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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

One of the symbolic objectives behind the campaign that took Evo Morales to power in 2006 was to move towards a '*gobierno de poncho y corbata*'; a government equally made up of new indigenous leaders (represented by the *poncho*), and **mestizo** leaders of the prevailing political class (represented by the tie). The party leaders could just as easily have heralded a government era of '*pollera y* ***vestido***', the corresponding symbolic female garms. But they didn't. While racial and social equality were strong on the agenda, gender was not a salient political issue.

As it happens, the President-elect wore neither a poncho nor a tie during his first diplomatic tour, but rather a plainish stripy jumper which quickly became iconic around the world. It was telling that the person spearheading the ascent of an indigenous political class opted for an outfit more representative of a hybrid urban class with a dual heritage—at once rural and urban. While the government still denies the existence of a mestizo identity, it has certainly found its own cultural and aesthetic expressions.

From formal suits with prominent aguayo details, to imported second-hand clothing repurposed and appropriated for the local market—Bolivia has become a point of confluence for diverse fashions spanning time and territory. Rather than harmoniously meeting in new aesthetic expressions, what we are witnessing more closely resembles a series of uncontrolled explosions. Austere indigenous colour pallets combine with neon and glitter, giving way to beautifully monstrous creations. Fashion trends seem to be driven by kitsch, chaos and entropy, rather than by an elite cloister of designers and models.

We have chosen to steer away from the few catwalks and established *haute couture* circuits in the country to pay more attention at fashion which originates and takes place on the streets: military tattoos, counterfeit clothing, second-hand gems from El Alto market, cholita clothes, traditional hairdressers, and even an emerging fashion brand inspired by a 'rap-rave' South African band. If we are to find the true expressions of what fashion means in the Bolivian context, it is needful to look at the people and movements that define the local aesthetic. It's especially important to pay attention to those silent icons who are seldom seen as fashion pioneers, even among themselves.

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

By Amaru Villanueva Rance

Cholita FASHION

A STATE SECRET

TEXT: MODUPE SANUSI
PHOTOS: ANDRES BEDOYA

I find myself in the outskirts of La Paz, close to *El Cementerio General.* As soon as I leap out of the crowded minibus I am immediately greeted with curious stares from every direction. For local tradesman, rushing hurriedly to and fro to carry out their daily business, it is clear that I am an object of intrigue—my blue denim jeans, Timberland boots, as well as the colour of my skin, instantly set me apart from the crowd. Yet in this part of town I cannot help but reciprocate their curiosity. One group of people in particular stood out among all others—like peacocks proudly flaunting their feathers in a densely populated zoo. It was the exuberant cholitas and their unique plumage of clothes and accessories. In awe with the meticulous designs of their garms —noting their uncanny resemblance to the **Yoruba** attire from my family's Nigerian homeland— it was the perfect opportunity to take photos. My first stop was a **tienda** specializing in cholita jewelry. As I took out my camera, carefully framing the perfect shot, the owner greeted me with an agitated reply: '*No no Señor*'—he hissed—'*¡No puede tomar fotos aquí!*' Bemused, I reluctantly returned the camera back into my bag. I had to wait another week to understand why I couldn't take the photo.

Not being used to La Paz, one would be forgiven for being taken aback by the magnificent, sharply coloured attire of the cholitas. Despite the ubiquitous global influence of denim jeans, polo shirts and Ray Ban sunglasses here in La Paz, cholitas, as well as their fashion, remain an intrinsic facet of Bolivian highlands culture.

Cholitas often wear outfits as colourful as the myriad of fruit on display in some of their market stalls, yet many tourists may not fully acknowledge the significance which lies behind these vividly-designed outfits. With the variety of materials imported from all corners of the planet, from the Far East to Italy, these outfits

often take a painstaking amount of effort and craft to produce. Much like with established Western fashion brands, cholita fashion is the aesthetic expression of a host of social and cultural values which encompass not only cholitas themselves, but designers, merchants and artisans. Their outfits are showcased at a yearly extravaganza called *Gran Poder*, a festival fuelled with an abundance of beer, religious hymns and endless dancing—sometimes lasting several days.

A complete outfit has several constituent parts. For a full set, one would need *'el sombrero', 'la pollera', 'las enaguas (or centros)', 'la manta', 'los calzados', and 'las joyas'*. These items more or less equate to what English-speakers would call the hat, skirt, petticoat, shawl, shoes and jewelry. The full set can cost up to 2500 US dollars (excluding jewelry), especially for eagerly anticipated events such as *Gran Poder*.

El sombrero (or hat) is one of the most distinctive elements of the outfit. It is often identified as an ornament which symbolically crowns the pride of the cholitas. These hats, which became fashionable in La Paz from the 1920s, are imported from a variety of countries, such as the USA, Germany and Italy. In the early 20th century, the crown of the cholita hat measured approximately 15cms in height, was predominantly white and had a wide straight brim. In recent decades the hat used has made an evolution of its own, notably gaining a pair of tassels dangling off the brim, a delicate band, as well as a decrease in crown height. Ivan Cussi, one of La Paz's most established hatters, estimates the fashionable crown height in 2013 to stand at around 10cms.

La pollera (or multi-layered long skirt) can be made from a variety of materials: from velvet and satin, to chiffon and synthetic fabrics. The fabrics for these materials are often imported from the Far East, with cheaper skirts crafted from materials originating in China and the more expensive skirts being manufactured from fabrics imported from Korea. *La pollera* often matches the colour of the *enaguas* (petticoats), with pale and soft colours such as white, yellow and light blue. *Las enaguas* are usually made from lace. The petticoats are considered to be a crucial part of the outfit, since they add bulk and prominence to the *pollera*, giving it the distinguished wide bell shape the cholitas so highly desire. Another item which often matches the colour of the skirt is *la manta*. The shawl is a delicately-designed garment which can be made from a variety of fabrics—including llama wool. Frequently crafted from silk, the fine materials used are often embroidered, by hand, with floral patterns. The most expensive *mantas* are made from vicuña wool, arguably the finest natural fabric on this planet. Limbert Cussi from VicuArt makes these exclusive items for select clients. While he's reluctant to talk about prices, we hear they can cost over Bs. 5000, or 4 times the minimum wage.

