

# House personhood in rural Andean Bolivia

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**ABSTRACT:** In the rural Bolivian Andes, personhood is defined by intersubjective reciprocal relationships between human and nonhuman beings. This paper examines the role of the house as a living being in itself and a conduit between its inhabitants and local place deities. In the rural Andes, houses (traditionally made from adobe but increasingly from brick) materially connect their inhabitants with a sacred landscape, and rituals performed at their construction create the house as a living being in its own right. This article, based on fieldwork with the Kallawayas, an indigenous nation in Northwest Bolivia, examines the Kallawayaya relationship to the house in the context of Andean ethnography on housebuilding, observing the role of the house in communal ritual life. The house, for the Kallawayas, is argued to be an assemblage of energy with its inhabitants and the landscape, a fractal representative of the homologous structure of the rural Andean community, the *ayllu*.

**KEYWORDS:** KALLAWAYA; ANDES; HOUSES; AYLLU; RITUAL.

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### *Introduction*

The house in the rural Bolivian Andes is a foundational unit of community, and a significant mediator in relations between humans and nonhumans that are a defining feature (alongside kinship) of a rural Andean community as an ayllu. This article examines how the house, known in Quechua-speaking communities as *wasi*, is constituted as a person in its own right and the rituals around the house that connect its inhabitants through the house to sacred places. A *wasi* is “both a physical space and a group of structures as well as the people who occupy them” (Rockefeller 2010: 68), and as such provides ample opportunity to examine ethnographically both the social organisation around the environs of the house (see Carsten 1995; Janowski 1995, influenced by Levi-Strauss’s 1983 and 1987 concept of House Societies) and how these social relations are constituted through ritual and the material nature of the house itself (see Buchli 2013).

The article draws mainly on ethnographic research conducted in early 2019 in the province of Bautista Saavedra in the North of the department of La Paz in Northwest Bolivia, in ayllus self-identifying as Kallawaya. Fieldwork was financed by a grant from the Society for Latin American Studies for research that proposed to study the relationship between people in Kallawaya ayllus and their houses. My interest in the topic had been piqued after returning to the municipality of Charazani (one of two municipalities in the province) (see figure 1) for six weeks shortly after completing my PhD (2016), and three and a half years after initial fieldwork there in 2012-2013 to find that many of the families I knew had new houses, donated or subsidised by the State Housing Agency (see Alderman 2021). The nature of the material from which they were built – brick, cement and ceramic tiles, all construction materials brought from outside the local region – were in contrast to the adobe houses I had witnessed being constructed, and indeed helped to construct myself, during my initial fieldwork (see Alderman 2016, 2021, forthcoming). The objective of my fieldwork in 2019 was to investigate Kallawaya understandings of, and relations with, the house, to understand how relationships with houses might change because of differences in their materiality. Here, though, I focus on the ritual relationships through which a house’s personhood is constituted, as understood by the Kallawayas.

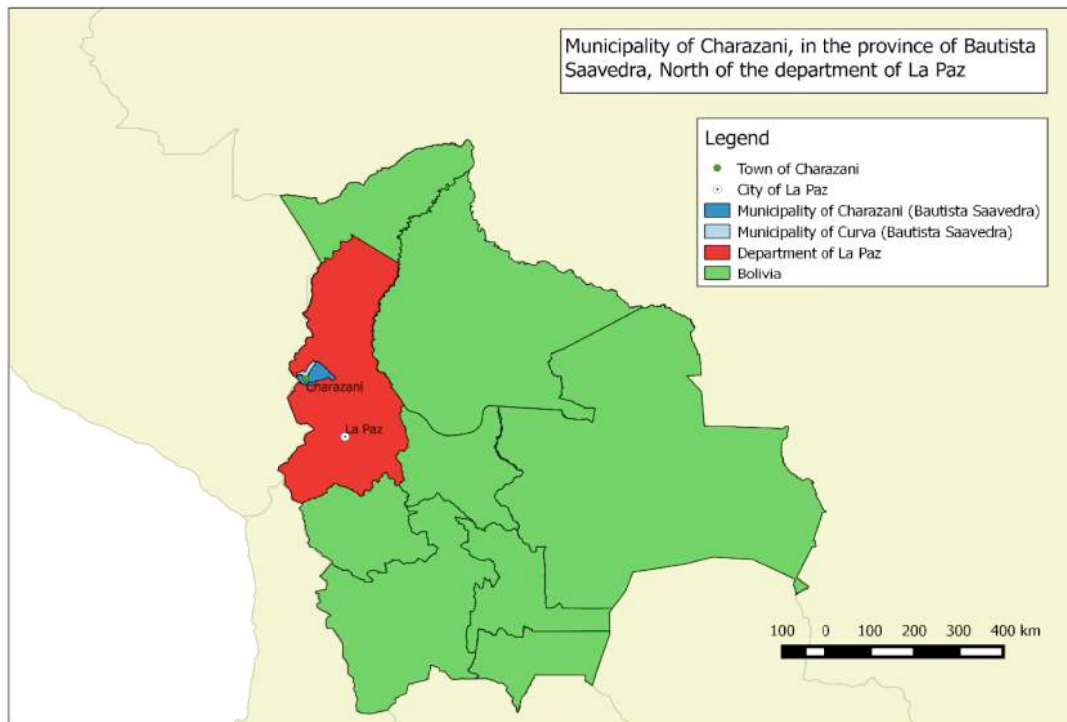


FIG 1: Location of research.

