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FOOD

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN TEXT: CHRISTOPHER LUNNON

Our 28th edition, published in May 2013, grabbed a slice of Bolivia's vast culinary palate. Bolivian cuisine used to disappoint travellers, but now there is so much to enjoy. There are tantalising wines, trout to hook the gringos and plenty of cakes to satisfy a sweet tooth.

Bolivia unlimited

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#85 *Contradictions*

THE WILD CHINESE GARLIC CHASE

WE LOOK FOR THE FOREIGN PLANT, BUT FIND SO MUCH MORE

TEXT & PHOTO: STEPHANIE LONG

Our quest for Chinese garlic, which is reportedly infiltrating and damaging the Bolivian domestic garlic market, began with a minibus ride to Avenida Las Américas, where prostitutes parade at night and market stalls crowd the streets by day. These same stalls have gained international notoriety for exhibiting one of the world's weirdest New Year's traditions – displaying wall upon wall of red underwear. Our minibus driver had already given me some indication of the locals' superstitious nature, explaining that the baby's shoe hanging from the dashboard had been left behind one day, resulting in him now seeing it as a protective talisman. Similarly, the red underwear during New Year comes with a superstition of its own: It is said to bring the wearer love for the rest of the year. The fact that yellow underwear – which is said to bring the wearer money – can scarcely be seen among this sea of red is perhaps a testament to the warm and loving nature of Bolivians.

As we emerged at the top of the winding road, a flood of minivans swamped us. But as we edged closer to a mass of overflowing stalls, the hectic roundabout and constant honking receded in the distance. Here we found clothes and knickknacks imported from China, and then – through a back passage lined with a tarpaulin – we were met with the earthy smell of nuts, dried fruits and spices. Once around the corner, the rows of overflowing sacks did not disappoint. Spotting a stall that not only sold dried peaches and mushrooms but also fresh garlic, we asked about the Chinese variety.

The **caserita** said her garlic was from Peru, and that Chinese garlic is always large and white. Despite insisting that her Peruvian garlic was good, she urged us with evident pride to seek out the Bolivian variety. Another stall along and there it was: highly praised Bolivian garlic, and at a very fair price.

The market was a surreal experience. Chicken cooked on skewers sprang up in one direction; from the other arose full walls stacked high with shoes and frilly bikinis. Other stalls were bursting forth with colourful fruits. There were women selling knitting supplies, others selling **cholita** hair braids and decorative outfits, as well as a plant by the name of **flor de Jamaica**. I was told that it is rich in vitamins and also an effective hangover cure. Suffice it to say, I was eager to try it.

Rounding a corner, we found two *cholitas* selling cherimoyas and pacays – both native plants grown in the foothills of the Andes. These *caseritas* explained how to eat the fruits. They were proud of the native products they sell, with the fresh produce often being brought into the city that very morning. We asked about this mythical big white garlic, and were cautioned against buying it. One woman even stated that, despite the poor flavour, it is sold at the same price as other varieties in this market – a surprising fact given the rumours of Chinese garlic threatening the local market due to very competitive prices. Further down, we encountered a barrage of new fruits: nonis, carambolas, kinotos and many more, the vendors patiently explaining the flavours and how to prepare them. Wandering through the maze of streets, the familial nature of the market became evident in the numerous generations manning the stalls and the casual chats between workers. Private guards patrolled the area, assisted in their endeavours by the vendors themselves, who all work together to prevent any theft.

Further along, we stopped to marvel at a sign advertising **caldo de cardan**, right near a dog sleeping on a chair at the entrance to a fancy dress shop with a young child in a cardboard box at its feet. It was truly an eclectic array of offerings. A couple of blocks down this winding market street we spotted more garlic. Upon asking for the elusive big whites, the stall owner scrunched up her face. 'They are big and stupid,' she said. We thanked her for her insight with a chuckle and moved on to a covered market at the bottom of calle Zolio Flores.

I was struck by the strong smell of quirquiña, an aromatic herb often used in **llajua**, permeating the air. We bought some from one stall, and upon asking, the vendor informed us that Chinese garlic was more likely to appear on the weekends with the influx of buyers and sellers. Otherwise, stall owners tend to avoid it due to its strong smell but lack of flavour. The *caserita* then kindly gifted me with a handful of huacatay to accompany the quirquiña. Exiting the market, we were hit once again with the hustle and bustle of La Paz, now laden with fruits and new knowledge on how to prepare these fresh Bolivian products. Despite originally searching for Chinese garlic, we came away with far more – gaining experience with the family environment of these markets and the tangible pride of the owners for both their fresh produce and the roads that have led them to where they are.

> THE FACT THAT YELLOW UNDERWEAR – CONNOTING MONEY – CAN SCARCELY BE SEEN AMONG THIS SEA OF RED IS PERHAPS A TESTAMENT TO THE WARM AND LOVING NATURE OF BOLIVIANS.

Editorial #85: *Contradictions*

By: Caroline Risacher

Bolivia is a paradox. It's one of the richest lands in South America (with vast deposits of lithium, silver, tin, natural gas and more), and it's also one of the continent's poorest nations, with extreme income inequality. Due to Bolivia's varied climate and topography – from the arid **altiplano** to the dense rainforests of the Amazon and the dry forests of the Chaco – its plant and animal diversity is unmatched. But for the Bolivian people, these natural resources have turned out to be both a blessing and a curse.

This curse materialised with the 16th-century arrival of the Spaniards, who tried to homogenise and dilute the diversity of indigenous identities in order to exploit these resources. This continued until recently as the **criolla** upper class reinvented Bolivian identity upon the central notion of being **mestizo**, and indigenous people were thwarted under the assimilatory and reductive term of **campesino**.

Since 2006 and the election of the current president, Evo Morales (the first indigenous president in the history of Bolivia), the country has had to grapple with these contradictions which have been defining it for hundreds of years: How to respect and value the diversity of ethnic particularities while at the same time uniting a nation around common ideas and values such as **vivir bien**? How to protect nature and culture and yet still exploit natural resources whilst addressing environmental concerns and protecting people's rights? And how to build a unifying Bolivian national identity?

This issue of *Bolivian Express* deals with these weighty contradictions but also with the smaller concerns that surround us and are part of our everyday life: the *altiplano* weather where one wears short sleeves at 4pm and a winter coat by 7pm, the eco-trucks carting away garbage whilst spewing dark gasoline emissions, the grumpy **caserita** who begrudgingly does you a favour by selling you a chocolate bar and the thousands of other idiosyncrasies which make Bolivia the place we know and love – but don't always quite understand.

But there are also a few less obvious contradictions that are much more problematic and paint a darker Bolivia. Prisons here are places where children sometimes live, exiting and entering freely while their parents stay locked inside. Despite achieving gender parity in the highest institutional offices and ranking second in the world in female representation in government, Bolivia still has high rates of domestic violence, femicides and sexual harassment.

Ultimately, to answer these questions and move past its entangled history, Bolivia will have to base its future on lived and shared experiences; on its unique tapestry of particularities, specificities and richness; and on newly forged paths that allow modernity and indigeneity to move forward together, whilst the country navigates the contradictions of its own identity.

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

BEYOND THE NUMBERS

CHALLENGES BOLIVIAN WOMEN FACE IN SPITE OF EQUAL REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT

TEXT: LEIGH ANDERSON PHOTO: COURTESY OF COORDINADORA DE LA MUJER

With women holding 53.1% of the seats in its parliament as of 2017, Bolivia ranks second in the world in female representation in government. In 2010, a series of electoral laws were passed that require an even gender split at the national level. In 2014, Bolivia became the second country to achieve a female majority in government after Rwanda in 2008, according to the World Bank.

But despite the quantity of women in positions of power, rates of domestic violence and femicide in Bolivia remain high. According to a study by the Pan-American Health Organisation, 53.3% of Bolivian women between the ages of 15 and 49 experienced domestic violence in 2003. Fifteen years later, while there has been progress in the cause of equal rights for women, the situation of domestic violence is still critical.

'The patriarchal system has reacted against women's advancement,' said Mónica Novillo, Executive Director of Coordinadora de la Mujer, an organisation that fights for women's participation in politics and women's empowerment. 'We're seeing that domestic violence has increased not only in number of cases, but also in level of cruelty. Due to the rising phenomenon of dating violence, we're also seeing that the age at which women begin to suffer domestic violence is younger.'

On July 4, Coordinadora de la Mujer hosted an event called, 'Agenda Política desde las Mujeres hacia la Democracia Paritaria', to promote a political agenda for women's rights. Representatives of women's organisations, empowerment groups and politicians from across the country were in attendance to address six key issues that Bolivian women face: political participation, the dismantling of patriarchal norms, the right to live free of domestic violence, reproductive rights, economic autonomy and environmental justice.

'We consider women's participation in politics to be very important,' said Graciela Vásquez, a representative of Centro de Apoyo a la Mujer y a la Niñez, which is based in Cochabamba. 'But this participation is not precisely a qualitative participation,' she explained, pointing out that even in positions of power, women's opinions often hold less weight than those of their male counterparts.

'It's a great jump to have achieved 50% women in various spaces of power,' said Elizabeth Salguero, former Minister of Cultures of Bolivia, who is now Advisory Coordinator of UN Women Bolivia. 'That is already a change – and it's a process'.

