

SPRING 2014

# ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA

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## FIESTAS!

BEYOND FOLKLORE



## Crossing Borders

At the Oruro Carnival, a few hours from La Paz, the heavy-set blue-skirted women swirl past me in a dizzying burst of color and enviable grace. The trumpeters, some with exotically dyed hair, blare not too far behind. I remember that as a young man President Evo Morales had been a trumpeter in this very carnival.

Men with clearly indigenous facial features and heavy kinky hair dress as blacks, while over-seers "caporales" dance along with wide skirts, exaggerated jewelry and stylized whips. Dancing skeletons—figures of death—are booed and chased off in this enormous celebration of life. The old are young, and the young are old. Women dance men's steps, and mixed-race Bolivians perform proudly costumed as indigenous people from the jungle. It's a spectacle, an exuberant explosion of folklore.

The enthusiastic audience this year was mostly Bolivian with a sprinkling of foreigners, including other Latin Americans. They clapped and shouted instructions, sprayed foam at each other, and as the day wore on, enjoyed beer, cotton candy and charquekan. Here, both in the audience and the dancers, well-off Bolivians participated along with poor folk who had saved all year to be able to come.

"It's the one time of year Bolivians cheer Bolivian identity and are proud to shout 'Viva Bolivia,'" observed Bolivian journalist and LASA Media Award winner Raúl Peñaranda. The Oruro Carnival, declared Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, is a syncretic religious celebration evolving from European Lenten and indigenous traditions, that honors the Virgin of the Mining Shaft (officially Virgin of the Candelaria). Dancers must perform in at least three Oruro Carnivals to pay their promises to the Virgin, and the all-day celebration ends up in the Temple of the Mining Shaft. This medley of religious expression and lay exuberance turns the world on its head: black and white, fat and thin, male and female, young and old, gay and straight. It is performing nationality, performing life, performing death, crossing borders of time and place and identity.

The carnival went on and on and I stopped taking notes and pictures. I became one with the crowd, cheering and clapping and dancing in place, although I admit to not shooting off any foam. In the late afternoon, we decided to avoid the crowds and set back to La Paz. In the bus station, we noted sounds of an ambulance and police sirens. Returning to the Bolivian capital, we heard that a pedestrian overpass had collapsed, leaving four dead—including three band members—and almost a hundred injured. According to news reports, the fiesta went on. But now the performers walked instead of danced, accompanied by sad and funereal music, up to the church.

I thought of the dancing skeletons and the fragile borders between life and death that Carnival evokes. Not just here in Oruro, but in all the carnivals and fiestas from Rio de Janeiro to New Orleans to Santo Domingo, celebrations become a flashpoint for what is happening in society. Just a few days earlier, I had been in Ayacucho, Peru, as it prepared for its carnival. I'd asked a local sociologist Edilberto Jiménez if carnival had been suspended or diminished during the time of the Shining Path terrorism, which had the Ayacucho countryside as its focal point. "No, on the contrary," he told me. "The Carnival became a place of resistance, a place where people could get together."

And so it goes. Fiestas perform life and death and turn the world topsy-turvy. Perhaps this is why so many academics from different fields have written on the subject. On these pages, you will find intriguing stories and analyses of fiestas around Latin America and the Caribbean and beyond. Fiestas are much more than folklore, as traditionally defined, and yet they are the essence of folklore.

But as you read and view the lush photos in this issue, please remember: Enjoy! Fiestas are to celebrate.

*June C. Erlick*

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HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA

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The cover photo by Steve Cagan depicts dancers at the Fiestas of San Pacho in the Chocó region in Colombia.

## The Paradox of Carnival

BY DAVID CARRASCO

TO WALK INTO THE “ENCOUNTERS WITH THE Americas” gallery of the Peabody Museum at Harvard is to experience a paradox of time. The floors of the oldest anthropological museum in the United States creak under your feet and there’s a sense that ancient dust hovers in every corner. The towering gray casts of 5th-century A.D. Maya stelae and the 19th-century style glass cases with their ancient and ethnographic objects combine with these sensations to signal to the visitor a very old part of the New World. This impression of a static long ago shifts as flashes of bright color beckon from the far corner of the hall to the large and brilliant Day of the Dead Altar. Mexico’s vibrant festival tradition has come to Harvard in orange and blue walls, climbing jeweled feathered serpents, a grinning *calavera* sprouting ceramic flowers from its head, magenta and green *papel picado*, bread for the dead, marigold flowers, photographs of the beloved deceased (humans and animals) and a miniature performing skeleton band of musicians showing that a carnival of life and death is permanently underway. Looking up at the top beam of this *ofrenda*, the visitor reads the playful Mexican saying “¡El Muerto al Cajón, El Vivo al Fiestón!” The dead go to the casket, the living to a festival!

The Mexican writer Octavio Paz proclaimed that [we] Mexicans “*somos muy fiesteros*,” but it’s been the multi-ethnic Harvard community and its Boston neighbors who have attended a thrilling festival every Day of the Dead/All Souls Day at the Peabody Museum for the last eight years. During the second half of October hundreds of school children visit the exhibit, often leaving private written messages to deceased family members and pets in a basket set aside for these tender and sometimes irreverent offerings. “Boo Dog, you were my first dog

and I will never forget you. I hope you are having fun terrorizing all the cats up there!” And “Tupac and Biggie Smalls-R.I.P.” Plus “*Papa, Pensamos mucho en usted. Su hijo que lo ama mucho*”. Then “Dear Johnny Cash, thanks for speaking out against injustice and helping my Grandfather and I bond.” Topped by “Dear Chris Farley, thanks for being the greatest comedian of all time. You made everyone laugh.”

On the night of November 1, more than 600 people gather, some dressed as *calaveras* with scary painted faces, others as the coquettish, ghoulish *La Catrina*, to view the stunning altars, eat *tamales* and *pan de muertos* and watch the Harvard “Mariachi Veritas” band sing *rancheras* and Mexican love songs. The electricity and joyousness of the evening raises the question, “What is the meaning of this festival at Harvard?”

The magnetic centerpiece of these overcrowded, loud, delightful fiestas has been a second, temporary Day of the Dead altar in the form of a decorated pyramid constructed by Harvard students (working with Peabody Museum curators) in William Fash’s and my class on “Moctezuma’s Mexico: Then and Now.” A few weeks into the semester we introduce our students, the majority non-Latinos, to the traditions of Día de los Muertos, which combine Catholic and Aztec symbols and invite them to choose that year’s theme for the altar. In 2011 they chose 9/11 and constructed an ominous skyline of New York City with the fallen towers. Another year the student altar memorialized immigrant deaths in the U.S.-Mexico desert. This year the class chose the Boston Marathon bombings and death by gun violence to highlight in their memorial. The result was a spectacular four-sided altar with miniature statues of gods, skeletons, saints, fruit baskets,





The hanging cards from the altar were created by David Carrasco's and William Fash's "Moctezuma's Mexico" students (with help from the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture exhibit department). The other altar was created by Peabody Museum staff with help from Concilio Latino and HUMAS (Harvard University Mexican Association of Students).

flowers, candles, divine dogs and photographs of politicians, revolutionaries and musicians gunned down around the world. Above the multi-colored altar was a gently moving mobile of running shoes and colorful tiles decorated with extravagant, humorous, tragic scenes and symbols of death and life. When I asked one participating student for his reaction to the Day of the Dead festival this year he wrote, “As someone with absolutely no Hispanic background, the experience was immersive. The mariachi band, the Catrinas and Catrins, the altar: for a few hours, I was no longer in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but transplanted deep into the heart of ethnic Mexico.”

Kevin Sun’s reaction hits on several key themes of many Latin American carnivals and festivals. The magnetism of the music, the meeting with masked characters who flaunt convention, fashion and in this case death, and the construction of a central stage or altar for symbolic actions temporarily rivet human attention onto an alternate world. Most importantly these festivals generate a “carnival spirit” with its potency to transform our experience of time and place thereby “transplanting” us, during these nights of wonder, danger and stunning symbols, into another section of our cos-

mos. Then the paradox appears because many Latin American festivals display a spirit that critiques the upper levels of the social order and provides to *los de abajo* (among the living and dead) the public setting to turn festival into a play of reformist politics and status reversals. The *gritos*, dances, masquerades, excessive drinking, grotesque pantomimes and sexual displays function to expose, in short term but extremely intensive ways, the naked existential condition, suffering, fantasies and hopes of the marginalized, excluded and oppressed.

#### THE POLITICS OF FESTIVALS

Our students often focus on very contemporary issues, but the political meaning of these festivals is shown early in Juan Pedro Viqueira’s reading of popular religious festivals in 18th-century Mexico.

“The festival which was deeply rooted among the inhabitants of New Spain, was also a ritual of inversion of the social and natural order. The complex relationship between life and death in the belief of the indigenous population, castes and poor Mestizos, was made manifest on this day....the night time visit to the cemeteries made by men, women and children of the town, the festivities and drunkenness that took place there, could

inclusive society. Viqueira added, “This fiesta...sought to make manifest the presence of death in the bosom of life...” and also made manifest the presence, powers and dangers of the underclasses who celebrated not in the light but in the darkness, gathered their families not in the church or the plaza but in the village of the dead where utter loneliness rules throughout the year but is turned into a crowd with power for this single night.

These nighttime festivals at cemeteries became too much for the Spanish authorities. In 1766 the Royal Office of Crime closed the cemeteries at the time of *Todos Santos* and banned drinking after 9 p.m.

#### FESTIVALS AS MIRRORS

Maria Julia Goldwasser, in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, claims that studies of Carnival in ancient Rome, Brazil and Trinidad show that “Carnival...revealed a world in which a playful immutability was possible.” Playing with, making fun of and inverting the symbolic and political “powers that be” led Victor Turner, through his work on the social dramas of Mexico, Ireland, Africa and elsewhere to insist that every society needs to oscillate between the firming up of its social structures and their periodic dissolution in ritual processes and theatrical productions. In “Are There Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual and Drama?” Turner observes that the crucial stage in this oscillation is a “threshold” or “liminal phase” in which the celebrants enter into “a no man’s-land betwixt-and-between the structural past and the structural future.” This most potent phase in rites of passage is filled with symbols, characters, words, gestures and moods emphasizing anti-structure, ambiguity, ambivalence, hybrids of animal/human, human/god, male/female beings and employs symbols that “represent both birth *and* death.” Turner’s insights help us see that liminality puts people in a “subjunctive mood” of possibility, hypothesis, fantasy, desire and what-might-become as well as dreams of revolution and liberation.

As the essays in this issue of *ReVista*

## Festivals reveal the vicissitudes and potentialities of human life. They generate a “carnival spirit” with its potency to transform our experience of time and place.

mos. The Day of the Dead festival took this student—an outsider to Latin America—away from Harvard and rooted him in the “heart of ethnic Mexico.”

In my view the underlying purpose of this and other festivals is to reveal the vicissitudes and potentialities of human life and place people in a comprehensive “communitas”—a living community peopled by a diversity of humans, spirits, animals, the dead and gods who interact temporarily on the shared level of the cos-

not have seemed more scandalous and above all, horrifying to the illustrious elite, who sought to expel death from social life.”(Quoted in Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer, *The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico*, University of Texas, 1991, p. 43)

This unleashing of frustrations, deep devotions and passions exposed social repression and injustices. In some festivals, it presented—temporarily—a shared vision of an inverted and more



Day of the Dead Fiesta photos from 2013 illustrate the extensive use of masks and face-painting.

show, Latin American peoples everywhere organized what Turner calls “cultural aesthetic mirrors,” grand and dynamic dramas which are powerful stories people tell to themselves about themselves in collective formats. These “mirrors,” in the forms of festivals, reflect and reveal critical commentary as participants gawk and gesticulate, mask and disrobe themselves and unmask the “emperors” of their world. When the architects of “official stories” and state media cast up their cultural and political slogans of reality, they usually exclude and diminish the fullness and complexity of the individual and society. Carnivals and festivals flash back shocking, ironic, outrageous, sometimes wicked demonstrations that unmask and often undress official hypocrisy and “good” manners as well as the wounds caused by authorities who strive to appear absolute. Yet in another paradox, it was the Spaniards who held the first great carnivals in Latin America, partly to dramatize their own

official, absolute authority of the *conquistador*. The centerpiece of the first great Mexican carnival was at the Plaza of Mexico City in 1538 when it was transformed into a spectacular Roman Circus by the Spaniards.

#### THE SPANISH CARNIVAL OF CONQUEST

A jaw-dropping description by the conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo shows how the plaza was turned into a fabulous series of theatrical stages where riotous hunts, a naval sea battle, lavish processions and actual killings took place in a recreated 1st-century A.D. Roman Empire.

To celebrate the Treaty of Aigues Mortes between the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, the “Lord of Glorious Memory,” and France, the Viceroy of Mexico Don Antonio de Mendoza and Hernán Cortés organized a series of “great festivals and rejoicings” to display the prodigious energies, wealth and excesses of

the conquistadors and the new capital. The entire Mexico City Plaza was transformed into the forest primeval and then the Battle of Rhodes. First they built a noisy forest with “a great variety of trees as natural as though they had grown there...so perfectly arranged that they were worth observing.” Based on Díaz del Castillo’s accounts, this imitation forest was supplied with deer, rabbits, hares, birds, foxes and jackal, young lions and four small tigers, “for the native Mexican Indians are so ingenious in arranging those things that in the whole universe, according to what many saw who have traveled all over the world, there has not been their like.” Into this forest were deposited a “party of savages” with bows, arrows and cudgels, and when the wildlife was released from their cages the savages “ran after them through the wood and came out into the great plaza” where they killed the animals and each other. This raucous, bloody hunt (observed from nearby windows and seating areas

by lavishly dressed Spanish women) was followed by a grand procession on horseback of fifty “cavaliers and negroes and negresses...suckling their negro children...with their King and Queen” all dressed in necklaces of gold and pearls, precious stones and silver ornaments. This calming display of order, elitism and wealth suddenly exploded into a Spanish and African attack on the indigenous “savages” who were conquered.

The following day, the City of Rhodes was built in the plaza with towers, battlements, turrets and entryways through which paraded “one hundred Knights Commanders with their rich embroidered insignia of gold and pearls...on horseback,” followed by a mock sea battle. Soon, a sea battle was staged with four ships with “main and foremasts and mizzens and sails so natural that many persons were astonished to see them go under sail across the plaza” firing cannons into the air. Masquerading the early successes of Christian evangelization as well, this sea battle included “some Indians on board dressed to be like Dominican Friars when they came from Castile” with the added touch that some were “plucking chickens and others fishing.” This noisy masquerade merged into full battle between Christian Knights and two companies of Turks... “most Turklike with rich silk robes all purple and scarlet

and comfits...best wines obtainable, *aloja* (*aloja*, a beverage made of water, honey and spice [mead]), *chuca* [*chicha*, a beverage made from fermented fruits and cacao all frothed up] and *suplicaciones* [a kind of thin, light pastry],” all served on a rich table service of gold and silver. In a gesture of verbal masking, Díaz del Castillo wrote that the jesters and “versifiers” recited praise and jokes about the Spanish authorities and conquistadores. Yet he blotted out the sentence in his manuscript that read “and some of them were drunk and spoke...indecently until they were taken by force and carried out, so as to silence them.”

#### COUNTER-CARNIVALS

Despite the ability of colonial authorities to present overwhelming performances of triumphal domination in the New World, colonized peoples throughout Latin America performed their own “aesthetic mirrors” animated and peopled by indigenous and African myths, gods, spirits, drinking rituals, dance movements, sexuality and the presentation of hybrid costumes and the manipulation of regalia. The immense exuberance of these counter-carnivals was considered scandalous and devilish by ecclesiastical and civil authorities who continually schemed to regain control and suppress what they feared were pre-contact

priests regarded as decorous and reverent conduct.” This drive and ability to rework the Christian rituals, according to their indigenous traditions and trance-producing practices, was combined with immense aesthetic repertoires and resulted in New World festivals that utterly changed European, ancient and local ritual practices into mixed Latin American styles of sensuality and symbolic politics as so many of the articles in this *ReVista* show.

#### CARNAVAL SIN FIN/MAGIC MASKS AT HARVARD

The ethnographic collections at Harvard’s Peabody Museum reflect all this history. They are more of a storehouse of possibilities than just a container of old, classified cultural objects. Cultural revitalization happens there through periodic educational festivals. When Harvard student Harleen Gambhir walked out of the Peabody Museum as midnight approached on a recent Day of the Dead Festival, her face was painted as a dramatic Mexican sugar skull and she learned the paradoxical power of masking. She wrote that during the magical evening when she and friends mimed their roles as spirits of the dead, “We played around with the many ways that you could say a lot without saying anything at all. We floated from child to child, staring mournfully, playfully, or inquisitively, as struck our fancy.” Walking to her dorm in the night through Harvard Yard, she wondered if someone would recognize her, “forcing me back into my daily identity.” No one did recognize her because living temporarily in betwixt life and death, recognition and anonymity, she realized that “the mask of the event was so powerful that the magic never wore off.”

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## Colonized peoples throughout Latin America performed their own “aesthetic mirrors.”

and gold.” This battle is disrupted when “a lot of fierce bulls were let loose so as to separate them.”

As every carnival needs a feast, Díaz del Castillo adds extraordinary details of the “splendid repast” that took place at this first and greatest of New World carnivals. The wives of the conquistadores were finely dressed in crimson, silk and damask with gold and silver jewels and along with other settlers of Mexico were served “marzipan, sweetmeats of citron, almonds

religious sensibilities rooted in Native American and African dreams. William Taylor describes the negotiations by the colonized in 18th-century Mexico when “Indians in central Mexico adopted a whole series of Christian practices that were familiar or readily understandable to them, such as attendance at mass, penitence by flagellation, pilgrimage, liturgical theater, sacred dancing and other forms of worshipful movement, but carried them far beyond what the





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# IDENTITY

Fiestas are associated with the revelry they bring Latin Americans, but they are just as important as a transformative social space. Here are accounts of how fiestas facilitate the creation and transcendence of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and sexual identity.

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# Whose Skin Is This, Anyway?

The Gran Poder and Other Tales of Ethnic Cross-Dressing **BY DAVID M. GUSS**

**AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN DRESSES AS A PLAINS** Indian, as if seen through the lens of Fellini, while Andean natives wear white masks and carry whips, pretending to be colonial overseers. Whites don blackface and blacks whiteface. But blacks also dance in blackface while Indians perform as blacks costumed as whites as imagined by slaves in the brutal silver mines of colonial Latin America. The combinations in these dances of ethnic cross-dressing are nearly endless as are their many interpretations. The caustic bite of dominant groups parodying minorities has rendered many examples of this often ribald behavior politically incorrect and unacceptable. Yet while it is true that many forms of ethnic cross-dressing can be seen as a theatre of domination, so too can many be understood as a powerful means of transformation by which groups take on new identities and nations are redefined. Fraught with ambivalence and contradiction, ethnic cross-dressing, a term that I have coined for this practice, is nearly universal. It is also a driving engine of festive behavior throughout the world.

Despite its global significance and complexity, there has been relatively little theoretical attention paid to ethnic cross-dressing, and what does exist has been generally preoccupied with condemning its racist manifestations. Without doubt, the sinister legacy of blackface, emerging from 19th-century minstrelsy, has understandably stigmatized most discussions of the subject. But even in this long-enduring tradition, one can discover meanings beyond the simple appropriation and parody of African-American forms. Michael Rogin, for example, argues that such “racial cross-dressing,” as he calls it, was an important if painful strategy in the naturalization of such marginal immigrant groups as the Irish and Jews. While acknowledging the

cruelty in a tradition that makes oppression entertaining and real history invisible, it was also a vehicle for remaking identities, one of ethnic cross-dressing’s most recurrent themes. As such, it is filled with ambivalence and contradiction, or as Rogin writes in *Blackface, White Noise*: “Admiration and ridicule, appropriation and homage, transience and permanence, pathos and play, deception and self-deception, stereotyped and newly invented, passing up and passing down, class, sex, and race—all these elements in contradictory combination can play their role in masquerade. Because cross-dressing contains multiple possibilities in theory, celebratory accounts must enter history.” (1998:35)

An even older U.S. tradition of ethnic cross-dressing than blackface is that of “playing Indian.” While today it is most commonly associated with the fraternal orders of white, middle-aged men and the controversial antics of buckskin-clad team mascots, its multifaceted roots stretch back to the Colonial era. After all, the Boston Tea Party, one of the United States’ most sacred foundational myths, is based on ethnic cross-dressing. As Philip Deloria points out in *Playing Indian*, the Sons of Liberty, who dressed up as Mohawks and dumped 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor in 1773, weren’t disguising their identities but rather creating new ones. By dressing up as Indians “Americans redefined themselves as something other than British colonists.” (1998:2)

“Increasingly inclined to see themselves in opposition to England rather than to Indians, they inverted interior and exterior to imagine a new boundary line of national identity. They began to transform exterior, noble savage Others into symbolic figures that could be rhetorically interior to the society

they sought to inaugurate...As England became a them for colonists, Indians became an us.” (*Ibid.* 21-22).

While assuming Indian identities may have been a powerful metaphorical tool for 18th-century American rebels, it was no less ambivalent than the use of blackface by immigrant performers. In fact, Deloria describes the relationship of whites to native peoples in a similar way as Rogin and others do between blackface entertainers and African-Americans, or as he characterizes it, “a dialectic of simultaneous desire and repulsion” (*Ibid.* 4). The Sons of Liberty didn’t end with American independence either, but was reborn with the Improved Order of Red Men (I.O.R.M.) and other fraternal orders that met in tepees with assumed Indian names and invented rituals. In fact, it was membership in a New York State order called the Cayugas that led one of America’s first anthropologists, Lewis Henry Morgan, to begin work among the Iroquois. Given the name Shenandoah, he was entrusted with the task of providing a native vocabulary for the group.

Although Morgan went on to complete the first extensive comparative kinship study, he never went “native,” as some anthropologists have done. A key trope in the history of the discipline since its inception in the 19th century, the figure who is absorbed into a non-Western culture (be it an anthropologist or soldier-scholar like T. E. Lawrence) holds an enduring fascination. And yet, “going

**In descending order, left to right: Diablada dancers representing the devil’s wife in the Gran Poder, La Paz; Morenada dancer dressed as an *Achachi*; Caporal dancer; Cholas dancing as part of a Morenada in front of the Church of the Gran Poder; Cholas with *matracas* in their hands.**



native,” just like “passing,” should not be confused with ethnic cross-dressing. When African-Americans, for example, dress up as Plains Indians to celebrate Mardi Gras in New Orleans, they are not trying to fool anyone about their real identity; nor in this instance are they using their elaborate sequined costumes and feathers to parody or ridicule another group. They are celebrating a history of mutual support and interchange dating back to a period when both groups suffered from an oppressive white culture. The African-Americans who dance with King Zulu, on the other hand, use exaggerated blackface as a type of visual double entendre satirizing whites satirizing blacks. In each case, ethnic cross-dressing uses the “other” as a discursive strategy, regardless of the message. To “go native” or “pass” is to erase one’s ethnicity and become invisible. The ethnic cross-dresser needs to be seen.

I first became interested in ethnic cross-dressing in the early 1980s when my friend Benito Yrady invited me to the village of Caicara in eastern Venezuela where a celebration known as the Día del Mono or “Day of the Monkey” was taking place. It was a raucous event with huge conga lines of drunken dancers singing and tossing blue dye at one another. In a separate circle, an overweight man in a long blue dress led a group of children in blackface while another group danced in burlap sacks with red bandannas and feathers made to look like Indians. It was a wild, chaotic bacchanal. And I loved it. That night I wrote in my journal that it was the perfect “antifestival.” But I was wrong, of course. For the *mestizo* population of Caicara this newly invented Carib dance, which had replaced the traditional Day of the Innocents, was claimed to be a celebration of their Indian identity. And while the dance’s history as well as the ethnicity of its participants could certainly be questioned, the instrumentality of the performance in establishing a uniquely local and hence “indigenous” identity was clear.

I wrote about the Day of the Monkey along with a number of other festivals in

*The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism as Cultural Performance* (2000). One such festival, called Tamunangué, took place on the opposite side of Venezuela in the state of Lara and was also performed to celebrate a new identity. Yet despite its indigenous name, Tamunangué was defiantly *mestizo*, a celebration of Venezuela’s multiethnic heritage. The dance itself, however, was derived from one of the most seminal celebrations in all of Latin America, the Dance of the Moors and Christians. Adapted throughout the continent soon after the Spaniards’ arrival in the 16th century, the Dance of the Moors and Christians provided the prototype for ethnic cross-dressing with the subjugated Moors easily replaced by Romans, Jews, blacks, French grenadiers, and even monkeys. Whatever the actors, the narrative of the Moors and Christians is a story of conquest and conversion, a theatre of domination (See Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, and María Soledad Carrasco, “Christians and Moors in Spain: History, Religion, Theatre,” *Cultures* 3,1 (1976): 87-116).

While I was completing work on *The Festive State*, my friend Javier Sanjines suggested that I visit Bolivia in order to watch a festival called the Gran Poder. Sanjines knew my interests and claimed that the Gran Poder synthesized them all like no other event. I was intrigued and it would certainly be a relief to be in one place after spending years doing a multi-sited ethnography. So in 1994, in the middle of the first World Cup in which Bolivia had ever participated, I took a flight to La Paz. While I had been aware of the importance of ethnic cross-dressing in Venezuelan festivals, *The Festive State* focused more on the way in which traditional festive behavior had been appropriated by both national and regional governments for the purpose of creating a new populist identity. The “ideology of tradition” was turned on its head and, in place of a conservative

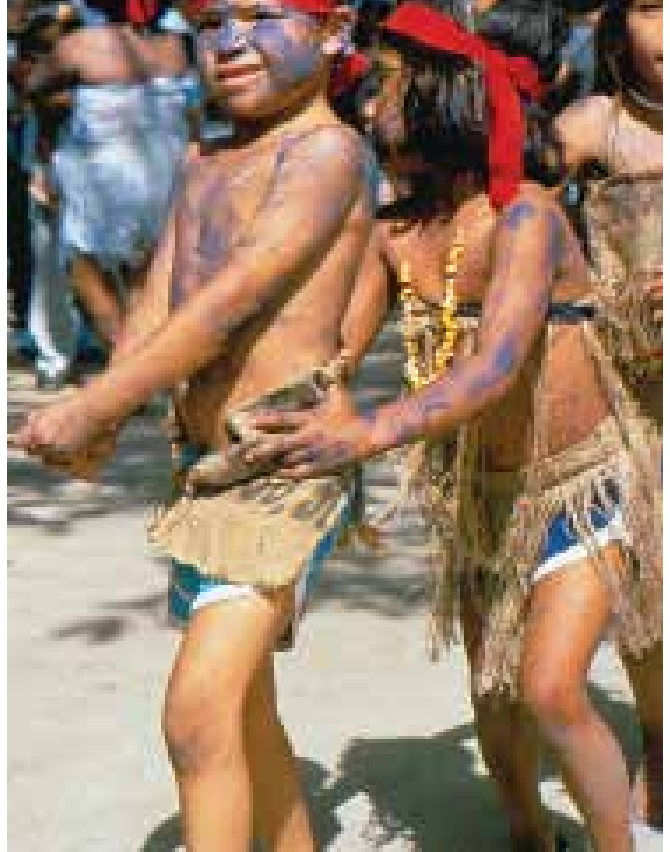
force, presented as a subversive language able to challenge and redefine concepts of race, ethnicity, history, gender and nationhood. In Bolivia, however, ethnic cross-dressing was much more than a subtext. It was the dominant idiom of nearly every celebration.

With its roots in the 20th century’s massive migration of rural Aymara to La Paz, the Fiesta del Gran Poder has become the largest urban indigenous celebration in the Americas. Its history has paralleled this large demographic change along with the ongoing conflict it has ignited with the dominant Bolivian oligarchy. In my article, “The Gran Poder and the Reconquest of La Paz” (*The Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 2006), I discuss how this event has provided a vehicle for not only mobilizing this newly arrived population but for remapping the urban imaginary. Recognizing that La Paz was once called Chuquiago, “the head staff” or center of a pre-Colombian Aymara world, the dance has extended itself little by little recolonizing what for centuries had been an indigenous universe. But just as the Gran Poder has remapped the city of La Paz, so too has it remade the racial and ethnic identities of its participants.

Celebrating a miraculous colonial painting of the Holy Trinity, the festival grew from a small neighborhood event in the 1920s to its current city-wide presence. The painting with its powerful image of the three faces of Christ joined together had long been outlawed by the Church and, like those who have adopted it as their patron saint, exiled to the margins of the city. But eight weeks after Easter, on the day before Holy Trinity Sunday, the members of these underserved communities gather together to descend upon the center of La Paz and the many areas once forbidden to them. With 35,000 participants organized

**In descending order left to right: King Zulu and his Court, Mardi Gras, New Orleans, 1940; Diablada troupe, 1940s; David Guss (left) and Kate Wheeler (right) in devil costumes at the Gran Poder, La Paz, Bolivia.**





into 57 different fraternities, the festival is an encyclopedia of Andean dance forms, both old and new. It also provides the world's greatest showcase of ethnic cross-dressing in a single place. There are native laborers called Doctorcitos dressed as 18th-century white lawyers while others wear blackface and chains in elaborate recreations of the slavery experience. Aymara dress as Incas and Conquistadors acting out the trauma of the conquest. They also dance as lowland Tobas, parodying their "wildness" with costumes based on Sioux and other Plains Indians. And then there are the whip-wielding Caporales in their tall boots laced with bells and costumes that combine elements of gauchos, Star Wars, and Cuban rumba dancers. Young and athletic, they represent the black overseers of the coca plantations that were once worked by African slaves.

The largest groups, however, are reserved for the Morenada, the "dance of the blacks." Referred to as the *pulmones* or "lungs" of the Gran Poder, Morenada fraternities have up to a thousand members with two sixty-piece brass bands each. The main body of the group is composed of the *morenos* wearing huge hooped skirts and oversized epaulettes and exaggerated black masks with protruding lips, a pipe, and a wart on the end of the nose. And topping it all is a miner's hat festooned with fruit, feathers, and flowers, a symbol of the role these black slaves were said to have played in the silver mines of colonial Bolivia; although the costume itself is claimed to be based on a black parody of 17th-century Spanish court attire. But other dancers also participate in the Morenada: *achachis*, the "old men" with white masks and long braided whips, said to represent the *morenos'* overseers, young *figuras* in mini-skirts and sexy high-heeled boots,

**In descending order, left to right: Morenada Unión de Bordadores del Gran Poder; children dancing as Indians in the Día del Mono, Caicara, Venezuela; Diablos del Illimani, 1946, precursors to the Diablada Internacional Relámpago del Gran Poder.**

and enormous bloques of *cholas* in beautiful silk dresses and shawls with expensive bowler hats and gold jewelry.

While the origin of the *morenos'* enormous 60-pound costumes is in dispute, the status that they convey is universally recognized. Members of these fraternities are upwardly mobile Aymara in transition from one identity to another. "If you want to dance the Morenada," goes a popular refrain, "You better have some money." And it is true that the cost for a couple dancing in the Morenada can be as high as \$2,000. To spend that much in such an ostentatious display certainly signals that one has arrived in the middle-class. But why do they signify it by dressing as black slaves who in turn are dressed as 17th-century white noblemen, especially when it was their own ancestors who were forced to work in the mines during the colonial *mita*?

Marjorie Garber notes in her book *Vested Interests*, a study of gender cross-dressing, that there are many interpretive possibilities for such behavior but that all of them appear to reflect a "category crisis" of some sort (1992). In the Andes, racial categories, as defined by concepts of *mestizaje*, seem to be in perpetual crises, causing what Mary Weismantel has referred to in *Cholas and Pishtacos* as a chronic condition of "racial estrangement" (2001).

Unlike Caribbean and Brazilian concepts of *mestizaje* that emphasize a utopian continuum in which all racial oppositions vanish, that of the Andes remains binary. And yet it is far different from the U.S. binary of hypodescent in which racial categories are fixed and immutable. Andean *mestizaje* is continuously shifting and relational depending on one's location and status. An Indian in one situation can be a mestizo in yet another. For native Aymara who move from the countryside to the city with aspirations of mesticizing themselves, the Morenada is the dance of choice. As much about ethnic mobility as social mobility, it enacts the process of changing one's skin and like so many forms of ethnic cross-dressing is about transfor-

mation and becoming.

People naturally assumed when I decided to dance that I would join one of the large and well-organized Morenadas. And it is true that I was tempted by the Rosas de Viacha with their beautiful red and black costumes and soulful band. But my wife, Kate Wheeler, had fallen in love with the Diablada and so we joined the Internacional Juventud Relámpago del Gran Poder, one of the oldest fraternities in La Paz. In fact, the Diablada was one of the earliest dances associated with the festival. Originating in the mining center of Oruro, the Diablada was a fantastic allegory in which the native gods, driven underground and demonized as devils, returned once again only to be controlled by the Archangel Michael. The conquest all over again, but with a commemoration of the millions of Indians who died working in the mines. Much more athletic and physically demanding than the Morenada, the Diablada costumes were also spectacular: huge horned masks with bulging eyes made of thermoses and teeth jutting out like knives and a three-headed serpent on top, a white wig, silk yellow pants with more serpents, a jewel encrusted breastplate, an apron of antique coins, a long black cape with red lining and gold sequins and a pair of dragons sewn on, three-foot-wide epaulettes with beaded tassels all around, red gloves with flames along the sides, and tall boots with serpents and red pom poms. I was Satanás. And with my costume and mask on no one could tell I was a white guy from New Jersey. Or as my companions liked to say, "*Somos todos diablos.*"

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# Bodies and God

## Rio Samba Schools and the Togolese Black Divinities Festival **BY ZECA LIGIÉRO**

**WHEN WATCHING THE FESTIVAL DES DIVINITÉS Noires** in Togo in 2011 I was reminded of the images of samba school parades, which I've researched in Rio. Even though Rio's carnival has become a mega multimedia event while the much smaller African festival retains a more artisanal organization, it resembled the old forms of the earlier carnival parades in Rio's early 20th century, when they were exclusively organized by communities of African descent in their own particular way. I began to be curious about that history and also to establish commonalities between these two celebrations, observing how they both deal with the question of ritual, the body of the performer and its meanings today.

African or sub-Saharan traditional

dances are characterized by both explosive and concentrated movement, total body involvement in tune with percussion, generating a context whose meaning is strongly spiritual and reaches, in ecstasy, a trance that represents the ultimate encounter with the divine. This may or may not occur depending on the type of ritual and the priest's preparation. African dances—countless in their styles—vary with ethnicity, environment and mutual exchanges through migration. In these cultures, rituals take place in arenas, processions or both. The dance always occurs within a celebratory ritual context—a large capacity for interactivity and audience participation with mostly people from the same group or guests and supporters. Ethnicity speaks through

the body in its own lexicon of articulated movements with rhythms and songs that are emblematic of the group's own mythology or concerned with its identity.

I agree with African philosopher Bunko Fu-Kiau that dance is only one element of African performance and should not be studied separately. He proposes the study of a single compound object—(“tied”) “drumming-singing-dancing”—a continuum. He also observes that when someone is touching a conga drum or any other instrument, a spiritual language is being articulated. Thus, we can understand that the classical separation between religion and entertainment does not apply in most African and their diasporic performances; they are complementary parts of the same celebration





as I experienced personally in these two festivals in Rio and Togo.

The drumming-singing-dancing that characterizes the celebrations of Black Africa as seen in the Festival des Divinités Noires in Aného, Togo, as well as in the American diaspora in the Samba schools in Rio, Brazil, highlight the ambivalent nature of both festivals. In both, ritual and entertainment are complementary, with dramatic and epic elements in their performances.