The Kallawayas are one of thirty-six indigenous nations implicitly recognised in Bolivia's 2009 constitution through their language Macha-Jujay, an official language of the state (Constitución Política del Estado, 2009 [NCPE]: article 5.1), though the most commonly-spoken languages in the province are Spanish, Quechua and Aymara. The Kallawayas are most well-known in Bolivia through their reputation as traditional healers and shamanic ritualists. While these two professions have been regarded by some researchers as entirely separate (Bastien 1985), and some, such as Schoop (1988 [1984]) have defined only those travelling to heal as Kallawayas, others, such as Rösing (1996: 65-67), find there is not necessarily a separation of roles. Indeed, Kallawayas regard offerings to place-deities as vital to individual and collective health. The most powerful places are mountaintops, referred to as *achachilas* and *machulas* in Aymara and Quechua respectively (though both terms are used interchangeably by the Quechua-speakers), terms literally meaning grandparent. Sacred places are also often referred to by Kallawayas as *lugarniyuq*, the Quechua suffix *-yuq*, added to the Spanish word for place, ambiguously indicating both belonging to and ownership over places, as well as in Spanish as sacred places. Mannheim and Salas Carreño (2015: 63-64) and Salas Carreño (2016: 832)

have argued that it is wrong to think of there being sacred places in the Andes, since there is no division between the sacred and the profane; rather, there are named places that “have a fractal quality, as it is possible to find more and more names within a given place” that are “vastly more powerful than humans,” and which “receive privileged attention” (Salas Carreño 2016: 832). Whilst from my observations I agree that naming is critical in conferring personhood on a place, and that for the Kallawayas it is what makes a place *lugarniyuq*, I take the lead from Kallawayas themselves (including one quoted here) in referring to them at times as sacred places. Naming confers a sacred quality to a place, making it subject to ritual offerings, called *pagos*, or commonly in the Kallawayaya context, *mesas* or *k'intus* (burnt offerings) or *kuchos* (buried offerings). Marisol de la Cadena (2014; 2015) has argued that through mutual exchanges between humans (*runa* or *runakuna*, pl. in Quechua) and what she calls Earth Beings, the identity of both, and the ayllu itself mutually emerge together. According to Ina Rösing (2003: 604-675; 1996: 439), Kallawayas believe that if humans fail to maintain their obligations towards sacred places, then sacrificial debt builds up, and, rather than providing beneficial weather for the Kallawayas' crops, *lugarniyuq* may instead cause catastrophic events.

Not just mountains, the most commonly cited named place in Andeanist ethnographies, but also houses can be *lugarniyuq* that are both mediators for offerings to more powerful mountain *lugarniyuq* (achachilas) and also recipients of offerings as named places themselves. At its construction, a *wasi* is enlivened by rituals that connect it to shrines on mountaintops and imbue the house with its own personhood through the spirit of Condor Tapa Mamani (the nest of the condor), the condor being itself a messenger of the gods. As will be examined ethnographically, exchanges between humans and nonhumans inhabiting sacred places take place through shrines known as *cabildos* (often pronounced *kawiltu* by Quechua speakers), located in the patios of houses. It is the *cabildo* where the Condor Tapa Mamani is generally understood to be specifically located. Each *cabildo* is a named place in its own right, and the name of the shrine is commonly used in speech as a synecdoche for the whole patio even including the house as well. The patio is at the centre of communal life, both as the stage for ritual offerings, but also of family and neighbourhood gatherings. In traditional Kallawayaya houses (rather than those recently built by the Bolivian State Housing Agency, which are self-contained; Alderman 2021), each room opens up onto the patio, rather than leading into one another, so is the common space of the family where visitors are greeted and social life takes place (Muñoz Morán 2020a: 105).

A central characteristic of the *wasi* is its recursiveness: “it can refer to a room, a building, a complex, and also the land that contains these” (Rockefeller 2010: 68). An examination of the *wasi*, therefore, provides an insight into the fractal nature of the ayllu, characterised by its homologous structure, as has been widely recognised in Andeanist ethnography (see particularly Allen 1997; 2016), compared to Chinese boxes (Platt 1986: 255) or Russian dolls (Harvey and Knox 2010: 131). As Catherine Allen (1997: 81) has described, “[e]very microcosm is a macrocosm and vice versa”. This is because Andean people like the Kallawayas regard the world in monastic terms as composed of one substance, and thus acting on one part can have effects for other parts through flows of energy that materially pass through the cabildo.

The article will examine the recursive structure within which the house and shrine connect their inhabitants to an animated landscape, firstly, by examining the rituals through which a *wasi* is understood to attain personhood, then the cabildo itself and the offerings that are made through it, and finally how an understanding of Kallawayas houses as assemblages with their inhabitants and the landscape is experienced practically, by examining some of the exchanges that take place in the ritual of Irwi in the Kallawayas ayllu of Amarete, when named places are fed as reciprocation for providing the first products of the harvest. In this last section I focus most closely on the role of the male authorities of Amarete (known as *jilakatas*) in the Irwi ritual because I personally participated in Irwi most closely with them, and they at times performed rituals separately from their wives (*mama tallas*). Though I have male and female interlocutors in Kallawayas ayllus, the majority are male and middle-aged. This is partly as a result of my initial research having been conducted within the male-dominated Kallawayas autonomy assembly, when I studied the Kallawayas project to convert the municipality of Charazani into constitutionally recognised indigenous originary peasant autonomy (*autonomía indígena originario campesina*) in 2012 (see Alderman 2016; 2018). I was invited to participate in the Irwi ritual by two men who had participated in the autonomy assembly, and who now both happened to be *jilakatas* during the same year. My other interlocutor, cited in this essay, is a Kallawayas healer from a different ayllu, Lunlaya, who I have also known since my initial fieldwork in 2012. This reflects my fieldwork that began as multi-sited across the municipality in an effort to understand the political project of the municipality and the ritual relationships within and between them.

### *The nest of the condor*

In this section, I will describe how the *wasi* develops personhood, with reference to Andean ethnographic literature, and descriptions of house-building ceremonies in Kallawayaya ayllus, based on my own observations and the description of a Kallawayaya healer, Aurelio. Catherine Allen, who has written extensively on the relationship between people and houses in the Andes finds that all matter is potentially alive and imbued with agency, all material things possessing a kind of personhood (Allen 2015: 24). Houses live because they are “formed out of the living Earth” (Allen 1988: 44) but “[w]ithout human intervention, the spot of earth on which, and out of which, the house is fashioned lies inert and without identity” (2015: 34). Houses become alive through rituals that activate their latent connection to mountain authorities, by making the house the centre of the circulation of animating forces that convert material things into persons (Muñoz Morán 2020b: 16). As will be looked at in more detail later, exchanges occur between people and the mountain deities (*achachilas*) through mutual feeding. By feeding *achachilas* through the house, they animate it (Gose 2018: 490).