For some, however, the fact that women occupy more than half of parliamentary positions doesn't mean much. 'We consider the quota between men and women in parliament to be nothing more than symbolic,' said Mayra Rojas of Mujeres Creando, an anarcha-feminist group that assists survivors of domestic violence, but was not in attendance at the July 4 event. 'Political contributions made at the state level do not meet the requirements or needs of women in Bolivia, and society continues to be sexist,' she added. 'You can agitate, you can have the best ideas, the best actions, but you can't force them to walk in someone else's shoes.'

Others are more optimistic about the advancements that women in Bolivia have made, whilst recognising the ground that still needs to be covered. 'I think it's very valuable that women are occupying more and more spaces,' Salguero said, 'but we have no female governor and only 8% of mayors are women, so there are still spaces in which we need more women.'

Since women occupying positions of power in Bolivia is still a fairly new concept, female politicians face all kinds of challenges, including harassment, threats and exclusion. In 2012, the Law against the Harassment and Political Violence against Women was passed in response to the assassination of councilwoman Juana Quispe. 'Obviously, if there weren't women in positions of power, a law never would've been passed,' Salguero said. 'But there are more subtle forms of harassment, such as not letting women talk and excluding women from meetings,' that still occur.

According to Novillo from Coordinadora de la Mujer, 'The laws are not sufficient for all that needs to be transformed so that women can fully exercise their political rights in confidence, without fear for their lives, their political careers, or their families.'

The solutions to these issues are not clear cut. As Celina Taveras, who is a representative of Mujeres en Acción from the department of Tarija, points out, these matters affect rural and urban women differently. While the challenges for rural women in politics include high rates of illiteracy and low levels of education, urban women are more likely to face political violence or harassment.

'Violence against women is so naturalised and normalised that women end up feeling blamed for it,' said Vanessa Rojas, also of Mujeres Creando. 'Violence is not recognised as a structural problem. Sometimes women don't recognise the pain they are experiencing; it gets worse and worse and they have to face it day by day.'

Despite the challenges that remain for women's advancements, recognising diversity, encouraging women to enter politics and continuing the progress that has been made in the past few years is of utmost importance. With more involvement and agitation for their voices to be heard, women in Bolivia can reshape what it means to hold 53.1% of positions in parliament: converting that number from a statistic to a force for change.

GROWING UP IN PRISON

THE LIVES OF CHILDREN IN BOLIVIAN JAILS

TEXT: ROBYN KATE POLLARD PHOTO: MARION JOUBERT

Rather than metal cell blocks meticulously controlled by guards armed with ammunition and authority, many Bolivian prisons could be described as autonomous communities. With shops, restaurants, and flat-type accommodation, the Centro de Orientación Femenina (COF) de Obrajes is a world unto itself. Regrettably, children also reside there.

While raising children behind bars isn't ideal, mothers often feel that there is no other option. They fear their children will face abuse in orphanages or shelters, or that their family members will be too poor to properly care for them. In certain cases, a child's whole family may be in prison, literally leaving no viable alternative. In Bolivia, in accordance with article 106 of the Child & Adolescents Act, children up to the age of six may live in prison with their mothers. Although children are legally prohibited from living in male prisons, it occurs regardless at the San Pedro prison in La Paz and the Palmasola prison in Santa Cruz. Such living situations may seem incomprehensible, but remaining with a family member in prison is the lesser of two evils for many children.

COF de Obrajes in La Paz is home to approximately 50 children, such as nine-year-old JJ, who has called the prison home for almost all his life. Like for JJ, it is all too common for children over the age of six to remain living in prison when there is no-one else to care for them. During our visit to Obrajes, he gave us a comprehensive tour with detailed explanations of how each section of the centre functions. He seemed proud to assume such responsibility, making it clear that an old head sat on his very young shoulders.

Inundated with hugs and hand-holding, we found it difficult to navigate through the swarm of children that suddenly surrounded us. Their inquisitiveness and happiness was remarkable. JJ was eager to tell us about his life plans: to be a lawyer, a film director and a doctor. When asked which one he would choose, he seemed confused at the absurdity of the question and replied: 'All three!'. Living inside a prison hasn't affected his life ambitions, but there are serious consequences to growing up in such living conditions.

Through los Centros de Apoyo Integral Pedagógico (CAIP), the Ministry of Education ensures that all Bolivian penitentiaries that accommodate for children have spaces dedicated to education. According to one of the teachers at Obrajes, due to the minimal time and resources at their disposal, they focus their time with the children on psychological and emotional support. The children generally live in an environment dominated by aggression and even violence, which can influence their daily behaviour. While instructors teach them writing and reading comprehension, they emphasise on helping the children build self-confidence and learning how to build relationships.

Unlike their mothers, the children are free to exit the prison. Once they turn four years old, they leave the centre during the day to attend local schools. It is not uncommon, however, for children to be denied this freedom. According to one prison instructor, one mother doesn't allow her two daughters to go to school. 'The girls understand perfectly why,' he explained. 'They tell me: 'If we go to school, dad might take us and not let us come back', so it's safer for them to stay inside the prison.' Consequently, basic education may be lacking for many children who reside in Bolivian prisons. COF de Obrajes fortunately has a relatively relaxed environment, but in more dangerous centres such as San Pedro, one may worry about the attention and education the children receive.

The Bolivian government recently announced a plan to remove children above the age of six from all penitentiaries across the country, motivated by what children unwittingly witness and are subjected to in prison: mistreatment, rape, bad behaviour, power games. What's more, given their innocence, children are regularly used to smuggle contraband past the unsuspecting guards. General hygiene is another problem, as overcrowding is prevalent. However, the most poignant issue facing the children that live in prison is abuse from other inmates. Given the lack of formal reports on the subject, it is difficult to gauge what these children experience. Nonetheless, under such conditions the quality of the education they receive is certainly questionable and the alternatives they have don't offer much more hope.

To get a better insight on the best way to help these children, I talked with educator and director of ZERA Bolivia, Sharoll Fernandez Siñani. ZERA Bolivia carries out long-term projects that work directly with children in these situations, taking them on trips to the cinema or to the park as a way to build social skills. 'It's easier to pack a box full of books, clothes and toys to send to the prisons,' Fernandez said, 'but what works better is when the children get to leave the prison to have a real experience. Kids need to feel that they can go out, not just to school, but to have fun. Social emotional tools are the best form of support for them.'

> 'IT'S EASIER TO PACK A BOX FULL OF BOOKS, CLOTHES AND TOYS TO SEND TO THE PRISONS, BUT WHAT WORKS BETTER IS WHEN THE CHILDREN GET TO LEAVE THE PRISON TO HAVE A REAL EXPERIENCE.'
>
> **—SHAROLL FERNANDEZ SIÑANI, DIRECTOR OF ZERA BOLIVIA**

By focusing on empowerment tools, ZERA Bolivia aims to provide these children with emotional and psychological support that they may not otherwise receive. 'Before considering the possibility of abuse or rape, once these children enter into shelters they are practically parentless,' Fernandez said, warning of the dangers that children may face in the alternative to living in prison. 'They feel totally abandoned and lose any sense of belonging,' she continued. 'At least by being in prison, they can stay with their mums and have some sort of family and face a less traumatising situation of neglect.'

While these children face a plethora of difficulties inside the prison walls, the alternatives they have are less promising. By attending local schools, children retain a certain level of normality in their lives despite living in a correction centre. However, what is necessary is an expansion of current programmes to help incarcerated family members properly support children so they can lead the best life possible despite living behind bars.

A FISHERMAN'S LIFE

VISITING THE CHILAYA COMMUNITY ON LAKE TITICACA

TEXT: KATHERINA SOURINE
PHOTOS: KATHERINA SOURINE

The boat rocked gently and the crisp morning air facilitated a sense of clarity in the experience: tangling fish out of the net, slipping them into a bucket and enjoying the view of the mountains. The Chilaya community in Huatajata, located on Lake Titicaca, is striving to share its livelihood with tourists from Bolivia and abroad by offering an interactive experience called 'Fisherman for a Day.'

We left around 6am from La Paz, accompanied by Jorge Roberto Salinas from Waliki Adventures, in order to arrive at Huatajata at 9am. During the scenic **teleférico** ride up to El Alto, embellished by the sunrise over the Andes, Salinas talked about how he discovered the tour. 'I was introduced to the project by a friend who shared the idea with me, knowing I had the professional resources to support it,' he said.

Upon arrival in Huatajata, we were welcomed into the community, which included members of the village as well as tourism students from the Technological Institute of El Alto, who were in Huatajata to complete the work-study component of their education. We jumped straight into our first activity, fishing, accompanied by Edwin Catari, a local beekeeper and fisherman, and tourism student Nelson Casas.

Casas explained that amongst the five species of fish that live in Lake Titicaca, three are native, while two were introduced in from abroad. The three native species include carachi, ispi and mauri. Trout and pejerrey, on the other hand, were introduced to the lake via the United States and Argentina, respectively. And although these fish now comprise a major role in both Peruvian and Bolivian cuisine, they've taken over Lake Titicaca, resulting in a precipitous decrease in the population – and sometimes extinction – of the lake's native stock.

'WE WANT TO SHARE OUR WAY OF LIFE, AND WE FIND VALUE FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS.'
—REMBERTO LOZA

As we hauled our net in and began untangling fish, Casas explained the importance of sustainability for the lake and the surrounding region and how his work here balances his love for tourism along with the promotion of sustainable lifestyles.

