legendary. So many tall tales have built up around his life that it is almost impossible to distinguish what is actually true about his life.

Born in 1820, Melgarejo spent the majority of his life in the military. He slowly worked his way up the hierarchy of the army, not from valient endeavours, but due to his willingness to participate in every rebellion. In 1845 he took part in a military revolt against the dictator Manuel Belzu and was subsequently tried for treason. He was pardoned, however, after he tirelessly begged for his life and claimed that he only participated in the coup due to inebriation.

After a seemingly successful coup against Arce, Melgarejo proclaimed himself President. However, Belzu had also been fighting to regain power and had control over half the army and the country. Melgarejo resolved this apparent impasse by personally murdering Belzu. A large crowd of Belzu supporters had gathered near the Government Palaces shouting 'long live Belzu!'. It was at that moment that Melgarejo appeared on the balcony holding Belzu's lifeless body and exclaimed 'Belzu is dead. Who lives now?', to which the confounded crowd cried 'long live Melgarejo!'

Once in power Melgarejo did nothing to prove his worth as president. He viciously and ruthlessly suppressed all opposition, horrifically abused the rights of indigenous people and allegedly gave away vast amounts of land to Brazil.

In 1871, Melgarejo was overthrown by Agustin Morales and was forced to flee the country. He sought refuge in Lima, Peru, where he arrived at the building where his old lover Juana Sanchez lived, pleading for her to take him in. He insisted for several days yet she stubbornly refused. Tired of his pigheadedness, Melgarejo was shot dead by Aurelio Sanchez, Juana's brother; a death which now seems rather befitting and almost poetic.



## GERMAN BUSCH

The infamously efficacious and reckless Busch is perhaps as well known for his self induced death as for any other event during his time in presidency from 1937 to 1939.

Throughout his life Busch had a fearsomely determined personality. As a youth he walked around 600 km by foot from his hometown of Trinidad to the city of La Paz to prove his worth to join the army. This attempt was successful and he entered military college at the age of 18. This was the beginning of a life-long military career which saw him flourish after showing outstanding courage during the Chaco War.

He played a key part in three major military coups, the final of which led to his presidency. During his mandate he famously signed a peace treaty with Paraguay and nationalised a large part of the mining industry.

In 1939 he fell into a deep depression. He began to believe that he was not only under attack by the opposition, but that the Bolivian people had turned against him. For one whole week he failed to show up at the Government Palace, claiming it was due to toothache. He took the extreme decision to close down the Senate and Congress, and declared himself a dictator.

This breakdown reached its culmination on the 22nd of August during a party held for the birthday of his brother in law. Busch remained downstairs in his study with his guards throughout the evening, lamenting over a letter he received which brought news of his mother's funeral which had been pitifully attended. Sitting at his desk he raised his colt pistol to his right temple and fired a shot. He was rushed to hospital and died the following day.

Some believe his suicide was fated. Busch came from a long history of family depression; his father had killed himself, as later did his two sons who also took their own lives. A truncated column stands in his honour on the site of his grave in the Cementerio General, which both represents his glory and his life which was cut short at the age of 35.



## ARTURO BORDA

Tirelessly roaming the steep slopes of La Paz, the painter Arturo Borda would wander the streets wearing an onion on the lapel of his ill-fitting suit jacket. An artist, political activist, and eccentric, he always carried in his pocket a pencil, a stray lens and a handmade notebook. A meticulous observer of everything that took place around him, he was perhaps most famous for the countless drawings, paintings, and etches of the Mt Illimani he left behind.

A staunch drunkard throughout his life, the writer Jaime Saenz believed Borda wasn't just another ordinary alcoholic who fell prey to the bottle's corrosive grip, but that instead he was misunderstood in that he simply drank because he 'felt like it'.

In the darkness of the bitterest of winters, this septuagenarian was looking for a drink on the 17th of June of the year 1953. He roamed the empty streets looking for an open liquor store, but only found a hardware store where he demanded the owner to serve him a **pisco**. There was nothing there to drink, yet Borda persevered. After the owner repeatedly told him there was nothing there for him, the old man asked her to give him anything she could find. Such was his insistence, that the vexed lady gave him a container with hydrochloric acid, which Toqui Borda proceeded to drink it down in a single gulp. This is how he met his end.



## MAURICIO LEFEBVRE

Lefebvre, a Canadian priest, spent 19 years of his short life in Bolivia and died a valiant death in the country which had become his home.

Born in Saint Denis, Canada, Lefebvre became an ordained priest in 1951 and the very next year travelled to Bolivia to work in rural mining towns. He later moved to Rome to study sociology, returning to Bolivia after finishing his degree. This time he moved to La Paz where he worked as a university lecturer, and later founded the sociology faculty in UMSA.

On 21st August 1971 a military coup overthrew the president Juan Jose Torres, killing dozens of people in the process, most of whom were fighting to defend democracy.

To succour the injured Lefebvre clambered onto an ambulance, tying a white pillowcase to its antenna as sign of peace. When he reached the calle Capitan Ravelo where he found the street strewn with injured students. On seeing a badly injured man calling for help Lefebvre went to help him, but was hit in the chest by a bullet as he approached the injured man. After some time the wounded man was able to drag himself to safety, but the same could not be said for Lefebvre, who was pronounced dead by nightfall.