Through materials used in its construction, the adobe house becomes what Denise Arnold (1991: 16) has referred to in relation to houses in Potosí in Southern Bolivia as “a personified representation of the mountain”. The mountain provides mud for the walls, kindling for the fire, shrubs used in mixing building materials, wood for the roof, and grass for the roof-covering. The straw represents the building’s hair, roof-timbers its collar, the rafters its ribcage, and the outside walls analogous to the cliff-face (1991: 22, 26). Descola (2013) has characterised Andean society as based on analogism. Different entities are unique, but connected to one another through analogous traits. Catherine Allen (2016: 437), however, while agreeing with Descola’s classification of Andean societies as analogical, argues that they rely on an underlying animism. In her analysis of *inqaychus* (small stones in the shape of figures such as animals, said to be made and animated by mountains), Allen (2016) argues that in the Andes analogous objects are not merely connected by representation, but by one being a “literal instantiation” of another (2016: 436). A house is not just *like* the mountain, but through what Allen (2016: 429), drawing on Gell (1998) refers to as distributed personhood, is imbued with the animating substance of the mountain itself. This animating force is in Quechua communities often referred to as *animu*, though in the Quechua-speaking ayllus of Kallawayaya

healers, the Aymara word *ajayu* is more common. Kallawayas believe that people have two *ajayus* (souls), a larger one (which leaves at death) and a smaller one (which can be lost due to fright). One of the specialisms of Kallawayas is recuperating the latter *ajayu* (Alderman 2016: 204). Muñoz Morán (2020b: 9) has argued that the person in the Andes is not understood unless in the context of these animating forces. The personhood of the house-wasi has to be understood in these terms.

How is a wasi animated? Before a brick is laid for the walls foundations are dug, and in a ceremony called a *wajta*, attended by neighbours and relations of the couple whose house is being built, offerings known as *kuchos* are buried. At a *wajta* that I participated in for the construction of my host family's house in the Kallawayaya ayllu of Amarete in 2012, an offering was made by a contracted ritualist to the *achachilas* and *Pachamama*, consisting of male and female llama foetuses, provided by the head of the household, *untu* (llama fat), and plates made of cotton wool in which were placed a *dulce mesa* (coloured sweets in the shape of various figures), a *qolqe* libro (golden paper), a carnation, incense and coca leaves. A second offering was made to the *chullpas*, pre-Christian ancestors who in stories told across the Andes are commonly described as having burnt to a crisp when the sun (Christ) rose for the first time (Abercrombie 1998; Bold 2019; Llanos Layme 2004: 170; Sendón 2010: 114; Canessa 2012: 132; Rivet and Tomasi 2016: 380). Unlike the offerings to the *achachilas* and *Pachamama*, which are made for the benefits they might bring, offerings to the *chullpas* are made so that they do not sabotage the house (see Alderman forthcoming). This offering consisted of a pig foetus, pig fat, coca, and plates made of grey llama fibre, containing a *dulce mesa* containing all white sweets, rather than of different colours. Finally, foods native to the local region, such as barley and quinoa were buried alongside streamers and confetti. In addition, the family and friends on the male side of the family brought guinea pigs which the ritualist buried on the right and front of the house to demarcate its male side, and the family and friends of the female side of the family brought guinea pigs which were buried on the left and back of the house to demarcate its female side. Weismantel (1988: 131) notes that to kill a guinea pig for someone is to declare that you would like to deepen and formalise a friendship between your two households; alongside the llama foetuses in the corners, they are buried as an offering to the *achachilas* and the *Pachamama* to ask their protection over the house (Alderman 2021: 106). Arnold (1991: 17) notes that the corners are considered female in relation to the mountains, considered male; the offering formalises a relationship between the two.

The *wasi* only finally attains personhood with the laying of the roof. Roof-laying ceremonies described in research from Andean Peru and called variously *zafacasa* (Leinaweaver 2009) *wasichay* (Allen 1988: 44) and *wasi lanta* (Gose 1991; Martínez 2019), involve cutting straw roofs, in a manner analogous to the first hair-cutting of children, known in Quechua as a *rutucha*, the ritual which marks children's first stage in becoming full persons (Canessa 2012: 136-139) (cfr. Rivera Andía 2018, who describes the *iglesia qatay* – the roofing of the church, as explicitly analogous to the child's first haircut, and therefore finds the church building to be analogous to a human being). In Kallawayaya ayllus nowadays families constructing their own houses commonly use corrugated iron for the roofs. This is called *wasi qatay* (house covering). However, a ceremony, called a *wasi q'oñichi* (house warming) in which straw is brought and burned in order to energise the house, is still performed, regardless of the construction material. The house's completion, through the roofing ceremony, marks an attainment of personhood. In conversation with a Kallawayaya healer, Aurelio, at his house in the ayllu of Lunlaya in 2019, he described it as then becoming inhabited by a spirit called Condor Tapa Mamani. "Condor Tapa Mamani is the god of the house, because once the house is finished it is like a person. It is living energy". Aurelio told me, there are "Kallawayaya superstitions" connected to the house as a result. "So, we sleep there, we live there. That's why we have to respect her<sup>1</sup>. And we can't fight inside her either". This is because to do so would fill the house with "bad energy".

"It can even make us sick, the house... Because the house is like a person when it is finished. So, inside one mustn't fight. One mustn't argue, and one mustn't whistle. So, we have to respect her. And the people who live there, when we fight, we can disappoint the house. This is why in a ritual, when a person gets sick we say, *wasikicha japisunki*, *wasiki japisunki*, or *wasipacha onqo jachasunki*, this means your house has deceived you"

"She has taken your energy", I checked.