#### SAMBA, PERFORMANCE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

I've studied samba performances in four quite flexible categories. Although they express historic transformation in the structure of samba, these categories should not be examined solely within a chronological framework. Coming from the oral tradition, they expand and retract and will reappear in another context without strict historical accuracy. "Samba-play," "Samba-ritual," "Samba-drama" and "Samba-epic" are settings designed

to study the forms and functions of samba from their own communities. Since the beginning, religious and secular community gatherings for samba festivity almost always happened on the same day as part of an ongoing celebration.

In the category called "Samba-play," including the use of samba as pure and simple game, we may list various forms of folkloric samba, such as *samba duro* (hard) or *de pernada* (kick) and, in some cases, traditional samba called *partido alto*. Here, a simple lyric incorporates proverbs, popular sayings, with onomatopoeia, a play on the words and rhymes, the mode for its deployment. Its function is playful exercise, whose practice of impromptu verses keeps skills sharp, challenging the samba master's poetry.

"Samba-ritual" is closest to its ancestral form. Generated within a religious context, it has liturgical functions, a form of prayer. Similar to the "Samba-play," its poetry is simple, as is its rhythm and melody. The "Samba-ritual" found in Umbanda and the other related rituals are even

reminiscent of the old *batuques* (drums). Its circular and repetitive rhythm and devotion that induce the lyric, take the body of the dancer to enter the vibration that requires the entity to return to the living world, through trance or possession. Samba as a ritual retains the qualities of traditional African style of performance: repetition, recitation, symbolism, and use of idiophone—known as a vivid representation of an idea with sounds.

"Samba-drama" comes about when the samba master talks about his daily life. Until the '20s, samba masters worked only within their own black communities. But with the spread and success of Rio's vaudeville and burlesque theatre, the expansion of the music and film industries, and the proliferation of radio stations and the labor market opened by casinos and nightclubs, new opportunities were created, even for black people. It was, however, the urban samba, created in Rio de Janeiro in the early 20th century, that became known to the world as the main form of Brazilian popular



The Togo photos of celebrating girls on the left and the women above suggest the combination of ritual and entertainment also found in Rio's samba.

music, a further development of this form of samba in the '60s supplanted the name samba, then called "bossa-nova."

The "Samba-epic" may be synonymous with *samba enredo* (samba plot). When creating the plot, samba composers seek an overview of the topic, listing the different elements that recall the historical trajectory of the hero to be honored or the significant events experienced by the subject of the plot. Currently, the function of the plot itself is mobilizing an imagination that is capable of visually supplying thousands of costumes, props and floats. The samba is also created by a songwriting team, so its fragmented narrative cohesion then becomes a kind of collage of different styles of samba, in which all the information is packaged to promote easy understanding and song assimilation, linking the intrinsic necessity of crowd participation in the parade of each school, with about 5,000 performers.

The carnival parade was developed over nearly a century; its final space, the

stadium Sambadrome, was inaugurated fifty years after the foundation of the first school of samba of Rio, "Let's Talk" in 1926. The transformation of the parade into a media event televised live across the planet popularized it in a thoughtless way. While confined to a suitable space, sponsored by the government and by large multinationals, the parade of the samba school still continues to be the most genuine of Afro-Brazilian inventions, the quintessence of their processional performances, a great fiesta turned into reality each year.

If in the beginning of the 20th century, Catholic processions inspired the samba schools' parade, many transformations have occurred since then; the samba processions created their own cosmogonies placing black gods and goddesses as black terrestrial representatives of human destinies. African kingdoms are resettled in Brazilian lands, but add the pomp elements from European clothing like velvet, the ornaments in

gold thread, the royal insignia. Through his body, the samba performer creates a utopia in the professional performance. In addition to having total freedom of body movement, everyone has the right to be king for one night—assuming that his kingdom is the powerful and inseparable trio of African performance: drumming-singing-dancing.

#### FESTIVAL DES DIVINITÉS NOIRES: RITUAL AND ENTERTAINMENT

The Festival des Divinités Noires that takes place during a week in Aného-Glidji, a Togolese shrine, every two years, is one of the most spectacular of black Africa. The festival schedule varies each day with a wide range of performances, which merge the rituals of different religions from distinct regions with performances from Europe and the Americas. Conceived as a festival of heterogeneous dance traditions, it brings together groups of religious initiation associations, groups of tradi-



Brazilian samba still continues to be the most genuine Afro-Brazilian invention, a great fiesta turned into reality each year.

tional African dance, and dancers who bring their solos, sometimes mixed with contemporary dance styles. The performances that come from other continents are artistic, but those groups from black Africa come to perform their old dramas, bringing their ancient ancestors back by using “drumming-singing-dancing.” From inside the performance, the unwavering faith of individuals belonging to distinct traditions incorporates their local ancient deities indistinctly called “voodoos.”

At the opening of the festival at the shrine of Glidji the priests of the sacred forest Glidji perform a ritual alluding to the 41 voodoos brought from the Ghana region by the founders of the ancient kingdom of Togo in the 17th century. Afterwards, they have the parade of the main groups that will perform throughout the week of the festival. It is reminiscent of the samba schools’ old system of parade before the construction of the Sambadrome, when it had been staged in the streets of downtown Rio de Janeiro. The parade lasts for a few hours. Among the groups, two, comprised solely of young women and girls, attract the most attention: Virgins from Bazaar and Virgins Adjifo expose the nude female body just as in Rio. However, in Africa they are part of an ethnic ritual while in Rio it is pure show business. Two narrators take turns giving names and some details of each group as they are presented, in French and the local language, Ewe-Mina. They provide us with some elements of the complex plot performed by the groups of priests, believers or artists who come from different traditions bringing different types of instruments and characterizations. The structure of the procession is very close to the samba schools’ parade—first a small group enters the space with flags and banners identifying them as a delegation; then the singers and drummers reach the small stage at the entrance of the arena and begin to sing and play. One or more groups of dancers proceed to the center of the arena, where they perform their most complex evolution. The space of the main town square

is transformed into a large arena for the presentation of the groups. On one side a large grandstand is mounted for a general audience and in the background there is a tent set up for the chief priests.

On the second day of the festival, the groups perform on a large stage specially mounted in front of the beach in Aného, and its structure more closely resembles that of a musical show. Two of the groups deserve special attention because they relate to Afro-Brazilian performances.

The first is the traditional dance group Amlima, composed of drummers, acrobats with stilts and singers, following the structure of procession. Some performances featured dancers with masks, props and flags. The group sings throughout the presentation and many of them take turns playing musical instruments with mastery.

## The two festivals in Brazil and Togo preserve strong parallels in terms of aesthetics, faith and joy; the links between them are evident.

The Goro Voodoo presentation is itself a spectacle. The strong and dramatic faces, marked with white dashes on black skin convey something mournful and eerie, but at the same time some of these characters like to play and pose. Sometimes they demonstrate being strong warriors; others show no fear of death by using their knives and daggers against their chest in a sequence of big hits. They traditionally come from Ghana but venerate entities from several neighboring countries, including some traditions of the ancient Hausa, who were converted to Islam in the 11th century: their clothes still resemble Muslim costumes. Some deities mentioned here are the spirits of “people who were sold” in Ghana, Togo and Benin, who for one reason or another were not shipped to the Americas but were enslaved by the local tribes of Ewes. Other legends say they suffered a violent death shown in their dances

through violent gestures made by striking their chests with a knife, alluding to the ancient drama of their tumultuous passage to the other world. Past lives, revived, are recalled in a performance, a theater of spirits for the believers to understand their own ancestries through collective catharsis and ritual dramas.

Whoever sees the festival of black deities or watches the parade of the samba school for the first time is struck with the wonder of music and dance, the extraordinarily elaborate costumes with pictorial elements alluding to the very plot of the story they tell. Even those who are not from the black community, or who are not researchers, even those not able to understand the story in the plot, engage in spectacular environments, where the artist, beyond “drumming-singing-dancing,” embodies the history of the deities.

As observed by New York University Professor of Performance Studies Richard Schechner, ritual and entertainment are performed simultaneously. While the Rio de Janeiro samba is strictly timed, Togo has an improvised schedule and long delays between presentations. However, even with the physical separation marking their evolution and the difference in the organization and structure of these events, the links between them are evident. Through a common ancestral literature, these two festivals preserve strong parallels in terms of aesthetics, faith and joy, commonly associated with Africanisms.

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# Fiesta and Identity

Barranquilla's Gay Carnival **BY ALEXANDER CHAPARRO SILVA**

**IN BARRANQUILLA THE DAYS OF CARNIVAL BE-**gin early. From the first hours of the day—already confused with the last hours of the night—the smells of celebration are in the air. The streets, adorned for the occasion, are quickly packed with people while taxi drivers try out new routes to deliver their passengers. “*Esta es la verdadera Barranquilla, la que aflo- ra los días de Carnaval*” (This is the real Barranquilla, the one that surfaces during Carnival), says the friendly driver as I get out of the taxi.

It's Monday, February 9, 2010. I walk into the Casa del Carnaval, a gleaming edifice from the Republican period, where the *hacedores* (creators) of the Carnival finish the last details to welcome the most anticipated day of the year. I had an early interview with Álvaro de Jesús Gómez, a notable figure in Barranquilla and one of the heads of the gay Carnival, who informs me that he is the first openly non-heterosexual candidate for elected office in the whole Atlantic Coast region of Colombia.

While we discuss the origins and objectives of gay Carnival—staged against the backdrop of the great Carnival of Barranquilla—Álvaro shows me his personal objects and photographs “from when he used to transform himself into a woman,” which he seems to always keep on his person for such occasions. He cannot avoid a tone of nostalgia for those days; now he dedicates his hours to community politics and has given up crossdressing: “*la edad y mi sentido de la elegancia, no me lo permitirían*” (age and my sense of elegance would not permit it).

Although I am a historian, Álvaro always treats me like a journalist. It does not surprise me then that he gives me an energetic account of the multitude of problems facing the gay Carnival: the heated debates among those interested

in organizing it; the constant scarcity of economic resources; the limited public participation of lesbian and bisexual women; the increasing homophobic acts in the city. With his words, I draw an imaginary map in my head of the most important gay fiesta in Barranquilla: identity, tradition, political rights and violence take the shape of the first coordinates. Before leaving, with total self-confidence and without my asking, he gives me an autographed photo. I have kept it since.

Days before, I had interviewed the official Queen of the trendiest gay bar, chosen this year from dozens of cross-dressers

that the gay Carnival attracts a large audience, making it the second largest event and generating both formal and informal employment in the Carnival of Barranquilla—a claim confirmed by others—and which receives the growing support of officials and the media:

“We, the gays, also participate in all of the Carnival of Barranquilla: we are its true artistic managers. Which Carnival activity doesn't have a gay person lending his labor, talent, or capacity to create beauty? We are present in all of the events, in *comparsas*, in *carrozas* and in dances; we are even in the Queen's procession; she was with us for the public

**The most important gay fiesta in Barranquilla, Colombia, brings to the forefront issues of identity, tradition, political rights and violence.**

(*transformistas*) and transvestites from all over the Colombian Caribbean. Her name is Camélica Noreña. When we met that night, after her dance show, she could not hide her extreme happiness about being filmed and interviewed by the local television station, with all of the details of her transformation from “man to woman.” She told me with pride: “The ratings shot up and they are going to repeat the program. Our evolution is impressive. We, the gays, work 365 days a year; we aren't *la loca* stereotype any more that used to be chased through the streets, we are now an image to be shown. Among our ranks are politicians, city councilmen, and we are fighting for our rights. We learn every day.”

During our conversation, Camélica tried to show the city as modern and respectful of sexual diversity. She said

proclamation (*en la lectura del bando*) and has presented herself as ‘gay-friendly’ to the press. Equality is unstoppable.”

In effect, you could take the history of the gay Carnival and easily see how it parallels the story of liberation and the increasing political voice of non-heterosexual people in the city. The history of these festivities is no less than the story of the struggles against discrimination and homophobic slander. Jairo Polo, one of the main organizers, observed that when the gay Carnival had not yet obtained official permission, a mass of people, including policemen, would follow the participants and throw stones at them. Despite these hostilities, after multiple individual and collective efforts by the participants, the event became widely popular, gaining recognition not only from the people but also formally by



Gay carnival is a time to carry out the legacy of resistance, but also for elaborate costumes and just plain fun.

the Carnival. Nowadays the authorities allocate resources to the gay Carnival and favor a campaign of tolerance and inclusion—their words—among local citizens. “Despite the homophobia, many things have changed with the gay Carnival; we can now express ourselves, we are freer, treated as citizens,” asserts Polo.

However, before accepting this story as the essential liberation of gay identity fulfilled through the Carnival—and before recognizing ourselves as the inheritors of this legacy of resistance and struggle—we should suspend our certainties for a moment to put into perspective the meaning of some important

gestures, which make possible the recreation of this identity game.

One recurrent theme that grabbed my attention during these and other conversations was that a variety of dissident gender and sexual identities is usually condensed into the epithet “gay”—many of my interviewees identified themselves

as transgender (cross-dressers, transvestites or transsexuals). Although for most this term is far from homogenous, those interviewed frequently asserted, before I had asked any questions, “because I am gay” or “as a gay person I can tell you that,” suggesting a voluntarily strong sense of identity, both personal and collective. “Gay,” Álvaro tells me, “is an Anglicism that means happy, glad, extroverted man; it’s a good platform.”

In that sense, the construction of their own particular history, of a collective memory, is an effective strategy for the creation of an identity—even if that identity may be built on anachronistic narratives. What is relevant is the capacity to articulate the historical reality and to justify contemporary political agendas. For cultivators of the history of the gay Carnival, it is important to define the gay experience as dignified and transform it into tradition. They seek to endow the gay Carnival with nobility, inserting its cultural inheritance into a glorious past. In this way, the origins of the gay Carnival will be so deeply rooted in time that they will be confused with those of Carnival itself. Indeed, Álvaro insists the roots of gay Carnival started at the end of the 19th century, telling me that the Carnival of Barranquilla began when the members of the high society in Barranquilla would go to Europe and noticed how men would sometimes dress as women in Belgium, Madrid, Barcelona, in Amsterdam and the Hague, at carnival time. So these people of privilege would return to Barranquilla and do the same thing in the carnivals; and at the beginning it looked like a comedy, a circus, but it became an embedded practice.

Of course, history does not serve as the only way to strategically create an identity. Performance itself is a fundamental anchor for the agency of the trans/gay community that participates in the Carnival, in a space of negotiation between assigned and chosen identities. On the one hand, hetero-normative questioning during the festival, fueled by stereotypes, makes the subjects responsive to social expectations—either to ratify or reject



“Gay,” Álvaro tells the author, “is an Anglicism that means happy, glad, extroverted man; it’s a good platform.” Left, two men enjoy gay Carnival in Barranquilla; right, transvestites celebrate.

them. Perhaps this explains the organizers’ zealous efforts to normalize the gay Carnival, in some cases even justifying a degree of homophobia—a phenomenon that disclose the dynamics of distinction, inclusion and exclusion in this very celebration. Álvaro suggests: “We are responsible for homophobia. Because we, the gays, should show composure, elegance, decency and class in the face of Barranquilla’s danger and machismo, and yet not all of us achieve this goal. The gays, *las*

*locas*, should avoid bad words and behavior to avoid becoming victims of violence.”

On the other hand, performance implies a willingness to affirm the existence of sexual diversity. It constitutes a channel of transmission of social knowledge, memory and identity. Of course, this festival of flesh has different social implications depending on who cross-dresses, what gender they assume, what type of body is portrayed and how and in what context. Everyone plays, acts, participates,



but not everyone does or can do it in the same way nor can everyone produce the same effects. Nevertheless, and perhaps more importantly, through performance all have the opportunity to affirm their identity or not; they have a choice. Jairo, for example, believes that participation in the Carnival of Barranquilla without emphasizing his trans/gay identity would contradict his own principles: “It would be ceasing to be who one is, negating one’s identity, not recognizing one’s essence. We, the gays, like to participate in the Carnival of Barranquilla because it

is a window through which to showcase ourselves. It is the time of the year when gays feel the courage to display their selves.”

This last aspect is fundamental to understanding gay Carnival’s identity-driven experience. In Barranquilla, in contrast to what happens in the biggest Colombian cities, the LGBTQ Citizenship March—better known as the March for Gay Pride—has not yet become a legitimate space for the recognition and visibility of the community; the first realization of this event

was in June 2011. Thus, the gay Carnival generally constitutes the principal collective space for demonstration and recognition of non-orthodox sexualities in the city. It has even become a small niche for a certain liberty; it is the only opportunity for some people from nearby towns to “come out of the closet” for a day without being submitted to strict social and familial restriction.

All things considered, I must say that I frequently think the festivity eludes all theorization that attempts to understand it in mutually exclusive terms of reinforcement or subversion of the established order. The gay Carnival of Barranquilla seems to be an illustrative example in that regard. Does it defy the sex-gender-sexual orientation triumvirate, or on the contrary, does it release the systemic pressure to continue reproducing its multiple asymmetries? Of course, finding a definitive answer to this question is beyond my intentions. Instead, I will only relate an anecdote. As I interviewed someone in the middle of the street, in the middle of Carnival, a passer-by tried to take the wig off of one of my interviewees named Barbie Girl—yes, like the famous doll. Without a doubt, his objective was to submit her to ridicule by showing that her real hair was not long and blonde; suggesting that, regardless of how she felt, she was a man. She remained unperturbed. She barely acknowledged the violent act and told me that she was who she wanted to be, who she had chosen to be. When I recall that scene I can’t help thinking that performance is an option to transform oneself, to create new realities, even if subversion remains partial and localized. The gay Carnival is the most important gay fiesta in Barranquilla, not for the authenticity of which the taxi driver spoke on the first morning of Carnival, but for its effectiveness in fighting to create an identity.

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# Divas Play and Queer Belonging In Brazil

## Notes on Ethics and the Imagination

BY PABLO ASSUMPCÃO B. COSTA

FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS OR SO, I'VE BEEN tracking down scenarios of queer friendship in Fortaleza, a major city in Brazil's Northeast. I've discovered that what some cultural critics call "performativity of language" is often inseparable from language's capacity to bring about a common sense of belonging. I want to take a hard look at this collective labor of language as an ethical phenomenon, closely connected to both imagination and self-imagination as a shared practice. Through collective verbal creation the queer people I have been following in Fortaleza use words in a collective manner to invert hierarchies of value and establish a register of a language of "affect" (in philosophical terms). This has interesting implications for a performative approach to ethics—and that's why fiestas, carnivals and festive religious ceremonies play such an important role in the formation of queer belonging in Brazil.

Language is not merely a system of representation but also a physical operation, as J. L. Austin proposed in his famous 1955 William James Lectures at Harvard University on the theorization of performative language. Language acts, activates, excites, moves, and seduces. Austin turned language into a matter of acting and worldmaking, and as a performance that makes worlds, his concept of language is foundational to the thriving of queer theory as a political project.

My queer friends in Fortaleza are not only compelled to talk, but they also enjoy talking a whole lot—espe-

cially about sex. We find pleasure in extracting from speech the excitability of sexual acts for its subversive (or "delinquent") affect. In the context of Brazil, and Fortaleza in particular, sexual delinquency is both an aesthetic and political practice, delineating a performative ground for queer belonging that traverses heterogeneous systems—sexual, racial, social and religious.

In Brazilian Afro-indigenous spiritualist traditions, particularly *Umbanda* and Congo-Angola traditions of *Candomblé*, one finds religious spirits, like *Pomba Giras* (female types of Exu) and *Caboclos*, whose major characteristics may be defined as sexual subversion. What is striking in this particular Afro-indigenous canon is the rejection of normative, European morality through the performance of mythical stories by delinquent subjects (such as the prostitute, the gypsy, the trickster, the drunk, the sailor) whose political potential is evoked and embodied as magical power during a ritual in the *Umbanda terreiro*.

Some five years ago, my friends Armando and Diogo and I attended a public ceremony at an *Umbanda terreiro* in Maranguape, a colonial hillside town in the outskirts of Fortaleza. *Pomba-Giras* were "possessing" people's bodies and, as usual, demanding drinks and cigarettes in bantering tones. When the bisexual prostitute spirit of Maria Paulina was assumed by a short male guy in his mid-fifties, people started clapping and singing

Carnivals and fiestas play an important role in the formation of queer belonging in Brazil.

her chants:

*Paulina dá, Paulina toma* [Paulina gives, Paulina takes]

*Paulina é mulher* [Paulina is a woman]

*é mulher da Zona* [A woman from the Zona, or whorehouse]

*Paulina tem* [Paulina has]

*tem cinco dedos em cada mão* [five fingers on each hand]

*tem cinco dedos em cada pé* [five toes on each foot]

*e gosta de homem e de mulher* [and she likes boys and girls]

Another *Pomba-Gira* was already in the room when Paulina made her appearance. When she noticed Paulina's presence, she greeted the newly descended spirit with a nice hug. After hugging Paulina twice she turned to the crowd widening her arms and said "*Pra que chorar, pra que sofrer? A vida é bela, nós somos belos. Vamos beber até o amanhecer*" [Why cry, why suffer? Life is beautiful, we are beautiful. Let's drink until sunrise.] People applauded. Paulina moved very graciously, and she approached us with flirtatious eyes, shaking her shoulders, and whispered, "*Salve a Nêga*" [Hail the Black Woman]. After getting dressed in a big skirt by one of the house assistants, she charmingly asked for some beer and then confided: "*Hoje eu dei pra cem homens*" [Today I gave myself to a hundred men]. Everybody applauded and repeated after her: "*Salve a nêga!*"

Armando and Diogo looked at me, and their eyes sparkled. I believe mine did too. It was so overwhelmingly thrilling to hear those words uttered and applauded in a religious ceremony. "*Hoje eu dei pra cem homens. Salve a Nêga!*" we repeated in the car driving home hours later. "*Guerreira, a Paulina*" [A brave woman, Paulina], said Armando, referring to her sexual prowess. Diogo played with it, "Wish I could take a hundred men." I facetiously completed: "I can." They laughed and concluded: "*Bicha baixa!*" [Shallow bicha!] In our group, we all tried to be shallower than each other—if not in practice, at least in language. But where does that

investment in base sexuality come from, and what does it mean or do?

When a raunchy *Pomba-Gira* addresses you, something happens to the order of ethics. The hyperbolic sexual discourse through which she demands one's engagement leaves her subject faced with an ethical question: how do I compose myself? Here I am invoking Spinoza's sense of composition, by way of Antonio Negri's contention that Spinoza's question relates precisely to the ethical composition of affects, and the disposition of both the self and the multitude in relation to these (*Subversive Spinoza, 2004*). Ethics, Negri writes, is the constant quest of composing the self with alterity for the purpose of increasing one's capacity to act.

The ethical quest for Negri is to oppose the body's demise, despite the seemingly triumphant power of negative affects. Faced with raunchy Paulina and the hailing of her sex, the (Spinozian ethical) being is ushered into a delinquent (queer) arena of sexual discourse and immediately asked to re-compose him/herself and his/her own relation to the sexual body. The meaning of the sexual organ is both queer and sacred, which might seem like a paradox at first sight. But the juxtaposition of such elements is precisely why the event vibrates with queer ethical potential. Paulina's performance asks from us that we expand our linguistic framework and enter into an unprecedented relationship between sexuality and religion.

I want to offer Paulina as a living framework of a performative deployment of language that queerly inverts hierarchies of value as an expression of political subjectivity. In the various speech acts I have heard in everyday, friendly queer banter in Fortaleza, there is a similar inversion of values. Breaking moral barriers with language seems to give the queer community a shared sense of belonging.

Linguistic compositions that express a minority identity through slang, certain forms of gossip, queer banter, verbal role playing, as well as the sexual public narrative, are actions grounded in imagination. "Queer imagination"

here should be taken as a current, a course, or a conduit through which a minoritarian ethics of the affect is practiced. Another form of political subjectivity is thus embodied and empowered.

About eleven or twelve years ago, a certain play with proper names took place in Fortaleza, when a few of my gay friends found themselves calling each other by their mothers' first names. I would call Emmanuel by his mother's name Glauca, he would call me by my mother's name Regina, and so on and so forth until the whole group had nicknames that referred to their mothers.

Playing with proper names proved to be fun; soon our lesbian friends were being called by their fathers' names. That also caused a few laughs, and eventually this practice escalated to the point where everyone just called each other by random names, usually crossing gender, but not always. Like most playful activity, this had no particular aim aside from play itself, but it still struck me as an interesting break with the sense of determinism associated with proper names.

Without planning though, the proper names that stuck the most were references to decayed *telenovela* stars from the 1980s. Around 2003, every Sunday night some of us would go to a very raunchy lower-class gay club called Divine, in a sketchy area of downtown Fortaleza. Perhaps inspired by the name of the club, on those nights we started calling each other "diva," and the act of partying at Divine (which in part meant having public orgasmic experiences) became referred to as "*divinar*" [to divine]. It didn't take long for Mayara Magri (myself), Narjara Tureta (Eduardo), Tássia Camargo (Lemuel), Lidia Brondi (Emmanuel), Magda Cotrofe (João), René de Vielmont (Armando) and Aretha (Diogo)—all *telenovela* actresses in supporting roles during the 1980s, who posed for Brazilian *Playboy* but utterly failed to make it into mainstream showbiz—to be called "divas," as an inside joke among gay friends.

And this is how the early play of random naming gave way to a fixed genealogical tree composed of decayed televi-

sion stars. An online group was created with the sole purpose of role-playing these decayed stars in insider narratives while partying and having sex at Divine. More and more friends started being added to the email group, demanding to be baptized as a diva themselves. We would then give a diva name to the newcomer—always a decayed *tele-novela* star or public figure from the 1980s whose image somehow became a sign of camp aesthetics. Years passed and the group grew tremendously, with more than fifty members. Baptizing a diva was no easy thing; it demanded a long discussion and sometimes even a vote. The only rule was that no one was allowed to pick his own diva name: it had to be assigned by the group, and it had to cause some kind of embarrassment to the person being baptized.

In 2007, I was strolling through New York one night when my cell phone rang: it was a conference call from João, Lemuel and Balla. Balla was insisting on being baptized, which would make her the first female friend to be assigned a diva name. Balla is a much loved friend, but also a self-proclaimed capitalist with a passion for high-end luxurious things, despite her middle-class upbringing. She sounded a little tipsy on the phone, but decidedly convinced she should be baptized as Rogéria, the legendary Brazilian *travesti*, who was able to carve her place in television for many years during the 1980s. Lemuel and João didn't agree. Rogéria was too dignified to be a diva, they argued. It had got to be someone less respectable—but who? João then proposed we baptized Balla as Clóvis Bornay, an overweight gay man with way too many plastic surgeries performed on his face, who appeared in magazines every year during carnival, because he always won the luxury carnival costume pageantry in Rio de Janeiro. Balla, who at the time was overweight herself, begged us not to be baptized as Bornay—she wanted to be Rogéria, who had real glamour, nothing like Bornay's tacky carnivalesque hyperbolic opulence. We could see she felt belittled by the asso-

ciation with Clóvis Bornay, and so we baptized her against her will. Virtually all baptisms into diva stardom causes the one being baptized similar feelings of belittlement. Being a diva meant taking pride in one's failure and lack of value. Our divas gain nobility through debasement: the lower and sleazier, the better.

There are several performative turns in this diva play. Any play with proper names already suggests a form of criticism. The diva "name" is furthermore a form of queer comment, putting into play collective assumptions about each person's faults and charms. Later on, when subjects begin to take on new names and behave accordingly in online written narratives, we see a linguistic operation through which bodies enter the realm of figuration. In this realm, a new set of hierarchical positions and relations organize value. Fiction and fantasy, some of the proper names of imagination, are rendered not only as aesthetic operations, but also as ethical-political ones. The creation of a fictional linguistic realm wherein subjects deposit their identities, provides new ways to negotiate affect and desire (ethical move) and an opportunity to act out unauthorized forms of dissidence and utopia (political move). A play with language becomes an alternative ground for conviviality and the sharing of common affective notions about each other.

In our game, each individual's diva identity corresponds to the name of a "trash culture" celebrity of the past (the 1980s), a form of social figuration that connects a particular queer body to that historical figure. The association of a failed past with a queer present is a linguistic operation that detaches each of us from the particularities of our historical present in order to incarnate camp and queer virtues such as failure, sleaziness and debasement.

Such a reshuffling of temporal references is a form of creating temporal alterity, of creating a breathing space for other (shallower) forms of embodiment, which then linger on as shared notions that bind an alternative social realm.

Here, in conclusion, "historical truth"

lies in what anthropologist Kathleen Stewart calls, in her *A Space on the Side of the Road*, the "contingency of retellings": sex partying, both real and imagined, turns into an alternative world that bring forth other hierarchies of value and affect. When I look at the whole discursive structure of this diva play—baptism as commentary, reference to the past, appropriation of the language of gossip, hyperbolic distortions of actual events, mixing of past, present and fictional references for poetic purpose—the whole system strikes me as a linguistic excuse to enunciate, over and over, the minoritarian affect of queer sexuality, which in Fortaleza, as I claimed in the beginning, revolves around figures of partying and delinquency, and which also echoes other forms of minoritarian subjective production (like those of race and class in Brazil, as seen in the context of Afro-indigenous spiritualism).

In Fortaleza, diva play is a performative, collective exercise in freedom and creativity—freedom to play, to cross the line of privacy, to be joyful, and to express debased sexuality—but also a linguistic ground for an ethics of belonging together in difference.

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# The Carnival of Rio de Janeiro

A Social Ritual of Enjoyment BY EDSON FARIAS

**CARNIVAL IN BRAZIL, INTRODUCED AT THE** beginning of the Portuguese conquest of Latin America, was an urban affair derived from paganism and restricted to major towns and cities. The festival took place before Lent and was embedded in the Catholic calendar, reaching all sectors of society, including women and slaves, although the stratification in the social hierarchy was still present.

By the beginning of the 20th century, however, carnival found a strategic place in the delineation of culture and Brazilian national identity. Its ritual practices were bound up with the passionate features etched into the country and its people: its sensual tropical style and fondness for playful behavior and an irreverent joyousness.

The sheer scale of its reach, spanning the entire country in all its dimensions (crossing the boundaries of class, race, gender, sexual orientation and age), establishes carnival as a national festival

par excellence. It has created gestures, languages and even codes. These symbolic and highly significant trappings have in turn created a plebeian cultural sphere. The promise to see and be seen, through this public platform where names and ideas can be exchanged, attracts diverse interests; this allows a consensus to be formed—or else stirs up conflicts in the face of clashing values—or both.

It is useful to note that the middle class in Rio de Janeiro attempted to establish a single model for the festival between the mid-19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Rio was then the national and economic capital of Brazil; the middle class sought to model the Rio carnival after the carnival revelries of Paris and Nice, to “civilize” the Brazilian public.

According to historian Felipe Ferreira civilization did arrive, but only to the degree that Rio’s main streets of the urban center brimmed with parades of large allegorical floats upon which

stood personalities from the wealthy elite against scenery splendid enough to dazzle the eyes of the audience composed of ordinary people. But history got in the way of this middle-class “civilized” projection of carnival. The model of the parade was copied throughout the city, leading to unforeseen consequences such as the schools of samba. These schools are often attributed to the working class, but, strictly speaking, they derive from the descendants of communities who until the end of the 19th century were bound by the shackles of slavery.

Carnival revelries became significant in asserting the concept of a mixed-race nation and are intertwined with the idea and image of Brazil as a construct. Moved by communal feeling, these festivals have been acclaimed for their supposed ability to bring together distinct social groups in a playful manner, as suggested by anthropologist Roberto Da Matta (Roberto Da Matta. *Universo*



*do Carnaval: imagens e reflexões*. Rio de Janeiro: Pinakotheke, 1981).

In his opinion, the carnival festival with its popular base ritualized a set of values that allowed it both to foster its social identity and plan its character. This occurred at a time when the prerogative of the “whole” was set up over the “part”—or in other words, the individual submits to the collective. Thus the carnival transferred the “affectivity” of domestic ties to the impersonality of the streets. This was able to occur through the temporary inversion of the social hierarchies that abolished existing divisions.

In the last decade, there has been a considerable alteration in the “discursive order” with regard to Carnival revelries in Brazil. Although specific national issues are not overlooked, the emphasis is increasingly on the comprehensive scope of the celebrations because they were founded on the basic values and aspirations of the whole of humanity.

Nowadays, more and more diverse participants have taken to the streets, city squares and avenues in different parts of Rio de Janeiro to enjoy Carnival. According to Rio mayor, in 2013, five million revelers participated in the festival, divided into 450 groups of paraders, many called “blocks” and others “bands.”

This mood differs sharply from that of the period between 1980 and 2000, when there were grumblings about the “death of the street carnival” in the city. Many discern a “renaissance” in the irreverent and playful spirit of the “Momesca [Momo the Carnival King]” revelry—a spirit that had been absent from the parades of the main samba schools—the most dramatic event of the Rio festival.

The anthropologist José Sávio Leopoldi also argues that “the revival of the carnival spirit” in the *Carioca* festival relates to the new concept of street bands, because these reintroduce a greater margin of natural freedom in human activities. This

**From left to right: Banda do Jiló (child with angel costume), Tijuca ; 2012 Banda da Barra, Barra da Tijuca, 2011**

spontaneity or appearance of spontaneity makes these celebrations attractive to tourists from countries that tend toward “an overdisciplined civilization.”

Nonetheless, the author states, native Brazilians, in particular the *Cariocas* [inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro], are ill-at-ease with the encrusted modalities of Carnival, particularly with the schools of samba, owing to the heightened informality that has begun to dominate their behavior. The advent of the street bands in the city represents a return to “unimaginable freedom” in their everyday lives; this freedom is expressed in provocative and licentious acts in the face of the prevailing hegemonic morality.

In the view of this anthropologist, the carnival still vibrates in the full vigor of that visceral “primitiveness.” He con-

cludes that since the street bands have the potential to globalize the popular festival, it permits them to materialize a primitive human essence that is even savage, but which has been tamed by the increasing strength of civilizing forces in other societies in recent centuries.

Many carnival practices tend to stress values such as authenticity and weaken the power of regulation. Without entering into the question of whether or not this “primitive essence” exists, the fact is that the groups have carefully arranged processions in the street; this implies the existence, albeit tacit, of operational standards in ordering the way the different participants behave. These include the increasing demands of public hygiene, such as stopping the male habit of urinating in the streets. Of course, the obvious solution for this is not to pursue those who do so, but to install chemical toilets and make sure they are adequately cleaned and supervised.

Constraints imposed by the state through public security forces do curb both excesses of licentious acts and the outbreaks of brutality; such actions often clash with the expectations aroused by the light-hearted fun. They are handled and restrained in the name of a categorical imperative that requires an orderly atmosphere of peace.

Advertising sales or “sponsorships” sold by the municipal council to banks or large industries such as beer companies also reflect a desire to safeguard the enjoyment of the celebrants. Likewise, hotel networks and tourist operators promote the enjoyment of the festival with a goal of attracting clients. Thus the principle of civility and the need to curb basic impulses are not absent from the invitation to people to participate in the festival.

This stress on a peaceful approach allows for the return of the masses to the streets in ever-increasing numbers—a development that was not planned in the bourgeois civilizing scheme. But it is the understanding of the carnival as a huge social ritual of enjoyment that draws attention to the traditionally unprecendented customs, such as the way the fes-

sive costumes and modern urban civilization are interwoven in Rio de Janeiro.

In some social rituals the search for pleasure is heightened by an awareness of the unstable nature of existence. The playful processions and carnival displays that merge rhythm with physical expression are comparable to other occasions that also witness the involvement of expression and visual appeal, such as that displayed in major sporting events (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Elogio da Beleza Atlética*, São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2007).