When his ambulance was retrieved it was found covered in over 30 bullet holes; the pillowcase he had used as a peace sign was still attached. Admiration and appreciation for his act are remembered today by a plaque in the very spot where he heroically lost his life.



## TUPAC KATARI AND BARTOLINA SISA

Tupac Katari, along with his fearsome wife, Bartolina Sisa, remain to this day among Bolivia's most influential revolutionaries.

The Aymara leader Katari, was responsible for one of the biggest indigenous uprisings against the Spanish Empire in the early 1780s. In 1781, after rounding up an army of over 40,000 people, they took La Paz under siege for a total of 184 days. The siege was eventually broken by colonial soldiers who had come from Buenos Aires and Lima.

Tupac Katari did not give up. Later that very year he laid siege again, this time alongside Andres Tupac Amaru. Despite their determination this attempt was also unsuccessful, and was broken by a loyalist group led by Josef Resequin.

One night after a grand feast Tupac Katari was captured by royalists, tortured and quartered: while he was still alive his body was torn apart by horses into four sections. His head and his limbs were each sent to different rebel strongholds as a warning. His famous last words still resonate today: 'I die as one, but will return as millions'.

Bartolina Sisa eventually suffered a similarly gruesome death. She was publicly beaten and raped in what is now Plaza Murillo before being hung. The International Day of the Indigenous Woman is held on 5th of September in her memory.

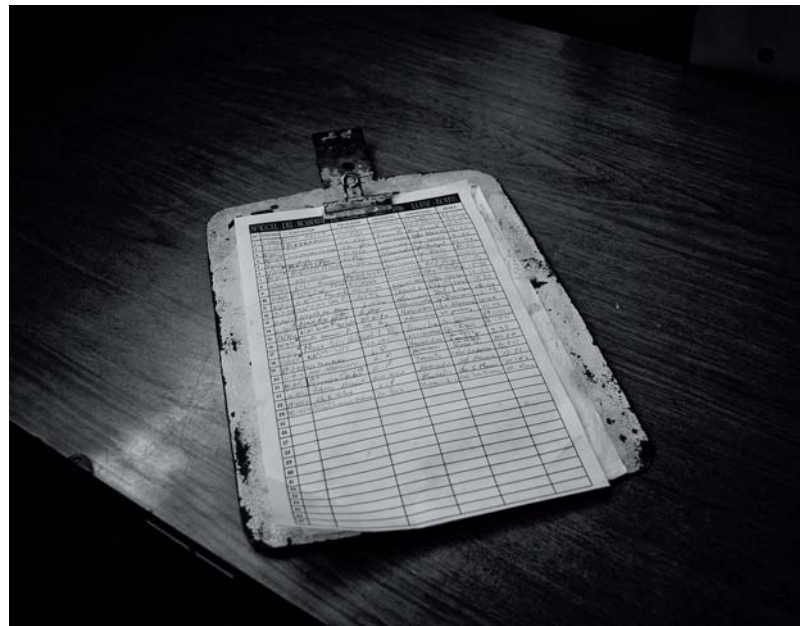




# OVERSIGHT TO OVERHAUL: THE BODIES IN THE ROOM

PHOTOS: MARCELO  
PÉREZ DEL CARPIO

TEXT: THEO HAYNES



**W**hen the Red Cross carried out a diagnosis of the Bolivian medical services in early 2011, one of the most distressing issues was the infrastructure of the morgue in La Paz. The conditions

did not meet with minimal standards concerning the treatment of corpses, perhaps the most glaring example being the stack of bodies piled up on the floor one encountered near the front door. The morgue is situated in a warehouse at the back of the General Hospital, next to the dumping ground for hospital waste. The precarious condition of the morgue is apparent from the condi-



tion of the entrance and continues throughout the small building, with rodents and a considerable lack of space in which to operate. The morgue only has two autopsy tables, one of which has certainly seen better days. Most of the bodies are naked without body bags, an affront to their dignity. In an endeavour to transform the morgue into a more dignified place, not only for the workers, but for the families who come and find their loved ones, the Red Cross went about installing and introducing new features. This primarily consisted of a dozen new shelves, detergents and disinfectant products, as well as 25 impermeable body bags. Put together, these things brought about a drastic change in the building and its operations. Once this change had taken place, a presentation was made to the authorities demonstrating how vital this change had proven.

In the following photo essay, Marcelo Perez del Carpio presents us with a set of powerful images which capture the state of the morgue before the Red Cross's work commenced.



*Marcelo's work on the morgue was Highly Commended for the Ian Parry Scholarship in 2012, and was recently featured in the Spectrum supplement to The Sunday Times of London*

*To see Marcelo's work, visit <http://www.marceloperezdelcarpio.com>*

# THE FORGOTTEN TOWERS

TEXT : NIALL FLYNN

PHOTO : GABRIEL BARCELÓ

The man presents me with a theory - a theory supported by many historians - that the intriguing funerary towers along which we are standing in an open ravine are, in fact, much more than mere tombs for the dead. The sun is setting on the vast plains of Bolivia's Cordillera Occidental and his theory sounds convincing. So I listen.

I had spoken to several people about the Chullpa, yet Eduardo was the first to talk passionately about these pre-Columbian towers. This unlikely tour guide told me that the Chullpas first appeared in the Peruvian-Bolivian altiplano after the demise of the Imperio Tiahuanaco in the 10th Century, and survived Inca supremacy but not colonial invasion. He believes they would have strengthened family and societal ties and served as a reminder to everyone in the community of the power once held by the Aymara aristocracy during their reign; a power some believe they would continue to have even in death.