'We live in a society that is destroying its own habitat, and I want to conserve the world around me,' Casas said as he threw a fish from the net to a nearby bird. And even the seemingly pristine Lake Titicaca isn't immune from this destruction. Lead and mercury levels in the lake have been rising in the past four years, while trash from nearby cities accumulates on its shores. To combat this pollution, the Bolivian and Peruvian governments signed a pact in 2016 and pledged more than $500 million to clean up the area through 2025.

A fisherman from Huatajata can collect 10 to 15 pounds of fish per day, depending on the weather and the season. We caught slightly less than that – due to to the full moon the night before, according to Catari. When we returned to shore, we were met by others who were preparing to cook, some making juice while others were preparing fish caught the day before with diced vegetables. Others stood around a small fire surrounded by rocks heating up from the flames, preparing to make **trucha a la piedra** (or *p'ap'i*, in Aymara).

When the rocks were sufficiently hot, we rearranged them flat on the ground so that the dried fish, vegetables and potatoes could be set atop, layer by layer, to cook. Once we added three layers, eucalyptus leaf was added on top and along with a blanket to trap in the aromas.

'Our grandmothers and grandfathers were extremely hard workers, cultivating vegetables, building houses, fishing,' Wilma Condori Choquehuanca, a tourism director who works with the village, explained. 'It is through them that we have the knowledge we use daily.'

We later disassembled the coals and feasted on the fish. Chef José Carlos Ramos Mamani explained that he has been cooking professionally for more than 12 years, but found this job especially interesting because it gave him the opportunity to cook with fish from the lake, a skill that he has been hoping to develop and share with others.

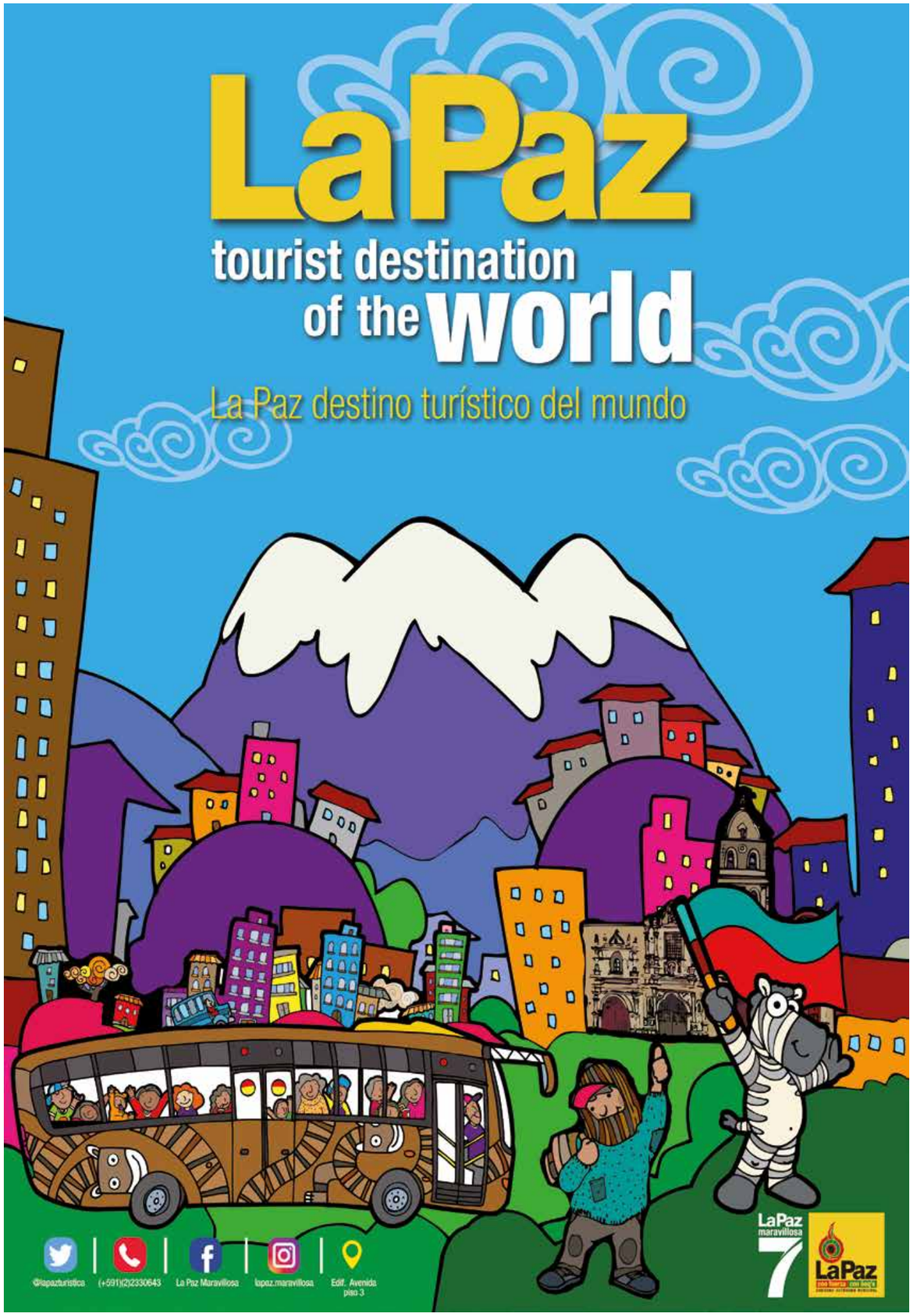
The rich lunch was followed by an excursion to extract honey from the village apiary, bee suits thankfully provided. The village people hope to sell the honey once they can create consistently greater quantities, along with various artisanal products from neighbouring communities.

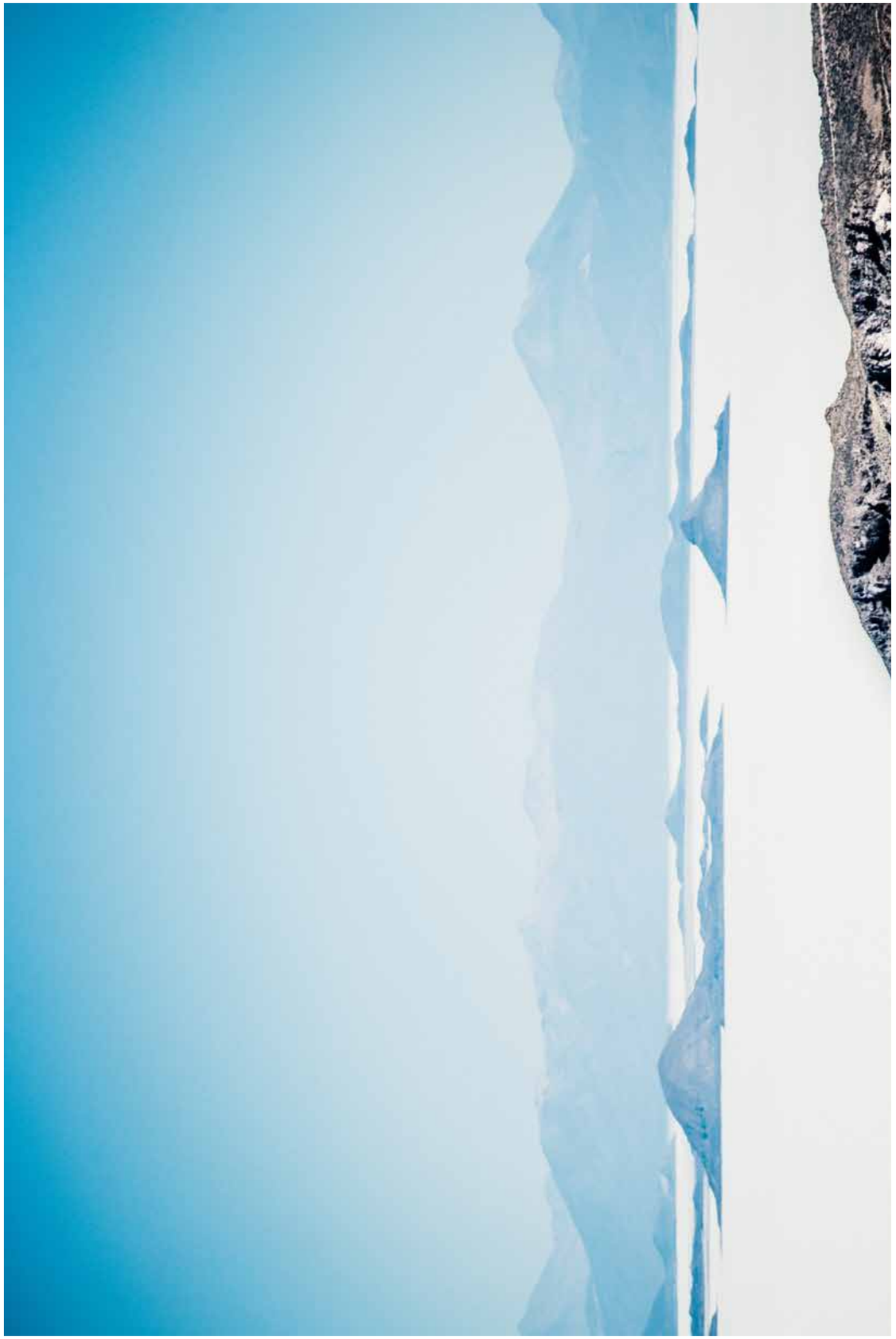
'The three parts of community tourism are the native population, the private businesses we partner with and the public,' said Remberto Loza, a Huatajata resident. 'We want to share our way of life, and we find value from the experience of others.'