Los calzados (the shoes), like the other elements of the outfits, signify elegance and differentiation. Cholita shoes are generally made using leather, synthetic crystal, or plastic. These flat and open shoes undergo rapid transformations from year to year, with a plethora of colours used to match the rest of the outfit. The last component of the Cholita attire is the *joyas* (jewelry), worn on the hat and as a brooch on the shawl. A lot of the jewelry in La Paz is fake, however, for the grander occasions, such as *Gran Poder,* cholitas are known to wear **topos** costing upwards of 1500 US Dollars—items so coveted and dear that security guards are employed to escort the dancers throughout the parade. Cholitas' large and heavy earrings are made from gold or fantasía, occasionally furnished with pearls (though Esmeralda Condori, a celebrity cholita, tells us silver is in fashion this season) . Furthermore, large pins—made from gold, silver or rhinestone—are designed to keep the shawl in its place.

FOR THE GRANDER OCCASIONS, SUCH AS GRAN PODER, CHOLITAS ARE KNOWN TO WEAR TOPOS COSTING UPWARDS OF 1500 US DOLLARS—ITEMS SO COVETED AND DEAR THAT SECURITY GUARDS ARE EMPLOYED TO ESCORT THE DANCERS THROUGHOUT THE PARADE

Now, fully equipped with some knowledge of *La Moda de la Cholita,* I returned to the *tiendas.* As confident as a model striding down the catwalk I made my way to *Diseños Esmeralda*, a tiny yet cozy cholita boutique.

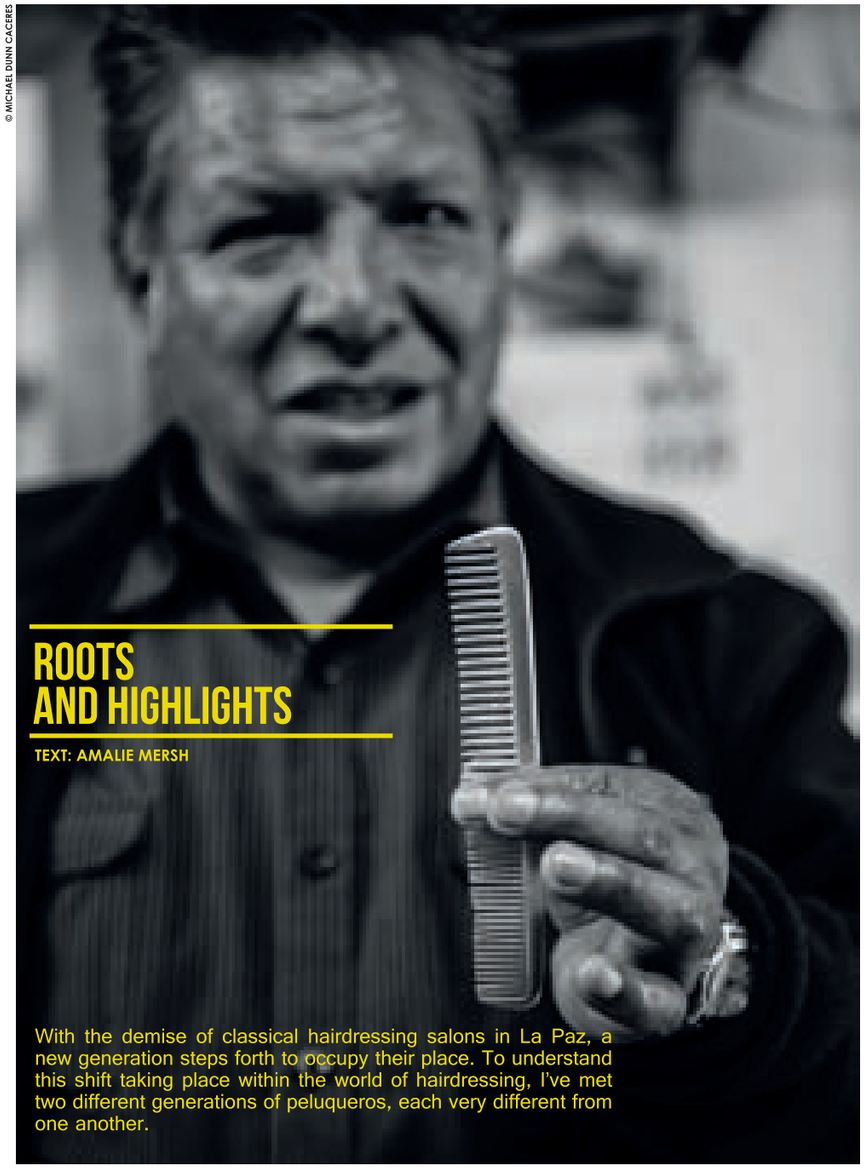
Perhaps, now, I would get my photo. I had arranged an interview with Eliana Paco Paredes, the owner of the boutique, to find out more about the cholita fashion industry. Proudly displaying a multitude of colourful recent designs, I was offered a seat

to begin the interview. 'Our biggest inspiration is nature, such as butterflies.' Looking around the boutique, I was immediately taken aback by the originality of her designs.