Long hours at La Paz's National Ethnographic Museum of Folklore had provided me with a wealth of resources and my interest in the above-ground tombs was ignited. Still, I couldn't help but feel that the information I was getting was all too academic; that although I could recite some charming facts, I didn't really understand them. I had to see the Chullpas for myself.

Having ventured five hours south of La Paz, I arrived at Sajama's ambitiously named Plaza Mayor (there is nothing 'Mayor' about it). Eduardo, just the second person I met, showed a surprisingly keen interest in my quest to visit the nearby Chullpas. Having encountered several blank expressions upon my previous requests for information in La Paz, Eduardo was the first person not only to hold



valuable knowledge of the Chullpa, but also to show a desire to share it.

Once the basis of important community post-death rituals, the Chullpas sporadically dot the landscape around many towns and villages, testament to an ancient indigenous mortuary practice. Sadly, they have been left untouched for centuries and although many can still be found intact and make for a fascinating archaeological visit, they now stand

which are still alive today, would teach their children to be considerate of their historical value. Nowadays, however, few people pay them any attention and while some are aware of their existence, the towers remain abandoned. They are simply no longer relevant'.

Although the national park status of Sajama prevents human destruction at Huayllilla, I stood, silent and despondent, as the sun ducked behind the towering

death as a process of life; not the end of it. Leather or llama skin enveloped the body as a form of further preservation; such was the importance of the supposed relationship between the body and soul.

Yet there are still several unsolved mysteries surrounding the Chullpa. 'The cult rituals involved the sacrifice of the jllakata's servant, at times involuntarily', Eduardo recounted, 'but anthropol-

## 'Nowadays, few people pay them any attention and while some are aware of their existence, the towers remain abandoned'

crumbling and forgotten, representing little more than a long lost burial tradition.

The sun is setting and the temperature drops below zero. Having plummeted through the valley along a winding, sandy road in Eduardo's 4x4, flanked by the impressive peaks of Pomerape and Parinacota, we arrived at the Huayllilla cluster of Chullpas. The towers in front of me stand 12 feet tall, each one built for a different *malku* or *jllakata*, along with their close family. They are grouped, with a degree of order, tens of metres apart. Totally secluded, their locations are by no means accidental, but strategically positioned - they once formed boundaries between different *ayllus*. At Huayllilla, of the Carangas province, their location had further meaning. Fighting amongst different Aymara groups, in this case the Carangas and the Pacajes, resulted in them being constructed away from settlements for protection.

I decide not to enter the Chullpa out of respect, but after a peek inside the small, ground-level entrance, I can see the compacted bones of past Aymara aristocracy, recognisable their artificially distorted crania. Decomposing, they lie feeble and disregarded; considerably different from half a millennium earlier, when the mummified body was preserved and actively worshipped. The entrance, always orientated towards the east, holds clues to the ancient Aymara conception of the natural world. They believed that the sunrise's provision of light, heat and fertility was key to maintaining life, and that orientation towards the sun setting in the west would result in burning of the soul.

'In the not too distant past,' Eduardo said, breaking our contemplative silence, 'people knew to respect the Chullpa. Grand-parents, the last of

volcanoes, disheartened at the thought that 500 years have passed since the Chullpa alongside me last served its purpose.

The lack of explicit government protection of the Chullpa is distressing. In the La Paz department, the Chullpas at Chican were damaged when local residents decided to build houses on a nearby site, collapsing the foundations and bringing the ancient tombs to shatter and fragment. These curious structures, once the keystone of family and community, are now left decaying; falling apart and no one seems to bat an eyelid.

Back in La Paz, I met archaeological expert Jédu Sagárnaga, who has studied the Chullpas for 15 years. I learned that the Aymara señorios, which formed following the collapse of Tiahuanaco, and from where the Chullpa tradition arose, each had their own individual diocese and therefore various religious differences existed between different ethnic groups. Despite this, two religious pillars were common in every community: the importance of the natural world and the adoration of dead ancestors. Sagárnaga made it quite clear that these two pillars of society were central to the ideology of the Chullpa. 'The importance of veneration is represented by the construction of such elaborate tombs to show the respect and personal prestige that the *malkus* invoked'.

Similarly, the strong influence of the natural world within Aymara religious conception was key to the ideological construction and burial. The Chullpa was built as a tomb representative of a woman's uterus in which the soul is re-born. The mummified corpse would be placed in the foetal position, due to the pre-Hispanic belief in re-birth and

ogists are still investigating the ceremony that took place at the towers and there are many unknowns'. Pointing to six square holes above the entrance he explained, 'archaeologists are still baffled as to the relevance of certain features at the Chullpa, but it is most likely that they too, relate to age-old Aymara religious beliefs'.

Mysteries aside, the physical preservation of the body, veneration and maintaining social interaction with the dead remain essential features of life in the Bolivian altiplano to this day. The tradition of sharing with the deceased is still practiced in a syncretic fashion between the Catholic faith and the Andean *cosmovisión*. Yet the Chullpa and its significance has been all but totally removed by Catholicism and its influence on pre-hispanic traditions; the wider population of the region remains largely oblivious to the ancestral significance of these towers once central to Aymara society. If they are known at all, it is as archaeological curios.