> 'WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY THAT IS DESTROYING ITS OWN HABITAT, AND I WANT TO CONSERVE THE WORLD AROUND ME.'
> —**NELSON CASAS**

The idea of 'Fisherman for a Day' was birthed last year when the community hosted a fishing festival, and both Bolivians and foreigners attended. It became evident that the community's daily life could be shared with others to spur economic activity in Huatajata. Now villagers offer a hands-on and personal experience that allows tourists to learn about Andean life on the lake, help cook lunch and interact with community members.

Visiting the Chilaya community provides an experience which truly taps into the essence of why we travel: to meet new people, to experience different ways of life and to learn new things. It's an adventure that will leave guests with their bellies full and a newfound enthusiasm to learn more.





Salar de Uyuni - Photo for sale (65 x 44cm): Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic ivan@boliviannexpress.org

LUCHAS PARA LA TRANSICIÓN

THE FIGHT BETWEEN SOCIETY AND TECHNOLOGY

TEXT AND PHOTO: JACK FRANCKLIN

Luchas para la transición, a book written by Jorge Viaña Uzedia last year, provides a fascinating insight into socialism in Bolivia. The book tackles modern issues such as technological development and its contradictory consequences for Bolivian society and the upholding of a traditional culture rooted in nature. Viaña, who is the coordinator and leading investigator of alternatives to development and emancipative education of the Instituto Internacional de Integración del Convenio Andrés Bello, has a passion for the subject and an interesting outlook on modern day society under Morales' socialist government.

This recent publication follows Viaña's previous book released in 2010, called *Construyendo fundamentos en la lucha por la construcción de un Socialismo Comunitario*, whereby he brings into question the works of the German philosopher and economist Karl Marx. The previous book lays out some of the basic political premises from which he builds on in his new work to sustain that 'technology reproduces domination and exploitation and so risks the degradation of the human being.'

By walking around La Paz and particularly **Zona Sur**, you can see that there is a surge in technological development, as well as in transport and the construction of residential and commercial buildings. There are six **teleférico** lines at the moment, and a further five are either being constructed or at the planning stage as a strategy to reduce traffic in the city. A more controversial technological development is the construction of a highway that will run through the Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory, also known as Tipnis. Now that President Evo Morales has approved the construction of the road, this project will greatly affect the 14,000 people who live in the territory as well as the rich biodiversity that surrounds them. Technology will always come at a cost to society. How much cost, though, is a decision, is a decision any government must struggle with.

Viaña's book stresses the need for a thorough analysis of technology in modern day Bolivia and for a non-sterile debate on socialism. There are advantages of cutting-edge technology in Bolivia. The German company ACI Systems GmbH, for example, has recently set about extracting the lithium from the Salar de Uyuni to make lithium batteries for electric cars. Since electric cars are environmentally friendly, they are fundamental in an age where climate change is a pressing issue. Viaña believes the extraction of lithium is positive for Bolivia and a good use of technology. The most important question for him when analysing these developments is: 'what type of technology is it and does it exploit human interests?'

In Bolivia, however, construction and technology can provide a contradiction with **vivir bien**, an ancient indigenous paradigm that stresses the importance of living in harmony with nature. The concept is based on the notion of the 'centrality of life', which places nature as the most important element of a community and the human as the least important. **Pachamama** is celebrated here in Bolivia and as a representation of nature and its importance for humankind. According to Viaña,Marx believed that the land was a prolongation of humans' hands. This is a concept shared by the Bolivians who abide by the principles of *Pachamama*.

'We should change our vision of the relation between nature and society and reset it through the praxis of history,' Viaña says. Perhaps this relationship could be improved by bringing together the dualistic visions of anthropocentrism on the one hand and ecocentrism on the other. By mentioning 'the praxis of history', Viaña alludes to the practical, not theoretical, evaluation of human history that can give us a better understanding of nature and help us create a community for both nature and human society.

Foto: Antonio Suárez

BESO DE CHOLA

THE ART OF EMPOWERMENT: FEMINISM, SEXUALITY AND THE INDIGENOUS IMAGE

TEXT: MILO CLENSHAW
PHOTOS: ANTONIO SUÁREZ & ALEJANDRA SANCHEZ

Since its conception in 2016, ***Beso de Chola***, a performance piece and accompanying photo display and video, has been exhibited and debated around the world. I met with its creators, multidisciplinary artists Ivanna Terrazas (a.k.a. María María) and Adriana Bravo, to find out about the controversial performance's origins and its continued resonance two years on.

Although most well-known for the image of two **cholitas** kissing in front of the guards on Plaza Murillo, *Beso de Chola* is only a part of what was a three-day performance in which Bravo and Terrazas transformed themselves into *cholitas*. Both artists identify as **mestizas**, and they say that for them the experience of wearing traditional Bolivian indigenous clothes, jewelry and braids was significant. Over the three days, they targeted some of La Paz's busiest and most recognisable locations – including Avenida Camacho, La Paz's historic centre and the **teleférico**, as well as attending a party – accompanied by hidden photographers. The resulting photos and videos captured Bravo and Terrazas' passionate kisses as well as the public's reactions, which ranged from shock and confusion to willful ignorance.

I asked Bravo and Terrazas how such a controversial and influential work came to fruition, and what its intended purpose had been. They must have been asked similar questions many times before, because they both immediately launched into the story of how they had been on a search for seafood one night when they stumbled upon a party near La Paz's general cemetery. It was full of *cholitas* drinking and dancing in beautiful yellow dresses, some with tattoos and piercings. They were both taken aback when one partygoer took Terrazas' hand, unashamedly expressing her desire. Bravo explained how this had been their 'lightbulb' moment. 'When I realised it, it was crazy, it's like the first kiss, like the loss of innocence,' she said. 'And it's something obvious, if you think about it within any feminist framework. Everyone, mixed race, indigenous, from European descent, kids, old people, we all desire. And when this happens to us, we have to think about it, and this is *Beso de Chola*.'

The artists explained some of their aspirations for the performance piece and how racial and class divides in Bolivia were a major motivating factor. As they put it, they wanted to shatter the collective public image of the *cholita*, that of a proper, matriarchal woman devoid of desire. 'People think of indigenous women as asexual, like children, like old people,' Bravo said. However, she was also keen to outline the duality of the issue, that the indigenous status of rich *cholitas* gives them a certain freedom that white women of the same economic class just do not have. 'Economic empowerment implies a sexual liberation, and the kiss between two indigenous women in traditional dress is powerful,' Bravo said. 'So there are things happening in Bolivia that couldn't happen in Mexico or Peru.' Nearly two-thirds of Bolivians identify themselves as indigenous, significantly more than any other South American country, and this creates an opportunity for indigenous empowerment that is unique to Bolivia.

Foto: Alejandra Sanchez

That the photographs and video depict two women kissing is an element which should not be ignored, and which elicited a variety of reactions from the public. One only has to scroll through the Facebook comments to see the controversy they caused, and Bravo and Terrazas said they were handed pamphlets telling them to go to church or were asked to go to a hotel by people in the street. At one point they were even accused of plagiarism by a Peruvian artist, compelling some other Bolivians to defend *Beso de Chola*. It seems that national pride, in this case, overrode homophobia. It's clear that Bravo and Terrazas believe passionately in the power of images to provoke change. 'We don't just want people to stare at the picture, we want it to open their mind,' Terrazas said. 'And even the laws – now Evo Morales and the mayor are saying these things and coming up with positive ideas. And even if we contributed to 1% of this, we have transformed something.'

Terrazas and Bravo spoke with warmth and eloquence about their art, which has a lot of personal resonance for the both of them. Near the end of our interview, Bravo made a statement summarising the mark they hoped *Beso de Chola* would leave. 'The kiss is an act of resistance, like an act of tenderness in a violent world,' she said. *Beso de Chola* is an example of the possibilities of contemporary Bolivian art, and one hopes it's not the last collaboration between these two innovative artists.

A full range of pictures, as well as photographs of the process and the performance video, are available to view at besodechola.wordpress.com.

'WE DON'T JUST WANT PEOPLE TO STARE AT THE PICTURE, WE WANT IT TO OPEN THEIR MIND.'
—IVANNA TERRAZAS

SAN JUAN

THE FESTIVAL THAT ROSE FROM THE ASHES

TEXT: MARION JOUBERT
PHOTO: OSCAR ZALLES

The night is particularly freezing, but I wouldn't advise you start a fire to warm up. On the night of 24 June, a 24th of June, you risk a fine of almost 200 bolivianos (about $30) if you try to light even a little flame or firework. With more than a 1,000 police officers in La Paz enforcing this law, it's simply not worth the risk.

The government of La Paz has implemented such strict legislation due to the famous customs of the San Juan celebration. Traditionally, families and neighbours gathered around big fires in which they burnt old furniture and any objects that belonged to the past or represented evil memories. Other than warming people up on what is considered to be the coldest night of the year, the fires served the alternative purpose of exorcising negative events in the past to start a new, purified life. Using the fire to their advantage, families also cooked collective meals over the flames, served with **sucumbé** or just straight singani.

Local authorities decided to forbid the fires more than 20 years ago because of the consequences of burning objects such as rubber tires. The fumes from this practice increased pollution in the city, which posed health risks for **paceños**, increased fire hazards, and disrespected **Pachamama**'s right to enjoy uncontaminated air, as stated in article 7 of Bolivia's Law of the Rights of Mother Earth.