Sensing my awe, Eliana asks: 'You like? we are always looking abroad for inspiration but we always retain our culture… so for example if we're talking of *Gran Poder* we may make prints with the image of the Virgin Mary and the rosary'. Intrigued, I ask her about their current innovative designs. 'This year there have been a lot of designs based on emeralds, pearls and salmon.' 'Salmon?' I asked, somewhat perplexed. 'Yes, we use silver and pink which are very light colours, which often seem strange but also look great!'

'NO NO SEÑOR'—HE HISSED—'¡NO PUEDE TOMAR FOTOS AQUÍ!' BEMUSED, I RELUCTANTLY RETURNED THE CAMERA BACK INTO MY BAG. I HAD TO WAIT ANOTHER WEEK TO UNDERSTAND WHY I COULDN'T TAKE THE PHOTO.

Eliana had given me an insider's look into the world of a cholita designer. However, there was still one more thing I urgently needed to understand. I brought out my camera and took aim at the collection of neatly-placed *sombreros*. 'No Mo, unfortunately I do not allow customers to take photos of my outfits. I'm sorry.' I attempted to look surprised, trying my utmost hardest to also look disappointed. 'It is impossible for us to take photos or show costume designs. The outfits must be guarded as a state secret until the day of delivery, because otherwise we would be risking the possibility of someone copying the model before it being displayed for the first time.' Perhaps, the look of disappointment had carried through, for after a short pause she continued, 'if you make a promise of never publishing these images, I'll let you take a few photos. Show your friends and family at home but just make sure there is no sharing!' I obliged, and began snapping away. There were only 5 or so photos taken, but I felt as if my mission had been accomplished. Content with my day's work, I thanked Eliana wholeheartedly and made my way home happily—one would have thought I got myself a date with one of the beautiful cholita models Eliana showed me; such was the grin I carried on my face on the way back.×



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ROOTS AND HIGHLIGHTS

TEXT: AMALIE MERSH

With the demise of classical hairdressing salons in La Paz, a new generation steps forth to occupy their place. To understand this shift taking place within the world of hairdressing, I've met two different generations of peluqueros, each very different from one another.

THE GENTLEMEN OF HAIRDRESSING

At the exact second you enter Don Juan's **peluqueria** on *20 de Octubre* in La Paz, the smell of alcohol is instantly noticeable. Not because this classic barber is an alcoholic—far from it— Don Juan is a very established hairdresser. Here, finishing a haircut by spraying alcohol in the freshly cut hair, is just part of the routine. Lit up by bright, fluorescent lights, the simplicity of the equipment along with the elderly, bright-spirited man who works here, give you the distinct feeling you're not standing in a typical salon.

Don Juan's hairdressing story starts way back in 1965, when he was just 15 years old. Still living with his family in the village of Calacoto, provincia Pacajes, he was taught the first basic steps on how to cut hair by his father. Back then it was just a pair of scissors and a comb that made his hairdressing tools. Don Juan was soon cutting, not just the hair of his siblings, but also his schoolmates and teachers.

Observing Don Juan cut the hair of the client in the tall, red chair of business I can sense that he is a man of great routine and experience. His client, who I later discover is actually his brother, is familiar with all the places where this hairdresser has worked, starting with his humble beginnings near Puente Avaroa on the Avenida Buenos Aires over 30 years ago.

As a new client takes place and gets ready to receive a haircut, Don Juan sterilizes the tools he is about to use with fire from a small, silver instrument.

After spending some time in the army, Don Juan returned to hairdressing to pick up where he left off in his career. Yet something was missing: he still lacked proper tuition. He got this opportunity when he became an assistant at Enrique Moñano's hair salon on Avenida Buenos Aires.

Don Juan spent four years working there and perfected his skills, but it soon became clear to him that the money he made was not sufficient. So he decided to make a swift move to Miraflores where prices were higher and business more profitable.

Don Juan smiles while he explains how Enrique Ezpinoza, his second boss, easily could have been over a hundred years old when he retired. His brother looks up from his newspaper to interject. 'He was closer to 80. But yes, he was very old'. Don Juan concedes he may not have been as old as a hundred, but emphasises that he continued to cut hair right up until his very last years. 'Don Enrique [the second] was a *peluquero clásico.* That's all he ever did. He never learnt any other style. Just like me. I only know classical hairdressing and I will also die that way.'

I look up at the walls in his small salon, where the calendar still shows February despite it being September. The mirror Don Juan uses for his work is not attached to the wall, but merely standing on the dresser where the many tools lie ready for use.

After over 4 years in Miraflores Don Juan moved to Sopocachi, the district where he now works. He started working for Enrique Berra, the third Enrique, at his salon. In 1982, an old friend of his turned up with a proposal. Now a senior military officer, he offered Don Juan a job in the army. He went with the **coronel** to Oruro where he was tasked with cutting the hair of senior military officers.

The situation was tense across the country, as Bolivia was in the middle of a military dictatorship. One day, while Don Juan was dining in a restaurant with a friend, a group of unionists and indigenous leaders came in. They shared food, drink and laughter with the group until his friend made the grave mistake of mentioning they belonged

© AMALIE MERSH

to the Comando General. The group, no doubt key figures in one of the several uprisings against the military government, responded to the news with a brutal beating. It was a close shave with death, but Don Juan survived the attack with little memory of the incident and a fractured spine and hip, which spun him out of action for two years during which he moved back with his parents. This incident made him decide to leave the army for good and instead focus solely on his hairdressing career.

Soon after Don Juan moved back his boss fell ill with **triquinosis**. Berra was saved, but he had to stop working after just one year, eventually dying from drinking-related problems. Shortly before his death, Don Juan offered to buy Berra's hairdressing equipment in 1985. The dying man accepted, and Don Juan still uses the equipment today.

The many years of hairdressing have definitely given Don Juan a reputation. He has cut the hair of several famous people, including former President and Military General Hugo Banzer, as well as his right hand man General Tejerina. Other famous clients include former President Toro, former Vice President Luis Ossio as well as several ministers, ambassadors and military diplomats. It's no coincidence Don Juan's skills are in such high demand from military figures: he represents tradition, orderliness and pride for a bygone era.