Whilst Andean mummification and subsequent sacrifices may not be relevant in the modern day treatment of the dead, it is saddening that the Chullpas are neither admired nor acknowledged by their rightful inheritors.

In the isolated ravine at Huayllilla, the scattered Chullpas are the only indication of civilization for miles. They continue to peer over distant communities; towns and villages that were once home to Aymara lords and are now home to Eduardo, one of remaining few who still care for the towers. Listening to this man, looking out on these towers peppered across the horizon with Volcán Sajama dominating the austere backdrop, it still remains possible to find comfort in his pride and passion. ■



# LIVING SKULLS OF THE DEAD

the ritual practice of keeping, adorning, and paying homage to human skulls, known as *ñatitas*, is a bolivian tradition whose origins are hotly debated. it is widely believed that in return for cigarettes, coca leaves, flowers, candles, and other adornments, these craniums provide protection and good fortune for its adoptive keepers.

TEXT: HARRIET MARSDEN  
PHOTOS: AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE

*Miope ñatita  
Tapiada cuenca del ojo  
Carcajada dislocada  
Mandíbula batiendo*

'De La Ciudad',  
Rene Alejandro Canedo Peñaranda

The ritual practice of keeping, adorning, and paying homage to human skulls, known as *ñatitas*, is a Bolivian tradition whose origins are

hotly debated. It is widely believed that in return for cigarettes, coca leaves, flowers, candles, and other adornments, these craniums provide protection and good fortune for its surrogate owners.

Common lore has it that this tradition stems from the pre-Incan civilisation of Tiahuanaco. In the past, not only did chieftains and high-ranking warriors keep skulls of defeated enemies retained as trophies, but those of deceased family members were kept and cared for. However, art historian Pedro Querejazu contends that the

*ñatitas* 'craze' is not as ancient as people might think, indicating that the tradition's origins are post-colonial.

### LIVING WITH THE DEAD

Here in Bolivia, laying out a collection of human skulls like curious knick-knacks on your living room shelves is far from other-worldly. In fact, that is exactly what I encountered at Doña Eli's house in the north of La Paz, well known in her neighbourhood for her extensive collection of skulls and her psychic abilities. She was kind enough to grant us an interview, or as she put it, an 'introduction to her children'.

With macabre familiarity, these skulls reside in familial harmony with their owners. The word *ñatita*, is an affectionate reference to the appearance of the nose bone of the skull, literally meaning 'the little pug-nosed one'. Often, the skulls are put into pairs or groups so that they can form bonds of friendship with each other. Some even get married. Many owners organise huge parties, known as *prestes*, in their honour, which involve offerings of food, drink and dance.

Doña Eli firmly believes that she owes her health and livelihood to her 'babies', as she refers to her 53 skulls. Everything in her house revolves around the *ñatitas*. The shelves of skulls take up a whole wall, not to mention the *ñatita*-related posters and photographs of her collection. Each skull sports its own personalised hand-made hat, which, as Doña Eli explains wryly, is absolutely essential for her to differentiate them. This altar is dimly lit by offerings of candles and adorned with flowers. Far from being exclusively beneficial to her and her family, Doña Eli explains that 'they are friends with everyone'.

This becomes apparent during the interview, with a steady stream of people coming through her curtain door in order to provide offerings for the *ñatitas*. 'One man even brought a television!' she exclaims.

The skulls, she explained, came from various places; gifts, inheritance, purchases, each with its own name and story. 'I have lawyers, police, lovers, even millionaires here on my shelf',



she laughs, 'and they each have their own character'. She even has several tiny skulls of infants, which hold pride of place on the shelf. Doña Eli tells us they are especially helpful to women who are trying for a baby.

When asked as to why she had amassed such a collection, Doña Eli told us that she had been born with a psychic gift, which manifested itself when she was about 8 or 9, and that she uses the spiritual energy of the *ñatitas* to help her. She also tells us that through these skulls

she is able to communicate directly with the souls of the departed.

### FORENSIC SKULLS

Eli calls herself an 'instrument' of God, *who works through* her: she claims no power of her own. She works both with her faith in God and her faith in her *ñatitas* in order to help others, but firmly states that she only works for good. 'People who come with faith and love', she tells us, 'are the only people I can help'. Indeed, she recounts with disgust a case of several men who had recently come to her requesting that her *ñatitas* cause the death of the president. She adamantly refused their offer of a large sum of money, imploring us to understand that her skulls were only 'a force for good'.

The Homicide Department of the police force in El Alto have been widely reported to use two *ñatitas*: Juanito and Juanita to help solve hard cases. Fausto Téllez, a former head of this department believes that the consequences of lying to a *ñatita* may, in the criminal's eyes, outweigh potential judicial punishment. It is even rumoured the police force use the skull of former president Mariano Melgarejo, who serves as a special advisor (turn to page 14 to learn more about his life and death). Yet *ñatitas* do not only work for the forces of good. Doña Nancy, a *caserita* who works outside the Cementerio Heroes del Gas in El Alto told BX that many criminals own skulls, and implore them to bring luck and provide protection from the police in their criminal pursuits.

### SOUL TRADERS

There are a number of ways of acquiring a *ñatita*. They can be inherited, given as gifts, obtained from the black market, cemeteries and even morgues. Milton Eyzaguirre Morales, an anthropologist at the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore, claims it is common for cemetery workers to rob skulls from graves, when relatives either abandon their dead or stop paying cemetery bills. 'It's illegal,' he says, 'but officials turn a blind eye to it'. The idea is that these are *almitas* which have been lost or abandoned by their owners, and who are in search of new living companions to care for them. In return, these souls lend favours and care for their new keepers. Their acquisition can most accurately be described as an adoption of sorts.