The fires have stopped as a result of the law, but did the San Juan festival disappear also? Thanks to the local company Stege, the celebration has continued. Instead of gathering around fires, people now meet around barbecues and enjoy... hot dogs. Stege was the first company to introduce sausages to San Juan, given its expertise preparing sausages for the German embassy in La Paz. Stege began marketing its products nationwide for the 24 June celebration and decided to take advantage of the fortune-reading tradition of San Juan to promote the brand, adding lucky charms or amulets to their sausage packs. The new tradition has continued and the offers vary every year, featuring different kinds of bread, sauces and sausages. Every region of Bolivia has its own way of preparing hot dogs using traditional ingredients.

So, in 2018, people are gathering around barbecues. Their grandparents were lighting fires. But when did San Juan start and why?

In the Andes, the Incas were already celebrating this special night as the starting point of a new year. However, it had a different name: Inti Raymi, which means 'Sun festival' in Quechua. The Incas honoured the rebirth of the sun and ate uncooked corn and vegetables in order to purify themselves. The feast was maintained after the Spanish colonisation, but acquired another religious meaning. According to the bible, the prophet Zacarias lit a fire on the night of the 24 June to announce the birth of his son: Juan Bautista, making him perhaps the only saint to have had a commemorative day of his birth, rather than of his death..

But this is not the only strange fact about San Juan. After reading my future in eggs, beer and melted tin (which is a local tradition), a **yatiri** explained to me the many beliefs that have emerged from San Juan through the years. When fires were still allowed at the festival, she said, it was common to start them in areas where people wanted the soil to be fertile. It was also the tradition at the time for people to walk across hot coals in order to show the spirits they were unafraid. The majority of people did this fire-walk at midnight because the legend assured that your feet would not be burned at this time. Then, on the next day, people used to read their fortune for the next year in the ashes.

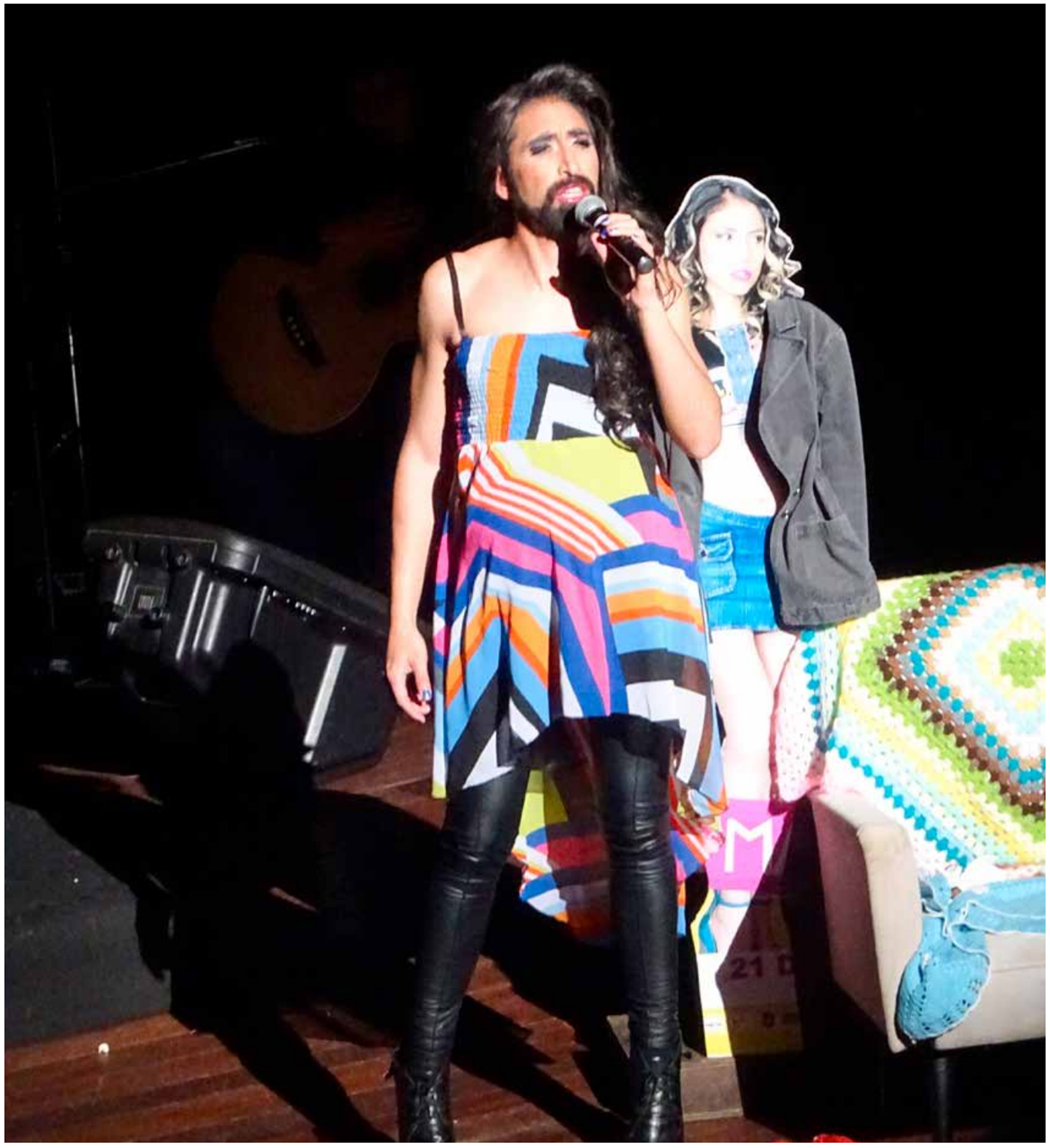
According to the *yatiri* one should refrain from sleeping on the night of San Juan to avoid being tired for the rest of the year, but also to reduce the risk being woken up with a water splash on the face. It is common for those who wake up first in a house to throw water on those that are still sleeping that day. Some even throw water on their neighbours! Others take a cold bath at 4am to maintain their youth, or look out the window in search for the love of their life.

The rituals and traditions of San Juan have changed over time, but there is one thing that is clear: It is still a festival that encapsulates the beating heart of La Paz and of Bolivian life.

EL CLUB DE LAS MALCOGIDAS LIGHTS UP LA PAZ

DENISSE ARANCIBIA IS THE MASTERMIND BEHIND THE IMMENSELY POWERFUL MUSICAL

TEXT & PHOTO: JACK FRANCKLIN



The final showing on 4 July of the musical *El Club de las Malcogidas* brought an end to a production which took La Paz by storm for six weeks. The musical, whose title translates to 'The Badly Fucked Club', lived up to the hype of a theatrical performance encompassing boldness in every form, sharply written and directed by Denisse Arancibia and produced by Victoria Guerrero. The live performance is an adaptation of the 2017 film *Las Malcogidas*, also written and directed by Arancibia. Its plot centers on Carmen, played by Pamela Sotelo, who struggles through life due to her weight issues and inability to orgasm (hence the name of the production). Arancibia's brother Bernardo plays Carmen's trans sister, Karmen, and Marta Monzón plays the sisters' grandmother.

An early scene sets the tone for the rest of the play. Álvaro, Carmen's handsome neighbour (played by Kartiel Hidalgo), sits next to a plastic cutout of his girlfriend whilst eating a chocolate bar. Listening to his erotic over-enjoyment of the chocolate bar and noticing her family bashfully going about their daily chores, Carmen recognises that sex is happening all around her – and that she's missing out on something important in her life. Her only hope is through her friend Lucho (Diego Paz), who works with Carmen at the only adult movie theatre in town. Despite the affection he shows her, she continually rejects his advances until the end, when she falls into his arms.

The production has many more underlying themes than just Lucho's battle to win over the **gorda**, as Carmen is regularly called by her companions and grandmother. Sotelo explains that the musical's approach to explicit themes creates a feeling of unease amongst the audience, which eventually elicits laughter. She notes that 'people see themselves in the mirror on a daily basis and don't want to laugh, but it is easy to laugh at others, who are acting on stage, for the same reason.' An important meaning of the play is revealed just before the end of one scene, in which all the characters reveal inherent characteristics of themselves that indicate they all **sobran** – they are all lonely and unwanted. Carmen, for example, says, 'Fat people *sobran*.' Each of the characters has a shortcoming in her life; it's the universal condition.

Musically, production is very powerful. 'All the songs construct the narrative of the work,' Bernardo Arancibia says, 'and at the same time strengthen the characters.' One song, 'Bailar hasta caer' ('Dance until you fall'), by AtellaGali, is particularly relevant for Arancibia's character, Karmen. It was this raw humour that left the audience in a state of unease, uncertain whether to laugh awkwardly or to sit in silence. So, too, was Lady Gaga's 'Born This Way' a very apt song choice, bringing to the fore the issue of sexuality and gender in Bolivia.

Musical director Miguel Vargas worked with the house band, las Mentes Ociosas, to tightly connect the music to the action on stage throughout the production. Like a Greek chorus, las Mentes Ociosas were consulted at times by Álvaro, who asks for their opinion on matters. They also play the part of Álvaro's imaginary band, los Espermos (the Sperms) – and they face the wrath of Carmen and Karmen's grandmother, whom Monzón plays with verve. Monzón, who played the same character in the film, says she had to adapt significantly to the demands of the play. 'It's a premeditated relationship between the actors, the director and the audience,' she says.