Don Juan finishes off the haircut, as he always does, by spraying a large amount of alcohol on his client's head. It's almost enough to get you a little dizzy from the fumes. He then brushes off small bits of hair from the neck of the client and looks satisfied at his work.

As a **peluquero clásico,** Don Juan, is a member of the Hairdressing Syndicate for Classical Hairdressers of La Paz and El Alto, an organisation almost a century old. I went to find the syndicate's Secretary General, Don Hilarión, who has a salon in Miraflores.

Like Don Juan, Don Hilarión is an elderly and talkative man. He proudly proclaims to be the intellectual author of a new policy that helps people without formal qualifications to be licensed as hairdressers. He is a strong advocate for giving less-established hairdressers a chance to start somewhere. He tells us that under Evo Morales' administration there has been an effort to offer hairdressing certification to people who work empirically, recognising them as skilled labourers in their own right, sometimes even more so than those who have studied.

As Secretary General, he is struggling for his syndicate to join the simplified tax regime despite the tax authorities insisting on them joining the general tax regime. This makes paying taxes a difficult matter they are required to declare all earnings separately and hand in receipts for all expenses. Don Hilarión believes it would be wonderful if it could all run through a simplified tax regime, that runs on a fixed, yearly contribution. Winning this battle is no small task, but Don Hilarión is not giving up.

Commenting on modern hairdressers and 'stylists', as he disparagingly refers to them, he says: 'There is no such thing as an original Bolivian style. We learn it all from abroad'. Don Hilarión laughs as he explains how he once said to the face of famous stylist Raul Ruiz: 'So you're a stylist? Show me your own creations'. Talking about the people who come fresh and proud out of the hairdressing schools, he argues that while everybody has their own style, they cannot be deemed 'stylists' as such, when there's such a dearth of innovation in the country.

Don Hilarión is keen to promote himself and his fellow 'classical' hairdressers as specialised artists. Times ahead are challenging for the ageing and dwindling cohort of classical barbers in Bolivia, even for one as impassioned and experienced as Don Hilarión. 'I used to charge one boliviano for a haircut, but now I can't even go to the bathroom with one boliviano.'

CUTTING EDGE:
THE BERLIN HAIRDRESSING INSTITUTE

Having gotten a glimpse into the dying world of traditional hairdressing in La Paz, I was eager to see how the new generations are getting trained .

The Berlin Hairdressing Institute started up in the town of Llallagua, Potosí, in 1980. The grand idea was to teach the students all about beauty—including styling, hair care and skin care.

From the outside you don't really realize you're standing outside a hairdressing institute. The entrance is barely noticeable. But after entering the hallway, there is no doubt that this is the place we are looking for. Even so, it seems a bit run down. Old Christmas decorations hang from the ceiling; cold, grey walls surround you, and at the end of the hallway a secretary sits and welcomes teachers, students, clients and visitors to the school. We look around at the mannequin heads displaying the different hairstyles to the sound of a crackling TV. The quality of the picture on the TV reminds me slightly of the good old VHS tapes popular throughout the 1990s, an era of which the whole place is reminiscent.

We are sent up to the next floor and into a room that almost blinds us with how orange it is. The room is split up in two—one side for men's haircuts and one for women's—both parts equally orange. Most of the equipment lying around has an interesting, pink theme going on.

We are greeted by the smiley, 30-year-old teacher Ana Luisa Morales, who is pleased to fill us in with information about the school. She tells us about how the courses work: 'The period of study is one year. The course is developed in stages—starting from making a braid to the latest fashions. At the end of the course, the students are given a national-level title, which is recognized throughout the country'.

We listen closely while she talks passionately about the school, where she herself was once a student. 'There are four centres in the institute, the most important of which is in **La Ceja**. At each centre, there are 25 students on each of the 3 schedules: morning, afternoon and night. There are also classes for people who want to learn about men's haircare.'

Two years ago, Ana Morales got a job as a teacher at the school. She proudly explains that the students' level is high, and that they come in ready and prepared to learn. I look around at the students and sure enough—they seem keen.

Out of nowhere a few students pull out a couple of tables and a few chairs and start

© IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

applying nail varnish on each other's hands. Pink is, inevitably, one of the chosen colours and I can quickly sense where the girly-girly prejudice comes from when people refer to hairdressers and styling.

Looking out of the taxi window on the way to the school, I couldn't help but notice the many hairdressers on the way. Faced with so much competition one might think that either starting up a business within this profession or making it into one of the established salons would be rather hard. But it is not, according to Ana Morales, who sounds almost naively optimistic about the students getting work after graduating. Anyway—what do I know.

When I asked the classical hairdressers, Don Juan and Don Hilarión, about these new 'stylists', they criticised them for not having their own style. They felt that hairdressing schools were merely mass-producing hairdressers with no real experience.

Despite the harsh words, Ana Morales say they try to give the students at Berlin as much experience and training as possible while they're there. They encourage them to create their own style and figure out where their strengths truly lie.

I ask to speak to one of the students and am quickly presented with a shy girl who has been getting her nails done in the same bright pink colour as many of the tools and equipment lying around on the tables.

Angelica also sees a bright future in the hairdressing business, and seems unpreoccupied at the prospect of having to find a job when she graduates.

'I like to create and do new things', she tells me.

She likes the school and says that she thinks that the teachers are very good. Whether she says this because three of her teachers are sitting around her, I will never know, but Angelica comes across as committed, so I let that pass. Despite the place at first seeming somewhat tacky, it sure seems like they get to try out a large number of things—even going as far as making clothes and shoes out of hair for no clear reason. While their creativity isn't currently being channeled towards defining Bolivia's hairdressing identity, it is certainly there. Traditional hairdressers may be sceptical, yet their numbers are falling and the new generation is stepping in and taking over.