This tradition has grown substantially over the last decades, going against the expected eradication of indigenous traditions by Catholicism and modernity. Their increased acceptance and popularity is partly due to the ceaseless stream of migration to La Paz and El Alto from the countryside, strengthening the position of traditionally indigenous rites in an urban environment. Belief in the abilities of these skulls are prevalent in many different social



PHOTO: HARRIET MARSDEN

sectors of La Paz; not only among indigenous communities, but also, for example, among medical students and urban social groups associated with merchants, salespeople, and transport workers.

In contrast to the imagery associated with skulls in most Western cultures -traditionally linked to images of doom, gloom and evil- the *ñatitas* teach us

a social way of relating to the dead rooted in reciprocity, companionship and celebration. The deceased which these skulls embody seem to belong in a different realm of the dead, a realm which maintains everyday contact with the living. As Don Simón told BX, while proudly displaying his bespectacled *ñatita* at the cemetery: 'we keep Claudio on the mantelpiece in our bedroom because he is part of the family'. Un-

like the souls of the countless skeletons in mausolea in the cemetery who are only offered flowers and gifts on special occasions throughout the year such as Todos Santos, these *ñatitas* accompany their keepers every day, and in return their surrogate-owners make them feel loved and at home. 'How would you feel if no-one cared for you?', Don Simón asks. 'It's our responsibility to the dead, it's our duty'. ■

## FIESTA DE LAS ÑATITAS

There is no better example of the affectionate revering of the skulls than the annual 'Fiesta de Las Ñatitas'. Every 8th of November the skulls are carried in their hundreds to the general cemetery of La Paz, where passers-by are invited to offer prayers to the *ñatitas*. Many of them bring crowns of flowers and gifts in return for favours. The general mood is festive and celebratory, with musicians playing upbeat *morenadas* and *cumbias* in contrast to the sombre *huayños* and *boleros* which dominate the festivities of *Todos Santos*, which takes place the preceding week.

On this day, the cemetery chapel holds several masses for the *ñatitas*. This demonstrates the amalgamation between Catholicism and indigenous beliefs that has allowed this practice to thrive in recent years. In the past, the fiesta was celebrated clandestinely for fear of repression, but nowadays thousands of practising Catholics of indigenous roots get their skulls blessed by a priest. The fiesta has changed into a pagan-religious festival: a product of the syncretism between ancient Andean traditions and Catholicism.

## QARWA SULLU

### THE UNBORN DEAD

TEXT: HARRIET MARSDEN  
PHOTO: GABRIEL BARCELÓ

A

s a newcomer to La Paz, Bolivia, my first tentative explorations of the city took me to the mercado de las brujas, or 'witches market', which is where I first encountered a strange phenomenon - llama foetuses. Without prior warning, I assumed that what I was seeing were a strange type of toy llama, or model. I was soon disabused of this notion by an enthusiastic stall holder, who explained the following to me.

Evolution has not been kind to pregnant llamas, it seems. Their bodies constantly abort foetuses throughout the gestation period, being naturally too fragile to handle a large litter. They can even become pregnant as soon as two weeks after a birth.

This gives rise to a large supply of naturally aborted llama foetuses, known as *sullus*, which can be anywhere from a couple of weeks old, resembling tiny dead birds, or just before the birth, which are more or less identical to a newborn llama, fur and all. The foetus's legs are tied together and it receives a blessing from a *yatiri*, ready to be sold.

These unfortunate stillborns are nevertheless considered incredibly lucky. They can be burnt as an offering to *Pachamama*, buried under the foundations of the house, or left by a front door, in the belief that they bring prosperity and health, and keep evil spirits away. I was assured by the shop owner that they would do exactly that, and that I shouldn't leave without one. ■



# THE JOURNEY OF

# THE DEAD

## CONCEPTIONS OF DEATH IN THE BOLIVIAN ANDES

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER  
PHOTO: MILA ARAOZ

**A**ccording to the Aymara conception of the world, life is not a state but a process. Everything that exists – solid or conceptual – has an opposite companion, another side to itself. It is a polarized game between complementary opposites that attract and need each other in order to be.

In that view of the world, life and death are two sides of the same coin; one side the prolongation of the other. Death is not an end but the beginning of a new life. It's a return to the origins, a rebirth. In the world down below -- the world of the dead -- life goes backwards. One is born old and dies young to start over again. In the world of the living, death is but a journey for the soul. A journey from the world of the living to the world of below.

We, humans, live in a realm called the Kay Pacha (or Akapacha). It's a realm that corresponds to the here and the now. Following the principles of duality and reciprocity that govern the Aymara world, every realm has another one that completes it. Our world is therefore divided into two planes - horizontal and vertical - and then into four realms: the world of above, the Hanan Pacha, where the gods live, is opposed to the Uku Pacha, the world of below, where the dead and yet unborn reside. On the horizontal plane, the Haqay Pacha - the world of beyond - completes the Akapacha.