El Club de las Malcogidas was a great success. The musical draws upon an array of modern issues and transforms its characters' – and by extension the audience's – often uncomfortable differences and flaws not just to create humour, but also to highlight that we all have our issues.

Now with a film and a musical under her belt, director Denisse Arancibia is ready to move on. 'The film was the best project of my life,' she says. 'The play was the cherry on top of the cake, as a last taste to leave the Carmens behind and dedicate myself to new projects.'

Andean Contradictions

BOLIVIA'S INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

TEXT: RAFAELA ALFORD / ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

THE QUECHUA AND AYMARA PEOPLE OF BOLIVIA AND PERU HAVE A COSMOLOGICAL VOCABULARY THAT HELPS TO DESCRIBE THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CONTRADICTORY FORCES IN NATURE. BELOW IS A SELECTION OF INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS THAT DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF THESE CONTRADICTIONS:

Pachakuti: This word can be broken down into the suffixes *pacha*, which means 'world', and *kuti* meaning 'upheaval' or 'revolution.' *Pacha* can be broken down further into pa, meaning 'dual', and cha, meaning 'energy', describing how the world is defined by duality. *Pachakuti* is used to describe a general transformation of order or a paradigm shift. According to the **pueblos andinos**, the last *pachakuti* occurred with the arrival of the Spanish, around 500 years ago. Some even claim that we are in the midst of another *pachakuti* right now!

Taypi: This refers to a place where everything unites or reunites, the centre of the universe. For example, some believe that the ancient site of Tiwanaku, near Lake Titicaca, is a *taypi*. It's a meeting point of all positive and negative forces where contradictory forces can cohabit, creating equilibrium with their union.

Tinku: Whilst a simple translation into Spanish is **un encuentro** ('a meeting'), *tinku* has a much more profound significance in Andean cosmology. It is a meeting that seeks to resolve tensions that exist between two parts, a point where two forces travelling in distinct directions connect with the intention to achieve *taypi* (see above). It exists not just conceptually but as a physical ritual performed to consolidate opposing groups. *Tinku* is the name for ritualistic fights between two communities, and while these might appear to be violent, their function is to unite two opposing factions.

Yanantin: This refers to things that belong together, like a pair of eyes or hands. *Yanantin* is often used to describe the concept of marriage. By allowing the forces of two halves to meet, the opposing forces are joined together. All social equilibrium depends on the exchange of forces situated in a *taypi*, in which the different forces meet and ultimately achieve **una igualación** known as *yanantin*. On a human scale, in terms of marriage, *yanantin* is the application of a principle of opposing forces that exist in hierarchical relationships, for example, when a male presides over a female in activities associated with his gender, whereas a woman presides over traditionally female activities.

Masintin: *Yanintin* is often seen more as '*yanintin-masintin*' which embodies the concept of complementary opposites. The reciprocity consolidates the unity of the two components making them one. *Yanantin* and *masintin* regulate the relations that an individual has with the outside world in both a literal and cosmological sense. *Masintin* describes the process by which the *yanintin* pair is paired.

AL-AZAR

THE TALENT OF AMALGAMATING ART AND POLITICS

TEXT: ROBYN KATE POLLARD / PHOTOS: MARION JOUBERT

A spacious workshop with a large window overlooking the mountains, home to an array of paints, brushes, oils, pencils and hundreds of books, is also home to Alejandro Salazar, the Bolivian artist known as: Al-Azar. Salazar produces many forms of artworks; he doesn't adhere to just one style or technique. He has put on gallery exhibitions, created flip books, and is a regular contributor to local Bolivian newspaper La Razón. His political caricatures have been the subject of great controversy over the years, particularly his infamous caricature depicting the disaster at the Carnival of Oruro in which five people died. The illustration titled 'Welcome to the Carnival', which features a band of skeletons observed by a crowd of cadavers, was deemed insensitive.

In response to critics, Al-Azar maintains: 'If a subject interests me, I'm not bothered if people protest, it's what I'm interested in. There are matters that affect me, and if I feel like saying something about things I have witnessed, I draw to express myself. You comment on it in conversation, whereas I use art.'

His defiance in continuing to produce art that is relevant to him, regardless of public opinion, is admirable. Despite this, Salazar recognises that some matters necessitate a more sensitive approach. 'You have to be careful in how you say things,' he admits. 'Generally, I try to create drawings that are much more subtle and that don't cause such a strong reaction.' According to Salazar, this way his art is more effective. 'People don't get angry and they accept the message,' he explains.

Flicking through Salazar's **cuadernillo** of recent work was like opening the pages to his mind. 'An American once asked me if I was unwell after looking at my work,' Salazar remembers. A sense of magical realism emanates from his workbook; the personification of animals and nature and the abstraction of the human form is prominent throughout.

Although primarily a source of humour, through oversimplification and exaggeration caricatures give their subject a new prominence, so much so that they can portray them in a different or potentially damaging light. Salazar's piece of the current Bolivian president, Evo Morales, stood out in his workbook. Morales appears with his arms and legs merging into the chair on which he is sitting. For some, the image could signify inactivity on the part of the government. Others might see it is a symbol of the restraints that the president faces – bringing to life the idea of metaphorically having your hands tied. Regardless of how the drawing is interpreted, it has the potential to provoke a change in opinion. With little or no written description, caricatures reach audiences of all literacy levels. With the stroke of a pen, artists such as Al-Azar have the power to influence in a way that reasoned, written argument may be unable to.

The purpose of Salazar's work, however, isn't to influence others, although he appreciates that it is a consequence of his drawings. His work is rather a form of expression. Salazar is a humble man, whose passion for art and creativity overshadows any desire for political power. 'What I struggle with is knowing what is true,' he asserts. 'I see the same news via different platforms, and essentially the same piece of news is manipulated to say something different. That is the difficulty.'

The conflict between what is portrayed in the media and the 'truth' is prevalent in Al-Azar's work. The beauty of his art is that it provides an alternative perspective on life that isn't readily available through standard news media. Amalgamating political opinions, humour and artistic design to produce striking pieces of art is a true talent, and one that ought to be cherished.

STREET AND URBAN ART ACCORDING TO KNORKE LEAF

TEXT: BRIDGET TAHOURDIN
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

The prominent Bolivian street artist Knorke Leaf has much to say on the power of street and urban art: 'It's a spiritual power…' she muses. 'It's in the colours.' Her artistic actions and her involvement in several projects aim to highlight the power that street art can have. In previous years, she was involved in a project associated with #TimeToAct, which addressed the issue of sexual violence. In addition, she has collaborated with 'Habitat for Humanity' to provide adequate housing conditions for children returning home after cancer treatment. At present, Leaf is working on a mural for the youth section of Fundación La Paz, which is a community style project that provides art therapy for people facing social, economic and familial issues.

With art, there is often no need to talk because the art does the talking. Although Leaf holds a Masters in Fine Arts, she has seemingly realigned her creative spirit to the forms of urban art. She often emphasises the notion that the streets are free from rules and judgement, and do not limit the styles people have to abide by. What is important is what you 'feel inside,' Leaf says. Street art is not limited in the way many traditional art forms are. For Leaf, galleries are evidence of how institutionalised and exclusive the art world has become, while in contrast the streets are inclusive spaces, somewhere everyone belongs.

But, there are challenges involved in being a female artist in a predominantly male scene. The main challenge is not fitting in or seeking approval from her peers, but rather representing Bolivia as a female artist. She was once invited to Denmark, for example, as the only female artist among seven men who were more experienced than she was at the time. It was a valuable learning opportunity for her. Although Leaf has been invited to a number of arts festivals in Europe, this has not been the case in her home country. 'In Bolivia,' she says, 'it seems festivals are only for guys.'

There is a special passion and appreciation for street art in Bolivia that makes it different from how street art is viewed and produced in Europe and North America. According to Leaf, 'street art in Europe and North America is about individuals'. It is rebellious in nature. In Bolivia and Latin America, however, street art is a platform for the communal and national struggles. It is another way to express political feelings.

'At the beginning people are always reserved,' Leaf says, describing the reactions she has observed to her artwork. 'It's always a struggle,' she continues. Recently, she was involved in a project in Sucre with a number of children and people who 'freaked out' at them painting a wall in black. However, once the mural was complete, reactions were quite different. Although reactions to her work can be extreme at time, she does not receive much negativity: 'At the end they love it,' she says, with a hint of satisfaction.

Leaf sustains that she has no style. 'Or if I do, I don't care about it,' she says, but she is visibly influenced by images in nature and by animals as well as by the rights and struggles of women. She claims that the stories of people she meets on the street are what most influence her work 'and give [it] a lot of sensitivity.'

Her philosophy towards nature and people is very inspiring: by harming nature, we harm ourselves, she asserts. 'We forget what is important. Violence against the bodies of women is violence against mother nature,' Leaf says, suggesting that as humans we have a great responsibility toward nature. She believes that we are more than 'just people', that we have relationships to other beings and thus have a responsibility with the rest of the world.

In a similar line of thought, Leaf sees a special link between painting and self. Painting has limitations, just like people. 'The idea of perfect makes you crazy,' Leaf explains. This is why painting is a humbling activity for her that involves creating imperfections. Perfection is an unattainable ideal and street art is about these imperfections.