ZEF

FASHION DESIGNERS VALERIA WILDE AND CARO VALDIVIA EXPERIMENT WITH ECO-FRIENDLY FASHION IN BOLIVIA, INTRODUCING ZEF, A RECYCLED CLOTHING BRAND LAUNCHING THIS NOVEMBER. BOLIVIAN EXPRESS GETS AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW ALONG WITH A SNEAK PREVIEW OF ZEF'S SPRING FASHION LINE.

TEXT AND PHOTOS : ALEXANDRA MELEÁN

BX: Why 'ZEF'?

Z: The first time we heard the word 'ZEF' was in an interview with Die Antwood (South African experimental rap group). If ZEF has taken different connotations throughout time and in distinct regions, the word, which roughly means 'common,' symbolizes being proud of your own essence, the ability to have style without money and expressing your inner self in every external aspect. To accept the idea of selling second-hand clothing, which has been redesigned, will be difficult in Bolivia. In comparison to European countries, where these trends and tendencies thrive, Bolivia still has prejudices about buying second-hand.

BX: How was ZEF born?

Z: We shop second-hand. You can find true, hidden gems, and make modifications without the remorse of over- spending when you thrift recycled clothing. You have unique pieces, and the best part is the

sentiment of knowing you aren't paying more than necessary. ZEF reuses materials, combines textures, rescues unique fabrics, transforms them and makes clothing consciously.

BX: What does fashion mean to you?
Z: Art. Expression. A world of creation: fashion is a reflection of the context and environment we live in.

BX: What is the first step you take to design new articles of clothing? How much time does it take to design one article of clothing?
Z: We let our imagination guide us and stop thinking. We start to play with colors,

ZEF REUSES MATERIALS, COMBINES TEXTURES, RESCUES UNIQUE FABRICS, TRANSFORMS THEM AND MAKES CLOTHING CONSCIOUSLY.

patterns, textures and fabrics. Our limits fall behind us. One can say the process lasts a week to various months. Details vary. We change buttons, add elements and interchange fabrics depending on the article of clothing.

BX: What influences your designs?
Z: Inspiration comes from the seasons, from day to day moments, from a song or something on TV, a phrase from a book, a look on the street or a state of mind. We accumulate these things subconsciously, reflecting in every item we design.

BX: What market are you aiming at?
Z: We design for 18 to 35 year old women above all, but we will also be introducing items for men. We market our clothing to a more alternative audience who support emerging trends and designs. We will not design expensive clothing, but keep in mind we are not only selling used clothing like some stores. We work individually with each piece, dedicating time and add necessary details so that we will be satisfied with the end result. Our efforts represent the final result.

BX: Where can we buy your clothing?
Z: We will be posting details on Facebook when the line is ready in November. Later on, we would love to open a store.

Agujas, Tinta, Pasión

Finn O'Neill meets a young inventor, an artist, and some inked locals to understand the past, present and future of tattooing in Bolivia.

Olmer Flores Pinedo is a 14-year-old **alteño** kid, trying to keep himself busy like so many others, yet he is anything but ordinary. I first met Olmer during a chance visit to El Alto market. Walking into a used clothes shop I noticed a skull tattoo on the arm of a boy which I later learned was the owner's nephew. I approached him to learn a little bit about it and was astonished to learn that he had made it himself, with a tattoo machine that he had constructed. At lunch the next day, Olmer brought his tattoo machine to show me. He assembled it in front of me out of a motor from a DVD player, a phone charger, a pen, a lighter, a needle, thread, pliers and

AS AN ARTIST I CAN SAY THAT IT'S MORE A WAY OF SHOWING YOUR FEELINGS OR SOMETHING THAT'S HAPPENING AT SOME IMPORTANT POINT IN YOUR LIFE, OR SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU'.

a knife. The end product? A machine capable of producing a tattoo of high quality, arguably of better quality than some of the tattoos I had seen on the streets of La Paz.

Despite his machine only costing around 35 bolivianos to assemble, the Chinese ink which he requires to make tattoos costs around 250 bolivianos. For this reason, Olmer can't do tattoos on other people, although he explained that his friends had asked him about the possibility in the past. He does, however, share a tattoo design on his arm with a group of his friends who are in a band together. Olmer was quick to note, though, that he was not part of a pandilla, but a music group. It is his dream to have his own tattoo parlour when he is older.

Perhaps Olmer will one day become someone like Jhony Jaramillo, a Colombian artist who works at Pepe's Tattoo in La Paz. Jhony explained the allure of tattoos: 'For me, it's not just marking your skin to look better or attract people's attention, it goes beyond this. As an artist I can say that it's more a way of showing your feelings or something that's happening at some important point in your life, or something that happened to you'.

AS AN ARTIST I CAN SAY THATIT'S MORE A WAY OF SHOWING YOUR FEELINGS OR SOMETHING THAT'S HAPPENING AT SOME IMPORTANT POINT IN YOUR LIFE, OR SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU'.

Tattoos in La Paz are common not just in rebellious local youths but even among middle-aged bus drivers. For many, tattoos are a mark of having spent time in the army, where it is customary (though not compulsory) to get ink on the hand or wrist to represent one's squadron or regiment. One slightly reluctant bus driver whom I spoke with had gotten a tattoo at the age of 20 whilst in the army. He was dismissive of his colleagues who did not have tattoos, calling them 'maricas'—perhaps a joke or a subtle show of strength. Ironically, the other bus drivers mocked him for having a tattoo, not necessarily because they thought of him as a 'marica', but hinting at the idea that having a tattoo could be a sign of immaturity. Perceptions aside, Jhony's words rang true: the tattoo on the man's wrist marks a moment in his life—something which he will remember all of his life.