"The small soul (*pequena alma*)", Aurelio replied. "So, the house can make us ill... This is why, before constructing a house, in this place, because it is going to be ours, where we will sleep, rest, laugh, talk, this is why in the four corners we put a clay pot with all of our foods: q'aya, potatoes, chuño, corn, wheat, beans, barley, full, so that this house does not fill with air, so that the house is very full, so that there is happiness. So that in this house there is no lack of food. It is also a form of offering to the divinities of the place. Because for the Kallawayas every place has its divinity. So, we bury this pot before beginning the cement". (see Alderman forthcoming).

"The house has a small god?", I asked.

1. The interview was conducted in Spanish, so Aurelio told me "hay que respetarla", referring to "la casa" as feminine. In reality, the house is composed of both male and female genders, though Arnold (1991: 17) writes that corners, in particular, are considered female in relation to male mountains.



“Exactly. So, we also plant llama fetuses. With carnations, with *k'intus* [offerings]. So, with the objective that in this house we are always content, happy, not in a bad mood, because there are people that get moody in their house, and when they go out they are happy”, he laughed.

Becoming serious Aurelio emphasised that “we have to pray [*salmear*], ... [because if a person hasn't] offered anything, then this house will always be filled with negative energy... So, we have to *salmear* so that the house is very fertile, so that when people come to this house it is always content, because happiness has to reign within the house”.

Aurelio went on: “You always have to do that, even if it has a cost. Because a llama foetus costs 70 bolivianos<sup>2</sup>, but you absolutely have to plant (*plantar*) the llama foetus in the house... This Condor Tapa Mamani is the god of the house. Yes, this is what contains the heat, the energy within a room. That is where the children are, the family. This is where we sleep, so we have to respect it. And it is always like this. From the time of our grandfathers, our grandmothers, we always do this, before beginning the cement, we always do this. Because where we are building, that is where the owners of the place are, and we have to ask for permission from them”<sup>3</sup>.

Aurelio's description of Condor Tapa Mamani as a god inhabiting the house matches similar ethnographic descriptions from elsewhere in Andean Bolivia of *kunturmamani* (condor-falcon) as a house spirit “that is most closely associated with the birth of humans as he presides over household production”, and who Andrew Canessa's (2012: 121) informant elsewhere in the department of La Paz describes as “the ‘pachamama’ of the house”, and Denise Arnold's (1991: 35) finding that in the North of Potosí, the house was addressed as mother nest (*tapa mamala* in Aymara) “from the moment when the walls stand up and the construction is complete” or alternatively the “nest of the condor and the falcon”.

In both my conversations with other informants and in Ina Rösing's research in the Kallawayaya region, there are variations on the interpretation of this spirit. Another friend, Juan, in the town of Charazani (see figure 2), the son of a noted local healer, explained to me that Condor Tapa Mamani was in a much broader sense “the energy of the universe” that can be invoked anywhere, “in the field, in the house, on the road”. One of Rösing's interlocutors regarded “nest of Condor Mamani” as not just restricted to the house, but everything connected to the earth: “it's the Pachamama, it's our cabildo, it's our house...”, another that “the cabildo is Condor Mamani, the nest of the Condor. Our village is Condor Mamani, wherever it is found; our village, our house, that is Condor Mamani” (Rösing 1990: 158).

2. Roughly €8.50, as of 04.07.2021 (source: XE.com).

3. Interview (in Spanish) with Aurelio Ortiz, in ayllu Lunlaya (15<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

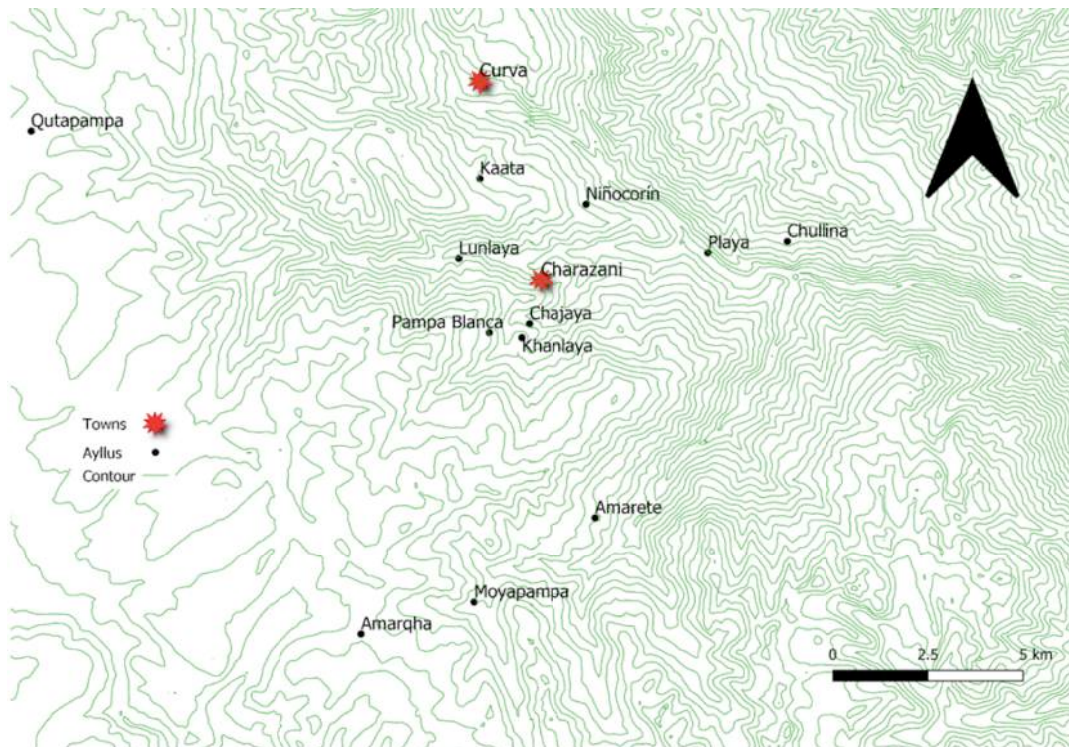


FIG 2: Map of ayllus and towns in the province of Bautista Saavedra.