PURE PRIDE

LA PAZ'S LGBT+ COMMUNITY CELEBRATES

TEXT: BRIDGET TAHOURDIN
PHOTOS: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

Last month saw Pride marches across the globe celebrating the LGBT+ community. For some people, Pride is more than just that – it's a celebration of humanity and, as important, of love. The majority of Pride events occur annually in the month of June to commemorate the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City on 28 June 1969, when the LGBT+ community fought back against police repression.

Pride can mean different things to different people, whether it be a celebration, a protest or even a party – it's subjective, and one cannot generalise, given the constantly evolving nature of the LGBT+ community. Perhaps it is best thought of as a celebration of life, a celebration of humanity and love.

In La Paz, Pride wasn't heavily promoted, but the turnout this 30 June was immense, and people from all walks of life were out in support. On Facebook a mere 70 people claimed to be attending; however, the **Prado** was thronged with thousands of celebrants marching from Plaza Bolivia to Plaza San Francisco. The La Paz City Council sponsored the event, and it featured a gigantic rainbow flag that participants clutched as they chanted for love and equality. The sense of community and cohesion was palpable, and marchers waved handmade signs that promoted inclusion.

Paceño Juan Pablo Álvarez Kawai summed up La Paz's Pride march perfectly: 'Pride is the feeling that you get when you can act freely and be responsible for your actions, when you don't violate other people's rights. Pride is the feeling you get when you are able to be yourself, and you can tell everyone who you are. Not because you have to, but because you want to, without being afraid. You have the right to be a human, a person, to be respected and respect others. Pride means to me to fight for everybody's rights. The moment someone's rights are violated or neglected is the moment everyone's rights are taken for granted.'

'PRIDE IS THE FEELING YOU GET WHEN YOU ARE ABLE TO BE YOURSELF, AND YOU CAN TELL EVERYONE WHO YOU ARE.'
—JUAN PABLO ÁLVAREZ KAWAI

VOICES FROM A UNIVERSITY PROTEST

CONTRADICTORY NARRATIVES BETWEEN MEDIA, STATE AND PEOPLE

TEXT: RAFAELA ALFORD / PHOTOS: POPPY KORONKA

The sounds of shouts, horns and flares accompanying bustling crowds, road blocks and picket signs often greet daily commuters in La Paz. In Bolivia, **marchas** are almost impossible to avoid and can be dismissed as normality. However, in recent months, the University of El Alto's (UPEA) demands for increased government funding have lead to a seven-week-long protest on the streets of El Alto and La Paz, that has claimed the life of a student protestor. This ongoing protest has exposed several contradictory narratives in the country between the state and the people.

The ongoing campaigning is primarily focused on amending **Ley 195**, which allocates the distribution of funding to the various public universities in Bolivia. At present, UPEA receives 0.355% of national yearly tax collections, but they demand an increase to 1.4%, or around 222 million bolivianos yearly. Protesters have rejected the government's 70 million bolivianos offer to solve the problem, arguing that the sum would do very little to address UPEA's 152 million bolivianos deficit. David Flores Vargas, a UPEA professor participating in the hunger strike as part of the protest, explains the sum 'only alleviates rather than removes the issue. It means that next year we will have to protest again, every year it will be the same,' he says. The movement is after an amendment to the law that secures future funding.

'THEY HAVE DENOUNCED US AS VANDALS, BUT THIS HAS BEEN A COMMON WAY OF DISMISSING PROTESTERS FOR MANY YEARS NOW.'

—EDGAR RENÉ QUISPE COLQUE, UPEA PROFESSOR

The government claims that there is no adequate justification for the requested sum, and sustains that a change to the law would be 'immoral' as it would take away funding from other public universities. However, in the eyes of the protestors, the university's current budget neither reflects the size of the university nor the quality of its education. According to Flores, 'UPEA is 18 years old, and has undergone a "natural" growth. Its student population has increased from 20,000 in 2011, to 47,000 in 2017.' Flores believes that the law needs to be updated in order to correspond with this growth, since it is the government's constitutional responsibility to look after the country's education.

Whilst the Bolivian Constitution exalts the freedom of the press and freedom of expression without censorship, the protesters believe that they haven't been able to fully exercise these rights. In response to the government's accusatory words regarding the movement, Nicolas Mendoza, founder of UPEA, replies: 'It is, as always, a situation in which the facts are distorted.'

'They have denounced us as vandals,' says Edgar René Quispe Colque, another UPEA professor who has joined the hunger strike. 'But this has been a common way of dismissing protesters for many years now, especially those of El Alto,' he adds.

Flores also distrusts the media. 'Since I have a history of political activism,' he explains, 'during interviews, journalists hope that I mess up. One time they came and interviewed every person in the room but me, because the government had instructed them not to interview "bitter" people.'

Despite these scathing opinions, several small media organisations with limited government funding still operate as exceptions to the rule. Radio Pachamama is a good example of a station that has retained the trust of its listeners. Based in El Alto, it gained a reputation as a reliable news source during the protests known as the Gas War in 2003. The station provided a platform for the words and wishes of the people, not the government. Now, in light of a similar divergence of perspectives between state and people, Radio Pachamama continues to report and reflect on these issues. Rather than remaining in support of the government they once helped put into power, the station is openly addressing the communication gap between government and people and giving voices to the protesters once more.

In these recent weeks of unrest, protesters attempted to take over the offices of the state channel, Bolivia TV. Gisela Lopez, Minister of Communication, denounced the act as a violation of freedom of the press. Dr. Alex Chamán, on the other hand, who is a high-profile professor and supporter of UPEA, defends the attempt, saying that they were acting out of desperation given how the state media has misrepresented their movement. 'The government curates a mudslinging campaign against us,' he says. 'At a certain point, one is compelled to deny their accusations. Although [the act] may not be completely justifiable, it is understandable…Evo Morales himself spent years fighting, in various ways, against the previous neoliberal government,' Chamán adds. 'This is a case where the steak does not remember that it was a cow.'

In 2003, protests arose against a law that would have allowed foreign investment in the country's natural gas reserves. Although this year the protests have emerged in a different context, Flores believes there are several similarities. 'The government has its own priorities that are neither education nor health,' he explains. 'The mixing-pot of the events of 2003 is beginning to re-emerge because the government is failing to fulfill its socialist promises.'

Chamán, however, has a different view of the situation. '2003 was different,' he says. 'Bolivia was in a catastrophic situation, governed by a neoliberal government that took away our rights…with huge poverty and repression, a situation that moved the entire country to fight. Now, Bolivia is in a hugely improved situation,' he adds, 'but this does not mean it cannot be further improved.' For Chamán, the protests are not meant to incite a revolution, but rather to communicate the need for further social improvement. In this case, the goal is for the university to reach an internationally competitive level of education.

The young protesters who are currently on the street didn't experience the 2003 uprising, but they are fighting for the government's attention in the same way as their predecessors. For them, however, the movement is mainly a matter of university funding, while for those who remember the revolution of 2003, it is a symptom of what they consider is a larger issue: that the government is not delivering on its promises.

'Bolivia TV belongs to Bolivians not the **Masistas**!' students reportedly shouted at the recent attempted takeover of the channel. Although it is not clear whether the protesters are united in their opposition to the ruling party, it seems evident that the supporters of the movement feel a lack of representation. For them, in the fading afterglow of 2003, there is no excuse for the government to avoid engaging with the demands of the population.

EL VALLE DE LAS ÁNIMAS

TEXT: CHARLES BLADON / PHOTO: GONZALO LASERNA

Just east of La Paz's **Zona Sur**, the spires of el Valle de las Ánimas hang over a carved-up glacial valley, resonating with a mystical quality. A mere one-hour bus journey from the city's centre, this beautiful park is often overlooked by visitors to this sprawling city. The natural attraction goes beyond the aesthetics; it has inspired spirituality for the indigenous population for centuries, who know it as the home of babies who died before baptism – this is limbo on earth.

'Limbus infantium' is a concept not readily accepted by the Catholic Church; however, with the indigenous assimilation to Catholic concepts, this interpretation has become commonplace in Bolivian Christianity. Looking up at the towering spires, it is hard not to see why the image of spirits in limbo struggling to reach the heavens has been projected upon these rocks. These dizzying spires inspired myths and tales of the yearning of those condemned to a monotonous eternity in the valley. Desperate to reach their exalted loved ones, they try to ascend these rocky ladders – or so the myth goes. Irrespective of spirituality, one can agree that it's a poignant tale. But those not convinced would happily settle with the geological explanation, which is simple enough: el Valle de las Ánimas was formed due to erosion left from glaciers, an explanation that is no doubt correct but underwhelmingly unsentimental.

But el Valle de las Ánimas doesn't only attract visitors purely for its aesthetics and spiritual depth. It's also known for its spectacular view of the iconic Illimani, the tallest mountain in Bolivia's Cordillera Real. There's nothing that stands in the way of the perfect view of Illimani, which, depending on the weather, can sometimes be seen from La Paz.

El Valle de las Ánimas so far only houses the lingering souls of unbaptised children and various species of birds; however, there have been recent government plans to introduce a variety of fauna – including condors, Andean foxes, vizcachas, kestrels, giant hummingbirds, hawks and other birds of prey – in an effort to turn the valley into a natural reserve. And then those poor children's souls will finally have some company in the vast eternity of limbo.