Another man I spoke with, Israel, also had a military tattoo which clearly marked his regiment and his year of service (1999) along with four other tattoos on his arms. I met him near a garage where he was hanging around and chatting to some mates who were taunting one of the younger mechanics for his neck tattoo. Unlike the older bus drivers, Israel was more than happy to talk to us about his tattoos.

FOR ME, IT'S NOT JUST MARKING YOUR SKIN TO LOOK BETTER OR ATTRACT PEOPLE'S ATTENTION, IT GOES BEYOND THIS.'

He explained that military tattoos are optional, something done by the 'big boys' in the army as a proof of their bravado and valour. Israel said that his tattoos had been done by a tattoo-artist friend, and they cost from 30 to 100 bolivianos—much cheaper than they would have cost in Europe or the United States, where the cheapest hourly rate is around £60 (more than 600 bolivianos). The prices of Israel's tattoos are still cheap when compared to the professional parlours in La Paz, where you can pay upwards of 200 bolivianos per tattoo. Israel told me that he wanted more tattoos and was unconcerned with how people perceived him because of them.

Certainly, there is not a vast tattoo culture in Bolivia; tattoos are not nearly as common as they are in Europe or the United States. But as tattoo art is increasingly appreciated as an art form, opinions are shifting and with them the prevalence of ink. Like elsewhere, tattoos are often merely seen as an act of rebellion by young people. But in Bolivia they're also emblematic of a long-lasting tradition carried out by military personnel to demonstrate their time in service and their personal strength. It is likely that here, instead of being subject of ridicule and condemnation by older generations, tattoos and tattoo art might gain appreciation. As Jhony Jaramillo puts it, they are ultimately symbols that mark important moments in people's lives, a form of expression and, above all, a piece of art.

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

CAN BOLIVIA'S BIGGEST SECOND-HAND MARKET SATISFY THE CURRENT FASHION DEMANDS? CHRISTINA GRÜNEWALD COMBS THROUGH THE FLEA MARKET OF EL ALTO, TRYING TO FIND AN ENTIRE OUTFIT INSPIRED BY CURRENT WESTERN FASHION TRENDS.

I am at one of the world's biggest open-air flea markets and this what I have learned so far: 1. always wear a good layer of sunblock unless you later want to be mistaken for a red traffic light; 2. always pay attention to your belongings; 3. even if you are spat at, always pay attention to your belongings.

Tourists refer to this place as El Alto Market although its actual name is 'Feria 16 de Julio'. It runs on Thursdays and Sundays in La Paz's sister city of El Alto, and it is quite simply a collector's heaven. You can find anything from vintage magazines to random cables and keys, as well as doors, barbie doll heads and second-hand clothing.

As you walk through the aisles, you get offered phones (probably stolen), various kinds of food, as well as llamas, pigs, dogs and, legend has it, once even a real life penguin. Before my first time here, I had heard that the market was 'big' but nonetheless I was overwhelmed by the actual size of it. I'd say HUMUNGOUS describes it better.

AS YOU WALK THROUGH THE AISLES, YOU GET OFFERED PHONES (PROBABLY STOLEN), VARIOUS KINDS OF FOOD, AS WELL AS LLAMAS, PIGS, DOGS AND, LEGEND HAS IT, ONCE EVEN A REAL LIFE PENGUIN.

After passing the furniture section and moving past the electronics, I find myself in the area allotted to clothing. Being here for the 5th time already, I stand (again) in front of tables and tarpaulins heaped with clothing. Some pieces are wearable, others, far from it.

But what is it with the current obsession with 'vintage' shopping? In the world of fashion, being up-to-date is not enough—you have to be one step ahead. Some of us are only now slowly discovering the trends of the upcoming Autumn Season, while designers have already presented their Spring/Summer 2014 collections on the runways of the fashion capitals around the world.

Yet it is hard to be one step ahead since you are trying to find clothes that cannot yet be found in stores. Therefore, as a trendsetter, you need to have deep knowledge of how the industry works. You need to know, for example, that trends tend to reappear in cycles of 15-30 years.

Does that mean that we should keep our clothes in our closets for when expired trends become fashionable again? No. What usually happens, is that old clothes end up on flea markets and second-hand stores, where they will be bought again when the trends make a comeback.

To succeed in the world of vintage shopping, you need a good eye to spot hidden treasures and a good deal of confidence. I'm in favor of avoiding a fashion faux-pas, but then again, fashion is not about right or wrong but about self-expression. And, in the end, street-style is what inspires fashion forecasters and designers around the globe.

In Bolivia, you won't find popular stores like H&M, Zara, Topshop or Forever 21. A nightmare, you say? No, not quite. Living here isn't exactly living on the dark side of the moon.

To prove my point, I have accepted the challenge of finding an outfit at El Alto Market, inspired exclusively by current fashion trends. Fashion blogs and magazines are part of my daily reading routine making me familiar with the Do's and Dont's of fashion right now. And the latest trends that have caught my attention are the use of dark, muted colors, monochromatic styles, and the appearance of accessories such as hats and boyfriend-inspired shoes.

THE HARVEST

After several trips to the market I have finally purchased the following items:

THE HAT

It took four trips to the market before I decided to actually take on the challenge. The only thing I had bought by then was my hat. There are tons of hats available, but my head, it seems, is just too big for all of them.
Looking back at the day when I was looking for the hat, I remember myself trying on every single model in sight. This must have been very entertaining to look at; cholitas openly laughed at me for trying on hats that were too small for my head. Luckily, in the end I found one that I was able to squeeze my head into.

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A PAIR OF SHOES

I know the market quite well by now, but the search is hardly easier. As I make my way through the alleys I am overwhelmed by the amount of clothes and their variety. I slowly realise that I actually have to rummage through piles of clothing to find something worth buying.