The conception of life and death in Bolivia is a good example of how pre-hispanic beliefs and Christianity have merged to create a unique vision that differentiates itself from other Latin American countries that share similar values. In what Henry Stobart has called a 'calendrical coincidence', it is remarkable that the Catholic day of

Todos Santos brought by the Spanish, coincides with the indigenous festivities marking the end of the dry season and the beginning of the harvest, during which Aymaras also honored the dead. Death is not necessarily perceived as something final or macabre, it's also a celebration of fertility and life. Death is filled with hope and anticipation for the soul to be able to start over and for the living to meet them again. As Stobart explains in *Music and the Poetics of Production in the Bolivian Andes*, 'the passions associated with the early part of the rains not only concern sorrow and invoke the dead, but are also linked to sexual desire: the pent up fluids released are not only lachrymose but also seminal'.

Upon death, the soul (**ajayu**) embarks on a three-year long journey that ends on November 2nd; Day of the Dead. At the Cacharpaya - departure of the dead - the soul is finally dispatched to the Uku Pacha where

the cycle can start over again. During this three-year journey to the world of below, the souls of the dead have larger responsibilities than just traveling to heaven; they have a duty to their community, a role of protection over the ones they leave, especially if they haven't fulfilled it during their lives. The living attend the dead by offering food and drink while the spirits of the dead help provide abundant rains for the harvest.

Of course, death is still a painful event experienced by the community, however, the meticulous preparation and attention given to the wake with multiple rituals to follow is a way to help with the pain felt. Moreover, when someone dies, the soul of the deceased doesn't leave our reality immediately, it stays there with the family during the wake and until the burial. For this reason, the body is never left unattended and is given food and drink. Somebody is always there

to keep the dead company on their new journey.

During the wake, those present drink alcohol and chew coca leaves to protect them against the possibility that the soul of the deceased might turn into an evil spirit, especially if it hasn't accepted its own fate yet. It might very well try to steal the soul of others to keep him company. The wake is also a moment of reflection and forgiving. The soul's misdeeds and errors in life, as well as its success are remembered and discussed. This dialogue with the soul is a way for people to ask and for the soul to receive forgiveness before its departure.

At the burial, the soul of the dead is given everything it could need for its journey. It is believed that it will embark on a long walk and therefore needs food, drink, coca leaves, utensils, and clothes against the cold. All his favorite foods and items are bur-

ied next to him so he can leave prepared. If something were to be missing, the soul would wander looking for that particular item. Once the soul is ready, it goes on a journey, on a spiritual pilgrimage, to achieve its fulfillment in order to be ready for the next life. During this journey, the soul stays in the Akapacha. The soul will meet different spirits along his way, some malevolent that will try to trick him and some not. Eventually, the **ajayu** will meet an Achachila, an ancestral spirit who will guide him and help achieve its fullness and responsibilities on earth.

On November 1st at noon and for 24 hours after, the veil between the world of living and the dead is tenuous - the souls of the dead family members are able to return. They are welcomed with special dishes and an altar is set up for them with bread, fruits, alcohol, depending on their particular tastes. Spicy dishes are prepared to entice the ancestors to come back to the world of the living - they particularly appreciate this flavor. Ladders made of bread are placed on the table to help them access our world and return to theirs. The souls can then manifest themselves as insects, birds, wind, dreams or even people. For instance, if a fly - bigger than normal - comes to eat the food, it shouldn't be swatted away or killed, as it could be a manifestation of the soul of the deceased. Todos Santos can also mark the final stop in the journey of the soul: on the third year after their death they are finally dispatched to the Uku Pacha. The end of this odyssey marks the beginning of a new life on another world.

Alongside Carnival - which is also a remembrance of the dead - Todos Santos is one of the most important festivities in Bolivia. It is as much a celebration of life as a commemoration of the dead. The departure of the souls at the end of the festivities are marked with songs, dances, alcohol and joy in general. On Todos Santos, Bolivians welcome and say goodbye to their loved ones but also embrace the new life that awaits them. It's also a way to thank them and honor their ancestors for what they provided them with and for the protection that they offer.

As an unavoidable part of every existence, we've developed a strange fascination and fixation on death and it is only natural to look for ways to cope and deal with the departure of loved ones and our own. In Bolivia, Todos Santos is a celebration, it's filled with joy, hope and a little nostalgia - but because everything is interconnected according to Aymara beliefs, the departed don't only live in our memories but in everything that surrounds us. They even come back on the 1st of November. ■



# KANDINSKY

## An Obituary

Our dear feline friend Kandinsky, known by the hundreds of people who passed through the Bolivian Express flat, passed away on the 9th of October 2012. His human father, Amaru Villanueva Rance, remembers a life lived in purrs.

TEXT AND PHOTO: AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE

**K**andinsky was born on my sister's bed in 2003, on a month no-one now seems to be able to pinpoint. The smallest kitten in a litter of four, he was spoiled from a young age, for some time by his mother Gata and until his very last days by the inhabitants of the Rance household. His three siblings were given away: the alpha kitten, who later came to be known as Martes, was snapped up by a niece; the other two were given away to friends of my sister's. Kandinsky, 'the slow one', was the one who remained, so although he was not chosen by anyone, he was in a strange way the one chosen to stay with us.

On the day my family moved to the penthouse flat where Kandinsky was to spend most of his life, he immediately realised something big was afoot. He acrobatically escaped several times from my sister who was frantically trying to get him into a taxi that was waiting at the door. Trembling and forlorn, he eventually realised there was no way out. Resigned, he surrendered to the embrace of my sister's hands and hid his head in the towel she was carrying, as if to say 'ojos que no ven, corazón que no siente' - what you can't see can't harm you. Making a conscious decision not to look back, he was cradled into the taxi to face life in his new home.