### *The cabildo in the ritual healing of the Kallawayas*

If Condor Tapa Mamani is both a house spirit and one inhabiting sacred places in general, it is through the cabildo as a physical shrine in the house's patio that the house is connected with these other sacred places. Rösing's interlocutors inform her that "the nest of the condor, of Condor Mamani, is always the cabildo. Nest of the Condor, it accompanies us through life, as a mother or father" (1990: 159), (the current man ritualist of Amarete has similarly told me that the spirit of the house looks after one as one grows up) but also that the Condor Mamani is a messenger for the gods. When an offering is made, he takes it to the sacred places (Rösing 1990: 157). In a fractal-homology typical of the ayllu, Condor Tapa Mamani both inhabits and is the cabildo. In prayers, the cabildo of the house is referred to directly as *condor tapa*, the nest of the condor (Rösing 1990: 156). The Condor is a sacred bird in the Andes, significant for what it represents. In Penny Harvey's (1997: 34-36) research in Andean Peru she refers to the condor as a powerful visitor, whose wild presence represents supernatural forces in the nonhuman landscape that are potentially dangerous because they are

unpredictable and outside human control, but is necessary for the regeneration of the community. The condor's name in Quechua and Aymara is *mallku*, a name also applied to sacred mountaintops and the highest authority of an ayllu (Rösing 1990: 158-159).

The house cabildo functions as “the centre of communication with the sacred places” (Rösing 1990: 109) because they are materially connected to other cabildos located in sacred places such as mountaintops (Rösing 1990: 36). This is because of what Gose (2018: 492) refers to as “ontological blurring... between the mountain and the lesser beings it animates and encompasses”: they are both separate and the same. In Platt's (1997) description of a shamanic session in Potosí, an ayllu's ritualist is possessed by the spirit of a condor and able to communicate with mountains. This is because *mallkus* are both the mountains's messengers and instantiations of the mountains themselves. Rösing (1990: 108) describes the significance of the cabildo as follows:

There is no house, there is no village, there is no sacred mountain or sacred lake without a cabildo. The cabildo is the sacrificial place of the house, village or mountain. Usually, the cabildo consists of nothing more than a large stone that rests upon the ground. The stone of the cabildo is lifted up so that the offerings can be burned under her. In special cases, the offerings are buried beneath the cabildo. The faith in the sacred places and the faith in the cabildo are inseparable. The cabildo has a meaning so large that a curandero [healer] told [Ina Rösing] once that a house without a cabildo is worthless, it isn't even worth entering such a house.

The shrine in the patio known in the Kallawayá region as a cabildo has different names in other parts of the Bolivian Andes. In the Toracarí valley in the North of Potosí, Into Goudsmit finds them called *iskinas*, “small stone tables everyone has in their courtyards and houses” (2016: 32), which are themselves “deities that form a partnership with male cumbres [mountaintops]” (2016: 39). Arnold (1998: 106, cited in Goudsmit 2016: 39) “describes Isquinas as the foundations or roots of houses” (Goudsmit 2016: 39). In Rockefeller's (2010) ethnography of Quirpini in the department of Chuquisaca the patio shrine is called a *wirjin*; “to have a house without a *wirjin* to ch'alla [make a ritual libation to] at Carnival is, in some sense, not to have a house at all”, because “a decent family must have a space in which to offer hospitality to guests” (Rockefeller 2010: 93).

The designation cabildo, though, is a particularly apt term to refer to the family shrine because rather than refer simply to a physical space the term encapsulates its characteristic as a gathering place where *lugarniyuq* congregate to eat and talk (Mannheim and Salas Carreño 2015: 62). In common parlance, cabildo is a term used to refer to a public meeting –

especially a *cabildo abierto* (open meetings, where political decisions are made), but perhaps more significant in this context is Platt's (1986: 231) description of *cabildo* as a synonymous term for a minor ayllu (large ayllus being divided, as fractals into smaller ayllus, with each family a member both of a maximal and a minimal ayllu; for example, *Athun* [large] ayllu Amarete is subdivided into four *sullk'a* [small] ayllus) (see also Arnold and Hastorf 2008: 125; Goudsmit 2016: 131). This usage of the term could probably be traced back to the 1570s-1580s, when Viceroy Toledo's reforms, regrouping 1.5 million Indians into 600 *reducciones* (model Spanish-style towns arranged around a central church and square), required each community to install government institutions, especially the *cabildo* or town council (Saignes 1999: 63). "The *cabildo* system as instituted by Toledo", writes Abercrombie (1994: 103), "was modelled upon Spain's 'democratic' communities. It included yearly rotating elective authorities, specifically *alcaldes* and *alguaciles*, posts inherited by the Spaniards from the Moors". These developed into

elaborate intra- and inter-ayllu turn systems [...] to spread the weight and honours of the responsibility equitably around' and '[s]ome time during the seventeenth-century, probably, but certainly by the mid-eighteenth, these systems of civil and ecclesiastical obligations merged into a single system throughout the region, becoming what is called, in the literature, the *fiesta-cargo* system, a "prestige" ladder or fixed individual career of ritual and civic obligations' (Abercrombie 1994: 106).

Saignes (1995: 190) feels that *cabildos*, amongst other colonial institutions both "reflected and promoted a profound reordering of social relationships".