As I start worrying, a shoe catches my attention sitting at the edge of a table waiting for me. To my surprise, it fits perfectly. I become a bit anxious as the vendor struggles to find the matching shoe in his bag, but eventually he does, so I pay happily and continue my stroll.

THE SHIRT

I begin to wonder how the clothes all ended up here—especially since I find clothes that have Goodwill-tags on them. I also realise that having a set image of an outfit in mind is preventing me from buying clothes I actually quite like. So I spontaneously pick up a black & white lumberjack shirt for only Bs 3 and decide to complete my mission on my next visit.

A PAIR OF LEGGINGS

One week later, I find myself in a different clothing section. Here the pieces have been washed and are displayed just like in shops. I didn't know about this part of the market and I am a bit confused when I get there. Apparently you can even find Jimmy Choos here. To me, all of this feels wrong somehow.

While looking for trousers I start talking to Pedro Paldo, 30, who owns one of those shops. Thanks to him I now know that the clothes originally come from Europe and the US, but that they arrive in La Paz via Iquique, Chile, passing through Oruro en route. He gets calls from personal contacts and decides whether he wants to buy something or not. His options are purchasing **fardos**, or picking and choosing among their contents. According to him, the advantage of selling at the market is that he is able to have another job on the days the market is closed.
From my previous visits, I already know that I am not a big fan of the pants selection because all the items are either denim or oversized. So, instead, I buy a pair of black leggings and decide to exit this part of the market. I prefer the sections that are more chaotic, where shopping feels like an adventure and success is dependent on luck.

A JEAN VEST

Now that I have shoes, a hat, a shirt and my new pair of leggings, I decide that I want a denim vest to complete the outfit. The market is full of jean jackets and I remember one man who offers a large variety. I get excited about the DIY-project: at home I will just cut off the sleeves and take a pair of tweezer to distress the edges.

As I rake up his piles, I learn that the vendor used to work in a mine until he started selling clothes for a friend and then started selling his own. He travels to Iquique every two months to choose his merchandise. He buys categorized sacks of selected clothes. That is what he has been doing for the last 20 years. He earns enough money in the two days on the market to make a living. I pay for the jacket I chose and leave the market for good.

As I leave, I feel in no rush to return to the market any time soon, due to the crammed minibuses, the crowds, the heat but I am really happy that I have also managed to find an entire outfit. Nothing crazy, but pieces that I like and that I will wear.

The shoes, the hat and even the DIY jeans vest, turn a comfy and ordinary outfit into a fashionable one. I only paid 173 Bolivianos for the entire outfit (25 US Dollars). Nowhere else would I have had the opportunity of choosing an outfit from that much variety for this price.

You can find anything you desire in El Alto Market—literally anything, or as the local proverb goes, from a needle to a tractor. So it's perhaps best to not go looking for things—as it happens, they find you.

ORIGINAL FAKES

JOHN DOWNES DIVES INTO BOLIVIA'S COUNTERFEIT CLOTHING MARKET

The fact that Bolivia has a word to describe anything fake or knock-off ('trucho' or 'trucha') goes some way towards explaining the prevalence and ubiquity, and even acceptance, of counterfeit clothing in the country.

The widespread tolerance surrounding the sale of counterfeit clothing is likely a result of the country's laissez-faire attitude to its production and sale. The unrestricted and abundant sale of fake, synthetic football jerseys directly outside Estadio Hernando Siles on match day is a point in case—such uncontrolled activity would be considered highly unusual in the UK.

Paul Brown of The Guardian believes, 'The production of fake designer clothing and trainers in developing countries (such as Bolivia) has overtaken the legitimate manufacture of the same goods for multinational corporations such as Nike, Adidas, Wrangler and Levi's'.

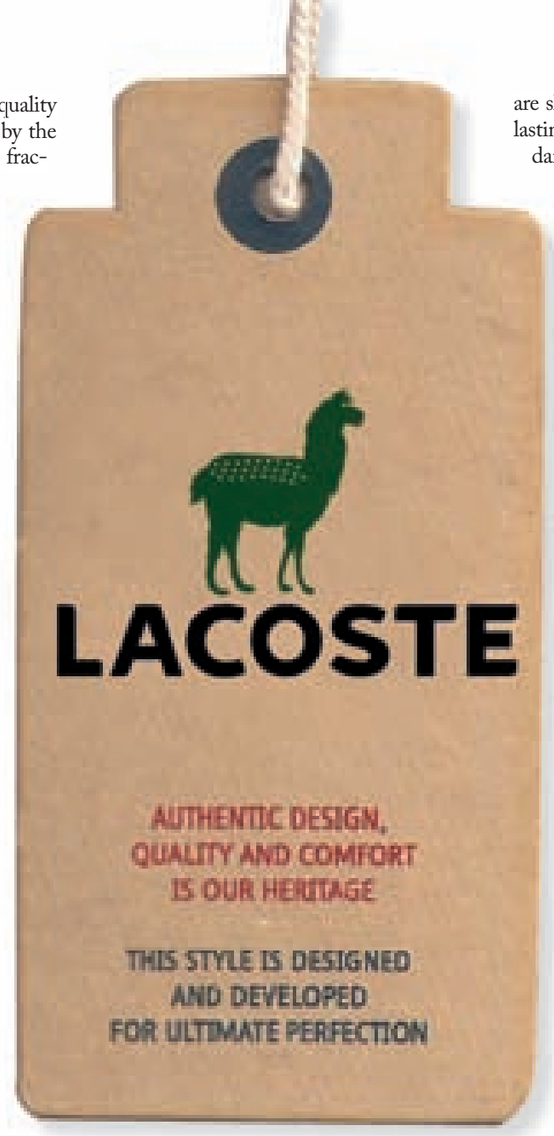
Counterfeit clothes produced locally are actually manufactured to a reputable quality. In fact, calling them 'replicas' in the first place seems unfair. It seems more befitting to think of them as originals produced for the local market, with designer labels sewn on to boost their marketability. Indeed, during a visit to Calle Tumusla I came across a pair of unoriginal Levi's trousers whose quality was comparable to that achieved by the original designers, and for only a fraction of the price.