Kandinsky was neutered from a young age, in part to stop him spraying, and in part because our incest taboo was challenged by the increasingly randy behaviour that evolved between him and his mother Gata. I'm certain this mutilation had an incalculable impact on the development of his sexuality and general temperament.

At some point during his youth, a Siamese kitten entered the household. Her name was Gatita, in keeping with the uninspired family naming conventions for female cats. She later became known as Moka (both on account of the colouring of her fur and the Spanish word for 'little spot'). Kandinsky and Gatita appeared to date for some years, much to his mother's despair. When I say 'date', I ought to make it clear that their relationship was largely platonic and that despite her occasional interest in him as a mating partner, after his castration he was only ever able to reciprocate through his signature vanilla cuddles and perennial willingness to use her as a napping partner. Moka was eventually given away due to the incessant and sometimes vicious fighting which erupted between her and her mother-in-law. I liked to think they fought over Kandinsky - who rose above the bickering - and his affections, without it ever being clear whether he was indifferent or merely oblivious. Either way, my mother would say that he was a 'sexist pig' - shrugging his shoulders to the oestrogen apocalypse erupting all around

him. She would say he had 'cara de yo no fui' (an 'I didn't do it' look of feigned innocence), and I must say that few descriptions have captured his spirit and appearance with such accuracy.

I'm pretty sure I was the only being he was ever truly in love with. He would stare longingly into my eyes, holding my gaze for several seconds longer than I was comfortable with, often weirding me out. Like many cats, he liked to think of himself as the centre of attention in all situations, and he frequently was.

Despite his deluded sense of self-importance, Kandinsky was a pathetic being - he had zero dignity and seldom displayed the integrity and finesse associated with cat archetypes, of which his mother Gata undoubtedly remains a better exemplar. He was more like a dog. Yet make no mistake: his pathetic-ness was, perhaps, his most endearing trait. Minutes after meeting him, guests could pick him up, hold him upside down, cradle him like a baby and make him play a miniature air-guitar, without him putting up any sort of resistance aside from the occasional feeble meow.

I came to believe he was the product of some reincarnation conjured up by some god to punish a morally-corrupt-yet-incompetent being of a higher order, like a petty thief or a greedy dolphin. The point is that he seemed to be on a downward trajectory in the cosmic order of the universe. Yet despite his simplicity and semi-inanimate inertia, he most likely redeemed himself during the short decade his life lasted and did so not through a courageous or benevolent disposition, but by unknowingly brightening the lives of the hundreds of people who had a chance to meet him. If there's justice in the afterlife he might return as something noble and simple like a benevolent beluga whale, or even as himself, should he be given a chance to relive a happy and unphilosophical life.

What was he like? He was an easy cat. Easy in that he was easygoing, and easy in that he was socially promiscuous and all-too-easily won over by complete strangers. He quickly warmed to the endless stream of people coming in and out of the flat, approaching them with under-alertness and over-familiarity. Kandinsky was communicative, if confused; mistakenly thinking he could hold conversations with humans. I remember him rubbing himself against my legs when he decided it was food time. He was grateful and appreciative of cow lung, which the flat's inhabitants invariably hated and the thought of which makes some wretch, even now.

My fondest memories of him involve holding him every which way: stretched out like a baby, cradled in my arms, nested under my shirt. He was invariably inert, you could remould him into any shape and

he would just stay that way.

Depending on who you ask, cats have seven to nine lives. Whether or not this is true, most cats certainly need at least this many to dodge death from their natural sworn enemies: cars, murderous neighbours (two of my previous cats were poisoned by my former next-door neighbours - fact), dogs and even other cats. Kandinsky only had one, and it's the only life he should have needed. Unlike my previous cats he was not exposed to the dangers of the streets, courtyards and rooftops of La Paz - he lived in a penthouse flat most of his life and had no fears - not because he was brave, but because he knew no dangers. The world happened outside the windows of the flat like images in a multi-display reality TV-arrangement. Always there, always out of reach. Looking out of the kitchen window now I can see the majestic Illimani mountain, taking up an inconceivably large proportion of the horizon; the sky-blue sky and the thousands of people walking up and down the city's arteries. This is not the the last scene he saw, though one he was all too familiar with, during the countless hours he spent sat on the cassette player on the kitchen table. In true feline fashion he would look down on the dots streaming up and down the Avenida 20 de Octubre, probably never registering he was looking at people and cars.

Why did he go? When I told my father the news, he told me that in Aymara culture pets are seen as people's spiritual guardians. When they leave us unexpectedly it means that the family they are a part of was in danger. "When the animal senses this, they absorb the impact of that bad thing that would otherwise happen to one of the members of the family". I don't know whether the thought of this now makes me happy or sad, but it makes me wish that he didn't die thinking it was in vain; makes me feel, in a melancholy way, that his death was at least as meaningful as his life.