The playful-aesthetic displaced the ethnic-religious as the *Carioca* carnival took the form of a large social ritual. This carnival formed a kind of shop-window for the public display of emotions that entailed the vulgarization of the images of groups and individuals. Since the 19th century, the same cultural pattern has emerged in the transformation of syncretic kinds of amusement based on a percussion rhythm called *cucumbi*, a Brazilian carnival dance of uncertain origin.

Despite maintaining a religious devotion to the Catholic saints and divine figures of African origin, the form of the procession that arose (with people clad in “costumes”) was hybrid and mixed secular features—especially the irreverence of the garments—with religious ones. It began to leave behind conservatism in pursuit of inventiveness and personal creativity.

Thus in the final period of colonial rule, the groups made up of Afro-Brazilians and mestizos began to take to the city streets during Christmas and Carnival. In a similar fashion, in the 20th century, the intrepid carnival “cords” (*cordões*) became popular. They were characterized by greater informality in the pageants, which inspired various kinds of modern street bands. In addition, folkloric groups, with their scenic and dramatic effects, added to the lively aesthetics.

Movement is paramount. People enter and leave (or just stop by) but others continuously take part in the parade. Since they are the most visible legacy of this long history today, the styles of the bands on the street and schools of samba prevail.

They consist of choreographed gestures, and their delineated forms and shapes are a response to the various kinds of rhythmic and musical stimulus always devoted to the public display. Their marches involve alternations between degrees of greater or less tension, but always follow the criterion that requires them to adopt an expression of joy. The admissible variations of these movements distinguish the different arrangements of the spectacular parades, street bands and “cords.”

The *Carioca* carnival festival anticipated structural characteristics broadly shared by various large festivals in Brazil today. In these events, amusements and even different musical styles are combined with other culturally mobile pastimes and are recognized for their eagerness to heighten the visibility of the events and communicate with a huge crowd of people from various social backgrounds (in socio-economic and ethnic terms, as well as with regard to different generations and genders).

As a result, the attractions become charged with meanings enshrined in different spaces and times, while priority is given to achieving individual freedom, happiness and unrestrained display of feelings. Since public displays of emotions increasingly occur in the orbit of a reflective and private appropriation of a populated stage, they are combined with new modalities of control and self-control. Finally, participation in the event by the intermingled crowd can be defined both as a professionalization of cultural products (whether artistic or otherwise) and a techno-administrative rationalizing and marketing of services, serving an increased commitment to commercial tourism and amusement.

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# MASKS AND MUSIC

Often, when one thinks of carnivals and fiestas, it's the aesthetics that one remembers: the music, the costumes, the masks, the dance steps. Here's an inside look at some of those aesthetic aspects of several celebrations from the Caribbean to Brazil.

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# Masked Enigmas

## The *Vejigante* of the Fiestas of Santiago Apóstol

in Loíza, Puerto Rico **BY LOWELL FIET**

THE BRILLIANTLY COLORED AND CAPTIVATINGLY grotesque mask of the *Vejigante* remains enigmatic. The name derives from the Spanish *vejiga* or bladder. Cervantes in *Don Quixote* describes costumed mummers—“*bojiganga*”—who use inflated “*vejigas*” on sticks as weapons to mock and chastise onlookers. The word *bejigante* entered the Puerto Rican lexicon by 1747. But neither reference specifically addresses the masked and horned character central to the African-Puerto Rican celebration and ritual. It is as much trickster-devil (or *diablito*) as sacred presence, as much dumb-show clown as sage, as much sensualist as shaman, as much a mythical and dynamic anthropomorphic face that scares children as a source of energy, strength and courage. With slightly different names, costumes, and masks, *Vejigantes* appear as devil-heroes of cultural performance throughout the Hispanic Caribbean and littoral Central and South America.

Two variations exist in Puerto Rico: the *Vejigante* of pre-Lenten Carnival in Ponce, on the south coast, with its *paper-maché* mask, and the *Vejigante* of the Fiestas of Santiago Apóstol (St. James) in Loíza, on the northeast coast, with its mask carved from coconut husks. The colorful billowy costumes used by both appear nearly identical, but the masks reflect different materials, modes of production, and historiographies. Studies ascribe African and European elements to both. The use of *paper-maché* and its molding on fixed forms (similar to European carnival and *commedia dell'arte* masks) facilitate the plasticity of the ornate horns, pikes, and crests of the Ponce version and suggest a stronger Spanish precedence. The carving of the

features of the Loíza masks in hard but porous coconut husks suggests a heritage more linked to the carved wooden masks of West Africa. I will here concentrate on Loíza's tradition because of that heritage, the elaborate narrative structure of the Fiestas, and the centrality of the role of the *Vejigante*.

Loíza's African-Puerto Rican population base and the Fiestas of Santiago Apóstol, celebrated annually from July 25 to 28, make that locality the seat of African cultural influence in Puerto Rico. July 25 is Santiago's saint day, often celebrated with a parade of floats and a bandstand for local music in the town plaza. However, the processions of the three effigies—Santiago of the Men (July 26), Santiago of the Women (July 27) and “Santiaguito” or Santiago of the Children (July 28)—are the *raison d'être* of the Fiestas. Each procession travels east from the town plaza in the afternoon, with devotees carrying the saints on their shoulders on Route 187 for nearly three miles to the neighborhood of Las Carreras.

It was there, the legend says, that fishermen found the carved wooden image of Santiago Apóstol (now Santiago of the Children) under a cork tree. They took the little saint to the town's Spanish church, but during the night it miraculously escaped to return to the spot where it was found. The miracle was repeated on the two subsequent nights. By refusing to stay in the official church, the image became the people's saint, and the three effigies of the saint stay in the community with *mantenedores* or keepers responsible for their care and upkeep.

The date usually cited for the discovery is around 1830, although the celebra-



tion of other saints could have preceded that. Saint's day processions were common in Puerto Rico from the 16th century onward. The community of Loíza formed very early in the process of colonization, and its Church of the Holy Spirit and St. Patrick, built in 1645, is one of the oldest on the island. Landowners (and possibly slaveholders) of Irish descent presumably influenced the choice of St. Patrick as the official patron saint.

The warrior St. James is the patron saint of Spain, credited with appearing miraculously to help drive the Moors from the Iberian peninsula; in his representations a Moor's head and dark face lie under the hooves of his horse. The saint's appearance in Loíza in the early 19th century could thus relate to Catholic evangelism and efforts to convert and control the non-Spanish-speaking Africans who arrived in Puerto Rico from





other Caribbean islands late in the 18th century or directly from Africa in the first decades of the 19th.

Regardless of whether the “miracle” served as strategic proselytizing or arose as an ingenious act of resistance by the free and/or enslaved African-Puerto Rican population, the saint’s popularity and the enthusiasm with which he was celebrated resulted in the addition of the two other plaster statuettes, each slightly larger than the original and each with a separate procession and celebration day. What began with one saint and probably one festival day of reduced labor and community interaction transformed itself, through devotional energy and over time, into three saints, three processions, and four days of worship and celebration.

Devotees carry the saints on litters, while in front of them devilish *Vejigan-*

*tes*, fancy-dressed Spaniards or *Cabaleros*, cross-dressed *Locas* with padded bosoms and buttocks and faces blackened with shoe polish, and tattered *Viejos* or Old Men, jump, dance and celebrate. The Carretón Alegre (“wagon of joy”), a sound system and mini-information center pulled by bicycle, pulses with recorded Caribbean music such as salsa, reggae, zouk, merengue, reguetón, calypso and soca. The municipal band plays traditional *danzas* from the platform of a roofed truck that follows the saint. Each procession arrives at the point where the cork tree of the founding legend once stood. A mosaic sculpture created by Loíza artist Daniel Lind-Ramos marks the location. The procession waits there until riders on horseback carry the flags of Santiago the roughly quarter mile back to route 187 and return. The saint and its retinue then begin to retrace their

**The *Vejigante* remains the most iconic and dynamic of the characters in Puerto Rican celebrations, deriving from the African traditions of masquerade.**

steps but quickly disperse in the music, dancing, food, and drink of celebration that lasts into the night.

On July 26, Santiago of the Men starts out in the church of the Holy Spirit and St. Patrick. The two other saints join him on the road, and all three reach Las Carreras. The following day, Santiago of the Women leaves just off the town plaza, salutes the other two saints near the houses of their *mantenedores*, but only Santiago of the Children continues with it to Las Carreras. On July 28, the road is reserved for “Santiaguito.” The effigy spends the night in the modern church built in his honor on Route 187 near the entrance to Las Carreras. In the morn-

ing devotees transport the saint to the plaza to celebrate with local children. At 3:30 or 4 p.m. the journey begins past the neighborhoods that line Route 187. The other statuettes salute but do not join the saint as it moves toward the point of its discovery.

The sacred and profane nature of the Fiestas fully reveals itself in the last procession. The medieval Christian strand of the litany of saints' day parades and Cervantes' bawdy *bojiganga* intertwines with the profound religiosity and sensuous celebratory strand of African masquerade. The movement through blazing summer heat, ear-pounding rockets that announce the saint's arrival, music old and new, a squadron of heavily armed police, dozens of bicycles, the horns and exhaust of backed-up traffic, riders on horseback, and the memory of violence that hangs over the route—all come together to create a transversal moment of freedom and communion.

In the 1950s, Puerto Rican archaeologist Ricardo Alegría explained the Fiestas in terms of Yoruban art and ritual practice. He saw in the image of Santiago Apóstol a suggestion of carved African effigies of Shangó, god of war, fire, thunder and lightning. More recent research finds the connection unlikely: virtually no evidence of Yoruban influence surfaces during the first three centuries of colonization, and shipping manifests record that most Africans reaching Puerto Rico in the first half of the 19th century were Congo-Bantú brought on Spanish ships that slipped through the British embargo of the slave trade. However, regardless of the origin of the African-Puerto Rican population of the Loíza region, two different cultural-religious forms and practices coincided, each complementing and facilitating the development of the other, and ultimately coming to share aesthetic and spiritual elements. The impassioned worship of the Spanish Catholic saint opened the door for the reinvention of African traditions of masquerade in the characters of the *Vejigante*, *Caballero*, *Loca* and *Viejo*.



Scenes from the Loíza festival, from left to right: *Vejigante* “pink”; *Caballero* or “gentleman” and *Vejigante* “stars.” As the African-inspired trickster *diablo*, it calls forth the ancestors and allows for them to return, if only briefly, to enjoy life and communicate through the bodies of the living.

The *Vejigante* remains the most iconic and dynamic of these characters. As the African-inspired trickster-*diablo* and the protagonist of African-Puerto Rican culture, it evokes the *egungun* quality of calling forth the ancestors and allowing them to return, if only briefly, to enjoy life and communicate through the bodies of the living. Whether one views that function as metaphorical or real, the mythical, otherworldly, and beast-like anthropomorphic mask preserves and reconstitutes the partially erased, broken, or submerged memory of an African past that reappears in the present.

The cultural performance of the *Veji-*

*gante* finds its parallel in the functions of the music, dancing and lyrics of Puerto Rican *bomba*, the African-inspired percussion of barrel-shaped drums with choreography that creates a dialogue between the rhythm of the drum and the body of the dancer. Current practice relegates *bomba* to the bandstand in the town's plaza or to the yard of mask-making Ayala family, which the processions pass on their way to Las Carreras. However, stories circulate a memory in which *bomba* drummers waited at the base of the cork tree and greeted the returning saint and revelers with drumming that symbolically recreated an African homeland.

The density and specificities of the performance, its urgency and vitality, the high level of community participation and the uncontrollable impulse to share and transform traditions create an act of cultural resistance and affirmation. Actors and spectators intermingle in the



same space, and a multitude of onlookers waits for and then joins the processions as active participants. What begins in the town plaza with a handful of devotees and festive characters multiplies exponentially during the course of the action.

This takes place inside a broader global environment that tends to negate memory, manual arts and crafts, local knowledge and beliefs, and non-media events. The processions traverse Loíza, one of Puerto Rico's poorest municipalities. The high under- and unemployment levels, drug trafficking, related gang and turf-war clashes, government and private development schemes, and violent confrontations with police scar the social fabric and undermine its natural tropical beauty. For a sad example, Carlos Ayala Calcaño, one of Loíza's most talented festival artists, was killed in February 2011 as the "collateral damage" of a drive-by shooting on the same

Route 187 where he danced every July as a brilliantly ecstatic *Vejigante*.

The artist Castor Ayala solidified the classical mask style in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. His son Raúl (the most prominent artist of masks and the leader of the Los Hermanos Ayala *bomba* group) preserves that style while also inventing elaborate new styles. Other prominent mask artists such as Pedro Laviera and Carlos Ayala Calcaño have added even greater plasticity to the coconut husk form. The focus on *Vejigantes* takes on particular significance because of the surge in participation of a new generation of performers that includes children, young adults, and virtually unheard of previously, women. In the past five years a more individual and expressive aesthetic reflects the individual performer playing a greater role in the creation of his/her mask. Multiple variations emerge in the carving, painting and coloration, shape of tongues and eyes,

and costume design. The new masks are more daringly seductive and sensual as the number of *Vejigantes* multiplies.

Camera in hand, I march among the saints, *Vejigantes*, *Caballeros*, *Locas*, and *Viejos* every July. I've done it without fail for the past eighteen years. In 2007, I published a book on the Fiestas, and my work with local artists continues as I prepare a broader study on Caribbean masks and mask-makers. Although I attend other festivals and study many masks, the enigmatic *Vejigante* of Loíza continues to amaze me as a mirror that probes my own enigmas.

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## São João in Campina Grande

Forró, Festival and Collective Intimacy **BY PANAYOTIS LEAGUE**

CAMPINA GRANDE, DEEP INTO THE STATE OF Paraíba in Northeast Brazil, is not a common tourist destination. Except, that is, for the month of June, when fans of *fórró*—the Northeastern music and dance genre made widely popular by revered singers such as accordionist Luiz Gonzaga and Campina native Jackson do Pandeiro—descend on the city for what is reputed to be Brazil’s largest music and dance festival dedicated to *fórró* in all its forms. Popularly known as the Festa de São João, after the most prominent saint of the season, the *festas juninas* combine the folk customs of the Northeastern countryside, such as the bonfires and dances of the summer solstice, with pop-

ular expressions of devotion to the three major Catholic saints—Antônio, João, and Pedro—whose feasts are celebrated during the June harvest. I’ve come to immerse myself in the local accordion music, with which I fell in love almost a decade ago while living in Brazil, and return frequently to observe the dynamics of the organized festival, unquestionably the event of the year in Campina Grande.

The highway from the state capital of João Pessoa to Campina Grande leads from the tropical coast, all coconut trees and oppressive winter heat, to the *brejo paraibano*—the cool, marshy plateau that marks the gateway to the *sertão*, the infamous badlands whose frequent droughts

have driven millions of Northeasterners to migrate to the large urban enclaves of the southeast. The hills roll on as we climb in altitude. By the roadside, occasional billboards advertise competing brands of coffee, beer and the sugarcane liquor *cachaça*, with São João and *fórró*-related themes. As we drive, my friend Flávio expresses mild surprise that I should be so interested in *fórró*, but tells me that tens of thousands of other people, mostly Brazilian tourists from outside of Paraíba, will be making this same drive during the rest of the month. “On São João weekend, traffic on this highway will be stopped. It’ll take us two and a half hours today. In a few weeks, it’ll take eight.”



Colorful scenes from the *forró* festival of Northeastern music and dance, São João in Campina Grande, Brazil.

“You know, Sivuca [one of Brazil’s most ingenious accordionists and composers] was born in my hometown, Itabaiana. We’ll drive through there on the way.” He rummages around, finds a disc with Sivuca’s famous composition “Feira de Mangaio,” which describes a typical Northeastern market. “It’s just like that,” Flávio says. “Make sure you go to one.” He’s silent for a moment. “Itabaiana’ means ‘stone that dances’ in Tupí. Maybe that’s why we love *forró*.” He smiles, the morning sunlight glinting off his glasses.

In Campina Grande, I meet up with the man who first convinced me to come here: 83-year-old button accordion pioneer Zé Calixto, one of my musical heroes. The son of a renowned local musician, Zé Calixto was born on a farm outside of Campina Grande. He began his career playing at local dances and radio programs throughout the Northeast before moving to Rio de Janeiro in 1959 to embark on a recording and performing

career that would embrace *forró* and other styles associated with his home region, as well as the samba, *choro* and popular music of his adopted home. Remarkably, he did this not on the versatile and today nearly ubiquitous piano accordion, but the eight-bass diatonic button accordion, a ferociously difficult instrument that produces two different tones on each key depending on whether the performer is opening or closing the bellows. This inbuilt rhythm makes the *fole de oito baixos*, as the instrument is locally known, ideal for playing the rustic dance tunes with which it is mostly associated; but performing the harmonically complex *choros* on the *oito baixos* is a virtuosic feat that has become Zé Calixto’s calling card.

Zé Calixto lives in Rio to this day, making the trip back home to Paraíba every June to play for São João. With his characteristic bowler hat, impeccably trimmed mustache and warm smile, he is an unmistakable figure. It takes hours to

walk a few hundred meters through the festival grounds with him, because every few paces he is stopped by old friends, fans, and well-wishers. Backstage, after a performance, one local celebrity gives him a prolonged embrace, addressing him as *mestre*, master, and tells me: “He’s a living legend. Make the most of having him around!”

The municipal fairground, where the festival’s official nightly events are held, is known as *O Parque do Povo*—“The People’s Park.” It’s an oblong maze of music stages, shops, restaurants and *bar-racas*—wicker-roofed huts selling drinks, *churrasco* and the numerous corn-based dishes that are ubiquitous this time of year. Independent vendors dart in and out of the crowd, offering roasted corn, bootleg CDs and light-up novelty items. The press of people is overwhelming, especially at the peak hour of 11 p.m., when the main attractions begin their shows on the big stage. Dancing, flirting,

drinking and sharing cigarettes, locals mingle with tourists from neighboring states and the urban southeast; a singer tries to attract a group from Brasília, shouting into the microphone, *Ô turistas, vêm cá que o forró tá bom demais!* “Hey, tourists! Come on over here, ‘cause the forró is mighty fine!”

My first night at the Parque, a Saturday in early June, rain is lashing down in a fury, soaking everyone to the bone and choking the gutters with rivers of froth. Aside from the floor in front of the main stage—where couples are blissfully dancing to the Forró Fest songwriters’ competition, drenched clothes stuck to their skin, bodies stuck together—the open spaces are occupied only by people scurrying from one dry place to another or by scattered revelers too happy or drunk to care about getting wet. It’s a different story altogether under the roofs of the *palhoças*, the small covered stages that dot the fairgrounds and feature small local groups, usually the traditional trio of accordion, *zabumba* (bass drum), and triangle, playing old-fashioned *forró pé-de-serra* (“foot of the mountain” *forró*) for partner dancing. Tonight, the *palhoças* are islands in a sea of pounding rain; but nobody’s dry inside. Sweat pours down dancers’ backs, drips off the accordion player’s forehead, and bounces off the head of the *zabumba* every time the drummer pounds the bass side in drops that glisten, a scene framed against the light from a beer advertisement (*É São João, eu já tô preparado/se xote ou xaxado, com Skol tá combinado*—“It’s São João, I’m ready/no matter what the dance, it matches with Skol”).

Near the center of the fairgrounds, next to the booths of the various local radio stations broadcasting the festival, is a towering three-story replica of a June bonfire, cartoonish in its hugeness. Nearby is a sign discouraging the public from lighting the incendiary balloons that are a symbol of the feast of São João, immortalized in numerous topical songs. Even neighborhood bonfires, a friend tells me, are on the way out; swayed by the municipality’s heavy

promotion of hugely popular bands performing nightly at the Parque do Povo, people have stopped organizing their own smaller-scale parties with traditional music and games. “The old *quadrilhas*,” once danced at these parties, are now performed on stage. These dances, in which groups of couples perform various figures on the dance floor in response to a caller’s instructions, are descendants of the quadrilles that became wildly popular in 19th-century Europe and cousins of American square and contra dancing. “You’ve seen all those groups performing them, haven’t you?” I have; teams of young men and women from various towns and parishes, colorfully dressed in exaggerated versions of festival costume, compete against each other daily in highly choreographed routines. “Well, hardly anybody knows how to dance that stuff anymore unless it’s all planned out ahead of time.” True, the whole month I’m in Campina Grande, I see dozens of performances of *quadrilhas*, but not a single spontaneous one at a social dance.

The *quadrilhas* are at the center of another feature of São João in Campina Grande: direct competition with the analogous festivities held in the rival city of Caruarú, the self-proclaimed “Capital of *Forró*” to the south in the state of Pernambuco. Campina Grande promotes its festival as “*O Maior São João do Mundo*,” (the biggest São João in the world); Caruarú, known for the quality of its artisan handicrafts and the many *forró* musicians that call it home, opts for “*O Maior e Melhor São João do Mundo*” (the biggest and best). The one-upmanship between the two cities, which compete for the substantial seasonal tourism around São João, is meticulously covered in the local press. Last year, Caruarú set the record for the largest *quadrilha* (377 couples dancing at once); this June, Campina Grande responded with a vengeance, putting together a group of 628 couples. They were counted, the newspaper article assures readers, by a group of independent observers. This fascination with the collective is also manifested in one of

the most striking features of São João in Campina: the *casamento coletivo* or mass wedding, in which hundreds of couples are joined together in matrimony on the day of Santo Antônio to the sound of a twenty-member accordion orchestra.

The São João festivities are clearly the economic lifeblood of Campina Grande and the larger region, and this is especially true for musicians. Some groups play up to 30 shows during the month of June, tripling or more their usual monthly income. This year the prefecture has hired 139 *forró* trios to play everywhere from the Parque do Povo to gas stations, pharmacies and grocery stores throughout the city—even to welcome every plane that lands at the local airport during the peak weekends.

But not everyone delights in what the large-scale, organized festival has to offer; with the massive crowds and alcohol consumption, problems have moved beyond the normal pickpocketing, with several stabbings and a shooting marring this year’s event. “Forget the festival. Come to my house on São João’s eve,” my friend Jorge urges me. “I do it the old way, with a bonfire, good music, and all my friends: it’s the Parque do meu Povo”—the Park of *my* People.

When I leave at the end of the month, I’m shown off by a pair of peerless *forrozeiros*: my last stop is the twin statues of Gonzaga and Jackson, forever playing their duo of accordion and *pandeiro* (tambourine) by the city’s old reservoir, steps from the Parque do Povo. Colored flags wave at me in the winter air, the smell of roasting corn and dancers’ sweat on the breeze. I leave the window down and turn up the radio, broadcasting live from *O Maior São João do Mundo*.

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# Carnaval in the Dominican Republic

A Stew of Cultures **BY BRIAN D. FARRELL**

I STAND MESMERIZED BY THE FLASHING FANGS and devilish eyes of the mask, topped with spiked horns and kaleidoscopic mane, worn by a whirling, dancing costumed figure in the street. Suddenly a bruising smack breaks the spell. I am hit hard on the leg by a pig bladder gripped by a laughing—and now running—10-year-old boy—an abrupt welcome to Carnaval in the Dominican Republic!

Just as in New Orleans, Rio de Janeiro or Port-au-Prince, every resident of the Dominican Republic seems to look forward each year to Carnaval. Each major city or town has a distinctive look or theme to its costumes. Neighborhood groups design and construct new costumes each year, spending months working on them. When Carnaval arrives in the days before Lent, the cos-

tumes are worn in town parades, and participants also often later travel to enormous combined parades in the capital city of Santo Domingo, and recently in Punta Cana in the east. Dominican Carnaval celebrations traditionally occur throughout February, and peak around Independence Day, February 27, earlier than in other countries.

As an ancient tradition based on

Catholicism, Carnival often begins on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, with feasting on the aptly named “Fat Tuesday,” the day before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, and the following 40 days of fasting before Easter Sunday. In the early colony that was to become the Dominican Republic, these days before Lent were known as “carnolestadas,” or days of much meat. The very word Carnival itself means *full of meat*, signifying an indulgent time of much carnal consumption before the cleansing abstinence of Lent.

Over the 500 years since its beginnings in Catholic Europe, Carnival has come to include cultural elements from many sources, particularly from Africa through the population that arrived as slaves, but also from native America and popular culture. Among the early images are those of the devil, still seen in the masks of the town of La Vega and elsewhere, the bronzed skins and loinclothes of the indigenous Taino, seen in Puerto Plata, and in the distinctive animal heads of Salcedo. They are joined by icons from popular movies such as *Star Wars* or *Predator*, as well as themes of protest.

Since the beginning, Carnival has been a relatively safe means to express dissatisfaction, for political protests and even rebellion. For example, a recurrent presence over the decades is a figure of a towering Uncle Sam (a personification of the United States ostensibly dating to the War of 1812 or earlier) invariably portrayed on stilts. Among the current political themes is the symbol of four percent, alluding to the constitutional requirement that four percent of the national budget be allocated to education (and showing dissatisfaction with lower percentages).

Thus, the Carnival is a stew of cultures, a mix of the old and new, the costumes and dances a freewheeling admixture of images and textures in motion. Enormous banks of speakers on roadside platforms blast deafeningly loud merengue, often written for Carnival, and other Latin music. The crowd is many deep on both sides of the street, with occasional openings created by

charging *diablos* swinging the inflated dried pig bladders called *vejigas*. Stands with ice-cold Presidente beer are ubiquitous and highly visible, and the larger towns and cities set up portable bandstand seating. The parades are open to everyone who wishes to participate, whether in groups known as *comparsas* or as individuals. This freedom of expression has characterized Carnival since its colonial beginnings, when male and female participants dressed in masks and costumes that blurred their genders as well as their identities. Freed from recognition, individuals threw water and eggs and generally created joyous havoc in the days before the somber weeks of Lent. The original themes from Spain and other colonizing countries often included devils and angels. In particular, the green, red and yellow colors of St. Michael the Archangel are predominant in the elaborate costumes of the devils known as *diablos cojuelos*, among the most popular costumes in the city. Hundreds of different groups of individuals create their own *diablos* costumes each year, festooned with mirrors, bells, tiny dolls and beads. The elaborate masks are made of *papier-maché*. The *diablos cojuelos* often carry the *vejigas* or synthetic equivalents, on a string to hit anyone that comes near, and of course, young boys are quick to put the *vejigas* to use without a need for a costume of any sort\*. Other popular personifications in the Dominican Carnival include *Roba la Gallina*, usually a man dressed as a very ample, matronly woman with a large bosom and broad skirt to hide her “stolen” chicks—followers (children and youths) who shout “*Roba la gallina, palo con ella*,” “The hen is stealing, hit her with a stick!” Another personage intrinsic to Carnival is that of *Califé*, a poet dressed in black, usually on stilts and with an exaggerated top hat, who uses jocular verse to criticize political figures of the day. Some groups express their African heritage by covering their bodies with black (usually used motor oil). Others called *Los Indios* dress as Native Americans.



Scenes from the Carnival—which we’ve chosen here to spell the Spanish way—in the Dominican Republic.

Another popular Carnival group is the Ali Babas, recalling the story of *One Thousand and One Nights*. A group of Ali Babas may number in the hundreds, and march to music dominated by double drums. One old theme of Carnival, most likely originally from Spain, is that of the Bulls and Civilians, typical of the north coastal town of Monte Cristi. Some participants wear animal masks and stage fights with civilians with whips. The cracking of whips in the street also accompanies the fantastic horned masks of the *diablos cojuelos* of La Vega, just outside of Santiago de los Caballeros in the north central region. Santiago is also known for the brilliantly colored horned masks called *Lechones* because of their pig-like snouts, and their wearers also wield whips as they ramble through the streets. Variation in these costumes may follow neighborhood efforts to be distinctive. For example, two well-known Santiago neighborhoods—La Joya and





Los Pepinos—are distinguished by the form of their horns and so their wearers are called *Joyereros* (the two main horns covered with smaller horns) and *Pepineros* (two main horns or many tiny horns ending in flowers).

On the north coast, the town of Puerto Plata is home to the Taimácaros, groups that recreate the masks and myths of the original Taino inhabitants of Hispaniola, including the rituals of use of tobacco and a hallucinogenic drug called *cohoba* to invoke the apparition of Yocahú or Opiyelguabiran, among the most important gods of the Taino. In Salcedo and Bonaó, enormous horned devil masks called *Macaraos* (*los mascarados*, the masked ones) are common Carnival personages, some representing giants or other mythological beings, and others the Moors of medieval Spain. Other *Macaraos* dress to resemble African animals such as those seen in early circuses. In the southern town of Cabral, men and women dress as *Cachuas* (the horned ones) with manes of colored paper. The *Cachuas* also use whips to fight in the streets. These and

other themes have been associated with their respective towns for as long as anyone can remember, though at the same time revelers also bring in new costumes and incorporate ideas current in public discourse, like the 4%. Ingenuity in costume design and construction is also apparent. For example, a tradition in the town of Cotuí was to create their costumes from newspaper, hence their name *papeluses*, with a mask made of a dried calabash fruit (*Crescentia cujete*, also known as *higuero*). Today plastic bags are replacing the newspaper and lending a new look. Sometimes in Cotuí the costumes are made of dried plaintain leaf, and are then called *platanuses*.

Dominican Carnival shares many elements with the Carnivals of other countries, including neighboring Haiti, but it is also distinctive in the traditions mentioned above, a tiny sample of this truly diverse celebration. From the beginning, Dominican Carnival was not simply imported from Spain, but rather integrated ideas from many sources, and was always meant to capture the

joyous, Caribbean character of the people, happy with life, and always ready to laugh at themselves.

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\*After being hit once, I discovered that pointing a camera will stop any *diablo* or boy in their tracks as they will pose and then walk away, but let's keep this secret among the readers of this magazine.

The information in this article draws on an excellent essay by anthropologist Soraya Aracena, originally published in *TR3: Contemporaneidad dominicana—Catalog of the 2005-2006 Traveling Exhibit*. I thank Irina Ferreras and our Dominican family for introducing me to the extraordinary celebrations of Carnival in the Dominican Republic.

# La Conga

Santiago de Cuba's Badge of Honor **BY LANI MILSTEIN**

I WAS TRYING DESPERATELY TO SLEEP, BUT IT was too cold. It was July in Cuba, but the air conditioning on the cross-country *Viazul* bus had two settings—"freezing" and "off." I was on the overnight bus from Havana to Santiago de Cuba and I hoped the 15-hour ride would be better than the train. I had waited in line for two days for that train only to be told I was number 347 on the waiting list, and so I decided to splurge on the slightly more reliable bus. "This better be worth it," I thought, as I pulled my towel tighter around me.

I had been studying percussion for eight months in Havana, and had soaked up as much music as I could, running around the city to attend religious *batá* and *palo* ceremonies, the symphony, *toques espirituales*, jazz clubs, internationally recognized percussion festivals, *rumbas* and outdoor *timba* (Cuban salsa) concerts attended by 30,000 people. As summer neared, I started to hear a lot of buzz about *carnaval* in Santiago de Cuba, and about how it was "the *real* carnival." That's how I found myself on that freezing cross-country bus.

Once in Santiago, I wandered through the city and took in the carnival activities that surrounded me. Vendors were selling roast pork and cheap fluorescent plastic toys and hair accessories, while *timba* blasted from speakers and couples drinking watery beer drawn from enormous vats danced in the streets. *Comparas* (costumed, choreographed groups of music and/or dance) paraded down the promenade, followed by the *paseos* with their glittery floats and girls in sequined g-string bikinis. It felt like a giant party. But after a couple of days, I found all the choreography, costume and glitter a little monotonous and worried that perhaps the 15-hour bus ride was in vain.

Then, one night, a friend and I were strolling through a residential area

slightly removed from the main carnival scene. Suddenly I heard something from off in the distance that generated an uneasy feeling in my stomach. The sound, unnervingly unfamiliar to me, came closer, and the ground shook softly. Moments later, I glanced behind me and saw a human wave cresting on the horizon. I was transfixed by this mass and rhythm that was clanging and throbbing its way towards me. As the crowd approached, my friend grabbed my arm and pulled us into the middle of the throng. The ground vanished beneath my feet! I was pressed hard up against strangers, sweaty and sticky from exertion, their knees knocking into me, their elbows in my ribs, as my flip-flops were trampled and left behind forever. What was unfamiliar to me was obviously not so for the revelers, who knew and repeated a number of lined-out *coros* (choruses). Despite the seeming chaos, somehow we were all moving together, in perfect syllabic synch to this wonderful and alarming sound. We moved through the streets, as if on a conveyor belt, writhing en masse, a human wave of energy, well over the line of "in-control" and "safe." After a while, my friend and I managed to extricate ourselves from the rest of the cyclone and catch our breath while the procession surged on without us. "What was that?" I asked, stunned. "That," my friend grinned, "was a conga."

After my first experience with conga in 2003, I resolved to learn more about this phenomenon which contrasted so deeply with the tightly choreographed, costumed, more obvious face of Santiago's carnival. I quickly discovered, however, that it was almost entirely absent from the extensive literature on Cuban music, save for a few one-line definitions. Desi Arnaz had of course popularized the



"conga line" in the United States in the 1950s, but I couldn't draw many parallels between what I had seen on *I Love Lucy* and what I had experienced that evening in Santiago. Ironically, Arnaz's father was mayor of Santiago from 1923-1932, and had repeatedly tried to ban the conga for its "dangerous" and "contaminating" morals. Likewise, Gloria Estefan's 1985 hit *Conga* didn't seem to correspond to what I had seen.

I eventually decided to focus my 2008 Master's thesis on the subject, working with Cuba's most famous conga from the neighborhood of Los Hoyos in Santiago de Cuba. I arrived at a definition of conga as "a neighborhood-based carnival group that proceeds through the streets playing specific rhythms and using certain instrumentation, collecting non-musician participants en route." It became clear to me that conga is much more than a type of carnival music, however. It is a social and musical phenomenon that is unique to eastern Cuba, one that is especially associated with Santiago de Cuba—a fascinating product of the region's complex and unique demographic. It is also an important source of pride for a region that has historically been denigrated by its western counterpart.



### MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

Santiago's conga has its roots in 17th century exhibitions by the various *cabil-dos* (mutual aid/slave nation societies). Authorities designated a time at the end of the sugar harvest when slaves were allowed to play their music and dance in costume in the streets. The large population from Saint-Domingue that had come to Santiago following the Haitian Revolution became one of the most prominent communities in the city and in the emergence of carnival. Other highly visible groups contributing to carnival included slaves from the central Congo and Calabar (Cross River State, Nigeria) regions of Africa (in Cuba, those descending from the latter are known as *Carabalí*.) The early 20th century also saw a large influx of migrant workers into Santiago from Jamaica, Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean—hence Santiago's moniker, “the most Caribbean city on the island.”

The elements that compose Santiago-style conga are particular to the east. The instrumentation includes bass drums likely taken from the Carabalí *cabil-dos* or perhaps Spanish military bands, as well as *bocuses*, which are basically portable versions of Congolese *yuka* drums. Frying pans mounted on wood blocks have been replaced by *llantas*—car

brake drums—which are struck with a metal rod. The hallmark of conga, the *corneta china*, or Chinese trumpet, was brought to Cuba in the 19th century by Chinese migrant workers. Upon hearing the shrill, piercing sound of the *corneta china*, only one thought springs to mind for Cubans: ¡Santiago!