MAYRA GONZALES

A BASTION OF BOLIVIAN FOLK MUSIC

TEXT: CHARLES BLADON
PHOTO: JAIME VARGAS

No doubt anyone who has paid mind to the music on the streets and in the nightclubs of La Paz would notice that the current generation is entranced by the bombastic drums and melodic synths of reggaeton. In all its inescapable glory, reggaeton refuses not to be heard. It dogs the commuter, booming from the **maestro**'s sound system and forces even unwilling feet to tap to its rhythm. This reggaeton takeover, however, threatens to undermine Bolivian folk music, a guitar-heavy acoustic genre that has dominated the country's pop culture until recent decades. But Mayra Gonzales, a proud **paceña** musician, stands by folk, unconvinced of its supposed decline and assured of its strength.

Gonzales was just seven years old when she started playing piano, while growing up in La Paz's Sopocachi neighbourhood. But despite this early start, she says, 'I dropped playing piano because I was concerned with my studies and was really disconnected from music until I was 17 years old.' It was then that Gonzales joined the *paceño* blues band Almitra, alongside her brother Daniel Gonzales, before joining Grillo Villegas's band Llegas as vocalist. 'It was like school for me, Grillo Villegas taught me a lot about music,' Gonzales explains. 'It was the most important time in my career.' After Villegas moved on to other projects with his career, Gonzales was left to ponder her own musical future. She decided to go solo, and called on Villegas to help produce her first album, *Árbol de la vida*. Gonzales refers to the album as her 'first baby' – a testimony to its importance to her.

With her debut album, Gonzales soon began receiving national and then international acclaim. She accepted an invitation to RockBol USA, a music festival in Washington, DC, showcasing Bolivian talent, in August 2017. Because her backing band couldn't attend due to lack of funds, Gonzales played alone, adapting her setlist and playing acoustic. While it was an unfortunate circumstance, it showed Gonzales that she could play solo very well, and shortly thereafter she recorded a solo album. 'I then arranged songs with various artists,' she says, 'and that resulted in my second album, *Bolivia, piano y voz*.' This year, Gonzales accepted an invitation to be a judge on the musical competition television show Factor X Bolivia, necessitating in a move from La Paz to Santa Cruz – a change that proved controversial to folk-music purists. Despite this, Gonzales says, 'Since being in Factor X, I have been more in touch with the younger generation who are more in touch with urban and pop music, and I feel like I've reached out and inspired taste in folk music.'

But today folk music in Bolivia doesn't have the universal reach it once had. Despite the strengths of talents such as Matilde Casazola, Willy Claure and César Espada (all of whom, with the help of the classical musician Fernando Román Saavedra, assisted in the production of *Bolivia, piano y voz*), it's no secret that the youth of today aren't as engaged with traditional Bolivian music as previous generations. And Gonzales doesn't see her music as a means to change the trend. 'You can't change people. That's not the objective that I have,' she explains. Instead of changing entirely to adapt to the palate of the masses, Gonzales aims to adapt folk music to offer something similar yet true to the genre. 'I am always looking towards evolving,' she says, 'not moving over to the mainstream.'

This is very much the stance Gonzales takes in the production of her new album, which she's currently working on with help from producer Dorian Mendez. Gonzales says that her taste in music is ever changing, and she's been working in phases and switching between various genres, ranging from soul and R&B to electronic music. Gonzales confesses, 'I wasn't sure whether I liked folk, but it was just very natural to me.' But, she concludes, she's 'not going to be a purist,' and her music reflects her different tastes – which her new album will showcase. By staying loyal to her folk roots but adapting to the modern musical landscape, Gonzales can help folk music rediscover its footing in Bolivia.

'We need folk – it's our culture, it's who we are. If we lose this, then we lose who we are,' Gonzales says. And with the changing times, the key to folk music's survival is its adaptability. This is something that Gonzales is aiming for and something that we can look forward to with the release of her forthcoming album.

GLOSSARY

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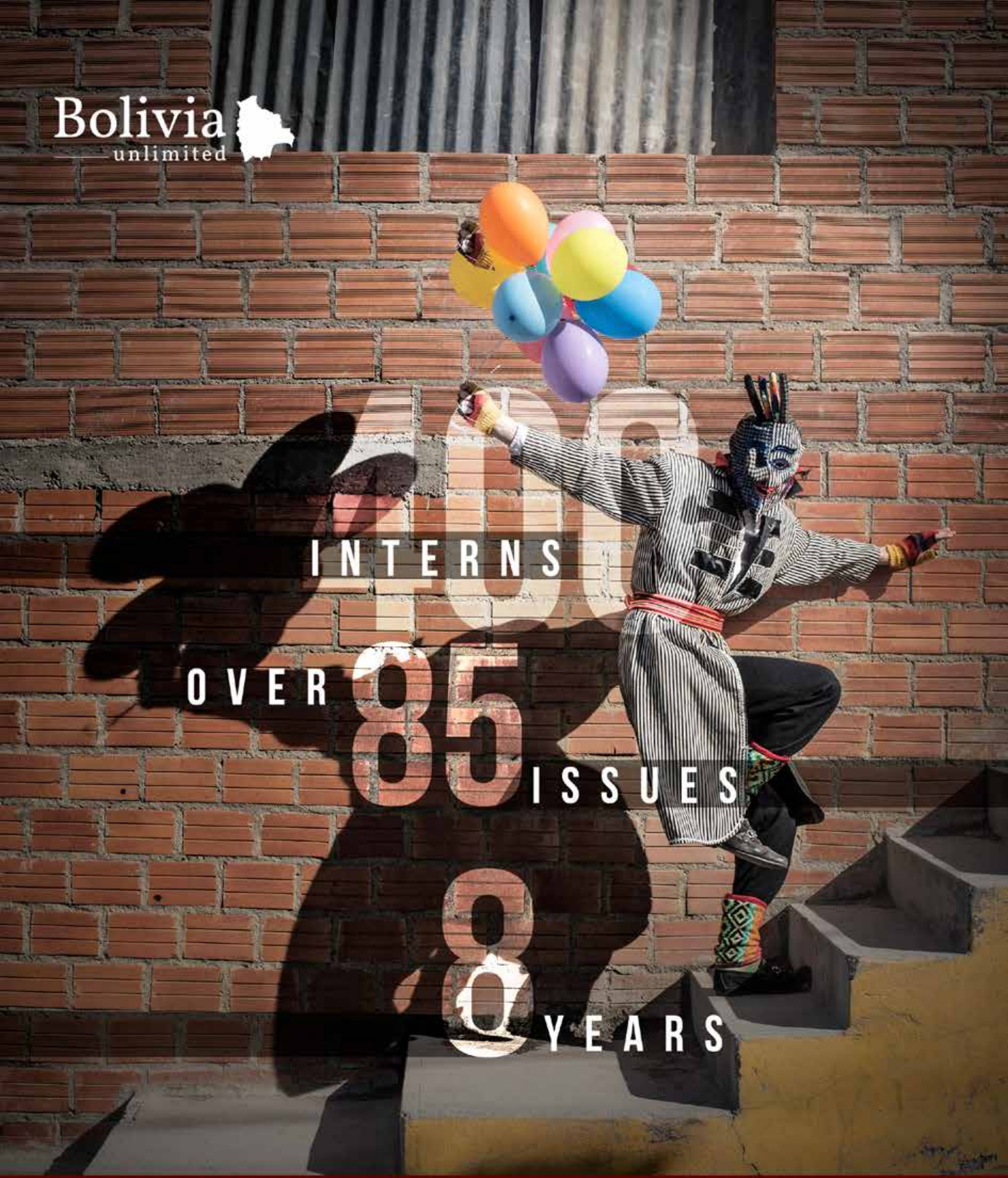
BESO DE CHOLA	Chola's Kiss
CALDO DE CARDAN	Bull penis soup
CAMPESINO/A	A farmer, someone from the countryside
CASERITA	Sales woman
CHOLA/CHOLITA	Bolivian woman of indigenous decent
CRIOLLO/A	A person from Spanish South or Central America, especially one of pure Spanish descent
CUADERNILLO	Booknote
ENCUENTRO	An encounter
FLOR DE JAMAICA	Hibiscus flower
GORDA	Fat
LEY 195	Law 195
LLAJUA	Hot sauce
MAESTRO	Term used to refer to taxi and bus drivers
MARCHA	Protest
MASISTA	A follower of MAS (movimiento al socialismo), the socialist movement headed by Evo Morales
MESTIZO/A	Woman of mixed heritage
PACEÑO/A	From La Paz
PACHAMAMA	Mother Earth
PRADO	Large avenue in the centre of La Paz
PUEBLOS ANDINOS	The Andean communities
SOBRAN	From the verb 'sobrar' which means 'to be left over'
SUCUMBE	Hot milk with singani
TELEFÉRICO	Cable Car
TRUCHA A LA PIEDRA	Grilled trout on slate
UNA IGUALACIÓN	An equalisation, the process of balancing
VIVIR BIEN	Living well
ZONA SUR	Neighbourhood of La Paz
YATIRI	Medical practitioners and community healers among the Aymara of Bolivia

MERCADO RODRIGUEZ

PHOTO: ANA RYAN FLINN TEXT: CHRISTOPHER LUNNON

From our 28th edition, a merchant at the Mercado Rodriguez stares suspiciously into the camera lens. A world away from the touristic Calle Sagarnaga, the market is a murky labyrinth where buyers brave the chaos to barter with vendors for Bolivia's fruits, vegetables and bull penis soup.



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