I had seen him pussyfooting sheepishly onto that window ledge before; a few years ago. Someone had left the window open just wide enough for a cat's reptilian body to slip through. They don't say curiosity killed the cat for nothing. 'Kandinsky no!' - the ledge was narrow and up 19 stories of glass and concrete. There was barely enough room on that ledge for a set of paws, let alone for a cat to turn around and climb back into the window. I managed to pull him in on that occasion and on another such occasion my mother managed to beckon him back somehow. This time he wasn't so lucky. It happened at night and no-one saw him climb out, let alone fall. I'm pretty certain he jumped. The way he landed, paws outstretched, whiskers now touching the pavement. He probably thought he could fly.

Kandinsky is survived by his mother, Gata, by his human family carers, and by his 78 Facebook friends. ■

# LAS BELLAS DURMIENTES

A FILM BY  
MARCOS LOAYZA

TEXT: THEO HAYNES  
ILLUSTRATION: ORIGINAL STORY  
BOARD FROM BELLAS DURMIENTES  
COURTESY OF MARCOS LOAYZA

## LAS BELLAS DURMIENTES (ALMA FILMS, 90 MINUTES, BOLIVIA - 2012)

The story unfolds in a lawless world which ignores both victims and perpetrators alike. Quispe, a humble member of the special investigations police unit, embarks on a pursuit of the truth and justice behind the murder of two beautiful and innocuous models. The Sergeant, Quispe's partner in the investigation, doesn't appear to share the same motives, and instead wants to close down the case as soon as possible, showing no regard for the truth as he does his part to maintain the unfair and absurd order that reigns in society. Quispe's attempt to uncover the truth is thus thwarted by the actions of his seniors. This case, and notably the Sergeant's unorthodox approach to the investigation, reveals an unsettling side to society that is usually concealed.

### MARCOS AND THE BELLAS

Marcos Loayza is one of the biggest names in Bolivian cinema, a distinguished director and screenwriter perhaps most famous for his 1995 film 'Cuestión de Fe'. Loayza studied architecture in La Paz at the UMSA, followed by cinema studies in Cuba. Theo Haynes interviews him about his latest film 'Las Bellas Durmientes' which will be released on the 20th of December in La Paz (Multicine, Megacenter and Cinemateca Boliviana), Santa Cruz (Cinecenter) and Cochabamba (Cinecenter).

Interview - Marcos Loayza

the camera had a level of presence that is unavailable with larger cameras.

**Is this one of your more dramatic films?**  
This film isn't a thriller but takes elements from this genre. It involves a balance between comedy, drama and a thriller. That is to say, this film is in some ways a thriller but with a 'Marcos Loayza' ending. Here, I am working on a particular genre and hence I am reflecting on what I see cinema to be. I am looking for a suitable authenticity and identity. I think there are people within society who try to uncover the truth and others who try to conceal it. For

who harbour the truth, nor the murderer, are as significant as those looking to uncover the truth. I based this film on a more or less typical police structure making for a transparent society.

**Do you have a theme in mind that you intend to bring to light in this film?**

When I'm making a film I don't have a subject in mind, I don't say 'I'm going to do injustice'. I know that I am managing good material from the start, but I don't know the exact subject. When I face the audience, that is when I find the answers. With 'Cuestión de Fé' I was focused on territorial



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### How and why is 'Bellas Durmientes' different from your previous work?

Well, working with actors is always the same, and in this case I worked with models who, whilst not being professional actors were experienced in this general field. I aim to have a solid script in order to produce good characters. Also the camera we used was much smaller, enabling us to shoot in tighter spaces such as inside an elevator or a telephone box etc. The fact that we used this type of camera meant that

me, it is easier to say something about our society through humour, which enables one to say things without causing offence. I want people to laugh, but also to change their way of thinking.

**Is there a specific message concerning the truth that you are conveying in this film?**

It is a pretext to understand how we, as Bolivians, confront problems, how we set about finding the truth and how we resolve issues. In this case, neither those

integration and popular culture, but in the background there was tolerance and friendship. In each film I find the answer as time passes, and my films last because they include a genuine question. Now it is topical to question why Bolivia does not want to move on from where it is, but I'm sure in a year this will have changed. I think the as a director I have the opportunity to act as a social sponge; to absorb everything and then broadcast it for the public to respond. ■



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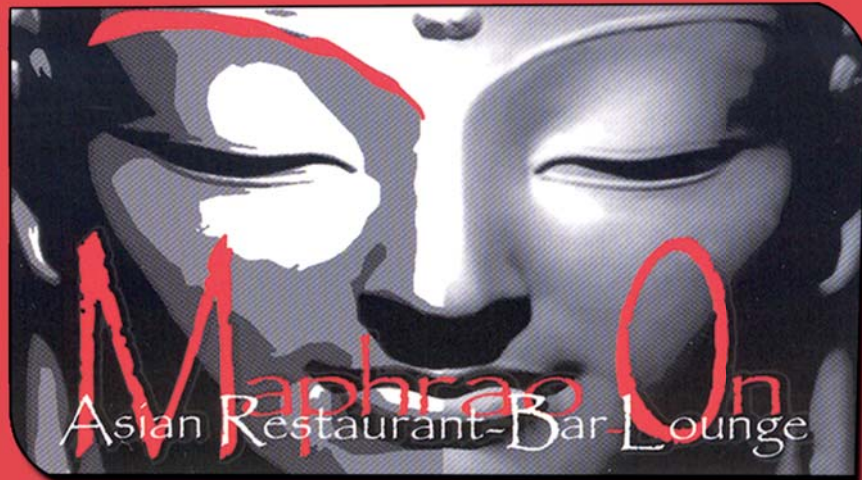


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