The congas of Santiago play three basic rhythms that are unique to these ensembles. One of these, *masón*, is taken directly from the *Tumba Francesa* repertoire. These were societies formed in Santiago, Guantánamo and surrounding rural areas in the early 19th century to perpetuate Saint-Dominguan culture in Cuba. The other two rhythms, *pilón* and *columbia*, are unrelated to the popular *pilón* or *rumba columbia* rhythms and instead belong exclusively to conga. The movement associated with conga, called *arrollando*, is a march characterized by exaggerated hip swaying, and is not found anywhere else in Cuba, though similar movements are found across the Caribbean. All these elements combine to form something special that you won't find outside of Oriente, the eastern region of the island. The experience of *arrollando*, roaming through the streets in conjunction with all these elements and people, is indescribable and unforgettable. Indeed,

**Santiago de Cuba's conga goes back to a time at the end of the sugar harvest when slaves were allowed to play their music and dance in costume in the streets.**

the best piece of advice I received in the field was from a librarian at Santiago's Biblioteca Elvira Cape, who told me: “Do your research, interviews, recordings, etc. But don't forget to just *arrollar*.”

### CONGA—A SOURCE OF PRIDE

Santiago is famous island-wide for its carnival and especially its congas. Carnival attracts people from all parts of the island who wish to participate in its activities, especially in the *invasión*. The *invasión* is the conga event which unofficially kicks off carnival, during which the conga of Los Hoyos travels through the streets “invading” the other five rival congas' neighborhoods. Upon arrival in a neighborhood the rival conga and that of Los Hoyos show off their respective groups' rhythmic chops in competition. It is a massive event, and according to legend, in one year there were 30,000 people *arrollando* in the *invasión* through Santiago's streets. In the documentary *Uprising*, by Blue Throat Productions, Santiaguero@s (people from Santiago; the @ stands for both masculine and feminine plurals in Spanish) expressed sentiments such as

“Conga is our kingdom,” and “if it were up to me, there’d be a conga every day. It’s my life.” My own interviews yielded similar comments. You will never see Santiago de Cuba play a baseball game (especially against the *Industriales*, Havana’s team) without a conga present in the stands. It’s the ultimate representation of the city, which is the de facto capital of the Oriente region.

One day, I was walking through the streets with 25-year-old Vladimir, the well-known corneta china player with the conga of Los Hoyos. We rounded a corner and came upon a group of boys—six to nine years old—shirtless, shoeless, and playing with empty gas cans and plastic bottles. The moment they saw Vladimir they snapped to attention, and one mimed a corneta china while proudly tooting the opening tune of one of Los Hoyos’ songs. The other boys, without missing a beat,

*be*. The song tells of a girl from Santiago who has left Cuba, but all she can think about is the conga from her hometown. She is tormented by the pain of no longer being able to feel the power of arrollando with the conga of Los Hoyos, where you might see “a cockroach dance with a cat,” a metaphor of unity across social classes. The song opens with the jarring sound of the corneta china and the high-pitched clang of the llantas. Then, an arrangement for string orchestra and trombone unfolds on top of the conga of Los Hoyos. The result is an irresistible march bursting with regional pride. But it is not merely a lament for a lost homeland. It is also a celebration of Santiago and things only a Santiaguero can understand. It elevates Santiagueros and gives them a distinction they rarely enjoy in the capital. As the song ends, the strings and brass fade out, and the full percussion of the conga

in her article titled *La Habana no aguanta más: Regionalism in Contemporary Cuban Society and Dance Music* (Musical Quarterly, 2009:3-4.) Indeed, there is a long history of tension between the east and the west of the island, which historian Ada Ferrer details in her work *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill, 1999.) These tensions have resulted in a kind of shame felt by some Orientales, and a reluctance to disclose their origins. Orientales are often accused of “*haciendose el habanero*”—pretending to be from Havana. They change their accent, omit certain words from their vocabulary, and increase the amount of “bling” in their wardrobe to avoid being identified as an Oriental, or, as one friend from the eastern province of Holguín admitted, to make themselves feel “more advanced like those from the capital.”

In 2006, “Añoranza por la conga” hit number one across the island and won the prestigious *Cubadisco* award for Song of the Year. This was a surprising and important moment for the east and the Havana-based commercial music industry. The song highlighted the unique identity of Santiaguero@s, and reinforced the relevance of eastern Cuban traditions like conga across the island.

Despite the Cuban government’s focus on cultivating a united national identity, regional tensions still exist. Conga has become a symbol of unification for eastern Cubans, especially Santiaguero@s, and also a site for the construction of an identity distinct from their western counterparts. While I myself am always somewhat anxious to leave Santiago and get back to Havana with its faster internet connections, abundance of restaurants, and flashy salsa scene, I never forget that extraordinary thing you can’t get in Havana: conga.

**Lani Milstein** is an ethnomusicologist and producer living in Toronto, Canada. Her first article on conga, “*Toward an Understanding of Conga santiaguera: Elements of La Conga de Los Hoyos*” was recently published in the Latin American Music Review.

## Conga has become a symbol of unification for eastern Cubans and a site for the construction of identity.

answered with the appropriate choral response and instantaneously turned their pieces of trash into functioning instruments. They proceeded to play the pilón rhythm with a precision and vigor that astonished me. Their eyes were on fire, eagerly searching for approval from Vladimir. He chuckled, looked shyly at the ground, shook his head and said, “Aw heck no, this tradition is never going to die.” The true value of conga crystallized for me in that moment. In Santiago, childhood heroes are conga members, and children’s congas that function to train the next generation of players are voluntarily well-attended. As Felix Banderas, director of the conga of Los Hoyos once told me, “when you are born in Los Hoyos, you are born inside a [conga’s] drum.”

The importance of conga to Santiago’s identity was dramatically displayed with the release of the song *Añoranza por la conga* (Yearning for Conga), by the popular music group from Santiago, *Sur Cari-*

returns. The chorus drives the message home, repeating “¡Oigan Santiaguero@s, sigan adelante!” (Listen up people of Santiago, keep moving forward!) as the conga of Los Hoyos plays relentlessly.

### EAST VS WEST

Over the last decade of working with Cuban musicians on the island and abroad, it became clear to me that easterners have a certain reputation among those from the capital. I have heard them described with such harsh terms as “underdeveloped,” “savage,” “inferior,” “illiterate” and “primitive.” Heavy migration to the capital from the east has caused Orientales to be blamed for Havana’s housing shortage and high unemployment rate, and has earned them nicknames such as “*palestin@*” and “*indocumentad@*” in reference to a people without a homeland. Musicologist Rebecca Bodenheimer discusses examples of such regional tensions, which are illustrated in Cuban popular dance music,



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# RESISTANCE, COMMUNITY, AND POLITICS

Even as carnivals and fiestas are joyous occasions, they are also vehicles for protest and resistance today. Amidst all the fun, they create and express community and provide a source of alternative power.

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# Pleasure is Power

Invading, Conquering and Dominating  
through Celebration **BY TOMÁS MONTOYA GONZÁLEZ**

**THEY APPROACHED, SINGING:**

*“Yo vivo en el agua, (I live in the water,) como el camarón, (like a shrimp.) Y a nadie le importa (And no one cares OR It’s nobody’s business) como vivo yo” (how I’m living.)*

I was a little late to the parade called *La Invasión* (the invasion)—the largest street parade in the conga tradition of Santiago, Cuba. Then I heard this simple song and was overcome by pleasure in it

and in the thrill of witnessing two unlikely lovers—*partying* and *authority*—on a date. It was just past noon on December 28, 2002. It was hot—really hot!—but the thousands of people along Martí Avenue were ready and willing to rebel against not only the heat, but also against anything with any semblance, real or symbolic, of power; *“it’s nobody’s business how I’m living,”* they sang, watching and dancing. The joyous individuals that day were free, having conquered the here





Tomás Montoya González paints a portrait of *La Invasión*—the largest street parade in the conga tradition of Santiago de Cuba, with both his words and camera. “It’s nobody’s business how I’m living,” participants sang, watching and dancing.



and now. The procession, amid shouts of enjoyment, somewhere between *pleasure and violence*, was the climax of a community; its very name suggests it: this conga is “por la Victoria” or “for Victory.”

The idea for this parade came from the First Secretary of the Communist Party in the province of Santiago, Juan Carlos Robinson, in 1996. He wanted to commemorate the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution (the actual date was January 1) with an *Invasión* of the conga each December. It also, however, served to alleviate some of the effects of the crisis that hung thick over the city at the time, the *special period* of austerity that battered Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This new celebration, for those who live “in the water like a shrimp,” has turned into an offshoot from the traditional and well-known *Invasión* parade that is a prelude to Carnival.

Traditionally, *La Invasión* takes place a few days before the beginning of carnival every July, which honors Santiago the Apostle, the city’s patron saint. *La Invasión* lasts about five hours, leaving from the largely Afro-Cuban Los Hoyos neighborhood, and winds through a large portion of the city, “invading,” quite literally diverse ethnic and class zones of many differing ethnic and class make-ups. Throughout the route it typically encounters other congas from different parts of the city.

This forms a constantly shifting reality, especially because of a type of *inverse gentrification* in which poor people flooded into the cities after the Revolution. It becomes a literal invasion by the *others* as they enter the *Sueño* (Dream) neighborhood, which is a mostly white, middle-class area, in stark contrast with *Los Hoyos* (the Holes), a mostly black and mixed-race neighborhood, where the parade begins.

We climb the hill on Martí Avenue. A young woman rubs her buttocks against a policeman’s fly, moving it to the rhythm of the music, with her head and torso inclined forward. The movement is sexual without a doubt! He attempts, quite poorly, to repress a smile. Gently, he

taps his riot stick, tool of repression, on her rear. Are these taps his way of symbolically caressing this girl’s body? She shouldn’t be right up against him. The policeman seems to debate between fulfilling his duty to bring order and ignoring it to enjoy himself. The young woman has succeeded in dominating him—at least for the moment—but then people begin to push, a fight breaks out, the police begin to strike the crowd, and the power shifts. The game has changed... but she’ll be back!

Women in the conga parades often play the role of easing tensions and maintaining a relatively safe space. They sensually dissuade the police from acting aggressively toward the crowd, taking advantage of the benefits of being close to the structural dominator. While the police form a circle around the musicians of the conga, shielding them from the crowd, the women in turn surround the police, offering them both closer enjoyment of the music and better protection from crowd violence, which is fundamentally masculine. But since this parade is, above all, a way to expose oneself, to play with our masks, everyone is a potential victim or victimizer, and end up being both, *de facto*. The police don’t act against women with as much force as they do against men, so this arrangement creates a slightly more peaceful zone; it isolates the police, giving the crowd a temporary shield, easing the pressure. The ladies conquer, and as a consequence, so does the crowd.

The invasion continues to move—and I move along with it. In *Sueño*, the Conga passes the old Moncada Barracks, an icon of the revolution, now ignored as the energy of the celebration rises to the next level. The rum and collective fervor accompany the growing intensity of the music. The *corneta china*, an Asian instrument brought to the island by Chinese immigrants, urges on new songs. In front of the barracks a fight breaks out, the police intervene with blows in all directions, people run, total chaos. Suddenly a song begins—“*cógele la nalga al guardia*” (grab the policeman’s butt)—

everyone repeats it, each time louder and in unison, euphoria, the police are helpless, always helpless against the songs, which are public domain. Nothing is sacred; the laws of freedom inherent to celebrations take over and in practice police action against transgressions is simply not viable.

The police protecting the musicians begin to make a space for them in a narrow stretch of the street. I see a policeman hit a young man. The young man looks at him and with a very *theatrical* gesture says “*conmigo no, con los americanos*” (forget me, go after the Americans) and a group near him begins to sing:

“*Conmigo noooo (Forget meeee)*”

*Con los americanos (Go after the Americans)*

*Con los americanos (Go after the Americans)*

*Con los americanos (Go after the Americans)”*

Don’t attack me, do that to the Americans, to those in power. As the singer Rubestier, who created this chant some ten years ago, put it, “I made a chorus saying (to the police): why are you gonna mess with me, if we’re just partying? Go over to America, where the real problem is!” These songs reflect events that affect the community: they are an *acted chronicle*. Rubestier also gives us an idea of how these *parallel discourses* arise in public places of celebration, where the people say—or rather sing—things which are far from the official discourse: “...it is different from a theatre...in the conga, on the streets, feelings are expressed more... it is like a release of tension... the police look the other way because once the conga is over, it’s over. It was just the conga, and now it’s done!”

Of course, feelings are expressed differently on the streets in any carnival, but in the Cuban case, taking into consideration the well-known government control over public opinion, it is very interesting that the community is given this open door for self-expression during these public celebrations.

In each neighborhood the amount



Scenes from the festivities in Santiago de Cuba; *La Invasión* lasts for about five hours, leaving from the largely Afro-Cuban Los Hoyos neighborhood and “invading,” quite literally, diverse ethnic and class zones.

of people, and the amount of alcohol, increases. There’s no conga without percussion, but without rum? Forget it! People begin to drop leaves in the street. The leaves of various plants are used to clean the body and spirit of negative energy—a common practice in the Afro-Cuban religious tradition, especially Santería. The leaves of different plants are used, and each plant has its own specific meaning. Once the revelers have used them to *strip* themselves of negativity, they throw them to the ground, to the past. Shoes also begin to appear in the wake of the parade: shoes that have fallen off, or broken, mostly sandals, of poor quality or simply no longer wanted. Some people just go the whole way barefoot.

People appear in doorways and windows; some dance and sing; others watch and judge, but from a distance. Some stay out of it because of racial or class prejudices; others simply shy away from the excesses. They are just spectators; the *actors* here have an audience, and these singers, dancers and musicians aim their play towards these spectators. They are conscious of being observed, and need to release what they produce to an audience.

Not everyone is enchanted by congas and carnivals. For comments against the conga, look up what rum magnate Emilio Bacardí said about carnival, even though his company benefited from the tradition greatly, or the statements of the former mayor of Santiago, Desiderio Arnaz. In an ironic twist of fate, his son, Desi, who starred in the popular U.S. television program *I Love Lucy*, actually helped popularize the stylized version of the conga, which has since become universal. (See N. Pérez Rodríguez, *El Carnaval Santiaguero* [Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1987] and R. D. Moore, *Música y mestizaje. Revolución artística y cambio social en La Habana. 1920-1940.* [Madrid: Editorial Colibrí, 1997]).



But my mind right now is not on the theoretical aspects of carnival. Crossing Madre Vieja Street, we arrive at Aguilera. Santiago is dilapidated but nonetheless beautiful. The city is mountainous and plunges downward towards its bay, so from the top of the hill on Aguilera you can see the summit of another hill, sometimes more than one; now what we see are hills covered with people. It is a magnificent spectacle.

We are now close to the intersection of San Miguel Street. This is my neighborhood. I can remember the excitement during my childhood when the *Invasión* approached and we children impatiently awaited its arrival, the pungent aroma of heat and bodies, a subterranean rumble that alerted us that they were near, the invading hordes were coming to occupy. I remember my mother and her warnings not to leave her side—it was dangerous, people took little children and ate them—but the temptation was stronger than her words. Although we were all black and mulato, in my family I had the lightest skin. My cousin warned me—they're gonna f\*\*\* you up in there, *blanquito* (whitey), so don't you come with me—but I went. Either I would escape or my neighbor Maida would rescue me. She loved the conga. A white woman whose father was a former official in the government of the dictator overthrown by Castro, she lived in a beautiful spacious house next to ours, which was the exact opposite. And her daughter was my secret girlfriend. Maida, my angel!

The *Invasión* pauses for a bit. In some areas people begin to argue, in others people dance and sing in small groups, they create a beat with glass bottles, drums, *claves*, any object that can produce sound. Some just clap their hands. It's time to enjoy a live concert. I hear a group singing:

*"Yo no quiero Panda (I don't want a Panda TV)*  
*Ni quiero teléfono (I don't want a phone)*  
*Yo no quiero na' (I don't want nothin')"*  
 Another guy improvises:  
*"Lo que quiero es un celular (What I want*

*is a cell phone)*

*Pa' llamar al yuma (To call the US)*

*Coro: rinng, rinng, pa' llamar al yuma (Chorus: ring, ring, to call the US)"*

To put this in context: the Cuban government authorizes the distribution of Chinese "Panda" brand televisions and telephones. As there were not enough for the entire population, they were given out to a selection of the "best neighbors" in every neighborhood. This practice resulted in frustrations and problems in the communities and in this popular carnival chant.

Laughter. Laughter and celebrating are our tools of vengeance: sarcasm, irony, dark humor, or as it's called in Cuba, *choteo*—but way beyond what J. Mañach described in 1955 in *Indagación al Choteo* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2nd ed.). These are not temporary rituals, as theorized by Victor W. Turner in "Pasos, márgenes y pobreza: símbolos religiosos de la comunidad," in P. B. Glazer and P. Bohannan (eds.), *Antropología, Lecturas* (La Habana: Editorial Félix Varela, 2nd ed., 2003).

We play, use, allow ourselves to be used by, negotiate and taunt authority on a day-to-day basis. Cubans know this, our spirits slip through the epistemological framework of the *other*; this is our best weapon in this bitter fight for survival.

It's true that our carnival is not a "pristine" example of resistance: the means of control, use and domination by the state over the celebrations are undeniable—in Cuba today they are easy to see. But we can affirm, without a doubt, that Santiago's conga parade is an example, albeit not *pristine*, but nonetheless powerful, of *social resistance*. I would say that these street parties are a specific type of struggle against the *forces of domination*.

We are on Trocha Avenue, where a trio of young gay men can be seen dancing with female friends. They are not trying to look like transvestites, but they are decked out—cross-dressing is a tradition with a long history in the congas and carnivals. Though this tradition is being

lost, you can still see men with feminine masks, wigs and clothing. It is also true that in the last, say, 20 years the presence of openly gay men has increased in these parades, showing a tendency towards new *transgressions*. Historically, this play had been reserved for "real men," men who may simply have fun by dressing up like women.

A group of singers accompanied by a single conga drum grabs my attention:

*"Maní maní (Peanuts, peanuts)*

*que yo no vendo avellana (But I'm not selling hazelnuts)*

*que yo no vendo avellana (But I'm not selling hazelnuts)*

*yo vendo marijuana" (I'm selling marijuana)*

The group responded at the top of their lungs, unabashedly repeating what this singer put forward. For now, let's leave this singer unnamed, because to say something like this in public, in the middle of the street in Santiago de Cuba, is far from advisable. Marijuana is not only taboo: in our community it is harshly penalized by law. Just a month after this parade the Cuban Ministry of the Interior carried out a police operation called "Coraza" and an unknown but very visible amount of drug traffickers were sent to prison on long sentences.

This same group starts another interesting song:

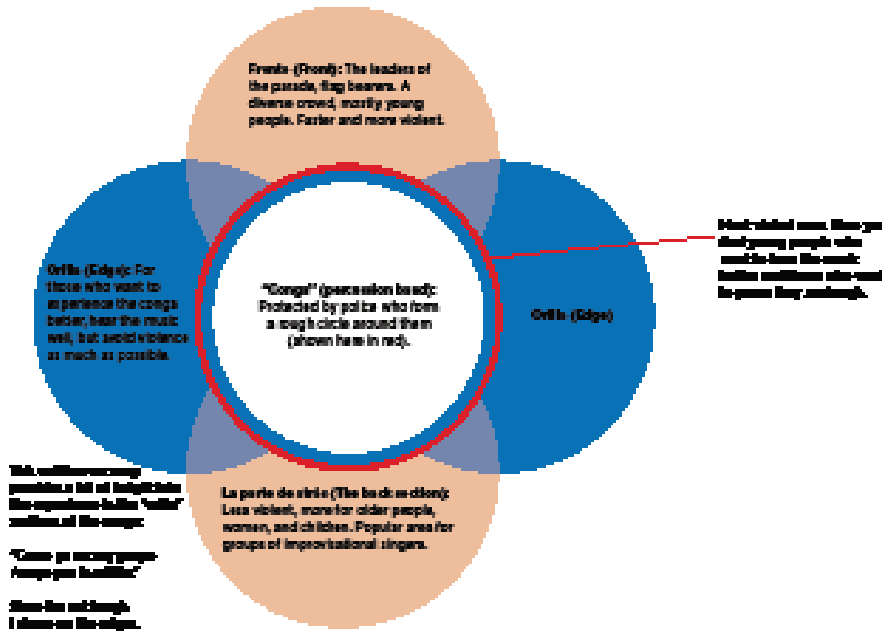
*"Para el nuevo año yo quiero mi lancha (For the new year I want a boat)*

*yo quiero mi lancha (I want a boat)*

*yo quiero mi lancha (I want a boat)*

*que éstas no me alcanzan" (Cause these aren't enough for me here.)"*

In Santiago de Cuba? To mention boats on the island, as ironic as it may sound considering it *is an island*, is like calling for the devil, especially since the 1994 *balseros* crisis, in which thousands of rafters took to the sea when the Cuban government authorized the departure of anyone who wished to leave for the United States. Boats are symbolic of fleeing,



betrayal, breaking the law. As a matter of fact, a few months later, in April 2003 the Cuban government would execute three young men, after a quick investigation and trial, for attempting to hijack a passenger ferry in Havana; but right now this group of young people not only asks for boats, they laugh about it!

In contrast, as we approach the San Agustín Pizzeria, others sing:

*“que le pasa a Bu’ (Bush) con mi Comandante (What’s Bush’s problem with my Commander [Fidel Castro])  
que le pasa a Bu’ (What’s Bush’s problem) con mi Comandante?” (With my Commander?)”*

That’s just how it is! Right in front of the Pizzeria we face the *Conga de San Agustín*, which represents the neighborhood we are in. In every neighborhood the congas greet each other by playing, or they challenge each other, sizing up the competition, because they are rivals and compete for a prize during the carnival.

We are now descending the hill on Trocha, while more people join in; the march has gone on now for about three hours. A policeman gets temporarily isolated in a dispute. A few men come at

him, he defends himself as best he can but they surround him—bad sign—but more police soon come to his aid and the balance of power shifts. They arrest one man. They hit him. The crowd, in a frenzy, starts a chant aimed at the police. It is direct:

*“abusador (abuser)  
abusador (abuser)  
abusador (abuser)”*

I decide to enter once more the police circle that protects the musicians, now that things are getting crazy on the outside. I am a friend of the band, I’m wearing the t-shirt that identifies them and the police allow me to pass. I am one of the privileged ones. The musicians manage to have their friends there with them, along with certain tourists, friends from abroad and girlfriends; it is their moment of *negotiation of power*. I can hear the music well now, drums, bells, and *corneta* create a unique and magical polyrhythm. From here I can also be, for a moment, both spectator and spectacle, I can see more or less what is happening on the outside and those on the outside can see me well, it’s the eye of the storm.

It is getting dark by the time we get

to La Alameda Street, which is right on the bay, and from a certain point you can see the ocean. This is enough to inspire a song:

*“tamo en la Alameda (Short for “estamos”. The letter “s” is often left out of speech in Santiago, and the word fits into the song better this way.) (We are on Alameda)*

*¿dónde está mi lancha? (Where is my boat?)*

*¿dónde está mi lancha? (Where is my boat?)*

*¿dónde está mi lancha? (Where is my boat?)”*

There is fun all around, there are fights, explicit demonstrations of sexuality, but the party is nearing its end. It’s already night when we return to Martí Avenue, to the home of the Los Hoyos conga. I am tired but happy. My friends and I share a few final sips of bad rum, which at that moment helps me to remember the poet Virgilio Piñera.

*“..Y gritaré con ese amor que puede (And I will scream with this powerful love)  
gritar su nombre hacia los cuatro vientos,  
(scream its name at the top of my lungs)  
lo que el pueblo dice en cada instante:  
(what people say at every moment)  
“me están matando pero estoy gozando.”  
(“they’re killing me, but I’m having a ball.”)*

**Tomás Montoya González** is a native of Cuba and resident in New Orleans, Louisiana. He is currently finishing his doctoral degree at Universidad de Oriente in Santiago de Cuba, and working on a documentary examining the role of popular celebrations and the power relationship in Santiago’s community. He is a photographer (finalist of NOPA’s Michael P. Smith Fund for Documentary Photography 2012 Grant), poet and arts organizer (He has organized several trips for CubaNola Collective to examine culture in Cuba). He teaches at Tulane University in the Spanish and Portuguese Dept., 2007-2014.

# Festival and Massacre

## Staging Excess in Mapa Teatro's *Los Santos Inocentes* **BY CAMILA ASCHNER-RESTREPO**

**FESTIVALS ARE PRIVILEGED SPACES TO HELP US** understand the meaning of community. They are a special way of presenting historical narratives, bringing together past and present, myths and historical facts in a single commemorative event. Festivals bring together joy and fear, peace and violence, happiness and sorrow in an unending paradox. They celebrate life, but often can be occasions for mourning.

Festivals may also offer us sinister characters, such as devils—sometimes in a concealed fashion. However, festive and even comic, carnivalesque devils often are the incarnation of less tangible evils that afflict a society. In Colombia particularly festivals are deeply connected to massacres in ways that are not always straightforward for either the participants or their spectators. This is the case of the festival of the Holy Innocents, which served as inspiration for Mapa Teatro's theatrical production *Los santos inocentes*. I read this play as a paradigmatic example of how a theatrical event can evoke the festive, the horror, the sacrifice and the sacred, all within the framework of real historical events presented through poetic devices as fiction.

### THE MYTHS AND THE FACTS

Every festival has its origin in one or several myths. French intellectual Roger Caillois asserted this idea in "Festival," his 1939 lecture for the College of Sociology. The Festival of the Holy Innocents is no exception. The story behind the production of *Los santos inocentes* mixes myths and historical facts that spring from both formal scholarship and oral traditions.

The first myth concerns the origins of Christianity, in which King Herod of Judea ordered the execution of all the male newborns in Jerusalem. This unconfirmed episode of biblical history is remembered in Christianity as the Massacre of the Inno-

cents, commemorated every year on the 28th of December. The Holy Innocents, victims of this massacre, are considered to be the first Christian martyrs.

In Colombia, people celebrate Holy Innocents Day by playing pranks on each other in the style of U.S. April Fool's Day. No matter how nasty the prank, both perpetrator and victim are protected by the motto "pásela por inocente" ("let it pass as innocent" but also "take that as innocent"). Anything that takes place that day, from newspapers publishing fake news to more domestic and private examples of lying and mischief, falls under the protection of the holiday and has to be, in fact, "passed as innocent." This tradition gives rise to a day of unrestrained license to celebrate a festival of carnivalesque proportions in the department of Cauca in southwest Colombia, which takes us to the second story that frames our festival/play.

The second one is related to the never-ending process of foundation of that imagined entity called Colombia. It tells us about historically secluded regions in the country, especially the story of Guapi, a municipality in Cauca. The town, built on the border of the Guapi River and the Pacific Ocean, is accessible only through the rivers that run through the rainforest and a small airport to which no commercial airline flies. A town of about 30,000 people, Guapi has systematically been affected by the different conflicts in Colombian history. The site of one of the world's richest gold deposits (some assert), the town was the setting for the African slave-based mining industry during the colonial period and for more modern colonial enterprises directed by multinationals ever since.

The 20th century brought a new and violent crop to the department of Cauca, all along the Naya River banks. The

department's rich soils, combined with the easiness with which the coca leaf can be packed and shipped across the Pacific Ocean from nearby ports, have made Cauca one of the main centers of the ongoing conflict in Colombia. Given the lack of government presence, the land has been the object of dispute between guerilla and paramilitary groups trying to gain control over the territory along with the production and traffic of coca and cocaine.

Between 2001 and 2004, a series of massacres known as the "Naya massacres" took place in the region traversed by the river. The Calima bloc of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (the United Self-Defense Forces), the national centralized organization of the paramilitary groups, was responsible for all of them. The leader of the Calima bloc, Hebert Veloza (alias HH, after Heil Hitler), confessed to around 2,000 crimes before being extradited to the United States for the crime of illegal drug trafficking in 2009. Alias HH plays a very important role in Mapa Teatro's *Los santos inocentes*, in which he becomes a haunting guest: both an uninvited intruder, and the not-so-festive devil of the festival.

Despite the ongoing violence, the people of Guapi take to the streets to celebrate their traditional festival on December 28. The men dress up as women, put on random masks "made in China" and go out to the streets with whips in their hands, hitting anyone they come across, inflicting real pain and sometimes even serious wounds, all covered under the motto "pass it as innocent."

The third story that guides the play is that of a journey that begins with the pretext of a real birthday and ends in the production of a "fictitious documentary," which provides most of the footage of the festival and daily life in Guapi shown in the play. Heidi Abderhalden, co-director

and actress of Mapa Teatro, was born on December 28 and, as her character explains, decides to travel to Guapi in order to celebrate her birthday at the Holy Innocents festival. In the play's narrative, this very real fact mingles with an alleged project of making a "fictitious documentary" about the festival, which brings the rest of the troupe to Guapi to take part in the carnival.

#### MAPA TEATRO'S LOS SANTOS INOCENTES

Mapa Teatro, "Laboratorio de Artistas," was founded in Bogotá in 1984 by the Swiss-Colombian siblings Rolf and Heidi Abderhalden. Over the course of their artistic career they have collaborated with

over the destroyed stage, surrounded by pieces of clothing and masks, tiny prostheses of exhausted and transgressed bodies. Ambiguity reigns as historical facts are mixed with the storyline of the play. The only moment where truthfulness is unquestionable is at the end, when HH's confession is displayed on the stage screen, along with a list of names that correspond to the victims of the massacres of the Naya River, while an actor violently whips the floor until exhaustion.

Despite the fact that *Los santos inocentes* is principally a fictional story, one can't escape the true story told through so many layered narratives. It begins with a real birthday used as a pretext, a real festival used as the background,

festival/play, creating a completely new event that involves the audience. Past and present come together in the single event of the performance that inscribes itself in a new space and temporality and imposes itself on the spectator through images, sounds, objects and bodies. Past and present come together, too, with the juxtaposition of the legendary and the recent "Holy Innocents." Two massacres, two festivals, one event.

The piece also (re)produces the excessive experience of the festival and shows the aftermath where all that's left is a sense of mourning. Rolf Abderhalden asserts that the production wanted to explore the literality of the events it refers to, instead of producing a representation of them. And it effectively does so by using a poetics of destruction in which simple festive elements like masks, pieces of clothing and balloons become sinister reminders of the massacres of the Naya River and the Holy Innocents alike. By privileging the register of the "real" over the "true," the play operates as an aesthetic mechanism that combines the form of the massacre and that of the carnival, constructing a new instance of excess.

It is said that "representations" can be even more real and threatening than the actual events they are set to imitate. Antonin Artaud stated in *The Theater and its Double* that there are uncontrollable forces in theater—at least what he considered good theater—"that make the incarnation of a crime committed on a stage much more disturbing for the spirit than the real crime when it is actually committed." Mapa Teatro, very much in sync with Artaud's precepts, is committed to making a theater that disturbs and moves every single fiber of a human being: a total experience.

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## A theatrical event can evoke the festive, the horror, the sacrifice and the sacred.

numerous artists in Colombia and the world, positioning the group as one of the most widely recognized Colombian theater companies.

Within the framework of the stories described above, Mapa Teatro constructed a narrative that mixes truth and fiction in a way that makes the audience question every fact that the play presents. The piece begins with the story of the troupe travelling to Guapi, mixing footage of the town and its river with interviews with its inhabitants about the coming celebration of the bicentennial of the independence of Colombia (2010). As the piece unfolds, one can see the birthday celebration taking place in the middle of the town festivities, interrupted by a nightmare in which HH appears on a screen only to remain there until the end of the play. The massacre is brought onto the stage through this image as well as a display of "festive" violence that evokes that of a massacre. The party, the festival and the massacre evolve together to converge in one and the same final image: bodies lying on the floor all

and a real massacre incarnated by a real character of Colombian history that haunts the entire production almost as a ghost. However, the mechanisms of the real operate in a different format in this production. The festival is brought to the stage, and even though it is brought through footage of the original event mixed with the group's poetical devices, it is no longer the festival of the Holy Innocents in Guapi, but the festival within the play. On a second level, the festival operates within the frame of Heidi's birthday, on December 28. The on-stage festival is framed by these two events, one of which is immediate (the play) and another one that is brought through narrative (the birthday). On a more global level, the play works as a festival itself. It introduces the myths of origin (the Christian holiday, Heidi's birthday, the festival in Guapi, the massacre and the journey to record the scenes for the documentary), recreates the characters that incarnate these myths, and then proceeds to its own celebration of the

# Colombian Devils

Caldas, Magdalena  
and Nariño

A PHOTOESSAY  
BY JORGE MARIO MÚNERA

THE DEVILS FROM EUROPE AND AFRICA ARRIVED in Colombia and as soon as they encountered the indigenous devils, they happily got together to amuse themselves. They take advantage of any opportunity around the churches on the day of Corpus Christi, with the diabolical bands of Santa Fe de Antioquia, Atanquez and Irra, or in the carnivals of Barranquilla and Pasto or during the principal celebration which is the Carnival of the Devil in Riosucio in the Department of Caldas.

In the first week of January in uneven years such as 2013 or 2015, the Devil, from his throne high up in the rocky Peñasco de Ingrumá, right in the heart of the River Cauca Canyon, sets an example and encourages his unruly vassals to indulge in the pleasures of life and fiesta. "Hail, hail, the joys of life...hail, hail this unique carnival" is the Devil's hymn sung by an excited crowd that rules the night with one voice: enjoy yourselves one and all!

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From top left, clockwise: The devils drink in Caldas; arty devil in Caldas; a devil in Caldas; the captain and his devils in Magdalena; burning the effigy of a landowner in Cauca.



Scenes from the fiestas of St. Francis of Assisi, otherwise known as San Pacho, in Quibdó, El Chocó, Colombia.

# The Fiestas de San Pacho

## Community Resistance in El Chocó

A PHOTOESSAY BY STEVE CAGAN

THE FIESTAS DE SAN PACHO (ST. FRANCIS OF Assisi) in Quibdó, El Chocó, Colombia, are sixteen days of barrio-based parades and religious observations (and, in fact, less well-known activities start a month earlier). Some people criticize the fiestas as excessively secular, lacking seriousness and religious fervor. Others see them as little more than excuses for drunkenness and disorder, and still others object to the expenses that poor com-

munities run up to support the parades. I have a different view; in an area where territory (in all its meanings) is a central social and political issue, I see these celebrations as an affirmation of community and a claim to belonging and ownership, as a form of cultural resistance. For a development of this idea, please see my article, “Las Fiestas de San Pacho en Quibdó, El Chocó: Punto de resistencia cultural comunitaria.”

<[www.stevecagan.com/SanPachopaper/SanPachoenero2014.pdf](http://www.stevecagan.com/SanPachopaper/SanPachoenero2014.pdf)>

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Emotions swing wildly at the sixteen-day celebration of barrio-based parades and religious observations in Quibdó in El Chocó on Colombia's isolated Pacific coast.





In an area where territory (in all its meanings) is a central social and political issue, photographer Steve Cagan sees these celebrations as an affirmation of community and a claim to belonging and ownership.



## The Fiesta Must Go on

A PHOTOESSAY BY NADJA DROST

FOR MORE THAN 150 YEARS, GOLD MINING HAS been the life-blood of Segovia, a town in central Colombia that sits atop a labyrinth of underground tunnels where miners toil. Above ground, hordes of motorcycles choke the streets, lights whirl from casino storefronts and beats pulse from steamy *discotecas* from night into the morning every day of the week.

Every year, this wild-west-like town

eagerly awaits its week-long festival celebrating gold mining and honoring the Virgin of Carmen, the patron saint of miners.

Days of parades feature fantastical carnival costumes, school marching bands and elaborate floats, each one representing a different mine that showcases its wealth with its ostentatiousness and level of preparation. Min-

ers compete in sporting events and race against each other with 110-pound bags of rock on their backs. Every night, the main plaza fills with concert-goers and the bars swell with patrons. Ultimately, it is one great, long party.