As I have described elsewhere (Alderman 2015), in the Kallawaya region, mountains are understood to take on rotative positions of authority or *cargos*. Each ayllu has their *watayuq* (the authority for that year, *wata* in Quechua meaning year, and the suffix *-yuq* ambiguously meaning both belonging to and owning) from among the mountains that surround them, that is specifically named as receiving a "plate" of ritual food within offerings to sacred places. In Aymara-speaking areas this mountain is known as *marani*, and in Jesús de Machaca, according to Orta (2013: 50), the rotation of the *marani* evokes political offices, with the *marani* spoken of as constituting a *cabildo*. In the Quechua-speaking area around Rapaz in the Checras Valley in central Peru, Salomon (2018: 28) describes the mountain range referred to as the "*cabildo* (town council) of the hills", while Platt (1997: 38) also uses the term *cabildo* to describe a shamanic session, therefore a meeting between humans and nonhumans. According to Juan, in Charazani, mountain authorities hold meetings that parallel those of the

local *sindicato*, in which there is a General Secretary, a Secretary of Relations, a messenger, etc. When the Kallawayas elect their leaders, they replicate the meetings of the *achachilas* who elect their own authorities by throwing rocks (Alderman 2015: 38). The *cabildo* then, as a sacrificial shrine, is itself a fractal subdivision of the *ayllu*, and is its very centre, since the exchanges that take place through the *cabildo* characterise the *ayllu qua ayllu*.

*The world as a nest, and the nest as a world*

For the world is a nest, and an immense power holds the inhabitant of the world in this nest (Bachelard 1964: 103).

If the *cabildo* is the place of communication between human beings and the sacred places around them in the Kallawayaya *ayllu*, then the medium of this communication is the *k'intu*. A *k'intu* is an offering that can take different forms. A *k'intu* is firstly a name commonly used to refer to gifts of carefully arranged coca passed from one person to another. In many community meetings I have sat in, while all present have been *pijcheando* (chewing) coca, I have been passed a *k'intu* of coca by the person next to me. This is often four or five leaves in good condition (not with holes in!), sometimes with one leaf wrapped around them. The minimum is two. As various anthropologists have noted, the usual etiquette, before consuming the *k'intu* is to acknowledge significant sacred places, motioning or sometimes blowing the *k'intu* towards them to share in its essence, often while naming them aloud or under one's breath (Mannehim and Salas Carreño 2015: 63, 68; de la Cadena 2015: 94; Salas Carreño 2016: 822-823; 2019: 156-157; Gose 2018: 494).

According to Aurelio, "You give a *k'intu* for an official conversation". If one goes to ask for *ayni* (reciprocal assistance) from a neighbour, one will take coca and offer it to begin the conversation. In a previous generation it was common for parents to look for a bride for their son, taking a bag of coca with them as an offering to begin a conversation with parents of the potential bride. To accept the coca means that a proposition has been accepted.

A *k'intu* can also refer specifically to the offering made to the sacred places of the *ayllu*. Often referred to in Spanish as a *mesa blanca* (*mesa* from the Spanish *misa* [mass], an allusion to the Catholic ritual), the Kallawayaya offering for general health is also called in Quechua a *yuraj* (white) *k'intu* (offering). Aurelio explained:

When you put a *k'intu* on the offering of the mesa, it is a *mesa blanca*; when we speak like this, when we speak between ourselves, it is a form of speaking officially, an agreement, in which we are arriving at an agreement. An activity, a business, etc. But when the offering is put in the mesa, and we are performing a ceremony, then we give coca, so this is to talk officially with the Pachamama and with the sacred places. With the *k'intu* of coca that you have in your hand, and which you are going to put in offerings you are not talking with people. With this *k'intu* you are talking with the Pachamama, to the sacred places, to the divinities. You are saying that you are going to change, that you are not going to fight... if you have made mistakes asking for the Pachamama to forgive you. It's a direct conversation with the Pachamama and the divinities<sup>4</sup>.

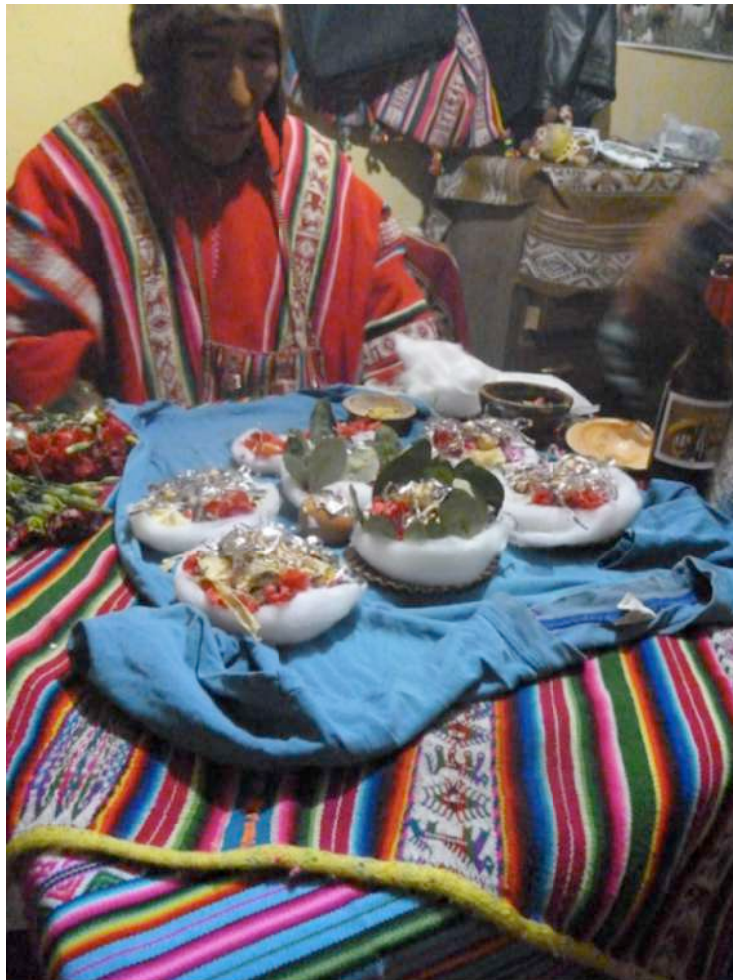


FIG 3: The *k'intus* in a *mesa blanca* Aurelio performed for me in 2013. Photo by J. Alderman.

4. Interview (in Spanish) with Aurelio Ortiz, ayllu Lunlaya, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

The *yuraj k'intu*<sup>5</sup> consists of various “plates” (see figure 3). The plate “is a ‘nest’ made with cotton, with sheep, alpaca or llama wool, in which offerings (for example, coca leaves) are placed. This is also sometimes called *q'into* in the callawayaya region. In other regions – not far from the callawayaya villages – *q'into* refers to a bunch of coca leaves placed in a plate” (Rösing 1990: 36-37).