The first time I went to Segovia's gold parties was in July 2012. At the time, Segovia was in the throes of a regional war between two armed groups fight-



From left to right: Military forces participate in an Independence Day parade during the fiestas, July 20, 2012; Segovians smear each other with a red dye and run through the streets, shown here with a cow head, August 2013.

ing over the territory and its gold mines. Homicide rates had tripled. Multiple funerals a day, in a town of 50,000, became routine. Fear hovered over Segovia's streets and seeped into its porous underbelly. The weekend of the gold festival, even the funeral home's driver showed up at the morgue, dead in his hearse. Everyone realized they weren't immune to the violence. Many people

were too afraid to head into the streets to celebrate—"and celebrate what?" they asked. "The killings? The massacres?"

For others still, the parties took on a greater importance because of the violence—an opportunity for Segovia to show that *alegría* could trump fear, and that its party spirit would not be snuffed by a war in its midst. "Segovia *needs* these parties this year," one community leader

told me. "The fiestas *have* to go well."

The week of the fiestas, Segovia teetered between revelry and tension but then triumphed in being a grand spectacle. On Colombia's Independence Day, military paraded through the streets, their menacing face paint and show of force made almost farcical in a town where state armed forces had no control in the face of paramilitary groups.

One day, hundreds of Segovians participated in the annual carnival tradition of smearing *moresca*, a red liquid, over each other, a screaming flush of euphoria. People told me the red liquid symbolized blood, and that gold mining both required it as a sacrifice and, as evidenced by the violent bloodshed up to that point, brought it to their town. As Segovians drenched each other in the fake blood, it looked like the town was performing a dramatization of its

strike reignited amidst nation-wide protests. Violent clashes endured for days between police and protesters. Stores shuttered, tires burned in the streets and all roads connecting Segovia to the rest of the department were blockaded. A state of emergency blanketed Segovia and yet again, the gold festival was in jeopardy.

Segovia's mayor allegedly paid for the thousand-plus protesters camping out in the town's coliseum to move en masse to another town so that Segovia could carry

## As Segovians drenched each other in fake blood, it looked as if the town was performing a dramatization of its own reality, a bloodbath of massacres.

own reality, residents careening through the streets as though they were running away from their own massacre. The bacchanal roared on for days.

The following year, much had changed in Segovia. A few months prior, the battling armed groups came to a pact, and the homicide rate dropped like a stone. But other problems followed. A miners' strike forced Segovia to postpone its festivals until the next month. But then, the

on with its party plans. This year, people questioned if it was right for Segovians to revel while hundreds of thousands of miners and *campesinos* across the country were making sacrifices to collectively stand up for their rights.

Could Segovia prepare for its fiestas so last-minute and under these conditions to do so? More importantly, did it have the spirit to? Questions murmured on the barricaded streets.

When the festival's organizers announced the fiestas would persevere but without many of its key events, revelers-in-waiting clamored for their re-installment. What kind of festival would it be without the *Gigantona*, the huge carnival doll who chased after red liquid-crazed denizens? *Impossible!* Certain festival traditions were too important to forego.

Again, Segovia *needed* its fiestas. In fact, it *deserved* them, the mayor said, and nothing would get in their way. Hastily, the town pulled them together. This year, the crowds were thinner. Confusion reigned over the festival, congruent with the general state of upheaval and uncertainty that Segovia had been living. The year and a half or so of violence had battered the town's economy, and merchants and miners didn't have much money to contribute to the fiestas. On top of that, many were driven out by the violence, taking their money with them. The floats representing different mines were far fewer and less boastful — money was scarce and there had been little time to prepare. Outside talent often couldn't arrive due to blockaded roads.

But Segovia pulled off its festival, and Segovians partied long and hard, though brushed by a current of weariness. That year, people told me that *moresca*, the red liquid they cover themselves with, had nothing to do with blood; it was simply a festive liquid used in carnivals all over Colombia.

With the fiestas, the streets convert into a stage where outsiders like myself see a piece of theatre that unfolds Segovia's story. Segovia sure likes its fiestas, but they also serve as a barometer of its political, social and economic climates.

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Miners called “catangueros,” whose role in a mine is to carry the rock out of the tunnel, race against each other in a yearly competition carrying 50 kg bags of rock on their back (July 2012).



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# NATION, NATURE, AND PATRIMONY

Collective fiestas represent common legacies of the past, but they also define the present and future. Fiestas are a way of constructing nation, defining patrimony and reacting to climate change—today's issues evolving from yesterday's legacies.

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# Carnival Inc.

## Public Space and Private Enterprise **BY PAOLO VIGNOLO**

**IN THE RAINY SEASON, STREAMS OF WATER TAKE** over Barranquilla. Streets transform into abundant, improvised rivers. They stop traffic, spilling over onto the sidewalks; they tumble trees, cars and pedestrians. The city—which does not have an adequate sewage system—gets paralyzed, waiting for the rains to stop. In the same manner, in the dry season, the carnival processions take over Barranquilla. Rivers of people spill out onto the streets with an enthusiasm that overflows the official fiesta, erupting into a multiplicity of neighborhood fiestas, celebrations on every corner and local dance teams known as *comparsas*. Like the downpours, carnival also overflows the riverbeds.

“To enjoy it, you’ve got to live it” is the Barranquilla motto. Because of this, we accepted with enthusiasm when León—the leader of the cumbia group Candela Viva—invited us to participate in the parade. The rehearsals took place at night in a chaotic hubbub of flirting couples who chatted and tried out different choreographies, neighbors drinking at the corner store with music blaring, and children playing soccer as women were putting on the final touches to their wide cumbia skirts. When we asked León why there were so many alternative parades competing with the official programming, he did not waste a minute in attributing the blame to Carnival Inc. (in Spanish, Carnaval S.A.).

In 1991, local elites founded the mixed state-private company Carnival of Barranquilla Inc. and privatized the festive event, citing the need to save it from the political patronage system (*clientelismo*), corruption and decadence. In public hands the carnival had been considered electoral loot rather than a space for an active citizenry. Once the carnival was in private hands, it became an expense rather than an investment, leading to

a scramble for profitability. Admission tickets were sold, fees charged for popular dances, seats and stages installed. The parades were invaded by commercial guidelines and corporate advertising displayed on tractor-trailers. In short, a collective festival was transformed into an economic engine for profit.

At first, most viewed the transfer from public to private hands as a step toward increasing efficiency and transparency in the management of carnival resources, as a break with a long-established game of political intrigue. Important sectors of the carnival-makers, however, grew more and more disgruntled. The carnival, they said, had fallen under the exclusive control of a profit-seeking social elite. Several rebel groups emerged and began to set up their own carnivals, in open opposition to Carnival Inc.’s management. “The first and most important dissident parade was on 44th Street, which in 1999 challenged the main official event, the Battle of the Flowers (*Batalla de Flores*), which goes down 40th Street. The competition’s leader Edgar Blanco says: “So we held our carnival parade on Saturday on 44th Street. We thought 40th Street would draw off some of our audience, but nothing of the sort. People came out. Within certain limits: there wasn’t much music, the costumes weren’t great, a lot of problems...but people came out. It was encouraging for us. We had a good crowd, however there was criticism: ‘What a poor parade’ .... They started saying that the carnival on 40th Street was for the rich and ours for the poor, that ours was very poor.”

Actually, the carnival’s commercialization is not a recent phenomenon. Way before the creation of Carnival Inc., the official slogan in the 1950s was “Carnival is celebrated with Águila” (the country’s leading brand of beer). Nowadays every-

body knows “Quien lo vive es quien lo goza” (To enjoy it, you’ve got to live it or, literally, Those who live it are those who enjoy it), but few know that this slogan is of recent vintage, the fruit of a 1990s advertising campaign. As Diana Acosta, Barranquilla’s former Secretary of Culture, recounts: “I attended that meeting for a tourism advertising campaign. The initial proposal was *El que viene es el que goza* [You’ve got to come to enjoy it]. Since we Barranquillans are so suspicious and dirty minded, we said no way, that won’t do, because people are going to change it to *El que se viene es el que goza* [You’ve got to cum to enjoy it]. So we ended up with *Quien lo vive es quien lo goza*.”

What we believe to be a popular saying that dates back to ancient times is in fact the result of recent marketing for tourism, whereas what is considered a recent advertisement had in fact accompanied the festival for more than half a century.

The debate on commodification reached a turning point in 2003, when UNESCO declared the Carnival of Barranquilla a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Most carnival-makers cheered the international award, since the designation of cultural heritage seemed to guarantee a way out from both state-based corruption and unruly merchandizing. The news was enthusiastically received all over Colombia, and no initiative involving the carnival—whether official or alternative—has since failed to boast of the prestigious acknowledgment. The “Cultural Heritage of Humanity” label now certifies the Carnival of Barranquilla as a national icon

**Fire-eaters show off their style at the Carnival of Barranquilla on the northern coast of Colombia. “To enjoy it, you’ve got to live it” is the carnival motto.**





worthy of display before the world.

Nevertheless, even today, a decade after the announcement, the enormous expectations have yet to be met. The controversies, moreover, have only become more insurmountable with the passing years. The entities charged with carrying out the plans to safeguard the carnival are at loggerheads, some of their functionaries have been questioned, and the communities who stage the event have remained divided. How could a distinction conferred by a prestigious international organization like UNESCO—a supposedly well-intentioned and invigorating, or at worst innocuous, initiative—spawn so many problems?

One of the major reasons has to do with reticence over economic matters related to the issue of cultural heritage. UNESCO took an ambiguous stance on the unending debate whether private interests or public entities should control the festival. While devoting dozens of pages to a meticulous folkloric description of endangered traditional dances, the UNESCO dossier refers only briefly and in general terms to the excessive and inappropriate commercialization that folk groups are forced to accept to guarantee their presence in the great parades.

The UNESCO document makes note of the alienation produced by the commodification of culture, but perceives its causes as external: “The globalized world and the penetration of a homogenizing culture imposed by first-world countries are exerting pressure on this cultural space to imitate other carnivals that have managed to enter the industry of universal culture and are founded on the theory of spectacle, which distorts the essence of traditional aesthetic creations.”

What is most striking in the UNESCO dossier is what goes unsaid: privatization, one of the underlying issues running through the carnival. Consider the traditional dances in danger of extinction. Since they attracted the attention of UNESCO, they have been the subject of dispute between the various parades. Edgar Blanco observes: “Then UNESCO

came along with the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity stuff. They noticed that there were a lot of dances headed for extinction, and it turned out all those dances were in our parade.... All of sudden people stopped calling it poor and started saying, ‘Hey, UNESCO says we have to help those people, so they don’t go extinct.’ And then the companies started coming, offering fabrics and this and that.”

The *danza de trenzas* (braid dance) of the Chamila Indians, for example, is considered by UNESCO as one of the carnival’s oldest and most traditional expressions, deriving from indigenous dance rituals as practiced by pre-Columbian cultures inhabiting the basin of Lower Magdalena (River) Province. It is one of the crown jewels of the 44th Street parade, which managed to snatch it away from the “official” 40th Street parade.

However, Dora Tomás Meléndez, the dance’s current “authorized” depository, freely admits that it is a tradition invented in 1936 by her mother, who, far from being indigenous, was a rural settler living on the Islas del Rosario off Cartagena. This same Dora Tomás brought the dance to Barranquilla 42 years ago. She had formerly taken part in the 40th Street parade but left when it stopped paying her. She moved to the 44th Street parade 28 years ago with emergence of the dissidents. The two parades are still fighting over her.

Unable, after hard-fought battles and counter-vetoes between the local stakeholders, to execute the Ten-Year Safeguarding Plan provided for in UNESCO’s declaration, the Ministry of Culture proposed a new plan in 2010. An outside interdisciplinary consulting team was appointed to reach an institutional and social agreement on the matter, and I was asked to coordinate it.

A vast process for a collective construction of the proposal followed, involving hundreds of people who actively participated in workshops and meetings over more than six months. Despite reciprocal diffidence, complaints, and allegations—even episodes of boycotts

and personal insults hurled at some radical sectors—the process was successful in building up a Safeguarding Plan with the contributions of all participants.

Some very polemic points were approved. No wonder the toughest debate among the participants dealing with the construction of the Special Safeguarding Plan was about Carnival Inc. The final decision was to abolish it, even if it was clear to everybody that it was merely a symbolic gesture, since nowadays the Carnival of Barranquilla Foundation runs the business. Nevertheless, the Minister of Culture expressed her total disagreement with that decision and the results of the collective participatory process, arguing that patrimonial preservation deals with folklore and tradition, and has nothing to do with social, political or economic matters. Suddenly the whole process was blocked, and the collective decisions reversed.

In May 2012, the Administrative Tribunal of the Atlantic Coast ordered that the Carnival of Barranquilla be managed by the public sector, since it had been declared Cultural Heritage of the Nation and Humanity. The court decision was made in response to a lawsuit filed by Blanco and two other individuals. Several folklore groups, associations and commentators supported this decision. “The Carnival is privatized and its organizers throw the people of Barranquilla a bone, while they get to devour the meat,” said one councilman. Others agreed that Carnival Inc. should not manage the Carnival, and that the judges were merely reaffirming Article 72 of the Colombian Constitution: “Cultural patrimony of the nation is under the protection of the state.”

For its part, Carnival Inc. received support from business people, trade associations and different folklore groups. Alberto Gómez, the Carnival Foundation spokesman, recalled, “Twenty years ago, no one wanted to organize the Carnival because it was expensive and resources were lacking. That was when Carnival Inc. was created to operate the fiesta, prior to the recognition of the Carnival as national patrimony.... We have a serious



A participant celebrates in blackface at the Carnival of Barranquilla in Colombia.

and responsible track record in handling economic resources, which allows us to support the district in financing its fiesta, which is the most difficult part of organizing the Carnival.”

In a meeting called by Mayor Elsa Noguera, the members of the board of directors finally declared that they would continue to manage Barranquilla fiestas, taking advantage of the totally confusing wording of the legal verdict.

More than affecting future practical consequences of the festival, the court decision negated the stance of the former Minister of Culture in a forceful way. She had insisted that the Special Safeguarding Plan did not have to get mixed up with questions of an economic, social and political nature and should be restricted to the preservation of a cultural heritage narrowly defined by its folkloric dimension. There is a certain bittersweet uneasiness in the fact that crucial affairs regarding the fiestas end up in the hands of lawyers and judges, when they have already been the subject of collective agreements in the scope of a participative citizens’ process.

We still don’t know the implications of the court sentence for the future of the

Carnival of Barranquilla, and the topic is still a hot one in the media and in meetings of folkloric groups. So far, nobody has been able to break the deadlock. An embarrassing situation indeed: the best-known and world-famous manifestation of Colombian culture, declared a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, is among the few in the whole country without an operational Safeguarding Plan. Edgar Blanco, who participated in the process, now denounces it: “We—the ones who are truly called to handle humanity’s cultural heritage—are those who are truly responsible for the tradition in the first place. I mean, if it is we who know the threats to our cultural identity, who have been making proposals for the past 28 years, and who have kept ourselves intact, then it is we who should handle our cultural heritage. But who, in fact, is handling it? ... Those people at Carnival Inc. The deal there is that Carnival Inc. is represented by the political class of Barranquilla, who are the multinationals’ best friends.... They don’t know shit, but they know where to find money. That’s the scam around the Carnival. And we’ve fought against it. We’ve made a stand. I mean,

the UNESCO declaratory is just a flag: we are the cultural heritage of humanity, but privatization continues. It’s not good. It’s like having your mother, but dead.”

When I asked him how he envisioned the Carnival in ten years, his answer disconcerted me: “We want to organize a Carnival of Carnivals to safeguard the tradition. The idea is to place viewing boxes at eight locations with a capacity of 30,000 people. We will broadcast live for four hours. We’ll present the best conga musicians—with a sound of 30 to 40,000 watts—in the style of Brazilian floats. An immense affair with thousands of congas, dancing in the traditional way. And another float with cumbia, with 500 couples dancing cumbia. Like in the *sambodromo* in Rio de Janeiro. We’re going to stage a night event and charge 30,000 pesos [\$US15] to get in. When these plans get known...an event like that would kill off Carnival Inc.”

Up until that moment in the interview, I’d formed the idea that his struggle was against the commercialization of the fiesta, but in reality his great dream was to go into big business on his own. So the old paradox returned: a collective fiesta, representing a common legacy and

staged in the city's public space, ends up being managed by a private entity. How to get out of this impasse?

Perhaps the most promising path would be to go further than the public-private dichotomy and to think about the festival as a common good. The growing global movement in defense of common goods opens up an epistemological horizon that has not been explored very much in terms of managing fiestas. Let us go back to participatory processes with powers of decision: there—I tell myself—lies the key to returning the Carnival of Barranquilla to its character of being a common good.

After almost four hours of dancing cumbia in the streets between two wings of a rowdy multitude, the exhausted comparsa dancers dispersed throughout the city like river water flowing into the open sea. León, euphoric because of the great performance of Candela Viva, approached us. "We can count on you for Monday, right?" he asked. "We're going to parade in the traditional comparsa on 40th Street." "40th Street?" I replied. "Isn't that the official carnival? I thought Candela Viva was not going to participate in the parades of Carnival Inc." "Well, yes and no," he said. "What's happening is that we want to win the Gold Congo, you know, because of that stuff about patrimony."

Around me, the plaza was filled with dancers and masked revelers, drinking and massaging their feet, exhausted, smiling. Well, I thought, one thing is certain: To enjoy it, you've got to live it....

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# Carnavals, Global Mega Events and Visitors in The Marvelous City

Rio de Janeiro behind the Mask **BY ELIZABETH KATH**

**IN THE HEART OF MY HOME CITY, MELBOURNE, A** television on the wall of a popular café plays footage from Rio de Janeiro's famous Carnival. Across the screen swan spectacular drum queens and *passistas*, their muscular bodies gleaming with sweat, adorned with jewels and plumage. Across their bodies flash words advertising package tours to the *Marvelous City*.

In the imagination of global audiences, images of Carnival in Rio de Janeiro have come to represent the quintessential Brazil.

Yet Carnival may be the one week of the Brazilian year that least represents life in Brazil. With its roots in European pre-Lent celebrations, and 400 tumultuous years of creolization, Carnival is undeniably a unique Brazilian affair, but it may also be interpreted in the Bakhtinian sense of carnival as an upheaval, reversal and mockery of everyday life.

A social release and a momentary abandonment of all the usual conventions, hierarchies and pressures, it is often described as the time when everybody has permission to be anybody or anything, with the help of wild disguises and costumes (*fantasias*).

## PERCEPTION MEETS REALITY

Since Carnival is also the one period of the year when Brazil is guaranteed a news slot on televisions across the globe, the ironic effect is that images of the annual tradition where "normal" life is abandoned have come to be interpreted as a reflection of what life must be like in Brazil and what all Brazilians must be like: flamboyant, free-spirited, unwaveringly joyful and scantily clad. As Brazilian anthropologist

Roberto da Matta once observed, "It was not Brazil that invented Carnival; on the contrary, it was Carnival that invented Brazil" (1984:245 in Sheriff 1999:1).

It is only when other stories of Brazil filter through the global news media that incongruities emerge. I recall, as a poignant example of a clash between global and local perceptions of Brazil, the worldwide coverage of a 20-year-old student's expulsion from a São Paulo university in 2009 for wearing a short skirt. The student's miniskirt incited the violent ridicule of her classmates, and the Universidade Bandeirante (Uniban) that expelled her cited "flagrant disrespect of ethical principles, academic dignity and morality."

The case was not all that surprising within the conservative Catholic context of São Paulo, but that subtlety was lost on foreign news desks, with reports contrasting the university's action against Brazil's fame for its tiny bikinis and carefree attitude.

The story also highlighted another emerging reality for Brazil—the growing influence of external scrutiny in a globalized world of information. Amid the international media flurry, the university took less than 24 hours to reverse its decision and reinstate the student, showing how global perceptions (even if naive or culturally uninformed) can provoke very real transformations at the local level, and sometimes very quickly.

## CARNAVAL AS A PERFORMANCE OF ITSELF

Images of Carnival have long told a seductive story of Brazil as a "racial

democracy” where jovial, unconstrained people interact spontaneously; an alluring destination that faraway dreamers might easily imagine visiting to escape the confines of their own everyday existence.

In this sense, “Brazil” as performed on a global stage is wearing a carnival mask. Moreover, Carnival has also become a performance of itself. It is paradoxical that Brazil’s annual ritual of democratic social and cultural upheaval—or to borrow Bakhtin’s famous description, “the world standing on its head”—has become the dominant global representation of life in Brazil. It is even stranger that this representation of Brazil has come to be officially captured, curated and promoted by corporate and state elites.

A turbulent history of street Carnival as a space of social tension and contestation—as the site for genuine race and class struggles, of blurred lines between spectator and reveler—took a fateful turn in 1984 with the construction of Oscar Niemeyer’s monumental *Sambódromo da Marquês de Sapucaí*. Purpose-built and white-washed, it sought as much to contain chaos from the street as to capture, promote and capitalize on the spectacle to national and international audiences; many consider this the moment when Carnival was “stolen.”

In “The Theft of Carnival: National Spectacle and Racial Politics in Rio de Janeiro” (*Cultural Anthropology* 14:1), Robin E. Sheriff describes a common narrative she heard in Rio’s *morros* (hillside shantytowns) of Carnival having been robbed from its rightful owners. While Carnival’s commercialization predates the *Sambódromo*, the construction of the stadium marked a significant and powerfully emblematic moment in this shift from Carnival as an exhilarating, potent site for participation and social transformation to a corporate production of a national spectacle on a global stage.

#### A NIGHT AT CARNAVAL

During a recent Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, I found myself seated amongst the spectators at the far end of the Sambadrome stadium, at its final stretch



Getting a little help from a friend in Carnival preparations.

where performers spill out onto the street. What would usually be considered the worst spot in the stadium turned out to offer the best view of a place where two realities collide. Under floodlights and *Rede Globo* television cameras, and sectioned off from grandstands that hold 90,000 spectators, a rehearsed and polished Carnaval paraded for the world along the half-mile long *passarela*. In the dark street behind the luminous Sambadrome stage, workmen in orange suits soared into the air with cranes to rescue feathered dancers from the tops of the extravagant floats, as though deposing carnival queens from their thrones.

On the street below, exhausted paraders milled around stripping off their regalia and throwing them onto growing mountains of discarded costumes. Raggedly dressed foragers rummaged through the piles to retrieve resaleable feathers and fabrics, while city garbage collectors loaded piles of costume debris into trucks. A few steps in any direction from this gleaming Sambadrome sprawled dark and sometimes dangerous streets, where half-costumed crowds tread cautiously through pools of dirt and urine and debris.

With the blasting music of the official Carnaval in one ear, and the distant roar of another Carnaval on the street outside, I could not help marveling at the richness and metaphoric significance of this boundary between this gleaming televised performance and the backstage scene that audiences of the globally televised Carnaval might never see.

Watching the televised spectacle from a faraway lounge room, who could guess that the dazzling *passista* girl dancing across the screen goes home at night to a tiny dilapidated room with a dirt floor in a favela (shantytown) where a drug war rages outside her door? Like a modern-day Cinderella, when the night is over she disappears again into anonymity; into the invisibility, marginality and insignificance of her quotidian life.

Who could guess that some of the Brazilian community members dancing on elaborate floats are actually fee-

paying foreigners, living out personal fantasies. These subtleties disappear and become irrelevant as images spin around the globe.

When the night is over, many of the Sambadrome show's stars crowd into buses that carry them home to favelas, while visiting tourists hail taxis that whisk them in the opposite direction to the air-conditioned safety of their hotels

## The gleaming televised performance contrasts with the backstage scene the audience never sees.

at Ipanema or Copacabana beach. And those two worlds rarely meet again, thus reinforcing the global stereotypes even in the minds of many who travel to Rio.

Adding to this, it is not unusual for some local Brazilians, those with whom tourists might typically mix in these wealthier zones, to have never set foot in a favela in their lifetimes, despite favelas visibly extending across the nearby hillsides.

### BRAZIL'S GOLDEN DECADE

As the economic superstar of the moment and the next host of both the Fifa World Cup and the Olympic Games, more eyes than ever are turning to Brazil. Through the official fanfare of preparations for these global mega-events filter other stories: brutalities associated with hardline interventions to "pacify" the trouble in favelas in advance of the events, evictions of communities whose homes lie too close to new sporting facilities, and ongoing social inequity culminating in mass protests.

A Brazilian friend who attended the protests described them as emotionally exhilarating events filled with music, dance and nervous excitement. Are these the newly emerging sites of the carnivalesque in Brazil?

Amid what some have described as its coming of age, Brazil is now more accessible to global tourism than ever before.

A visit to the official Carnaval website now contains explanations in English and accepts Visa and Mastercard for the purchase of a ready-made costume for those wishing to parade along the Sambadrome. From here in Melbourne, or anywhere in the world, potential tourists are but a credit card payment away from the instant purchase of the "experience of a lifetime." And during the Fifa World

Cup alone, over half a million foreign visitors are expected.

Visitors always affect the places they travel, whether consciously or not. No matter how brief the visit, or how whimsical the ticket purchase, they are never the passive spectators they sometimes assume themselves to be. Their choices—including the way in which they behave and engage, what and where they consume, the conversations they have—always have some impact, not only on those they meet but also on those who come after them.

Mindfully or not, those who attend Carnaval or book their tickets for the World Cup or Olympics, or even those who take an interest from afar, become participants in Brazil's future. For Brazil, an intensified dialogue with the global audience over the coming years is inevitable; how this translates into the lives of ordinary Brazilians is a story yet to unfold, and one that will be written by each person who takes part in this dialogue.

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# Fiesta Politics

A Rehearsal—and an Act—of Governance **BY ANGELA MARINO**

**ZÁIDA GARCÍA SAT AT A TABLE IN THE MIDDLE OF** a small storefront facing the plaza of Ocumare de la Costa in Venezuela. She was busy working late at night, drawing a map for the nearby community of Cumboto. “It takes many hands,” she said, looking up from the page neatly penciled with roads and walking paths, houses and their family names, signs and landmarks. Leaning against the wall of the small space were several instruments: a cuatro, congas and a long three-person mina drum. Just above, a poster of the patron saint San Juan Bautista added a splash of red color from his finely adorned robes, matching García’s red pro-Chávez shirt

with a small handprint on the pocket. In 2010, García’s job as an organizer was to work with thousands of people staging music events, classes on culture and the arts, dances and popular fiesta. The following year, García was elected mayor.

García’s election to this official rank of political power in Ocumare, as an organizer in the cultural arts and as a woman of African descent, says something in itself about the changing politics in Venezuela as it generates socialism of the 21st century. Yet, what Zaída García said that night revealed an often dismissed aspect of politics: the power of cultural performance, fiestas and the

popular arts in the practice—both in the sense of rehearsal and also the act—of governance. Especially when witnessing the production of Ocumare’s fiestas and religious manifestations that involve hundreds of people in this small town (pop. 9,000), cleaning streets, arranging flowers, cooking food, conducting traffic and helping to facilitate and regulate different aspects of these sometimes multiple day events, I find that I continuously turn back to the idea of “many hands” or what I call “multiple arms of production” in thinking about how fiesta and other forms of cultural performance intersect with the political

acts of governance.

Popular fiesta is a participatory act. Hands create; they make; they express. Arms connect and lift, they are limbs of body that provide the vital conduit to the whole for the work of many. The idea that “it takes many hands” is one of the key tenets of popular fiesta and also of participatory politics, where “Participation,” as Olga Pizano Mallarino, Luis Alberto Zuleta and Lino Jaramillo write in their book *La fiesta, la otra cara del patrimonio*, “is fundamental to the production of popular fiestas in bringing together neighborhoods, authorities, means of communication and economies” (Convenio Andrés Bello, 2004: 113). When dozens make masks, and dozens more sew costumes, build altars, cook food and convene rehearsals, popular fiesta and other large-scale popular performances are participatory acts. Furthermore, when thousands of people sing together and move along a processional path, boundaries—both physical and otherwise—are renewed and forged in what Charles Tilly calls the reproduction of political boundaries that are continually set and negotiated in law, language, social rules, and kinship systems—where fiesta includes all of these.

Popular fiesta is a political act. Where “many hands” in fiestas lift up, carry, push inward, and through what may be soulful, devotional, or secular, or utopian sensibility—there is another dimension, which is the multiple points of agency and production that lift up and carry what is also a political body. In other words, fiesta and carnival may indeed involve the spectacular, the playful, the *comunidades*, and what Milla Riggio describes as a release from the “workaday” world (*Carnival in Action*, 2004). Yet, large-scale, popular performances also significantly involve material production and order, the rules and the organizational means to achieve collective action with far-reaching and substantial implications in the governance of everyday life. In other words, fiesta is not necessarily in opposition to the laws of production and productive labor, rather it makes its own.



A toll must be paid to get through to the fiesta; the handwritten sign paves the way for the collection of the road tax for the Pro-Fiesta Committee.

By political, however, I’m not referring necessarily to campaigns or partisan politics. In *Ocumare*, partisan politics happens outside of fiestas and popular religious manifestations with most organizers making clear distinctions between what they do in their work as activists or in affiliations with a particular policy, party or candidate and their involvement in these events. While the PSUV (Chávez-Maduro) party has taken a stronger role in the region and many fiesta organizers support it, others do not, and all generally agree that fiestas and religious manifestations are officially unaligned and open to everyone.

Popular fiestas activate networks. Where García’s work may seem exceptional, the idea that “it takes many hands” in relation to governance is connected to long-held networks of people who work at the seams of both social services and fiesta. These public events involving music, dance and devotional ritual are inseparable from the multiple nodes of production including massive food preparation, tending to streets and houses, recording of information,

material exchange and labor, and taking care of the elderly and infirm. Religious manifestations, carnivals and fiestas are performances in which multiple arms of production generate and also manage some of the basic functions of civic life and administration.

Fiesta is about governance: governance of land, people and place. Further west from Venezuela, in the Sierra Madre mountain town of Atanquez, Colombia, a small group of women and men sit in fold-up chairs by the side of the road. The day is Corpus Christi Thursday 2011. As a car pulls up, two men and a woman draw a rope tight across the road with a handwritten sign for the “fiestas of the patron saints.” The rope would be released upon receipt of a road tax for the Pro-Fiesta Committee. This fiesta toll or *retén*, not uncommon in other towns throughout Latin America, exercises both the fiesta’s right to establish a public funding system and its organizers’ control over the entrance to the town. While the act may be temporary and is not enforced by the army or police, the fact that these organizers establish the *retén*—as they have



done for decades—presents an important degree of agency and power for fiesta rules.

This basic and yet significant act of the local committee to both symbolically and materially control the road leading to the fiesta is, recalls what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o describes in *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, a performance of state where, “The nation-state performs its own being relentlessly, through its daily exercise of power over the exits and entrances” (21). This road stop is, of course, a very different act of governance than that of the state. The fiesta *retén* did not prevent the Colombian national guard from setting up a checkpoint further up the road. Furthermore, the road leading in to Atanquez, known as the “road of death,” where dozens of Kankuamo people since the 1990s have been murdered and left by the roadside mostly by paramilitary alliances, raises serious questions about the role of the state in both the ongoing violence, and in “official” government claims of reconciliation. Especially in a region where fiesta leaders have been targeted in those crimes, it’s important to further recognize that the Organización Indígena Kankuamo and the three other native peoples in the Sierra Nevada Mountains—identified together as a *fogón*, or a four-legged basin—demand to fully govern their own territories—and that fiesta is one of the means to do so. Fiesta organizers, too, exercise their power over the entrance of their town with the toll rope, where they and the community that authorizes them act as their own governing body. While these are ongoing negotiations, fiesta in this case operates “as if” it were the state to rehearse an alternative system of rules and conduct.

Renowned Brazilian theater practitioner Augusto Boal brings this idea of participatory performance of fiestas and governance into even closer view. In Aristotelian theater, Boal argues, the doings of the world on stage pacify its audience, resulting in a purge of the very impetus for the action needed to change

society. “Dramatic action,” Boal writes, “substitutes for real action,” where the divide between actors and spectators, the installment of the protagonist hero, catharsis, and other devices of the ancient (and modern) stage essentially disengage people from their right to govern. Conversely, in a theater practice of liberation, Boal writes, “The spectator

**“In the beginning, theater was poetic song, free people singing in the open air. A carnival. A fiesta. Later, the dominant classes appropriated the theater and constructed divisive walls. First, they divided the people, separating the actors from spectators: people who do and people who observe, The fiesta is over! Second, among the actors, they separated the protagonists from the masses: and there began the coercive indoctrination!”**—A. BOAL

no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in her/his place. The spectator frees her/himself; s/he thinks and acts for her/himself!” Thus, Boal famously concludes, “Perhaps the theater is not revolution in itself, but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!”

As “masses” detached from the means to produce our own collective action, we are usually stripped of the ability to practice or rehearse governance. Fiesta as participatory practice provides a means of purposeful engagement with cultural and regional affiliations so often co-opted by the state—where we are coerced into relinquishing our own controls, rules, language and authority.

While Boal’s view of early forms of performance of “free people singing” (of any number of performance practices in the Americas: *mitotes*, *areitos*, *kutsu*, *candomblé*, or European-influenced carnivals of the Middle Ages, to name a few) may idealize them, countless studies have also shown the ways fiestas appropri-

ate, co-opt or silence histories. In some cases, they are hijacked; in other cases, they were created to propagate violence, increase inequality, or exist to produce as much exclusion as inclusion. While they have a liberating potential, there are also dangers, and fiestas should not be mistakenly assumed to be *equivalent* to liberating alternatives.

Nevertheless, there is an important potential in fiestas as rehearsals or acts of governance. Rather than a release valve for lawless confusion or chaos, or events that are suggestive of merely moral or cultural realms, fiestas can tell us a great deal about what a participatory governance might look like, and how governance can function differently. Whatever we ultimately choose to carry on for future generations must be deliberated. However, in the act of governing those choices, the many hands of fiesta can help carry it to fruition. As open-air, networked, and multitudinous acts of singing, poetry reciting, procession, and dance, fiestas offer ways to move further towards how to govern ourselves.

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# This Isn't Your Grandmother's Vodou

After the Earthquake **BY LINDA KHACHADURIAN**

**JULMIS PIERRE, THE HEAD VODOU PRIEST OF Cité Soleil,** awaits clients in his 15' by 15' cement cube of an office on Rue Audain in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. His slight frame is partially obstructed by the heaps of crumpled newspapers, books and empty glass bottles on the table before him. Perched on top of a large mound of papers is a "Total Dream Body: Feel the Burn" DVD, featuring a white couple with ferocious smiles and skin baked to a molten caramel. A seven-foot-long plywood coffin, pressed against a wall that has been draped with a pink cotton cloth, takes up much of the room.

Pierre removes a pair of mirrored Ray Bans that shade his deep-set steely brown eyes, and places them on a worn leather Bible. "It is quiet today," he announces. The exuberant melody of A-ha's "Take on me" suddenly fills the office. Pierre's mobile phone is ringing. "Phff," he hisses, then flips open the phone with a cal-

loused thumb and pecks at the keypad until the room is silent once again.

Pierre, who has been practicing Vodou for 27 years, begins to discuss the current obsession in the United States with the mystique surrounding Vodou, from zombies and dolls with pins to horror movies and day-of-the-dead walks in New Jersey. He says that he understands the fascination with Vodou, but doesn't comprehend why people who have such an interest can't be bothered to learn what it truly encompasses.

In her book *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*, Wesleyan religion professor, Elizabeth McAlister defines Vodou as "a religion of survival, which produces meaning and protective strategies for the poor who cope, on a daily basis, with the traumas of poverty and insecurity." She also adds that Vodou is a "worldview" that encompasses many categories, such as philoso-

**Olrich Exantus, department head at École Nationale des Arts, Port-au-Prince, Haiti**

phy, medicine and the arts, and that all of these things combine in a "cosmic scheme where the fundamental principle is that everything is spirit."

Pierre concurs, adding that Vodou is something that is embedded deep within the Haitian culture and shapes the manner in which his countrymen both celebrate and mourn.

When a cholera epidemic hit Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, he received an influx of people suffering from the illness and seeking help. He offered them sewom oral—an oral rehydration solution, and then urged them to get medical treatment. When Carnival/Kanaval—the annual parade and celebration that coincides with other Mardi Gras festivities throughout the world—rolled around that year, Pierre and the other Vodou priests

honored those stricken by cholera by wearing costumes that were more somber and made of “rougher” cloth.

Several miles away, inside the dance studio of École Nationale des Arts, James Dieujuste is reflecting on the “disappointing” lack of Vodou representation in Carnival. “Any [Haitian] art will and must have the Vodou influence,” he proclaims. The twenty-something student, who has danced in two Carnivals, is stretching as he talks. He has a soft, curved face that is a startling juxtaposition to the sharp angles of his body. Dieujuste acknowledges that Vodou is predominant in the Rara processions that take place at the end of Lent, but insists that Carnival is the “regular and important” celebration on which most people focus.

According to Jean Luc “Djaloki” Dessables, a Haitian cross-cultural consultant, interfaith minister and Vodou priest currently based in the Washington, D.C. area, the unofficial breakdown of religion in Haiti is as follows: 60% Catholic; 40% Protestant; and 100% Vodou. He adds that Carnival is the one time during which all Haitians become united across the divides of skin color, religion, culture, language, ancestry and social classes. “Vodou is the secret form of Ayisyen [Haitian] unity; Carnival is the open one.”

Dieujuste says that it was a privilege for him to be able to perform Vodou moves during the celebrations in previous years. He begins to demonstrate some of his favorite Vodou dance positions. His limbs have such a fluidity of movement that when he walks his arms ripple like waves rather than swing by his sides. One by one, he glides through the various dances: *yanvalou*, *petro*, *mascaaron*, *ibo* and *congo*.

“I dance Vodou with all of my heart. To do so means happiness and pride in my Haitian culture.” Dieujuste also confides that some of his favorite music to dance to comes from the popular *rasin* band, RAM, which melds the supple melodies of traditional Vodou-inspired lyrics with a pulsating rock and roll edge. “It is the music of the people,” he explains.

Richard Morse, the Haitian-American founder and lead singer of RAM—one of the most celebrated groups to perform at Carnival—is the manager of the landmark Hotel Oloffson in Port-au-Prince, as well as an initiated Vodou priest. He has large, stormy green eyes that shift in color slightly when he tilts his head. A cascade of muted black curls, interwoven with ribbons of grey and restrained with a rubber band, tumble past the shoulders of his six-and-a-half foot frame.

Although Morse, who has a degree in anthropology from Princeton University, insists that he is primarily a musician, he still finds the time for impromptu healings, such as curing a woman, with whom he crossed paths in the countryside a few years ago, of her partial paralysis by “feeling around and touching her.”

Several hundred feet from the majestic veranda of the Oloffson is a pool house that Morse has converted into a refuge for the spirits, where they are welcome to come and take residence in the numerous urns, scattered across several tables, that have been meticulously bundled in varying pastel hues of silk dupioni. Morse, who refers to the place as a “sanctuary” says that he tries to visit every day when he’s in Port-au-Prince. He makes his rounds, visiting the various tableaux of spirits, holding a tapered candle in one hand, an electronic tablet in the other. He cradles one of the bubblegum mauve urns in his hands and says: “It doesn’t feel empty.”

When asked about Hollywood’s rendition of Vodou, Morse, who will often respond to a question with a counterquery, says, “Why do you think they do that?” before adding: “They portray Vodou as everything that is crazy, nutty, or evil.” McAlister shares some of Morse’s frustration. “Misconceptions Americans tend to have come right out of Hollywood films—snakes and dolls with pins, and people crawling out of the cemetery,” she says. “All of these elements are seized upon by Hollywood.”

*Africana*, the iconic encyclopedia edited by Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Professor Kwame Anthony

Appiah, states that: “Despite media portrayals, Vodou shares many elements with other religions. Like members of other persuasions, Vodouists believe in creating harmony, in keeping a balance, and in cultivating virtues and positive values.”

Pierre says that although he thinks dramatic, fictionalized Vodou plotlines will always be in demand, society is slowly starting to accept it as a legitimate religion. Now, he says, children of Vodou priests are allowed to attend school with Christian children—something that his offspring did not have the privilege of doing years ago. As he speaks, a man sporting sweatpants that are scrunched part way up his calves, wanders into the office and lifts the canvas bill of his baseball cap in a deferential salute. Pierre bobs his head in acknowledgement, then continues, saying that in recent years, he has had the opportunity to travel to Brooklyn, Boston, Miami and Washington, D.C. to provide “spiritual guidance” to transplanted Haitians as well as to Americans who have sought him out.

Dessables also thinks that things are improving, but still prefers to err on the side of caution. He points out that his ability to communicate with the invisible world isn’t something that he brings up with strangers when he’s giving his “elevator pitch.” “I don’t want to scare people away,” he says and laughs.

Plump tears have started to fall from the sky. Through the open doorway of his office, Pierre notices a young girl dancing in the downpour. He steps outside and brings his palms together in two stern, staccato claps to get her attention, but she doesn’t notice. She is spinning with outstretched arms, catching raindrops in her hands.

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# Patsa Puqun

## Ritual and Climate Change in the Andes

BY PATRICIA J. HAMMER

IT WAS A CHILLY PREDAWN MORNING IN 1984. I enthusiastically joined my Quechua-speaking host family going to their field at the base of one of Peru's highest glacial mountains, Hualcan, to plant oca, a variety of native Andean tuber that produces at elevations over 10,000 feet. We turned the bend of a steep southeast-facing hill and were suddenly confronted with the majestic snowy peak.

Family members dropped their loads of tools and provisions, taking deep breaths of rarefied mountain air before squatting or sitting at this resting place, called *hamana*, a ritual point along a direct sightline to the glacier. "This will help you acclimate," Don Antonio said, as he handed me a wad of coca leaves, while his wife served him a small gourd of fer-

mented maize beer, spilling a bit on the ground in devotion to the earth. Doña Francisca motioned for me to rest on an accommodating rock as the sun rose from behind the mountain.

Just then, bright sunlight reflected off the metal tools and a shiny adornment on Don Antonio's wrist—it was a watch, an item only recently affordable to the general population. Curious, I inquired, "What time is it?" Don Antonio first looked up toward the position of the sun, then looked at his watch, finally he turned to me and said, "*Inti hatunnam*," which means, "the sun is [getting] big." As the sun cycles through the sky, he is considered "to grow larger" until midday, after which he begins to shrink as he travels along his route toward the

western horizon. Another time, when I asked an older villager when would be a convenient time to visit her, she thought a moment and replied, "*Inti ichikllam*," meaning when the sun is tiny and low in the sky, referring to sundown.

Time and seasons are very important in Andean culture. A major aspect of Andean seasonal fiestas is a ritual harvesting of the glacial ice. People from the lowlands put the ice in their soups and drinks in celebration of the community relationships with the high mountain deities that provide essential water for crops. This special kind of ice is considered medicinal, categorized as "hot and dry" and applied to ailments caused by cold and wet elements. Ceremonial ice harvest is a focal point of the larg-



Left: UKHUS, Dance troupe of “bears” with symbolic llamas, preparing to hike to the glacier in Ausangate, Peru, 2012; Above: VARAYOQ, Cross bearer with image of the Señor de Quyllur Rit’i as ritual elder, on the 24-hour walk to Tayankani, Peru, 2012.

est pilgrimage on the South American continent, *Quyllur Rit’i* (“star snow”). This celebration draws tens of thousands of believers every year on the full moon prior to the June Solstice in the southern Cuzco region, to the mountain *Qolqepunku* (literally, “storehouse door,” in reference to the star that leads the constellation Pleiades observed from that perspective at that moment in time). However, as the glaciers recede, not only is it more difficult to reach the ice, but touching, harvesting and dancing on the ice is now prohibited. This limitation causes troupes of dancers, worshippers, and musicians to continue to fulfill their spiritual obligations, but now at the place where the glacier once existed.

In the Callejón de Huaylas, consump-

tion and appreciation of ice still goes on, but differently. An elderly ice harvester, Sr. Teodoro, has made the provincial town of Carhuaz famous for ice cream flavored with seasonal native fruit. He tells us, “We would leave the house around 3 a.m. to reach the ice before dawn. At the high lake, Shonquil, we would place our chewed coca leaves to appease the mountain, and quickly approach the glacier. This is the most dangerous moment. You must be sure of yourself and know how to relate with the mountain, or you may be killed or later become very ill and die. It is important to work fast, you must cut the ice, tie it to your back and then run down the mountain at top speed without looking back. I would rush home and by 10 a.m. we would be serving flavored

shaved ice in the plaza for the Fiesta de Mamá Meche (Celebration of the Virgen de las Mercedes, patron saint of Carhuaz at September Equinox).”

Communities in the Quebrada Hualcan manage communally owned land all the way up to the glacier, and may still permit ice harvesting for ritual and medicinal purposes by community members only. On my visit to communal pasturelands more than 12,000 feet with retired ice harvester, Don Eulogio, he pointed out the place on the dark rocky mountainside where the glacier once reached. He expressed sadness as he remembered his experiences of receiving the ice as a gift from the mountain to the people as a sign of mutual care and respect between the environment



Quyllur Rit'i Snow Pilgrimage, located by Gabriela Valenzuela, UNESCO, Cuzco.

and inhabitants. Our team specialist in Quechua language, knowledge, and concepts, Martín León Huarac, says that local farmers explain climate change in terms of *patsa puqun*, a notion that the earth is in an advanced stage of maturity, perhaps even fermentation, hence the warming of the high altitude ecological zones that affect agropastoral activities.

Andeans do not conceptualize astral and seasonal processes to cycle inevitably and effortlessly, but consider rather that purposeful human activity, in forms of ritual actions and responsible work, must take place to guide and ensure desired outputs of human-environment relationships. *Patsa*, as time-space, may be verbalized as *patsaakaatsiy*: adaptation and acclimatization of humans and plants to changing environmental conditions. *Puquy* refers to ripening, but mat-

uration has its peak expression of suitable ripeness, after which fermentation and/or spoiling commences that may lead to rotting, rather than the desired cycle when fruits of harvest return to seed to bring new life.

For the Andes region of South America, time-space concepts as explained by Inca elites continue to be deeply embedded in the cosmovision of present-day Quechua-speaking peoples. The interactions between human beings and their environment weigh heavily in interpreting the world and society in which we live. Thus, a changing climate has a profound effect on the thinking and actions of the inhabitants of the Andes (see Mura, J. El “control vertical” de un máximo de pisos ecológicos en la economía de las sociedades andinas. *Visita de la Provincia de León de Huánuco en 1562*. [Huanuco, Perú: Univ. Nac. Hermilio Valdizán]).

The dramatic mountain landscape of the glacial ranges of the Andes is central to highland livelihood and social organization where communities manage dispersed agricultural plots at distinct altitudes with particular ecological characteristics. Peru has an enormous agrobiodiversity that has contributed more domesticated edible plant species to the human diet worldwide than any other region. Therefore, the effects of climate change on food security are important to its habitats and crop experimentation.

Time in Andean thought is cyclical, entwined with both biological and social processes that give form and meaning to concepts of chronology and appropriate moments for human action. Humans and nature are merged in consequential relationships in which rituals are means of communication and reciprocity. Life processes are applied to describe annual seasons and significant eras, as comprehended in the use of the Quechua terms *patsa* and *puquy*.

#### RITUAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Our Center for Social Well Being in the Hualcan valley (*Quebrada Hualcan*) of the Cordillera Blanca explores issues

of climate change here in the highest tropical range on the planet, where the glaciers are a storehouse for a significant reserve of fresh water. We work with traditional Quechua communities— as well as with researchers from a wide array of disciplines such as glaciology, geography, environmental studies, public health and anthropology. The center’s indigenous experts note that the term *patsa puqun* came into use with the current era of global climate and culture change. While *patsa* (equivalent to *pacha* in Cuzco Quechua) is often translated as “earth,” it actually refers to a combined concept of time-space, or the world in which we live. The verb *puquy*—to mature or ripen—refers to agriculture, humans, and the fermentation of grains. In the yearly agricultural cycle, *puquy* is a season that commences with the December solstice, when plants sprout. Then, plenty of rainfall should continue up until the month known as *patsa puqu quilla* in pre-Spanish times (the present March equinox) and harvest celebrations, now merged with Christian Carnival and Easter traditions.

We must dispel the myth that indigenous peoples are unaware of climate change and its implications, a belief held by academics, scientists and others who influence government decisions with regard to water and land use. On the contrary, contemporary Quechua communities that interact daily with their environment are not only highly sensitive to and observant of ecological erosion and transition, but are key actors in the development of viable sustainable adaptation and mitigation strategies, to which they bring thousands of years of wise experience, continually acting in response to the consequences of global climate and culture change as lived in the Andes.

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# CELEBRATING DIASPORA

Whether it's Mexican-Americans in the streets of Los Angeles or Uruguayans carving out their celebratory territory in Madrid, the diaspora of Latin America (and elsewhere) perform pride, identity, belonging and unbelonging...and fun!

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# Death in L.A.

Días de los Muertos, a Living Celebration **BY FELIPE AGREDANO-LOZANO**

WITH PHOTOS BY EMMANUEL SANDOVAL

I WAS A CHICANO BOY GROWING UP APOSTOLIC-Pentecostal in Los Angeles. I never celebrated anything remotely Catholic like the feasts of All Souls nor All Saints. ¡Dios nos libre! (God forbid)—God keep us from anything as pagan-demonic as the Aztec gods of death, such as Día de los Muertos. My first experience of this holiday was far from Los Angeles; hoping that no one would notice me at a Day of the Dead celebration, I was trying to hide somewhere along the streets of San Francisco's Mission District. Now, the celebration has spread throughout the United States, expanding beyond its Chicano-Catholic roots. In San Antonio, Texas, residents flock to the local cemeteries where mariachi bands play by gravesites, while families of loved ones clean tombstones and eat homemade

tacos on the grounds. Denver, Colorado, recently hosted an exhibit on the work of legendary artist José Guadalupe Posada who brought the Mexican *calaveras* (skulls) and *calacas* (skeletons) to life. Chicana/o and Latin American artists across the Southwest have long participated in these celebrations, producing a variety of cultural artifacts. Many of these artists attended U.S. colleges and are now producing, importing and transporting art, culture and intelligence of this history beyond the southwestern United States or Aztlán. Activist students have been the conduits of art, and songs like “La Bruja” (the witch) and dances by student ballet folclóricos in places like the University of California Berkeley, UCLA, Stanford, and even by the the Harvard Ballet Folclórico de Aztlán.

In fact, it was at Harvard in Adams House that I made my first Day of the Dead mask (*máscara*) in a workshop led by Luz Herrera, a fellow Chicana student at Harvard Law School, who had learned how to make *máscaras* as a Stanford undergraduate. In 1996 at Harvard, I organized my first procession of students, wearing *calaveras* and holding candles, with student Aztec *Danzantes* cavorting through the Cambridge streets. Marchers walked behind them, clapped and cheered, chanting “La raza vive” (“The [Chicano] people live”) and “La lucha sigue” (“The fight continues”). Seventy marchers moved through the streets, ending up at the Harvard Divinity School, where together we built my first altar inside Anderson Chapel in collaboration with the LGBT and Latino





student groups; Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata's images were propped next to Harvey Milk, and Tejana-superstar Selena's pic stood between Audre Lord and James Baldwin.

It was authentic celebration, made their own by Harvard students. But others also have tried to appropriate this increasingly popular festivity. In Los Angeles, the Walt Disney Company recently tried trademarking Día de los Muertos (which I will refer to as *Días de los Muertos*, plural, because this celebration has always been more than one day). Immediately, Latina/o activists fought back on social media. Insulted, activists let Disney know this holiday, "*Días de los Muertos*," was not for sale; it did not have a price tag; this was our collective sacred *calavera*. For decades, masses of Angeleno children and grandparents showcasing painted faces have commemorated days of death as a two-month celebration of life, starting in late September though early November with street festivals, hole-in-the-wall galleries, exhibitions, concerts and large public processions. In L.A., *Días de los Muertos* is celebrated in the mainstream across the

variety of social strata, divergent venues and spaces which range from the public downtown and commercial stores to the private, communal and sacred other.

The festival of *Días de los Muertos* spreads across L.A., from the more affluent Westside at Hollywood Forever Cemetery, where Marilyn Monroe is buried, to the city's Latino blue-collar Eastside at Rose Hills Memorial Park and Mortuary, where for years now the Cultural Festival and Marketplace take place. Events in Downtown L.A., La Placita on Olvera Street, Uptown Whittier, the nation's largest celebration at Self-Help Graphics in the Boyle Heights neighborhood and in a diversity of locations cover the entire L.A. basin. These events and dozens more attract hundreds of thousands of spectators to the altar exhibitions for a social cause such as the American Diabetes Association or commercially assembled by a corporation such as Goya or Nestlé's Chocolate Abuelita. Children and parents flock to have their face painted with *calavera*-adorned Mexican-Chicana/o motifs. Art exhibits feature prolific Chicana/o artists like Yolanda Gonzalez, Lalo Alcaraz and Hector Silva,

as well as children's crafts, market wares, food zones, performance stages, altar contests and many other attractions. At most commemorations of Days of the Dead, spectators represent a broad swath of the community, everyone from white to Chicano hipsters, also called Chipsters, wearing fancy painted Marilyn Monroe-themed *calaveras* or a simple self-painted Rosie the Riveter *calavera*, often including a character outfit to match a glamorous Elvis face or simply a flower over an ear for the Frida Kahlo or Betty Page; it's in proximity to Hollywood after all. Any character within the imagination is brought back from the dead to live and celebrate with the living at this festival.

"I grew up observing *Día de los Muertos* by going across the border to the Mexican cemetery where both of my parents had family buried, several generations of family members. We'd clean up the tombstone and gravesite, tie flower arrangements and walk around as my mother pointed out long-gone relatives," said Macarena Hernandez, a professor at the University of Houston-Victoria, who has written about Day of the Dead. "The first time I saw *Día de los Muertos*



Scenes from the Days of the Dead in Los Angeles, 2013.

as a community-wide celebration was in San Francisco when I was in my first year as a graduate student at UC Berkeley. I remember feeling so detached from the celebration, because up until then, it had been a very private family commemoration." This year, Hernandez made her first public altar, dedicated to her maternal grandmother, at the NAVE Museum in Victoria, Texas. This experience is not new for me; I've been making public altars ever since that first one at Harvard. Years ago, with my students at CalState University Northridge, we dedicated a public altar in memory of Marco Firebaugh and the Dreamer students he fought so hard for during his life. This year my altar was dedicated to "Dead Divas," including Celia Cruz, Whitney Houston, Selena, Amy Winehouse, Jenny Rivera, Chavela Vargas and a very dear friend Jorge Herrera, a fellow Apostolic and Cal grad too. Across L.A., individuals and community organizations build personal and public altars in sacred spaces, such as their homes. Some businesses paint windows with *calaveras* as they would paint Frosty the Snowman during Christmas.

#### THE BIRTH OF DEATH AND THE ORIGINS OF DAYS OF DEAD IN MESOAMERICA

Ironically, U.S.-style Halloween is celebrated widely in Mexico and Latin America, with "All-things-American" dominating the October 31 holiday. Commonly worn are Halloween-type costumes, like witches and jack-o-lanterns. Even trick or treating has quickly spread across Latin America. However, many countries celebrate both *Días de los Muertos* and Halloween—sometimes forgetting their origin in Mesoamerica's celebrations of the lives of defunct relatives and heroes. The Pre-Colombian and pre-Hispanic Aztec-Nahuas, Purepechas (of modern-day Michoacán), Mixtecas, Zapotecas, Oaxaqueños and other indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica observed several Days of the Dead before 1492. The Mesoamerican axis-mundi or world centering enjoyed a complex view of life and death

as a duality, as the opposite sides of a coin, male and female, light and darkness, Ying and Yang. From a Mesoamerican perspective, the dead and the living were symbiotic, the living learned from the dead and their experiences and the dead needed guidance from the living to help them transition into finding their resting place, Mictlan (Aztec underworld). Marcos Aguilar, the Tlayecantzi (Aztec) Principal of Anahuacalmecac International University Preparatory High School of North America in L.A., reminds us of the Days of the Dead didactic when he says, "*Micailhuitl* is the name for our traditional honoring of the passing of life from physical to essence. In our ancestral traditions, we do not only honor people who have passed away, but all natural life that makes up the great mystery of the world and universe. This is a cultural ceremony that helps teach our children about the natural laws of life as understood by our ancestors."

#### ANGELS OF DEATH: POLITICS, VOTER REGISTRATION AND CAUSES DU JOUR IN LOS ANGELES

*Días de los Muertos* has taken on other and very contemporary meanings. Death lives on in L.A. Often the high price of political silence, civic non-participation, social alienation, environmental discrimination and economic underdevelopment can mean life and death. In the 20th century José Guadalupe Posada, from the Mexican state of Aguascalientes, armed with pen, paper and political satire, transformed the *calavera*, giving birth to a new Mexican political reality. Through his most famous character "La Catrina," the mother of all *calaveras*, Posada mocked the dark mestizos like Porfirio Diaz, a president well known for denying his indigenous peasant roots preferring to pass for European. Posada poked fun at Mexican society with satire.

Today in L.A., artists transform the social, economic and cultural landscape armed not with guns and bullets, but with brushes, paint, skills and talent. "I personally celebrate by first and foremost

making an altar as traditional as possible. I start with the children and then the adults," said Lilia Ramirez. "I also paint and make *Día de los Muertos* jewelry, art, and handmade crafts. Related themes such as: spiritual, love, daily interactions, familiar Mexican iconography, scenes and urban landscapes. I make costumes and dress up within the theme of *Días de los Muertos* and participate at various Day of the Dead venues."

Another community activist, Sandra Figueroa-Villa, works at El Centro Del Pueblo, a local non-profit organization that has transformed the urban core through youth programs, dance and culture, jobs and social services. Like Figueroa-Villa, thousands of mothers, community activists, businesswomen and soccer moms continue this familiar Posada tradition of painting L.A.'s urban canvas with their broom, pushcart business, minivan, a brush or pen. Festivities take on a didactic form to paint murals, register youth to vote and share public policy activism by speaking at city hall. As *calaveras* presented Posada with a conduit for transformation of ideas, today in L.A. *Días de los Muertos* offers an opportunity to celebrate life, transform community and all the culture, social and political satire for the entertainment capital of the world.

I must confess: *Días de los Muertos* has become my favorite holiday and this celebration lives on immortally in the City of Angels.

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# Fiestas Madriguayas

A Touch of Candombe in Madrid **BY KARINA BOGGIO**

**I'M WRITING THIS STORY FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD** of Barrio Sur in Montevideo, Uruguay. The lively pulse of the *candombe* drum reaches me from the streets. This Afro-Uruguayan rhythm penetrates the houses along the banks of the Río de la Plata, a river we like to call “the sea,” offering an urban soundscape with steady impact. The wind helps to carry the sound, mixing the color and heat of the *candombe* rhythm of each drum and marching corps ensemble—*comparsa*. My neighborhood, together with Barrio Palermo, is home to the largest number of families of African descent in Montevideo and their cultural expressions. The past history and present performance of the *candombe* drums permeate our streets. The *comparsas* rehearse for carnival or simply go out to play in the after-

noons and evenings for sheer enjoyment. *Comparsas* from both neighborhoods beat on their drums at the same time, but march on different routes, marking their territory through rest stops at particular corners.

This very local experience with well-defined borders takes other shapes when it travels, as I have learned from studying the Uruguayan community in Madrid and its cultural practices. The ethnographic methodology I followed requires the prolonged presence of the researcher in the community. It demands social, emotional, and sensorial involvement, and, as I understand it, an altogether total participation of the researcher. Based on that approach, I'd like to provide *ReVista* readers with a description of how I participated and negotiated my

involvement in the *comparsa* of the Uruguayan Center of Madrid (CUM), and what *candombe* drum playing means in the experience of an Uruguayan immigrant in Spain.

The borders of Montevideo's Barrio Sur overflow not just toward Madrid. We found *candombe comparsas* in distant cities wherever Uruguayan immigrants have settled. These immigrants keep on updating, reinventing and making traditions of these practices despite the geographical distance, because they have maintained their emotional closeness and sense of belonging to Uruguay to this day. Some migration specialists such as Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick-Schiller

**The lively pulse of Afro-Uruguayan rhythms takes over the streets of Madrid once a year.**

explain these practices and transnational communities as transcending national states and linking them.

These *comparsas* recall African fiestas staged by black slaves in colonial Montevideo, as, for example, the Kings' fiesta during which the Congo Kings are crowned, a ceremony described by Gustavo Goldman in *Candombe ¡Salve Baltasar! La fiesta de Reyes en el Barrio Sur de Montevideo* (Montevideo: Perro Andaluz, 2003). Leaders and some families of Afro-Uruguayan heritage promoted the *comparsas*, and others kept on joining in because of family ties, friendships or neighborhood organizations, and because they could play drums, dance or act. Thus, learning to drum for the *comparsas* has been passed down from generations and also through neighborhood ties.

It is only in the last couple of decades that *candombe* playing has been reevaluated. For a long time, it was considered to be just an expression of the Afro-descendants, while other expressions

with the highest sound. The drums are played standing—walking around wearing the drum—or sitting with the drum held between the legs. Both hands are used to beat the drum—one free and the other holding a drumstick. To tune the drums, the leather is cured with fire; this becomes an initiation rite—a beautiful scene. Dancers, *vedettes* and other participants such as banner carriers, healers, broom wielders and the Uruguayan version of mummies—*mamás viejas*—complete the scene.

I first got involved when the Uruguayan Center of Madrid (CUM) was forming a *comparsa* from a class at the *candombe* school. When I arrived, some ten men were sitting in a circle and playing their drums. Jorge, the director, interrupted the session. Pointing at me with his drumstick, he said, “You, go sit in the circle. Flaco, give her a drumstick.” I said that I had come to talk. “Yes, we’ll talk afterwards, but if you’re here, get busy drumming!” The message was clear; I had no alternative. I was quite embar-

my video camera during the entire process of forming the *comparsa*. To be the *comparsa*'s “camera” allowed me to participate in a more comfortable way than being a drum apprentice. I also collected more than 25 hours of audiovisual material—both valuable to them as documentation and to me as an ethnographer.

The structure of the *comparsa* paradigm in Madrid is similar to the *comparsa* of Montevideo. The Madrid *comparsa* operates in four spaces: the *candombe* school where both techniques and values are imparted; Sunday rehearsals in the Parque del Retiro (a collective expression in the city's public space, similar to the roaming of drummers in the Montevideo neighborhoods); the fiestas of The Colony, as the Uruguayan community in Madrid calls itself; and finally, the parades, the moment to show off the work of the *comparsa*, to enjoy getting together and having the freedom to take over the streets. These spaces for dialogue with the local community in Madrid are very scarce: there is Carnamundi, the carnival parade in which immigrant collectives participate; the Festival Viva Madrid; and some neighborhood fiestas. On all of these occasions, it's necessary to present an exotic and eye-catching product.

The *comparsa* and *candombe* drumming in Madrid, as I described both in my thesis and in a 2012 article, permit the expression of emotions in a collective form through music and a certain emotional relief in the face of hostility encountered in the immigrant experience. Moreover, I witnessed the physical delight and the aesthetics of drumming, demonstrated in all its splendor in the parades, evoking what we Uruguayans call the “magic of *candombe*.”

Drumming in parades acts as a mediating intercultural encounter; it presents differences in a way they can be tolerated. Jorge, the *comparsa* director, affirmed that he wished to cause a sensation in Madrid with the *candombe* parade. That is, he wanted the denizens of Madrid to be moved emotionally; he wanted them to get out on the streets and dance and to

## The *comparsa* and *candombe* drumming in Madrid permit the expression of emotions in a collective form.

were more valued in Uruguayan culture. Today, though, as I wrote in my 2011 thesis, “Procesos migratorios y expresiones culturales: Un estudio antropológico sobre uruguayos residentes en Madrid,” *candombe* is viewed as national patrimony, and its transmission and teaching have been professionalized with the creation of schools of *candombe* throughout Uruguay.

Drums are central to the *comparsa*; the formation of a *batea* or a group of drums can involve dozens of drummers. The instruments are handmade from cask wood and covered with leather (some smaller drums are beginning to use plastic). There are three types of drums: the *piano*, the largest and with the deepest sound; the mid-sized *repique*; and finally, the *chico*, the smallest drum

rassed because I was never very good with musical instruments. They had the good will to allow me to participate without asking anything, so I sat in front of the drum and tried, and I keep on trying. I was willing that day and every other day to submit myself to these rites of initiation. And through such efforts, we ethnographers are able to obtain access and share experiences in an intimate way. I also made myself available to work on the common project of the *comparsa*. I took classes, rehearsed in the Parque del Retiro and went out with the *chico* drum to do some street-drumming sessions in neighborhood fiestas.

This participation was fundamental to understand and verify my observations and to establish confidence for my field research. Eventually, they let me use



The drums have a strong internal and emotional resonance. They connect immigrants with the Uruguayan nation.

make enough noise so that others would be startled. This can seem too aggressive sometimes. As a student in Montevideo said in a presentation, “What’s going on with this? Why do they need this aggression to intimidate others?” One can explain this aggressiveness by seeing that when we define ourselves as “we,” we do so by leaving others out of this space. Moreover, the subaltern condition of immigrants does not permit them to negotiate their cultural expressions on an equal footing. To all this is added the paradox that these immigrants aspire to be recognized as citizens who participate in the city of Madrid and at the same time to be distinguished by their belonging to the Uruguayan nation.

In that way, to perform *candombe* in the fiestas of Madrid is to depict who we are to Madrid natives. The performances are an active act of resistance to the feelings of being invisible and subordinate that so many immigrants in Madrid or other large cities experience. This use of the *candombe* confirms in a modern-day context the narrative about the mean-

ing of drums for black slaves in colonial times in Montevideo society. Black slaves were not allowed to express themselves in Christian fiestas and so they took to the streets, just as immigrants carve out some of the few spatial-temporal expressions they are freely allowed in Madrid.

Finally, the collective practice of Afro-Uruguayan drumming strengthens the internal ties of the Colony and its cohesion. The drums have a strong internal and emotional resonance. They connect immigrants with the Uruguayan nation: the performative nature of *candombe* practice produces in every drum beat a self-affirmation, “We are Uruguayans.”

Several of the members of the CUM *comparsa* have returned to Uruguay because of the difficult economic situation in Spain, constituting a return migration. It is possible that because of this change in direction to the migratory process, in these trajectories of comings and goings of practices and their meanings, we will find members of Madrid’s CUM drumming in some *comparsa* in Montevideo, providing a certain novelty

in the ways of conceiving and performing *candombe* drumming. And it is also possible that these sounds will spiral past my window in Barrio Sur and end up in some other article or book.

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For further information on *comparsas* in an earlier issue of *ReVista*, see George Reid Andrew’s article on “Rhythm Nation” <<http://drclas.fas.harvard.edu/publications/revistaonline/winter-2003/rhythm-nation>>.

# Bolivians in Argentina

The Other Fiesta **BY IRENE DEPETRIS CHAUVIN**

IN 2007, WHILE LIVING IN BRAZIL, I DECIDED TO take a short trip to Argentina to attend the Festival of Independent Film (BA-FICI) held every April in Buenos Aires. I looked forward to seeing the first documentary made by Martín Rejtman, a director who, with only three films, had developed a trend dedicated to portraying apathetic middle-class youth in crisis. Because of his important role in New Argentine Film and concern for purity of form, the very idea of *Copacabana* (2007) seemed strange to me. Commissioned by a Buenos Aires television channel the previous year, this short documentary is a distant perspective of the preparations Bolivian immigrants make for the celebration of Nuestra Señora de Copacabana.

The history of the Virgin of Copacabana in the city of Buenos Aires dates back to 1972, when the replica of a famous sculpture of the virgin in Bolivia arrived at a little wooden chapel in the Charrúa neighborhood. From then until now, the yearly celebration brings together more than 50,000 people who come to the neighborhood to enjoy a week of dancing and musical shows with traditional Bolivian costumes—the most massive and important gathering of the Bolivian collectivity in Argentina. In 1991, the Fiesta de la Virgen de Copacabana in the Charrúa neighborhood was declared to be “of municipal interest” (rather like national patrimony, but on a local basis) by the then-Deliberating Council; later the Buenos Aires legislature pronounced it of “cultural interest,” and finally the city government chimed in by saying that it was “of interest to the capital.” This delayed institutional recognition of the Bolivian community’s most important patron saint fiesta corresponds with the relative absence of film representations of Bolivians in Argentina. Before Martín

Rejtman became curious about these celebrations, only Adrián Caetano, another of the “founders” of the New Argentine Film movement, had given a Bolivian immigrant the role of protagonist in *Bolivia* (2001), a film that narrates the drama of discrimination and the exploitation faced by these immigrants.

Argentina is a country of many waves of peoples, but while European immigrants were readily included in the narrative of *argentinidad*—what it means to be Argentine—Bolivians and other contemporary immigrant groups are still excluded from this collective discourse. Little is known about how Bolivians relate to the larger Argentine society and how they see themselves. Argentina, the so-called receiving society, often stigmatizes these immigrants. Alejandro Grimson, in his book *Relatos de la diferencia y la igualdad: los bolivianos en Buenos Aires* (EUDEBA, 2005), analyzes how, in everyday life and leisure activities, the Bolivians make efforts to insert themselves within the host society. In this sense, the patron saint celebrations, traditional markets and the growth of civil society, sports and religious organizations formulate a social code and circumscribe a common space on which the very idea of community depends.

The fiesta in Charrúa, one of those spaces identified with *bolivianidad*—what it means to be Bolivian—has become more and more visible in the past few years. According to Grimson, some Bolivians explain the fiesta in terms of Catholicism, while others make reference to Aymara-Quechua traditions and the Pachamama, a goddess revered by the indigenous people of the Andes. Still others point out the hybrid nature of the celebration’s particular qualities. Most spectators enjoy the carnivalesque spectacle of more than thirty dance groups

from different neighborhoods throughout Buenos Aires, from many provinces of Argentina and sometimes even directly from Bolivia. The different meanings Bolivian immigrants give to the event nevertheless coincide with the sense of reconstruction of “national culture,” of a “tradition” that brings them together as immigrants. This discourse operates within the immigrant group itself, but it is also directed toward the “receiving society.” The fiesta underscores the immigrants’ national belonging, their ties to a place other than that of the local society, but the ritual carries with it a profound sense of equality. In the patron saint fiestas, most of the dancers show their desire to be upwardly mobile by choosing one of the typical dances associated with the Bolivian middle class, the *caporal*, which depicts foremen and allows the use of modern clothing and urban music.