The nature of the *k'intu* as both a plate of offering and a nest makes it homologous with the *cabildo* in which the offering is made. The *k'intu/tapa* is a fractal, because it is both the offering and the place where the offering is made. It is itself an *ayllu* within an *ayllu*.

### *Ritual communication in the Irwi ceremony in Amarete*

In this section I will examine the communication between humans and *achachilas* through ritual feeding in the Kallawayaya *ayllu* of Amarete, lying at 3,800 metres in altitude, and four hour's walk from the eponymous town at the centre of the municipality of Charazani. De la Cadena (2014; 2015) and Salas Carreño (2016) argue that it is through the relationship between humans and places that humans themselves emerge as persons, but, as I have argued, in Kallawayaya *ayllus* it is also through exchanges between humans and *achachilas* that the house emerges as a named place. While earlier I discussed the spirit of Condor Tapa Mamani inhabiting the house as a messenger of the mountains, here I will look at the relationship between people in Amarete and *cabildos* also as individual named places in their own right.

In February 2019, I accompanied the authorities (known as *jilakatas* or more properly in Quechua *jilakatakuna*, pl., positions of authority that rotate annually) of the *ayllu* of Amarete in the collective ritual of Irwi, which takes place annually the week before carnival to mark the first harvest. Irwi literally means “to try” and partly involves the 14 *jilakatakuna*, being given the first vegetables of the year's harvest to taste. Irwi has been described in great detail by Ina Rösing (2003), who was invited to participate by the *ayllu* authorities in 1993. I will only present certain aspects of the ritual that took place in the house of the sponsor of the ceremony, known as the *alférez*, and in the house of the *ayllu*'s ritualist, the *wata purichiq*, which highlight the relationship between its inhabitants and an animate landscape. Wata

5. Although Ina Rösing uses the spelling “q'into”, when asking my friends and interlocutors in Charazani as to the correct spelling, I found disagreement between “k'intu” and “q'into”. I am following the spelling set out in Jesús Lara's Quechua-Spanish dictionary (2001), and Felix Layme Pairumani's (1992) Aymara-Spanish dictionary, which both give “k'intu” as the correct spelling.

purichiq literally means in Quechua, the one who makes the year walk, and he makes the year walk by making sure that the agricultural rituals, including offerings for *lugarniyuq*, are performed correctly. The *alférez* sponsored Irwi by gathering together the relevant ritual equipment, including purchasing the sacrificial animal. As I go on to describe, the rituals in which the authorities collectively recompensed the *alférez* for this sacrifice demonstrate an understanding of the house and its inhabitants as an assemblage of shared energy, as referred to by the healer Aurelio in an earlier section.

On Wednesday morning, ritual offerings were made in the cabildos of the *alférez* and the wata purichiq as well as the surrounding house and patio. The cabildo in the patio of the wata purichiq is named Chukisán, but also called Qhowa Isqani, because it is understood as the wife of Isqani, the most powerful mountain in the Kallawaya region, and particularly important to Amarete because of its proximity. In the wata purichiq's patio, he and jilakatakuna made offerings to named places in the region, including the cabildo itself, using a carnation to sprinkle wine in the direction of each named place in turn. These included local mountains like Isqani and Atichamán, but also mountains further afield (the wata purichiq named Machu Picchu, for example). While the jilakatakuna fed achachilas through *ch'allas* (libations) with the carnation, the wata purichiq invited each of them to add water that they had collected from springs around the ayllu the previous day to pots boiling on two pyres to which the wata purichiq also added black and white corn. When both pots were well boiled, the wata purichiq added to each the carbonised heads of two llama foetuses that had been heating with coca leaves and llama fat on a third pyre. Everyone present then took a wooden oval cup called a *mat'i* (Rosing 2003: 312), filled it with some of the mixture, drank some and sprayed the rest around the patio in a circular motion from left to right, covering the house, those present, and the street outside over the patio's outer wall (see figure 4). This *ch'alla* was a way of strengthening their relationship with the gods around the ayllu by feeding them vital substances. Salas Carreño (2016: 827) writes that from a Quechua perspective, "named places are the primary givers of all types of food to humans--food that constitutes the substance of their bodies and their social relations". Feeding them in this way was the ayllu's way of recognising that they owe their lives to the harvest provided by the *achachilas* and Pachamama (Allen 2002: 29) and reciprocating.





**FIG 4:** *One of the jilakakuna flinging a libation around the patio of the wata purichiq. Photo by J. Alderman.*

Salas Carreño (2016: 830) and others (Weismantel 1995: 695; Mannheim and Salas Carreño 2015: 61) have argued that this feeding relationship makes places and humans kin (though Gose 2018 is critical of this idea, since the punishing losses that named places are understood to inflict would not be acceptable from human kin). Allen (2015: 39) has argued that “Feeding and eating is not an idiom through which a group of people symbolically communicates with the dead – it is communication, and the corporate unity of living and dead thus achieved is corporeal”. Through food, different bodies become related as the same substance (Salas Carreño 2016: 821). Through the offerings flung in all directions, both the house and patio, which received the food directly, and named mountains in whose direction the offering was sprayed, shared food with humans in the ayllu (Salas Carreño 2016: 824).



**FIG 5:** The *wata purichiq* burying the offering in the *cabildo*, Chukisán. Photo by J. Alderman.

As the most powerful mountain locally, *Isqani* is fed with a ritual meal buried in *cabildo* Chukisán in the patio of the house of the *wata purichiq*. Each *jilakata* brought with them a guinea pig to sacrifice, which they pass to the *wata purichiq* along with two coca leaves. The *wata purichiq* removed the heart of the guinea pig while it is still beating and inserted the two coca leaves in its stead. Rösing (2003: 310) calls this part of the ritual *much'in*. Once all of the *jilakatakuna* had finished performing libations of wine with the carnation, they collectively dug a hole in the *cabildo* and the offering of guinea pigs called a *kucho*, the local Aymara term for a buried offering or *pago* (see Gose 2018: 494), was buried within (see figure 5).