Martín Rejtman decided to show the parade of the *caporales* as a way of painting a particular image of the Bolivian community of Buenos Aires. The documentary *Copacabana* “shows” because it fits into a category that film theorist Bill Nichols has called “observational documentary,” a film that depends entirely on sound and image. Thus, *Copacabana* avoids the use of first-person sound track, on-camera interviews and even voice-over narration to explain what the camera is showing. It makes sure that what is shown speaks for itself. The narration is developed through a succession of a series of well-defined images; through the visual narrative of the camera, Rejtman first shows the local celebrations dedicated to the Virgen de Copacabana and the popular dances associated with it. Later, the film flashes back to the organization of the celebration, rehearsals, the places Bolivians congregate, their bands, their postcard and



Filmmaker Martín Rejtman decided to show the parade of the *caporales* as a way of painting a particular image of the Bolivian community in Buenos Aires.

photo collections, their labor in textile workshops, their life in humble abodes, and ends up in the border between Bolivia and Argentina, in the Bolivian city of Villazón, with images of new Bolivian immigrants crossing into Argentina.

The fiesta, the thematic crux of the documentary, is never explained nor are any discursive details given about its

preparation and organization. *Copacabana* depends on the power of observation and threads together information through visual and sensorial means. If knowledge can be obtained from the realm of intuition and sensitivity, then it may also derive from a story constructed on these visual footprints, a tale which distances itself from a formal registry of events and

puts emphasis upon the gaze. In the case of *Copacabana*, the “gaze” is revealed through cinematography. The “other”—the non-Argentine—is a potential space for an infinite number of tales, but the form of the film, the result of the selection of audiovisual resources, constitutes one decision among many and brings a veritable wealth of meaning to the film.

This tension between the recording of events (“registry”) and way of perceiving them (“gaze”), as well as the viewers’ own preconceptions about certain migrant groups, arose spontaneously the first time I showed *Copacabana* to U.S. undergraduates in a course on globalization and migration. First of all, the students had what was also my first mistaken impression of *Copacabana*: they thought it would be a documentary about some fiesta on the Brazilian beach. In using the name “Copacabana” without specifically indicating that the film is about Bolivia, Rejtman seems to play with the preconceptions of the middle-class spectator for whom leisure is the private exoticism of the Brazilian culture and not the Bolivian one, most frequently associated with images of work and exploitation. After becoming aware of the theme, the students felt a mix of fascination and discomfort with the form in which the fiesta was portrayed: Rejtman seeks to record a fiesta with which we are unfamiliar but does not allow the fiesta to be made into an exotic subject since he situates his characters through a meticulously distanced gaze.

But why have I used the term “distant”? Throughout the film, the camera narrates by means of very fixed medium shots. Acting as a frame, tracking shots open and close the film. The first images in the documentary are tracking shots taken from a car of the preparations for the fiesta, silent shots of the parade routes and colorful neighborhood stores. Later one sees medium shots of *comparsas* rehearsing their dance steps, but this time at night. The camera briefly shows the development of the choreography, and with quick blackouts, Rejtman’s fixed planes trace in the course of a very few minutes a temporal arc that leads to empty streets at dawn, where the camera once again pans from the car to show us the remains of the celebration. In the absence of a voice-over narration, the use of tracking shots not only serves to synthesize a temporal arc, but also brings a way of looking that appears to suggest

that *Copacabana* is directed to the spectator as tourist, one who voyeuristically observes from a distance the life of the Bolivians who live on the margins in the city of Buenos Aires.

After the initial tracking shots, most of the film is a succession of objective takes of rehearsals. In the first brief scenes, the camera captures dance in its essence of magic flight, then withdraws from the perfection of the fiesta’s performance to concentrate on the rehearsals. Thus, the documentary captures the cultural density of the phenomenon of the Copacabana celebrations. The numerous moments in which dance rehearsals for the fiesta are recorded serve to illustrate a collective effort ceremoniously dedicated to the repetition of a ritual. Like the panning shots, the recording of these rehearsals is distanced. Objective shots, especially frozen stills, retain the established distance, not only because they are long or medium shots, but because they are used to frame the scene. Indeed, a great many scenes have some sort of frame (windows, hallways, doors) through which the camera captures the action. However, because the defining characteristic of a movie is that it has movement and represents the passage of time, the documentary’s images stay in the perpetual present. This temporal suspension makes the narrative construction of the film quite slow and deliberate precisely because the takes create an act of contemplation.

Yet an act of contemplation does not mean a purely formal exercise that cancels out the possibility of deeper understanding. *Copacabana* illustrates that the fiesta forms a complex weaving together of different discourses whose meaning is always being disputed. The medium-range shots show the announcer for Radio Urkupiña and suggest the importance of the radio in the organization of the fiesta and also for strengthening a sense of belonging to the Bolivian community through the programming of folkloric music and constant references to services available to members of the community.

Questioning the borders between fiction and documentary, Rejtman also refused to structure a narrative through the use of voice-over or to reproduce the “authentic” speech of the protagonists, but allows the historical and affective density of the fiestas to speak for itself. In one scene, an elderly Bolivian immigrant, whose name we do not know, shows us an album filled with postcards and photos demonstrating that the fiesta of Copacabana began to be organized early on as a way of preserving cultural memory and as a way of strengthening the ties of the Bolivian community in the diaspora. In this sense, *Copacabana* shows us a lived dimension of the collectivity in which elderly immigrants, the radio program and the dance appear as the embodiment of the collective in public space.

As in every documentary, the aesthetics of *Copacabana* present a tension between the object and the gaze, but this tension—a productive contradiction to help rethink a genre from its origins—has frequently been associated with the exercise of representing the “other” and has an ambiguous relationship with the exploration of the exotic. Martín Rejtman’s “cold” portrait distances us from perceiving the other as merely a wearer of exotic costumes. More than the simple reception of a lived scene as “authentic,” the film proposes a carefully “disconnected” gaze that does not reify the exotic but, from a respectful distance, contributes to the recognition of a group and its cultural practices.

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Leading the Bolivian parade on Buenos Aires' Avenue 9 de Julio before an enthusiastic crowd.

# Proud to be Bolivian

## Visibility Fights Xenophobia in Buenos Aires

BY NATALIA GAVAZZO AND CONSUELO TAPIA MORALES

THERE WAS A TIME IN BUENOS AIRES WHEN Bolivians were often victims of hate crimes. They huddled in their working-class neighborhoods, hoping they might be confused with others from Argentina's north. Those times are changing, and fiestas—as well as legal reforms—have

helped make the Bolivian community visible in a positive way. In 2010, for instance, hundreds of Bolivians migrants and their Argentine-born children marched during the bicentennial “Parade of Collectivities,” occupying a more central space in comparison with other

more “traditional” immigrant communities like the Italians. Since 2009, Bolivians even have their own folkloric parade at the *microcentro* of Buenos Aires.

When you hear “Buenos Aires,” the first thing you may think of is a couple dancing tango accompanied by a violin

or *bandoneón*, symbols of the transoceanic immigration that at the beginning of the 20th century left its mark on both urban landscapes and local culture. It is enough just to walk down Avenue 9 de Julio or through the Plaza de Mayo and observe the still-existent architecture from that period to feel as if one is in Europe—not a coincidence if we consider the process by which the Argentine nation-state was constructed. Under the slogan “Civilization or Barbarism” (in which the former is white-European-desirable and the latter is indigenous-

see them: to the sugarcane and grape harvests and to the cotton fields on the Bolivian-Argentine border. Many even traveled between the three harvests, loading their *aguayos* (blankets) with basic supplies and also with their icons of the Virgin and the saints. Being so far from the center of the country (Buenos Aires), they were not seen as a “social problem.” Crises of the regional economies—principally of the sugarcane harvests when drought struck—provoked the migration of many workers, including Bolivians, to the larger cities. By the

ess of Bolivia and of Bolivians abroad. A few dancers and some guitarists accompanied the religious procession, but there were no more than 300 people from the first families whose practice of Andean solidarity allowed them to form the neighborhood which would become a referent for many other communities and migrants.

It was in 1991 that Argentina implemented the so-called Convertibility Plan, an exchange policy that established a fixed exchange rate between the Argentine peso and the U.S. dollar. Initially, this generated an economic stability and growth that caused many Bolivians to emigrate to Argentina and particularly to its capital. However, at mid-decade, when economic growth reached its limit and unemployment rose to 20%, migrants from neighboring countries and especially Bolivians—who had survived “camouflaged” within an important marginal working class—became more visible. Sustained by an immigration policy inherited from military dictatorships based on restrictions, selection and control of migratory flows, the government of President Carlos S. Menem decided to implement sanctions and persecute “illegals.” Among migrants from countries on Argentina’s borders, Bolivians—whether documented or undocumented—suffered acutely due to the racist component of this stigmatization. Primarily from the Andean region (including various rural and indigenous communities), Bolivians faced very high levels of xenophobic violence. In the media they were accused of delinquency, narcotrafficking and the breakdown of security. Many Argentines spoke of a “silent invasion,” blaming Bolivians for the collapse of public services such as hospitals and schools. Around this time, several Bolivian citizens were murdered, with their deaths linked to police abuse including torture and robbery, crimes that are still unpunished. In fact, to this very day, even though there has been some positive change, a large sector of *porteño* society still makes Bolivians scapegoats for Argentina’s social problems.

## Over the past ten years, Bolivian and other migrants have started to win in the war of invisibility.

mestizo-backwards), the Argentine government attempted to “modernize” the population, which correlated perfectly with policies meant to encourage foreign immigration, beginning in 1880. These policies resulted in the formation of the famous *crisol de razas* or melting pot, which, despite being diverse, excluded large segments of society. The so-called “little black headed-ones” (that is to say, the migrants from other provinces—especially those from Argentina’s north) mingled with people from neighboring countries in their own neighborhoods on the margins of the city. If they were even to consider walking through the exclusive Recoleta neighborhood or through Plaza de Mayo among the city’s resident *porteños*, they would be completely out of their element. Unless of course it was to participate in one of the large political demonstrations of Juan Domingo Perón’s first government (1945-1955), when these *cabecitas negras* became the focus of the alleged benefactor state that brought them there. And even then they were looked down upon and criticized by elites and the middle classes.

However, during that same period, migrants from bordering countries such as Bolivia were going where few could

1960s and 70s, when Bolivian migrants moved to Buenos Aires, they became more visible to *porteño* eyes.

Some of these first Bolivian families settled at the southern end of the city, for instance in the Charrúa neighborhood, then known as Villa Piolín (“string village”) because residents marked the boundaries of their properties with cord. These families not only survived three large fires (which threatened the great number of houses made of flimsy cardboard) but also resisted attempts by successive military governments to evict them. Up until fairly recently, the eradication of “temporary” settlements such as Charrúa was a government policy objective. During the same struggle, in the 1970s, a migrant from the Cochabamba department in Bolivia brought a statue of the Virgin of Copacabana to the heart of the neighborhood where a chapel now stands. Around 1973, families and neighborhood residents organized themselves to celebrate the first *novena* (nine days of communal prayer) dedicated to the Virgin. They decided to name a *pasante* or ritual sponsor, design typical clothes, convoke a band and prepare typical foods at the first procession in honor of the *mamita de Cochabamba*, Patron-

Faced with these attacks, Bolivians mobilized toward the end of the 90s and began to demand justice, even calling on the international community for support. They organized in defense of their rights and actively participated in the creation of the current Argentine Migration Law, which is a global vanguard. The law not only demands respect for the basic human rights of migrants, but also establishes terms of equality between natives and foreigners, especially for those who come from other South American countries. Bolivians began to win access to “central” spaces in which visibility could mean something positive and reinforcing. These spaces allowed them to recount their histories from their own points of view and express their own cultures, customs and convictions beyond their neighborhoods. Although the change has not occurred without conflict, conquering these spaces has meant winning a symbolic battle against the negative stereotypes that sustained the stigmas that had branded them in the 90s and before. Whether in the Flores cemetery on the Day of the Dead, when Bolivians bring offerings and remember their dead with music, or in the Indoamericano or Avellaneda parks where they play soccer and enjoy typical foods, Bolivians today constitute one of the large groups recognized as part of Argentina’s contemporary *crisol de razas*.

This citywide growth of cultural spaces paralleled that of their own neighborhoods, as in Charrúa, where the celebration expanded from one lone group dancing to more than one hundred groups now found nationwide. Some of these groups have more than 500 dancers. Many are Bolivians, who dance out of nostalgia to remember their country, but an increasing number of second-generation Argentine-Bolivians participate for the enjoyment of affinity and communitarian spirit. These groups perform many types of typical Bolivian dances: caporal, morenadas, tinku, saya, salaque, diablada, kullawada and pujllay, dances with distinct territorial origins that contribute to an understanding of Bolivia’s

great cultural diversity. The Argentine society—accustomed to viewing Bolivians as a monolithic group of construction workers, domestic servants or small-scale food vendors—is often completely unaware of that diversity.

This emphasis on pluri-cultural patrimony also promotes identity rights, the right to be who you are without fear of being repressed or excluded, the right to have rights. In addition to the Migration Law, another new government policy establishes a better orientation. The Secretary of National Culture (an entity that answers directly to the Presidency and has funded the folkloric parade which, for the last four years, has proceeded down the central Avenue 9 de Julio) declared, “One sees the way the Bolivians participate and integrate, and thinks, ‘If the great challenge of Argentina at its Centenary was to integrate the European migration, which it did, then the great challenge of the Bicentenary is to integrate the Latin American and Bolivian migration, [and] of course to remind ourselves of our true South American belonging’” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIlg5PVLcEg>).

Over the past ten years, these migrants—now, after Paraguay’s, making up the second most important percentage of Argentina’s resident foreign population—have started to win in the war of invisibility, overcoming attempts to negate, annul or hide them, to make them little more than urban poor, to strip them of their identity, customs, traditions and specificity as a people, to treat them just as cheap labor force. This victory has made them visible in a positive way and allowed them to speak out with their own voice. Taking into account that more than half of Bolivians in Argentina live in Buenos Aires and its surrounding areas, to see this group of men and women, most with indigenous features and of Andean heritage, celebrate their heritage at the capital’s center demonstrates some of the cultural and political change. That their culture parades down Avenue 9 de Julio, past the iconic obelisk, through Plaza de

Mayo and by the national cathedral and Presidential Palace (*Casa Rosada*), in front of thousands of astonished *porteños* and tourists who still sometimes ignore and stigmatize them, allows us to think that it is possible to break negative stereotypes by a show of positive characteristics. It is possible to overcome the ignorance of others (whether local or not), recuperate an ignored cultural heritage, creatively fight against xenophobia and convert victimhood into pride. As a result, Bolivians have indeed taken a step toward revindicating the rights that correspond to migrants as human beings, regardless of nationality, age, gender, race or wherever they decide to live their lives.

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## The Power of Paper

A REVIEW BY DEBORAH T. LEVENSON

**Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala**, by Kirsten Weld (*Duke University Press, 2014, 368 pp.*)

In July 2005, Edelberto Cifuentes, a noted historian at that time employed by the office of Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) as a hands-on researcher, went to investigate reports of improperly stored explosives on grounds owned by the Guatemalan National Civil Police (PNC). Once there, he spotted another kind of poorly stored explosive material. Seeing bundles of old papers stuffed up against the interior windows of a building, he inquired within and was told by the PNC official who opened the door that these stacks were documents, and that Cifuentes was standing at the entrance to the National Police Archive.

Cifuentes was stunned: the official story was that such an archive did not exist. Taking a quick look around that same day, Cifuentes walked through several rooms and saw heaps of papers in piled-high cardboard boxes, or simply spread about on the floor in poorly wrapped bundles. He quickly alerted the Ombudsman. Practiced and audacious, the Ombudsman immediately assumed custody over what was a complex of buildings. Politically savvy, he also sent staff to guard them.

The revelation of this Archive unfolded in a country torn by, and immersed in, dangerous arguments about what are truths and what are lies about the role of state agencies in violent repression. In retrospect, it seems a miracle that the Archive could have been appropriated and turned into the Project for the Recovery of the National Police Historical Archives (PRAHPN), known for short as the Project, a site where people could mine what the PNC had stored away there.

One year later another historian, Kirsten Weld, entered the Archive to research her dissertation. She got a first-hand look at what initially seemed the Project's endless task of going through an unknown quantity of disarrayed papers to learn what secrets they revealed. When later counted, the materials in the archive added up to approximately 80 million pieces of paper. Over time it became clear that alongside driver's license applications, personnel files, traffic tickets, reports of complaints, criminal reports, invoices and registries of arrests were over one hundred thousand documents that detailed human rights violations and the surveillance and the fate of thousands of the approximately 35,000 Guatemalans "disappeared" during the years of internal warfare

between 1961 and 1996. In boxes, corners and metal file cabinets crudely marked with words such as "Assassinations" and "Disappeared," were identity cards, snapshots of unidentified bodies and of persons illegally confined, fingerprint files, rolls of film, interrogation records and transcripts, and ledgers filled with photographs, names and fates; a secret arsenal in the service of the state terrorism that enabled it. The information needed to prove that police—in some idealist fantasy presumably dedicated to fighting crime—were, as long suspected, committing the terror, was there; now it was necessary to somehow organize it into something that could approach being a comprehensible whole that would be, as Weld puts it, the "self documentation" of police activities.

The book Weld has written, entitled *Paper Cadavers: Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala*, is brilliant and engrossing, told with the passion the topic deserves. Its title is horribly perfect: paper, and not only bullets, kills. At the same time, part of the strength and draw of *Paper Cadavers* is that it points us in the opposite direction: the power of paper to give life. It approximates being an optimistic text by demonstrating how in the right hands and with the appropriate skills,



the very documents that made state violence possible can empower relatives and friends of those victims of violence to protect historical memory, expose the administrators of state terrorism, and help, one hopes, to bring them to justice. In her introduction, Weld opens up a discussion of how paper guns can be turned around, a theme that continues to be elaborated upon throughout the book. I use Weld's terms to best explicate her ideas: the Archive is a "unit of analysis" that needs "archival thinking" to get at its archival logic as a Cold War mechanism of secret surveillance, control and punishment. As Weld puts it, her intention is to "document the process, not to process the documents." This approach is compelling: state violence is not the fundamental subject of her book. The processors, an intriguing and brave group that included ex-guerrillas

as well as children of the disappeared, are this history's heroes, and how they make coherent and react to what is in the Archive is the centerpiece of *Paper Cadavers*.

Weld has done an impressive job of bringing together material on post-1954 Guatemala. *Paper Cadavers* covers much ground. Nine chapters compose its four parts. The first of these parts, "Explosions at the Archives" consists of chapters 1-3; the next, "Archives and Cold War Counterinsurgency in Guatemala," is made up of 4 and 5; the third, "Archives and Social Reconstruction in Post-War Guatemala" consists of 6 and 7; and 8 and 9 constitute the last, "Pasts Present and Future Imperfects." This complex structure allows Weld to flesh out what has surrounded, and what runs through, her well-told story of process.

One part of the landscape is the Guatemalan state's legendary hostility to public knowledge. It underfunded—and today does so even more virulently—the largest regional scholarly archive, the *Archivo General de Centroamérica*. A far more serious politics of inaccessibility that protected the post-1954 counter-insurgency state was the peril faced by scores of relatives, activists and lawyers who knocked on the door, so to speak, of the National Police seeking information about the disappeared. It is after the doors get pushed down in the final chapter of Part 1, "How the Guerrillero Became an Archivist," that *Paper Cadavers* kicks into full gear as a history of process.

Originally, the women and men working in the Project eagerly piled papers in chronological order, and unwittingly disrupted the PNC's system of filing, and of connecting different sub-departments to one another. Their passionate hunt for friends and family members at first seemed to be marginalized when Guatemalan and international professional archivists quickly intervened to teach the basic two concepts of archival science—original order and provenance—and to organize work around this. With warmth, Weld describes the emotional progression through which Project members came to realize that they could not achieve their goals without archival thinking. In addition, and with rich detail, she writes how they slowly turned the dank building into a strange home of sorts with pictures and a garden; and how they met new challenges with new solutions. For example, informed that they could not use glue to bind papers because it attracted insects, and without staples and staplers, they sewed the pieces together.

The context of the United States government's key support in keeping the Archive modern, running, and on time by sending its own professional archivists is the subject of Part 2. With state of the art materials and a bottomless pit of money, these Cold War experts focused on special investigations units, including that of the Judicial Police, which was in charge of the death squads. They honed in on centralization, management and political knowledge

to fine-tune a long-term bank of information that could go into action as needed, and it did. One example out of many Weld gives is that of the well-known ex-mayor of Guatemala City, Manuel Argueta Colom. The Archive charted the movements of this progressive leader from his first participation in a political rally as a young student in 1957 to his assassination in 1979, one week after he formed a reformist political party. Weld underscores that while many studies emphasize U.S. military aid to and intervention in countries such as Guatemala, the U.S. role in the accumulation and systematization of knowledge necessary to repression needs to be known.

Part 3 returns the reader to the topic of process to discuss the Project members' own emotional and political transformations as they worked. They followed the lives and the faces of the known and unknown tracked by the national police. To stay with Colom Argueta's case, the documents are a repository of 22 years of his life, not only of a plan for his assassination.

Knowing about such lives became a political coming of age, even for the old. For the Project's older generation who had lived through the war, doing what Weld calls "labors of memory" constituted the painful experience of recalling fine moments of struggle, and of reflecting on the failures of the very left movements in which they participated. For the younger generation, new questions of why the dead became

militants in the first place have led to self-reflections about who they are as carriers of memory with responsibilities in the present, and in a country where most youth are apolitical and or pro-capitalist.

This point segues into *Paper Cadavers*' final section, an inquiry into the Project's prospects and into its relationship with the country in its own fragile future. Weld gives careful consideration to fundamental questions—will the Project be sunk by a political shift even more to the right? Will it help bring social justice? Will it lose its political punch? Answers can only be approximations based on many contingencies. But one certainty, Weld argues, is that the Project has placed transparency at the center of the national conversations about the compatibility of democracy and secrecy; this is a conversation for us all. And one possibility that her book suggests is that the young people who have dug up the past, and others like them whose subjectivities have been changed in part by understanding that past, are the future's best bet.

Perhaps that applies here in the United States as well. A study of surveillance and secrecy and of the courageous few that expose that power, *Paper Cadavers* is a book for us all.

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# Legacies of Violence

A REVIEW BY JOANNE RAPPAPORT

## Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru,

By Kimberly Theidon (*University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, 461 pages.*)

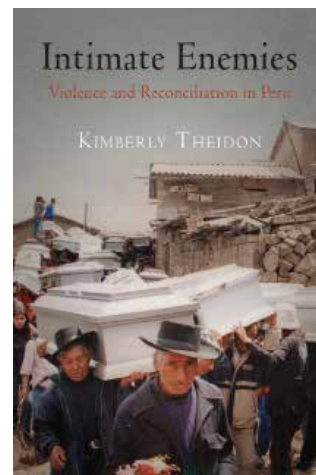
A little more than twenty years ago, Andeanist anthropologists were taken to task for “missing the revolution.” At the time—the early 1990s—Peru was awash in internecine violence spawned by continued clashes of the Shining Path guerrilla group with the Peruvian army. Peru’s Quechua-speaking peasants were unapologetically trapped between two armies, frequently forced to take sides in self-defense and subjected to monstrous human rights abuses. Students of Andean culture were accused of being too preoccupied with investigating traditional indigenous cultural forms—such as systems of trade and ritual that symbolically and materially linked the Andes’ multiple vertical levels to one another or gender complementarity in Andean cosmology—to notice the imminent approach of armed conflict. Ultimately, Peruvianist anthropologists were themselves caught up in the war, some of them relocating their research sites to the more peaceful haven of neighboring Ecuador. Others turned their ethnographic gaze to the burgeoning refugee populations in

Peru’s cities: the war transformed Andean ethnography in profound ways, forcing anthropologists to pay closer attention to the social disintegration it generated. Indeed, anthropologists were probably already moving in that direction when Shining Path erupted onto the public stage. Like their colleagues studying other parts of the world, Andeanists had already begun to shy away from the descriptive ethnography of isolated and culturally homogeneous rural venues and turned to an examination of weighty social issues, such as urban migration, political violence, class tensions, new social movements and racism.

Notwithstanding the social significance of these issues and the extent to which Andeanist ethnography was revitalized by this shift in subject matter, I believe that something vital was lost in our rush to become politically relevant. The Andeanist ethnographers of the past two decades have, to a degree, lost sight of the cultural texture of everyday life in the region, of what gives life meaning for Andean people, even in the face of extreme violence. Our ethnographies have begun to ignore the rich cultural traditions that characterize the region. In a sense, ethnographic writing about the Andes since the 1990s has

become markedly thinner, less intense, as anthropologists strive for greater social relevance. Paradoxically, while indigenous organizations throughout Latin America are underscoring the centrality of culture to their political projects, many anthropologists stubbornly choose to ignore the intricacies of indigeneity as something not only constructed by politicians but also lived by people.

In recent years, however, a small number of ethnographic monographs have begun to appear in print that take greater note of Andean cultural specificity at the same time that they focus on many of the central issues facing the people of Andean nations. Kimberly Theidon’s *Intimate Enemies* is one of the best examples of this trend. As I began reading her book I was surprised at how classically ethnographic it is and how relevant are her descriptions of rural Quechua ways of life, particularly those pertaining to the medical realm to the ethnographic study of human rights. This is evident, for example, in Theidon’s insistence on comprehending the layers of meaning that Quechua-speaking peasants of Ayacucho, Peru, associate with suffering; she examines how a series of Andean concepts— notions like



*llakis* and *susto* indicating physical reactions to extreme stress—exceed and overflow the idea of trauma as it is articulated by human rights workers in Peru. To label the populations who suffered the depredations of the army and Shining Path as “victims” is, maintains Theidon, to ignore how native people experienced the war on their own terms and to foreclose any possibility of true reparations and reconciliation in the post-conflict period. Moreover, Theidon does not confine her study of victimhood to concepts that we would define as explicitly “Andean,” but approaches the people she is studying as complex modern actors, whose social practices evince a melding of Andean tradition and global movements. She offers, for example, a thoughtful and respectful portrait of rural

Protestantism as a means of confronting the horror caused not only by external actors, such as the Peruvian army or Shining Path, but by community members themselves, who, Theidon lucidly recounts, were complicit in the bloodshed when forced to take sides in the conflict.

Theidon's meticulous ethnography in the first part of *Intimate Enemies* clearly lays the groundwork for her subsequent examination of how peasants learned to live with one another despite remembering that their neighbors were murderers. But her ethnographic approach provides more than just background information. Theidon cogently demonstrates that a classic Andeanist style of doing ethnography is necessary for comprehending the nature and impact of the Ayacucho bloodbath.

to persevere as a community despite the horror that came from within. This rich ethnography is part of what makes *Intimate Enemies* significantly more thoughtful than many contemporary anthropological studies of violence.

What happens when community members who have been forced to take sides in the armed conflict narrate their stories to truth commissions? Is there a gender dynamic at work in the ways that people recall their victimhood or their heroism? Do men and women recount their experiences of conflict in distinct ways? What does this tell us about how truth and reconciliation commissions should operate if they are to be effective? Fiona Ross's landmark study of gendered narrative in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commis-

of violent abuse—especially rape—women preferred to focus instead on their everyday experiences coping with communal dissolution, scarcity, and fear, remembering not only the anguish of bearing children conceived in acts of sexual violation, but, also how they fought back against the rapists.

Theidon's work sharpens our understanding of what it means to live side by side with one's enemy. The second half of *Intimate Enemies* probes the nature of post-conflict social relations in two regions of Ayacucho: the north, where communities welcomed the army and openly repudiated Sendero, but were nevertheless victimized by the Peruvian army; the south, where indigenous people tended to support Shining Path and in the post-conflict period were forced

nearby cities, and through constant attempts to silence the angry voices of those who were most brutally victimized (particularly, the women). I think that Theidon's ethnography is much more effective in Part III of the book than in Part IV, perhaps because she spent more time in the north; the ethnographic narratives of Part III move fluidly between interviews and Theidon's own experience, while in Part IV they cleave more closely to an interview format. Nevertheless, Part IV is critical to her argument, because it is here that Theidon resolves some of the issues she has brought up in the course of her ethnography, particularly the nature of gendered anger and what happens when women's memories are suppressed.

I suspect that the intensity of Theidon's writing comes in part from her obvious talent as an ethnographer, but it is also the product of decades of engaged research she has conducted in Ayacucho in the course of her collaboration with the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She clearly demonstrates that anthropological engagement not only makes significant contributions to society, but also makes for better ethnography.

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## This rich ethnography helps make *Intimate Enemies* significantly more thoughtful than many contemporary anthropological studies of violence.

An awareness of Andean worldviews is essential to her objective of capturing the texture of memory, observed in people's silences as much as their narratives. It is at the heart of peasant recollections of what Theidon terms the "militarized masculinity" of armed actors who blew apart their communities. It also makes more comprehensible the practices that made community authorities complicit in the violence and the strategies people still follow

sion, *Bearing Witness* (Pluto, 2003), substantiates the assertion that truth commissions narrow the narrative space in which women are able to recount their experiences. *Intimate Enemies* builds on this in very significant ways, by examining not only formal testimony but also engaging in an ethnographic analysis of the gender dynamics of local focus groups in the Andes. Theidon found that while men strove to silence women's narratives

to deny both their earlier political leanings and accept as equal citizens those among them who had collaborated with the guerrilla movement. The post-conflict "traumas"—that Theidon unpacks in the first part of *Intimate Enemies*—work out differently in these two settings, and she provides us a fascinating look at how social relations were repaired through a process of suppressing memory, in the course of the dispersal of some of the actors to

# Rio's Paradox of Plenty

## Culture and Urban Reform in the Marvelous City

A REVIEW BY MARCIO SIWI

### **Porous City: A Cultural History of Rio de Janeiro**

by Bruno Carvalho  
(Liverpool University Press, 2013; Series: Contemporary Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures, 235 pages)

In her book *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*, Susan Buck-Morss cautioned against the growing trend in the academy towards specialization. Specialization, Buck-Morss points out, creates arbitrary boundaries resulting in “disciplinary isolation.” To avoid these shortcomings, Buck-Morss called on scholars to “expand porosity” among the disciplines. That was in 2009. Fast forward to 2014 and enter Bruno Carvalho, assistant professor at Princeton University, whose groundbreaking new book *Porous City: A Cultural History of Rio de Janeiro* defies specialization and will no doubt become a model for scholars engaged in interdisciplinary research. *Porous City* explores the history and culture of Rio since the 1800s and the processes through which marginalized cultural practices became mainstream. In so doing, Carvalho develops a rich analytical concept which, incidentally, he also calls porosity. Through porosity, Carvalho sheds light on a paradox that is central to Rio and perhaps

to all of Brazil: that is, the coexistence of mobility and segregation. Or, as Carvalho puts it, “social-racial mixture and cultural inclusion can abet other forms of exclusion, just as stratification does not preclude fluid boundaries.”

In *Porous City* Carvalho draws on methods from literature, history and urban studies, weaving together an impressive array of sources—including travelers’ accounts, novels, songs, maps and paintings—as he investigates the intersection of urban development and cultural production of Praça Onze, one of Rio’s most compelling and enigmatic public squares located in the now-razed Cidade Nova neighborhood. If you have never heard of Praça Onze, you are not alone. Most *cariocas*—as Rio residents are called—only know it as a subway station. However, you have no doubt heard of, and perhaps danced, the samba, a symbol of Brazilian national identity whose origin and popularity are, Carvalho argues, intrinsically tied to Praça Onze and its surroundings.

Built by Royal Decree in 1811, Cidade Nova was located between downtown Rio and the residence of the newly arrived king. The royal family had great plans for Cidade Nova, but nature intervened. Yellow fever struck the city in 1849, causing the wealthy resi-

dents of Cidade Nova to leave the area for more salubrious housing along the ocean on the city’s southern edge. While yellow fever contributed to the demise of what was supposed to be Rio’s richest neighborhood, Carvalho argues that the epidemic played a key role in the emergence of a more complex, albeit poorer, neighborhood whose impact on the cultural imaginary of Rio—and Brazil—was greater than anyone could have predicted.

Lured by cheap rents, favorable location, and closeness to public transportation, Cidade Nova would become home to several ethnic groups, including Afro-Brazilians, gypsies, European immigrants and Jews. Carvalho’s careful examination of the Jewish presence in Cidade Nova and their place in the history of samba is one of the book’s many contributions. Yet, despite being one of Rio’s most diverse communities or, as Carvalho writes, a place of “multi-ethnic encounters and a permeable cultural life,” Cidade Nova was often portrayed in the contemporary media (and by scholars today) as predominantly black. So much so, that by the 1920s it was simply known as “Little Africa.” Not coincidentally, Cidade Nova developed a reputation for being unruly, uncivilized, unhygienic and home to Rio’s “dangerous



classes.” Carvalho tells us that such racially charged notions had a lasting effect on Cidade Nova, making this centrally located neighborhood appear faraway and marginal in the minds of elite *cariocas*.

Carvalho argues that Cidade Nova was not marginal or particularly violent or an “ethnic ghetto,” despite its reputation. Instead, it was a “fluid frontier.” To substantiate these claims, Carvalho conducts a close reading of several works by known and less known writers to highlight just how entwined well-to-do *cariocas* were with Cidade Nova. Machado de Assis is a case in point. Though he reproduced many of the stereotypes associated with the area in his early writings, Machado would later develop a more nuanced take on Cidade Nova, depicting characters who, though from Cidade Nova, were neither defined by nor bound



to the area. Rather, characters like Elisiario from the story *An Errant Man* moved about the city with relative ease. Much like the author's later characters, Carvalho explains that Machado circulated throughout the city, including Cidade Nova. By focusing on Rio's porous quality, Carvalho offers a highly original interpretation of Machado as not simply a writer of Rio's elite but as a writer intently aware of the larger transformations brought on by modernity and their effects on the urban poor. Another author with an interest in Cidade Nova was Manuel Antônio de Almeida. In *Memoirs of a Police Sergeant* Almeida describes the music of Cidade Nova in such great detail that, according to Carvalho, it reveals the author's ties to the stigmatized neighborhood and Rio's porosity more generally.

## Carvalho draws on methods from literature, history and urban studies.

Almeida was not the only one swept up in the music of Cidade Nova. Over the years, thousands more would ride the streetcars to the neighborhood for the music and the all-night parties. The most famous venues in Cidade Nova were located around Praça Onze. Among them the legendary house of the *baiana* Tia Ciata, one of Rio's renowned *Candomblé* priestesses. It was here, a place Carvalho calls a "bastion of Afro-Brazilian spiritual, cultural and social life," that in

1917 the first samba was created. Tia Ciata looms large in the history of samba. Indeed, Rio's best-known samba acts at the time were in some way tied to her house and Praça Onze. The list is long and Carvalho explores them in great detail, but the most emblematic were Pixinguinha and his band Oito Batutas. Pixinguinha, a descendant of slaves, was a pioneering *sambista* in more ways than one. In addition to defining the style, he helped to break down racial barriers associated with samba by performing in elite clubs throughout Rio, and he secured samba's popularity when the Oito Batutas toured Paris in 1922. Samba's rising popularity was also due to the growing interest in Carnival, which, as Carvalho argues, was also tied to Praça Onze. In fact, Carvalho writes that the first modern carnival

parade composed of competing Samba Schools was held in Praça Onze in the early 1930s, attracting thousands of people. The street carnival of Praça Onze would remain Rio's most popular until the early 1940s, when the square and most of Cidade Nova were destroyed to make way for President Vargas Avenue. Carvalho's argument that samba, Carnival, and other practices associated with Praça Onze constituted "spheres of Brazilian life that allowed for the greatest porosity in a society

of deep inequalities" is all the more relevant when we consider that these practices were often persecuted by the state.