Later that same day, the largest offering was made in the patio of the *alférez*, called Ch'iñarhuaya: an alpaca, brought by two *jilakatakuna* in the early hours. I was taken aback by how calm the animal was, despite its limbs being tied, though this is probably because it was drunk (see Rösing 2003: 322). It remained calm even after being carried to the centre of the patio, and when the *wata purichiq* cut its chest open and inserted his arm up to the elbow to extract its heart while it was still beating (see also Branca 2018). Llamas and alpacas are sacred, and according to Ina Rösing (2003: 325; 1990: 119), citing the wife of the *wata purichiq* in 1993, known as the Mama Thana, when Amareteños sacrifice a live llama or alpaca it is as if they were sacrificing their own bodies; when they give libations of the animal's blood it is as if they were donating their own. After extracting the heart, the *wata purichiq* waved it in the air, invoking the sacred places of the region (mountains, such as Isqani, Atichamán, Tuana), and further afield (Machu Picchu) that the offering was being made to.

While the *wata purichiq* was invoking the sacred places with the heart of the llama, the *jilakatakuna* and their wives, the *mama tallas*, one by one took a *mit'i*, plunged it into the animal, and after consuming some of the blood, flung the rest in the direction of the house of the *alférez*, staining its outer wall a deep red (figure 7). The *wata purichiq*, meanwhile took the heart, divided it in two and added it to two pots boiling on pyres on the patio, along with corn and the remainder of the bottles of water the *jilakatas* had collected from springs around the ayllu. His assistant then invited those who had not already drunk the animal's blood to consume this mixture and spray a ritual libation (a *ch'alla*) over the house. In this action the consubstantiation between the house and its inhabitant became evident, demonstrating that "[t]he house is an extension of the person" as Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995: 2) note for houses more generally. Rösing (2003: 330), asked a *jilakata* what it means to drink blood, and was told that "it means riches, I am going to have a good harvest, a warm house". For her interlocutor, the house and their fields related to the person in a homologous synonymy. Every person, she writes, wants to perform a lot of libations, because this brings "*uj q'oñi wata*", which she translates from Quechua as a year of nourishment and a warm house. When I asked the *alférez* himself about the purpose of making *ch'allas* of blood over his house, he explained that he had entered into many expenses as sponsor of the ritual, and as recompense the other *jilakatas* were liberal with their libations of blood, so that he and his family would enjoy a year full of riches, and abundance. As Branca (2019: 19) has described, in Puno, just across the border in Peru, *ch'allas* of alpaca blood against the house after the roof is laid

re-establish links between the inhabitants and their ancestors. Similarly, Allen (2015: 33) has analysed forced feeding as leading to other bodies connected to the person to also become alimented. This is usually when people get drunk or eat enormous quantities of food at fiestas. The excess is understood as consumed by the *achachilas* through their corporeal connectedness with humans. As the *alferéz* of Irwi described it to me here a similar process is also occurring between the house and its inhabitants. The house-human assemblage share in the good luck as a result of the libations by all present. Earlier in this essay, a Kallawaya healer, Aurelio, explained that a house's inhabitants can make a house sick through their behaviour. A transference of positive energy can also happen between house and inhabitants, and this is part of the motivation for the *ch'alla*.



FIG 6: The blood-stained walls of the house of the *alferéz*. Photo by J. Alderman.

After this, just like in Chukisán, each *jilakata* handed a guinea pig to the *wata purichiq*, who opened its chest with his nails, and extracted its heart while it was still beating, inserting two coca leaves given to him by the *jilakata* and placing each guinea pig side by side in the middle of the patio, with carnations between each. His assistant dug a hole in the middle of the patio, and another hole was dug at one side of the patio. Half of the guinea pigs were buried in each hole. While this appeared to mean that there were two *cabildos* in his patio, compared to the one in the patio of the *wata purichiq*, the *alferéz* explained to me that the *cabildo* is not one specific place in the patio, but in reality is the whole patio. However, according to the

analysis of Ina Rösing (2003: 319), in contrast to other patios in the region that only contain one, in Amarete a patio contains various distinct cabildos, some masculine and others feminine. The female guinea pigs must be buried in the female cabildo and the male guinea pigs in the male one. As another of the jilakatakuna later explained to me, each of the patios has a male (right) side and female (left) side, and corresponding cabildos. The exception is the feminine cabildo of Chukisán, in the patio of the wata purichiq, whose masculine pair is the corresponding cabildo at the top of Mallku Iskani. In contrast to other cabildos located in patios, Chukisán was not the cabildo of the household, but of the entire ayllu, therefore functioning through synechdoche as the house of the ayllu itself.

### *Conclusion*

As Catherine Allen has observed, the Andean *ayllu* is understood by those living in it as functioning on a synechdochal logic, because it is itself a fractal. Fractals are characterised by the same patterns at different levels of scale (Allen 2016: 425-428), as we see within the ayllu through houses as nests (*k'intus*) at different levels of scale. The *k'intu* as offering at the smallest level of scale (nest shaped wool containing other offerings to be burnt in the cabildo for the achachilas) is translated into Spanish both as *plato* (plate) and *nido* (nest), indicating the house as a place to socialise and a medium of consuming (particularly ritual) food. At a slightly higher level of scale, Condor Tapa Mamani – the nest of the condor – is located principally in the house's cabildo, the main location of socialisation and alimentation of achachilas in Kallawaya ayllus. Through rituals at the house's construction (e.g. the *wasi qoñichi* ritual to give the house energy) and periodically from then on (such as the Irwi ritual) the house's personhood is created and reinforced through assemblages that it shares with its inhabitants and other more powerful *lugarniyuq*. As a hinge through which humans and named places connect by eating and drinking together, the house is at the centre of the ayllu's sociality, a place where the ayllu itself – through the relationships that define it – is made and remade.

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