Around the time that cultural practices associated with Afro-Brazilians were gaining popularity, another equally significant process was underway that would forever change Brazil's national identity, namely the valorization of racial mixture. Much like samba and Carnival, Carvalho argues that Cidade Nova was also central to this development. According to Carvalho, one progenitor of this idea was the writer Lima Barreto, the most vocal critics of the infamous Pereira Passos reforms. Carvalho argues that Barreto's notion of a collectivity born out of racial mixture was deeply tied to the author's experience of the rich cultural milieu of Cidade Nova. Barreto's proposition that a more authentic Brazil was to be found not in Rio's Europhile elite circles but in places like Cidade Nova was later picked up by the Modernistas, a group of influential writers, poets and painters who found excitement and inspiration in Cidade Nova. A few years later, President Getúlio Vargas would make samba, Carnival and the idea of racial mixture symbols of Brazilian national identity as part of a larger effort to portray Brazil as a land of racial harmony. However, as U.S. filmmaker Orson Welles would find out, Vargas' embrace of Afro-Brazilian popular culture and miscegenation had its limits. A Praça Onze enthusiast, Welles set out to make a Good Neighbor era film that prominently featured samba and

street Carnival. The film was never completed because, as Carvalho argues convincingly, Welles' less commercial depiction of samba and Carnival as well as his insistence on working with Afro-Brazilian musicians and actors and filming Rio's favelas clashed with local authorities, who preferred the image of Brazil in Walt Disney's *Sabudos Amigos*—a film that portrayed an idyllic city of Rio and elite (and mostly white) ballroom carnival. It is a sad irony, Carvalho points out, that the same government responsible for turning samba, Carnival and the idea of racial harmony into symbols of Brazilian identity censored a film that sought to celebrate those expressions. More importantly, that same government also oversaw the destruction of Praça Onze, the place that gave rise to those cultural expressions in the first place.

Finally, in tracing the history of Cidade Nova from a central place in the Royal city to a "marginal" but diverse community known as the cradle of samba until its destruction, Carvalho sends a warning to those in charge of preparing Rio for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. He reminds us that no matter how well-crafted and attractive on paper, Rio's large urban redevelopment projects have a troubling legacy. On the one hand, urban interventions such as highways and tunnels made the city more accessible and, as a result, *cariocas* living in distant parts of the city are now closer than ever. But, on the other hand, urban reforms pulled them apart. Urban interventions

tore through established communities like Cidade Nova, displaced residents, and spurred the growth of Rio's notorious favelas. Put another way, state-led efforts to modernize Rio have further divided the city along the lines of class and race. Sadly, there is reason to believe that history is repeating itself. The question that *Porous City* prompts us to ask is how many would-be Cidades Novas are being destroyed as Rio prepares to host these mega-events, and what impact might that have on Brazil's cultural development? The answer is not yet known; however, the solution may well be in the methodology. In the same way that scholars like Carvalho seek to incorporate several methods, approaches, and sources in an attempt to arrive at a more comprehensive and balanced perspective on complex historical processes, so too should urban planners pursue a more porous and inclusive approach to planning that takes into account a variety of voices—including the urban poor. Only then will Rio become the marvelous city it aspires to be.

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## Citizen Voices and the Law

A REVIEW BY PEDRO REINA-PÉREZ

**Derecho al Derecho: Intersticios y Grietas del Poder Judicial en Puerto Rico**, Editors Érika Fontáñez Torres and Hiram Meléndez Juarbe (*Cabo Rojo: Editora Educación Emergente, 2012, 213 pages*),

On March 23, 2011, a woman attacked by her partner, was denied a legal remedy under Puerto Rico's Domestic Violence Prevention and Intervention Law in a highly publicized case (*Pueblo v. Flores Flores*), because she was in an adulterous relationship with her aggressor. To the astonishment of many, the Puerto Rico Supreme Court issued a split decision (3-3) effectively upholding an appellate court ruling that many felt betrayed the original purpose of this law. The court claimed, in Justice Eric Kolthoff-Carballo's formulation, that the law's intention had been to protect the family unit leaving adulterous relationships outside its protection. Yet the 1989 law, approved by the legislature to eradicate domestic violence, was broad in its intention, referring to relationships in the most diverse ways and making no distinction as to people's sexual orientation, gender or marital status. The court's opinion therefore generated a vigorous public reaction.

Renowned legal scholars denounced the ruling, contending that it invalidated the legal protections originally intended in the letter of Law 54, to shield a victim from an act of violence, in this case inflicted by her partner. Other opinions followed in the media, focusing on the effects on other pending cases of a conservative-leaning court willing to extend its moral views to other pending cases, and the repercussions that one case may have in arresting social advances achieved through litigation.

These and other relevant cases and legal topics are carefully analyzed in *Derecho al Derecho*, an ambitious book comprised of a selection of articles published between 2008 and 2012, mostly in a blog by the same name (some appeared in other electronic and traditional media), compiled and edited by Érika Fontáñez-Torres and Hiram Meléndez-Juarbe, professors of law at the University of Puerto Rico. Many of the texts are followed by comments posted by readers and the authors themselves, resembling a conversation among a greater community seeking to expound on a particular topic. Its title is a clever play on words as "derecho" in Spanish, aside from "law," can also mean "straight"

or "right," depending on its use. Any combination of the two reveals the intention of the editors to promote open discussions of legal matters, particularly those dealing with the performance of the courts and the standards of the legal profession for the general public.

The book is organized into four main chapters: A Critique of Judicial Power, Legitimacy of Judicial Power, Democracy and Deliberation in the Political Process, and The Social Responsibilities of Lawyers. Each chapter presents eight to twelve articles followed by commentary. Among the authors are legal scholars Esther Vicente, Ana Matanzo-Vicéns, Julio Fontanet and Efrén Rivera-Ramos—former dean of the University of Puerto Rico Law School.

In the introduction, the editors describe their motivation in pursuing this project. "Traditionally, legal scholars have served as translators of norms and developments occurring inside the legal system for the greater community. That has averted a more active and critical citizen participation in matters pertaining to the law, its institutions and its experts. At the same time we have incurred the contradiction of reproducing certain practices, institutions



and discourses that limit and hinder critical public engagement with the legal system. But the digital information technologies available today offer new possibilities to overcome these structural hurdles. Thus, however imperfect or incomplete they may be, these technologies can help breach the barriers to take legal discussions to the public forum. This seems particularly important at a time when public trust in the justice system has reached a new low, and politics and government are in a crisis.”

The book offers a detailed portrait of a troubling period in Puerto Rico, marked by the 2008 election of Governor Luis Fortuño of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP in Spanish). A rising Latino star in Republican circles (his name was even floated as candidate for Vice President on the 2012 national ticket), Fortuño reacted to a declining economy with massive layoffs of government employees, among other drastic measures to reduce the payroll. Fortuño and the PNP controlled both houses of the legislature, allowing them to enact an aggres-

sive conservative agenda. His predecessor, Governor Aníbal Acevedo-Vilá (2004-2008), from the rival Popular Democratic Party (PDP), had been unable to fully enact his party’s platform as the legislature was fully controlled by the PNP during the same period. The legislative deadlock that ensued led to a government shutdown in 2006 and prevented the governor from filling vacancies in many government agencies: among other difficulties, his nominees would fail to win confirmation by the Senate. This was particularly troubling in the case of the Supreme Court, which had four vacant seats.

Once in office, Governor Fortuño appointed four new justices to the top court: Mildred Pabón-Charneco, Rafael L. Martínez-Torres, Erick Kolthoff-Caraballo and Edgardo Rivera-García, effectively giving control of the Court to justices appointed by his party for the first time in history (the remaining three justices had been appointed by the PDP). The confirmation process was denounced as a travesty for not allowing enough time

to examine the candidates’ professional records, thus preventing proper evaluation of the nominees. It was clear that the new governing party was keen on taking control of the island’s highest court. Yet more controversies awaited.

Shortly thereafter, the new majority in the Court, invoking the constitution, requested an increase in the number of judges from seven to nine. Governor Fortuño enacted legislation to comply with the request, deemed necessary from his perspective to lighten the workload of the Court, which had almost 800 cases pending resolution. The proposed law again was quickly approved by the Legislature. The expansion was criticized as unnecessary, while others contended that it was a partisan attempt to stack the court with PNP appointees. Media coverage and public discussion of these events were vigorous. Claims of a partisan takeover of the judiciary abounded and the aforementioned blog was a notable place to follow the discussion on the consequences of these and other matters.

These events concerning the Supreme Court are discussed at length in the book as the editors pose a series of questions dealing mainly with transparency, accountability, access and public trust in the democratic process. It is evident that they intend to raise issues that concern not only lawyers but also the general public as stakeholders of their judicial institutions. The editors want to expand the conversation to include citizens as well as law students

in order to empower people to speak up against perceived prejudice and unfairness. The conversation is not limited to the actions of the courts but includes the executive and legislative branches as well. References to cases dealing with environmental protection, community organizing and minority rights are presented and commented on. In this regard the editors play their part as legal educators well, challenging the reader to carefully examine the implications of each event, and to offer their own views on the consequences of arbitrary decisions beyond the legal realm. They constantly refer to the social responsibilities of lawyers, a topic that is present from cover to cover. It is clear that they intend to reclaim the legal process not only as a tool for the privileged but also for the disenfranchised, as they pursue the leverage of social and economic change for the greater good.

Finally, the book is an important historical document containing a cross section of intellectual reflections on one of the most troubled periods in contemporary Puerto Rican history. The editors have fulfilled their objective valiantly with academic rigor, and most importantly with utmost respect for the general public.

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# Making Chávez Possible

A REVIEW BY MICHAEL SHIFTER

**Venezuela Before Chavez: Anatomy of an Economic Collapse**, edited by Ricardo Hausmann and Francisco Rodríguez (*University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013, 445 pp.*)

In early 1999, in an event organized by the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington D.C., Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez addressed the U.S. policy community for the first and last time of his 14-year rule. A notably agile Chávez displayed the charm that would help account for his popularity and longevity in office. At a private session before the event, Chávez engaged in banter with some he would surely regard as representatives of the so-called “Washington Consensus” associated with orthodox economic recipes that had been the target of attacks that resonated with most Venezuelans in his successful campaign for the presidency.

Few foresaw what was to come: Chávez’s increasing radicalization and belligerence and his grandiose ambitions on the regional and global stages. At the height of his influence, around 2006, no scenario contemplated that Chávez would die while in office, of cancer, on March 5, 2013.

Among those present at the Washington D.C. event was Ricardo Hausmann,

then chief economist at the Inter-American Development Bank and now a professor at Harvard University. Hausmann, who served as Venezuela’s Minister of Planning in the early 1990s, joined with Francisco Rodríguez, another Venezuelan economist currently at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, to assemble a respected group of economists and political scientists to explain in this lengthy book the country’s unrelenting crisis in the 1990s and how, as they put it, “Chávez became possible.” Readers looking for an assessment of the Chávez period, or—of far keener interest today—the likely denouement of Venezuela’s descent into economic and political chaos, will have to look elsewhere. The authors are chiefly concerned with the underlying factors that propelled Chávez to the presidency and that ultimately enabled him to consolidate control over one of the world’s largest oil reserves.

The volume reflects a worthy and systematic exercise, carried out with impressive methodological and analytical rigor. Each chapter discusses a particular dimension of Venezuela’s growth collapse. The editors are commendably parsimonious, attach appropriate weight to different pieces of the puzzle, and carefully distinguish the causes

of Venezuela’s implosion from its consequences. One chapter, for example, focuses on the severe lack of human capital—a serious problem, no doubt—during the pre-Chávez period, but found no evidence that it contributed to the decline of output. Another essay highlights Venezuela’s highly skewed income distribution but concludes that it was not among the most relevant causes of the system’s meltdown. Yet another, an examination of the impact of immigration on native-born employment in Venezuela, sheds new light on the phenomenon and is interesting in many respects but less germane to the volume’s core focus.

In their introductory chapter, Hausmann and Rodríguez offer a sophisticated version of the most commonly held explanation for Venezuela’s collapse in the 1980s and 1990s. Their interpretation emphasizes variants on the “resource curse” formulation and the deleterious and distorting effects of ample rents on the economy. In the context of a shifting international oil market, the authors focus on declining oil production and falling non-oil productivity. They are particularly struck by the incapacity of the economy to move resources into alternative export



industries. The chapter is a contribution to the “Dutch disease” or resource curse literature that goes beyond problems in growth performance, fruitfully delving into the question of why it is so difficult to recover from such sharp drops in oil revenue.

Hausmann and Rodríguez further suggest that “institutional quality” cannot adequately explain Venezuela’s growth performance because the “same institutions” were “compatible with the highest growth in the region for the half century starting in 1920.” Yet in their chapter, Francisco Monaldi and Michael Penfold of the Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración (IESA) in Caracas, Venezuela, adopt a political economy perspective in their chapter and argue persuasively that institutional variables are in fact a crucial part of the story

of Venezuela's collapse in the 1980s and 1990s.

To be sure, Monaldi and Penfold recognize that the country's initial decline resulted from a dramatic reduction in per capita oil income, the volatility of oil prices, and soaring debt. But, especially since 1989—the decade before Chávez came to power—the “weakening of democratic governance, poor and declining institutional quality, and increase in political stability” were fundamental in accounting for the country's inability to adapt and respond effectively to deepening economic challenges.

Venezuela's Punto Fijo two-party political system, established in 1958, had for several decades been held up as a model of democratic effectiveness and stability in Latin America. The pact between the two parties, the Democratic Action, with more social democratic leanings, and the Christian Democratic COPEI, func-

tion of federalism and modification of the country's electoral system, led to increased party fragmentation, volatility and turnover. The discipline that had been the hallmark of the political system—and the envy of many in Latin America—utterly broke down.

In another instructive chapter, Javier Corrales of Amherst College provides a nuanced view of the theory that Venezuela's political parties became ossified in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, part of the story of “what made Chávez possible” was not just profound discontent with the prevailing political order and the demand for alternatives, but also the emergence of “small opposition forces” in such institutions as the military and universities that were amenable to radical discourse. Corrales offers a more complete picture of the political parties that, as other political scientists have pointed out, suffered both “representational”

essays that highlight political and institutional variables. Indeed, Venezuela's rigidities that have proved so costly are evident in both spheres. In the face of plummeting oil revenues, a succession of governments in the 1980s and 1990s was incapable of fashioning sensible policies to promote alternative export industries. And the political party structures—actually quite dynamic in the 1960s—proved disappointingly inflexible when forced to deal with declining resources.

Those were the conditions that explain the emergence of Hugo Chávez, whose seductive rhetoric and charismatic personality helped catapult him to the residency. When Chávez assumed office, oil was less than \$8 dollars a barrel—the lowest in three decades. What followed was an unprecedented bonanza that gave some plausibility to Chávez's ambitious schemes. From 1998 to 2001, Venezuela's terms of trade grew almost seven times more rapidly than the regional average. Chávez collected a huge rental income that would have been the envy of previous Venezuelan governments.

Chávez's resources and personal magnetism gave Venezuela a rare opportunity to undertake a profound structural transformation that was desperately needed. The country had endured not one but two “lost decades” and it had a chance to reverse the deterioration. And Chávez put his finger on a legitimate grievance—lack of social justice—that many Venezuelans understandably felt.

Yet, what is striking about the Chávez period, as Hausmann and Rodríguez stress, is that many of the same problems that afflicted Venezuela in the 1980s and 1990s, under conditions of economic crisis, were just as present—and as corrosive—during the years of economic boom. The underlying problem was the governance model that Chávez put in place that relied on one-man rule and a monopoly on all decision-making.

*Venezuela before Chávez* is not just a product of scrupulous academic research. It is also, as the authors understand—and as present circumstances in the country attest—a helpful and coherent guide for those who devise policies and make decisions in a country so reliant on oil. It is not clear how much longer a situation characterized by spreading shortages, rampant inflation, political disorder and unchecked crime can be sustained. What few doubt, however, is that even under the most sanguine scenario, such deep problems will persist for many years to come.

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## Venezuela had a rare opportunity for profound structural transformation.

tioned reasonably well in the context of significant oil revenues. But with the beginning of the economic crisis in the late 1970s and increasingly scarce resources later on, cracks in the system became more pronounced, resulting in what the authors call the “deconsolidation of the Venezuelan political system.” High levels of corruption, coupled with the activation

and “technical-expertise” deficits in the pre-Chávez period. In other words, politicians were disconnected from the citizens they were supposed to represent, and there were few good “policy wonks.”

Although the volume understandably concentrates on economic factors and includes some important, original research, it is considerably enriched by the

# Invisible Violence

## Is There a “Post-Conflict” in Guatemala?

A REVIEW BY AVIVA CHOMSKY

### Enduring Violence: Ladina Women’s Lives in Guatemala.

By Cecilia Menjivar, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.)

When I was a graduate student in Latin American history at Berkeley in the 1980s, the words “violence” and “Guatemala” seemed inextricably linked. We devoured newsletters from the Guatemala News and Information Bureau, participated in house meetings where refugees described the terror in the highlands, watched innumerable videos and protested U.S. support for counterinsurgency there as well as in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Then the books started to come out, starting perhaps with Rigoberta Menchú’s testimony in 1984. Their titles reflected the horror: *Refugees of a Hidden War* (1987), *Harvest of Violence* (1988), *Guatemala: Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny* (1988), *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and US Power* (1991), *Massacres in the Jungle* (1993). You might think that authors would run out of titles that did justice to the carnage, but no, they kept coming: *Trade Unionists against Terror* (1994), *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (1995), *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village* (1995), *The*

*Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (1999), *Guatemala: Never Again!* (1999), *The Blood of Guatemala* (1999), *The Last Colonial Massacre* (2004), *Buried Secrets* (2004), *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala*, *Paradise in Ashes* (2005), *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* (2007).

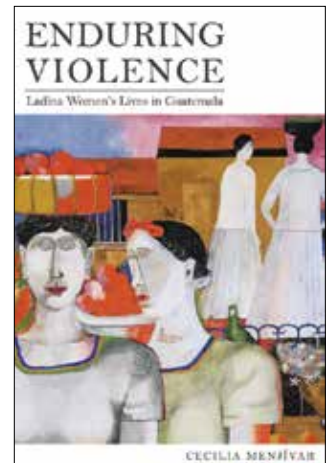
Most of these works logically focused on what Guatemala’s international Truth Commission deemed a “genocide” against the country’s indigenous Mayan population. The signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 was supposed to signal an end to the violence and terror, as optimistically predicted in the title of the Archdiocese report released in 1998 (*Never Again!*). The gruesome murder of the report’s chief author, Bishop Juan Gerardi, on the day after its release, made it clear that the optimism was premature.

Cecilia Menjivar’s book asks us to think about the violence in a different way. Instead of focusing on the Mayan highlands, she chose a research site in lowland eastern Guatemala, among *ladina* (non-indigenous) women. Instead of looking at the overt violence of the war, with its massacres, torture, disappearance and murder,

she examines the violence of everyday life in the post-war 21st century. It’s a violence that goes unrecorded and unacknowledged, a violence so embedded in social norms that it goes mostly unrecognized even by its victims: they view their suffering as too normal to merit comment. The book shows how years after the war’s end, echoes of its large-scale violence continue to blight the lives of Guatemala’s most vulnerable, especially the poor, and especially women.

The violence she focuses on is multisided, emanating from “multiple systems of oppression and exclusion” (3). While initiated by individuals, the underlying causes are “extrapersonal forces” (4). She describes it as “veiled violence in forms of social control of women that result in devaluation, humiliation, a lowered gaze, the kind of violence that does not shock the observer because it is part of the everyday but that is deeply connected to the more noticeable acts that inflict physical injury because both kinds of violence arise from the same structures” (4).

This violence is embedded in a national and global order that imposes poverty, lack of resources, and lack of access to decent work, education, and social services—what she terms “structural violence”



(29). Compounding this is the state terror that characterized Guatemala in the 1980s and has been succeeded by impunity and a depoliticized criminal violence that mimics it (37). Underlying these is “symbolic violence,” the mental constructs that justify and naturalize violence, suffering, and inequality, explaining them as the “natural order of things.” “Gender violence”—the belief system that justifies male dominance and control of women—contributes to “gendered violence”—acts of violence carried out specifically against women (46).

Through meticulous interviews Menjivar examines various areas of women’s lives, including marriage and intimate relationships, children, work and religion, and shows in excruciating detail how poverty and lack of resources compound social norms that denigrate and

discount women to create a context in which pain and suffering are normalized. In their intimate relationships, women confront control, humiliation, alcohol, physical violence and infidelity. When raising children, they face a lack of access to basic needs, infant and child death, constant scrutiny and criticism for their care of their children, and unending blame for failing to meet the standards of their partners, in-laws or health providers. Decent work is practically non-existent, and women's work in and outside the home is denigrated. The church—like the other sources of support and solace that the author investigates—generally encourages acceptance of the social order rather than questioning it. This natural-

fighting the Taliban does not detract from her courage. But Menjívar's book reminds us that legal prohibitions enforced by overt violence are not the only way that girls are deprived of education. Out of the international limelight, and unremarked even locally, large numbers of girls and women in rural Guatemala do not attend school at all or attend only a few years of primary school. "Not attending school or abandoning school, for girls especially, was an act so embedded in the 'order of things' that most did not blink an eye when the subject was brought up for discussion" (176). As one of her informants explained, "As *uno de pobre* [a poor person], one doesn't think of these things, like school. One knows as a poor person that

*¿Qué dirían las ventanas, tu madre y su hermana, y todos los siglos del colonialismo español que no en balde te han hecho cobarde?*

[A good girl from a decent home can't go out

What would people say at mass on Sunday if they find out about you?

What would the friends say, the old neighbors who come here?

What would the windows say, your mother and her sister, and all those centuries of Spanish colonialism that not in vain have made you a coward?]

In the song, as in Menjívar's book, the weight of gossip and shame hangs over women and controls their behavior. The song's title, and the reference to the impact of centuries of Spanish colonialism (in Cuba until 1898), suggest the same point that Menjívar emphasizes, that there is a political economy at work here (11, 62, 180). "Taking gossip out of context... may present this practice as the product of culture or tradition, unrelated to violence in the way I am arguing it is linked," she writes. "Gossip becomes a form of violence because it is a weapon of social control and a source of humiliation, pain, and affliction in women's lives" (77).

Disturbingly, the author ends each chapter, and the book as a whole, with a section on the sources of support, connection, and sociability that women rely on to endure the violence of their lives. These include their relatives, other women, co-workers and the church. In each case, Menjívar draws

a complex picture in which the very support that women seek, provide and receive simultaneously serves to naturalize and sustain the ideologies that underlie the violence. Women console each other by saying "men are like that" or "that's the way it is around here."

"Although women found solace and comfort in the people who were close to them, at the same time the actions of these individuals often reinforced the structures of inequality and violence in which the women lived. While a mother's words might have helped to soothe her daughter's pain, they also encouraged the daughter to continue to endure a husband's abuse" (124). Similarly, the church provided a space "where suffering is normalized." "In the absence of actions that would lead to genuine transformation in the women's lives and make women realize that avenues for change were possible, the comfort and solace provided by the churches served mostly to sustain various unequal structures, to internalize and to naturalize them" (214).

Despite Menjívar's qualifications about redeeming moments in the lives of the women she interviewed, I finished the book feeling an unbearable weight of sadness. Violence and suffering in Guatemala have deep roots and branches, and will not be uprooted any time soon.

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## The violence Cecilia Menjivar focuses on in this book is multisided, emanating from "multiple systems of oppression and exclusion."

ization of violence, embedded in social structures even if embodied in individuals, forms the core of Menjívar's analysis.

As I was reading *Enduring Violence*, Malala Yousafzai, a 16-year-old Pakistani girl, surged into the headlines for her courageous advocacy of girls' education after an almost-successful assassination attempt by the Taliban. The fact that her story is politically convenient for the U.S. government and others

these things are for others, but not for us" (178-79).

Menjívar's arguments brought to mind Cuban singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez's 1969 song "The Family, Private Property, and Love."

*Una buena muchacha de casa decente no puede salir  
¿Qué diría la gente el domingo en la misa si saben de ti?*

*¿Qué dirían los amigos, los viejos vecinos que vienen aquí?*

## A Tale of Two Cities

BY MERILEE S. GRINDLE

**HARVARD'S TIES TO LATIN AMERICA** go much farther back in time than 1994, the year that Neil Rudenstine and David Rockefeller launched the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and John H. Coatsworth became its founding director. Indeed, for two centuries, Harvard has enjoyed multiple ties with the region in the sciences, the arts and humanities and the social sciences. This historical relationship with people, institutions, and countries in Latin America has been extraordinarily important in the development of this university and for the lives of its faculty and students.

Initial encounters between Harvard and Latin America were established through Europe and the humanities. Beginning in 1816, students were able to choose to learn Spanish as part of the curriculum. Their teacher, Francis Sales (originally François Sala), a French emigré and modern language pioneer who taught until 1853, was revered by them; during his long life, he developed a curriculum for teaching Spanish and translated some of the jewels of Spanish literature for his students. After 1819, Harvard students also had the opportunity to study with Boston Brahmin George Ticknor, who became the

first Smith Professor of the French and Spanish Languages and Literatures, and whose lifework was a magisterial three-volume *History of Spanish Literature*. Then, in 1836 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow assumed the Smith professorship, passing along his deep knowledge of Spain and its culture and language to his students. Continuing with this history of eminent incumbents, poet James Russell Lowell occupied the Smith chair from 1855 to 1891.

Harvard students, and the small cadre of professors who made up the teaching faculty in the mid-19th century, would also have been very familiar with William Prescott's detailed *History of the Conquest of Mexico* and his equally monumental *History of the Conquest of Peru*, published in 1843 and 1847. Running to several volumes apiece, each of these histories followed the path of the Spanish *conquistadores* with vivid accounts of how they overcame the much larger forces of advanced civilizations. Prescott was a meticulous descriptor of peoples and places he had never visited. Indeed, it is still difficult to read these volumes without a sense that Boston's first Latin Americanist had somehow been transported in time and place to the region

in the 16th century.

The Harvard community of the mid-19th century would also have known the Peabody sisters. Mary Peabody Mann, married to the educator Horace Mann, and Sophia Peabody, who later married Nathaniel Hawthorne, were among the Boston Brahmins whose writings on Cuba and its practice of slavery were important in shaping the views of the New England abolitionists. When Argentine writer and statesman Domingo Sarmiento visited Boston in 1847, and later in 1865, he met Ticknor, Longfellow and other Harvard luminaries. During those visits, he also met Mary Mann, who became his champion in the United States and translated his famous book, *Facundo: O civilización y barbarie*, into English.

Relations between Latin America and Harvard continued to develop through such personal encounters. When Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro II visited in 1876, he was wined and dined in Cambridge by Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Elizabeth Agassiz and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Indeed, in the close-knit social and intellectual life of Cambridge and Boston in the mid and late 19th century, there were many opportunities across

dinner tables, literary salons, public lectures, and exhibits for discussing what intellectuals and scholars knew of Spain and Latin America at the time.

Jeffries Wyman was the first Harvard professor to journey to Latin America to undertake research. In 1858-1859, Wyman, a natural historian, traveled to Argentina, up the Rio de la Plata and then the Paraná River before heading to Chile and Peru, collecting archeological artifacts for the university's Lawrence Scientific School. Then, in 1865 and 1866, the most famous U.S. scientist of the time, Harvard Professor Louis Agassiz, set out to study fish and geological formations in the Brazilian Amazon. Larger than life, Agassiz was charming, outgoing, eloquent, charismatic, egocentric and stubborn, as well as a compulsive collector. Although on the losing end of an argument about evolution, and with increasingly unpopular views on the evils of miscegenation among the races, Agassiz was a colorful leader of science in the United States, known especially for his emphasis on the importance of the direct observation of nature.

Agassiz's obsession with collecting would fill Harvard's new Museum of Comparative Zool-



ogy (known popularly as “Agassiz’s Museum”) with hundreds of barrels, boxes, jars, and presses containing an enormous variety of animals, plants, and geological specimens. A daunting eighty thousand specimens in alcohol-packed containers were delivered to the Museum from the 16-month trip to Brazil. In addition to the material bonanza, his expedition would capture contemporary imaginations as an exciting tropical adventure to the “other America.”

## Harvard’s historical relationship with people and institutions in Latin America has been extraordinarily important in the development of this university.

Similarly, several years after the Amazon work, Agassiz’s leadership of the Hassler Expedition around South America, in the wake of Darwin’s *Beagle*, would generate extensive descriptions of lands and peoples still considered exotic by many in the United States.

As a 19th-century foray of U.S. scientists to Latin America, Agassiz’s Thayer Expedition is important for many reasons, not least in terms of the Darwinian

debate it engaged or the specimens that it delivered to the museum in Cambridge. The journey is also remembered as an episode in the life of young William James, who would go on to shape the discipline of psychology and to play a leading role in the life of Harvard, where he spent his long professional career. In 1865, he was a 23-year-old medical student still searching for a focus for life. He, along with four other students, joined the expedition as volunteers, ambitious

to expand their educations and, no doubt, to have a great adventure. His letters back home to his family are full of self-deprecating humor, descriptions and sketches of the exotic tropical landscape, and observations of those he met along the way. After a bout with smallpox in Rio de Janeiro, he vowed to leave the expedition; luckily, however, he changed his mind and continued on to explore “a most extraordinary and lovely country,” in canoes

and on steamers through the byways of the Amazon. After eight months of collecting innumerable fish and even more insect bites, James returned to Harvard and finished his studies in medicine. In 1873, he returned to teach at Harvard after a sojourn in Europe, eager to develop the emergent field of psychology as a science.

The Thayer Expedition also included Elizabeth Cabot Cary Agassiz. After the voyage, Elizabeth used her notes and letters as the lead author of the popular story of the expedition, *A Journey in Brazil*, in which she described the lush landscape and the species of flora that abounded in the tropics. Ever present when meeting local dignitaries and the people of the villages they visited, she described societies and customs not familiar to readers back home. In later years, she accompanied Agassiz on the Hassler Expedition and likewise wrote of the adventure in ways that reached the popular imagination. Nevertheless, like James’s, her Latin American life is often overshadowed by her later accomplishments, when she went on to play a leading role in encouraging the higher education of women in Cambridge, to become the first president of Radcliffe College and to

shape its evolution through its first several decades.

The Thayer Expedition lives on as a chapter in the life of a famous, if flawed, scientist, his young student and his expressive wife. But the journey was also emblematic of a heightened interest among U.S. academics in assigning scholarly importance to the world beyond the United States and Europe. From the 1860s to the 1930s, U.S. universities burgeoned into repositories of studies, specimens, artifacts and investigations of global knowledge. They became more worldly. In this regard, the Brazilian expedition was a significant event in the life of Harvard, for it represented part of a lengthy transformation of a small, parochial school for the sons of the New England elite into an important research university with claims to broader and deeper scholarship. As would become clear in the decades following the Amazon trip, Harvard researchers, like those from other universities, sought to acquire knowledge in new and more direct ways. Their travels tested them and their contemporaries to observe more closely and to become more tolerant of “the other.”

Thus, the Thayer Expedition was followed in 1889 by an initiative of the Harvard

College Observatory to establish an outpost in Peru for mapping the southern skies. Solon I. Bailey, his wife, his 4-year-old son, and his brother lived like pioneers in a tar-paper house on a mountain outside of Lima for a year before establishing a more permanent home near Arequipa, where they lived for several years. Bailey traveled extensively into the interior of Peru, Bolivia and Chile, witnessed a revolution from behind doors barred against marauders, and became a well-liked part of Arequipa's scientific community. Harvard's Boyden Observatory, which remained in operation until 1927, was responsible for sending more than 200,000 photographic images of the stars to Cambridge.

There were others among these generations of roving scientists from Harvard. Roland Thaxter, a professor of plant pathology, entomology and mycology, and the son of New England poet Celia Thaxter, spent nine months in Chile and Argentina in 1905-1906 in search of small parasitic fungi that attach to insects, and his research added significantly

to the collections of the Harvard Herbarium. Thomas Barbour was a larger-than-life professor of herpetology who, beginning in 1908, made more than 30 trips to Cuba, Panama and Costa Rica in search of reptiles and amphibians. His journeys in the Caribbean and Central America were occasions for a "moveable feast" of local relationships and institution-building in the name of science. He was also, for many years, the custodian of the Harvard Botanical Gardens in Cuba.

Social scientists were early travelers also. A growing cadre of anthropologists and archeologists from Harvard were fascinated by the cultures and ancient civilizations of meso-American and the Andean region. In 1901, Alfred Tozzer, a pioneer in the development of the discipline of anthropology and archeology, set out for Mexico to explore Maya civilization, returning often to Harvard with artifacts for the Peabody Museum in his suitcases, a practice that is certainly not accepted by today's archeologists. Selden O. Martin of the Harvard Business School used his summer

vacation in 1908 to travel to Brazil to understand how firms interacted with markets in different contexts and of the potential for commercial expansion in Latin America. Paul Cherington, also from the Business School, spent the summer of 1910 studying marketing and public opinion in Panama, Costa Rica and Guatemala. Then, in 1923, Clarence H. Har- ing became Harvard's first professor of Latin American history. With this acknowledgment of the importance of the region, the university has never since moved away from this commitment to the region. Indeed, the number of faculty focused on learning from Latin America was poised to grow to more than a 100 by the beginning of the 21st century.

By the mid-20th century, it had become expected that scholars seeking to understand the richness and diversity of Latin America through the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences would travel frequently to the region. More recently, Harvard has generated similar expectations for its students. The year after DRCLAS was established, we know of 31 students who traveled to Latin America to undertake research and other activities. By the 2010s, more than 400 were traveling to the region each year. Without fail, they return to Harvard energized to learn more about Latin America, to work harder on their Spanish and Portuguese language skills, and to return to the region in the future. Most admit that their sojourns abroad have

significantly altered their perspectives on the world and many indicate that their experiences have changed their career plans. They are not alone in bringing Latin America to Harvard, as each year more than 400 students come from the region to study and to enrich the university's culture.

Harvard's professors and students have built a great legacy of scholarly travel to and from Latin America. What is evident in even a passing knowledge of their interactions with the region is how long-lived, rich, and varied are the ways in which travel, research, collaborations, and Latin American students have made a difference to the university—in its knowledge base, its museums and collections, and its culture. While we hope that Harvard's past interactions and current vibrant relationships with Latin America are also making important contributions to colleagues, universities, institutions, governments and research there, it is clear that we owe a deep scholarly debt to the pioneers who brought the region to the university. They have definitely made a difference to Harvard.

*Merilee Grindle is the director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS) and Edward S. Mason Professor of International Development at the Harvard Kennedy School. Her most recent book is Jobs for the Boys: Patronage and the State in Comparative Perspective (Harvard University Press, 2012).*



DAVID ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS) at Harvard University is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a new logo and best wishes for the faculty, students, Visiting Scholars, alumni and community members that have continually energized us!

# VISITING SCHOLARS AND FELLOWS PROGRAM



## **THE CENTER**

Founded in 1994, the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University works to increase knowledge of the cultures, economies, histories, environment, and contemporary affairs of past and present Latin America.

## **THE PROGRAM**

Each year the Center selects a number of distinguished academics (Visiting Scholars) and professionals (Fellows) who wish to spend one or two semesters at Harvard working on their own research and writing projects.

The Center offers nine fellowships that provide support for one semester. Applications from those with their own resources are also welcome.

Visiting Scholars and Fellows are provided shared office space, computers, library privileges, access to University facilities and events, and opportunities to audit classes and attend seminars. The residential fellowships cover round-trip travel expenses, health insurance, and a taxable \$25,000 living stipend while at Harvard. Appointments are typically for one or two semesters. Recipients are expected to be in residence at the University a minimum of twelve weeks during the semester.

**APPLICATIONS DUE FEBRUARY 1<sup>ST</sup>**

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