In Bolivia, replica logos are either downloaded from the internet, traced and reproduced in local factories, or ripped off of genuine branded clothes to later copy and mass produce. Such is the Bolivian retail sector's indifference to appeasing designer firms, that shops have even opened using the names of these brands, perhaps most notably, 'The North Face Adventure Store' on the touristy Calle Sagárnaga. Despite selling no authentic North Face products, the store originally opened in an attempt to lure in travellers seeking new backpacking goodies.

Two of the dominant trends in Bolivia's contemporary clothing market, are the increase of American and European second-hand imports, alongside the growing dominance of the Chinese and Korean manufacturers who entered the market roughly ten years ago.

Ramiro Villca predominantly sells second-hand American clothes near La Feria 16 De Julio. The clothes he receives originally get sent to Iquique in Chile and then to Oruro before they reach his home in El Alto.

Although illegal, Ramiro's type of business is fairly common in Bolivia. For retailers, importing clothes legally would mean they have to pay higher taxes. However, in the everyday hustle of a market such as El Alto's, with narrowing profit margins due to competition, very few follow de jure procedures. At the start of his tenure, President Evo Morales tried hard to end the Bolivian trade in used, imported American clothes which he believed to be undercutting Bolivian clothing manufacturers and the livelihood of domestic producers. Ultimately the industry proved too large—and its practices too widespread—to quash.



Ramiro's clothes, which he calls 'ropa semi-nueva', are evidently genuine as they are imported from North America. He believes that most people prefer American clothes even though they are second hand —only very few, particularly in the wealthier areas of the city, such as the affluent Zona Sur of La Paz— look for new branded goods.

Though he acknowledges that people buy the items he stocks because they are a cheaper alternative to first-hand originals, he believes these logos are important but not essential. For him, the superior quality of materials and design are his most important selling points. Ramiro also points out that his customers are more inclined to buy his clothes as they are slower to discolour and have longer-lasting stitching due to the superior standards of manufacturing procedures in the United States.

Indeed, not even 'Evo Fashion' could prevent Bolivians craving the superior fabrics of their American cousins. Between 2005 and 2006, local clothing company Punto Blanco helped begin a jumper craze in Bolivia inspired by the casual dress sense of then President-elect Evo Morales. 'Evo Fashion' was designed to appeal to young people but was only successful for a short period before normality was reinstated.

According to Ramiro, the contraband (yet original) American clothes which he sells appeal to young Bolivians who want to dress like rappers and 'copy guys from the West'. Ramiro believes that Korean and Chinese fake clothing, which comes tagged with brands such as Adidas and Nike, resembles the real product more than the counterfeit clothes made in Bolivia.

Martha Canedo, a clothing merchant and manufacturer, also shares this sentiment. Martha embarked on a humble family enterprise with her husband 24 years ago, making clothes from one sewing machine, and selling them on Calle Tumusla and Calle Buenos Aires. She then grew her business and less than a decade later had 20 people working for her. She quickly began exporting some of her clothes to Argentina and other places. However, following the closure of a border at Yacuiba, she could no longer export goods south to Argentina, so was forced to devote herself fully to the local market.

The story is remarkable but not atypical, and exemplifies some of the shortcomings of the local clothing industry. Over the past three decades, people who work in clothes manufacturing have been migrating en masse to Argentina and Brazil. By some estimations, there are currently over 1.5 million Bolivian migrants in Argentina alone. It's not surprising there are fewer skilled labourers

left to employ in the local market.

To add insult to injury, Chinese manufacturers swamped the market just over a decade ago. As these clothes are sold at such a cheap price, it is very hard for Martha's business to compete. Martha told me that these Chinese producers manufacture to a variety of quality standards, and the quality that comes to Bolivia is the lowest because it's the cheapest. Although the Chinese clothes do not last as long as Bolivian products such as Martha's, they are cheaper due to their synthetic material. This makes it difficult for Martha to compete with the Asian producers and, faced with rapidly closing market, she may be forced to abandon her business.

Martha's understands that placing international brands on her clothes would not work, as by doing so she would be entering into competition with Chinese manufactures. Competing with the counterfeit clothes from China would be 'ridiculous', considering the low pricing and mass-production capabilities for which the Asian countries have become renowned. She also believes local producers should develop their own brands but, in such a competitive market, the fake clothes imported from China —combined with the stock of second-hand sellers like Ramiro— are likely to dissuade anyone attempting to create their own brand. Currently, she is thinking of closing down her company because it is struggling in the current market climate.
Martha laments the passing of the time when brands such as hers boasted such a high quality that they had nothing to envy from foreign brands. However, in 2013 there is a very different outlook; as a formerly successful manufacturer, Martha is now considering travelling to sell her clothes. She believes it is an easier and more profitable prospect than competing in the local market saturated with cheap fake imports and high-quality second-hand clothes.

While the Bolivian authorities remain seemingly indifferent in the face of the proliferation of fake clothes from abroad, the country is doing so at the expense of locally produced items which may be of a higher standard. For better or worse, what both Ramiro and Martha's stories make apparent is the Bolivian market's insatiable appetite for foreign brands, and merchants' willingness to supply them. Fake clothes thus play an essential role in satisfying that need, and are very much an intrinsic part of Bolivian **moda**.

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CALLING THEM 'REPLICAS' IN THE FIRST PLACE SEEMS UNFAIR. IT SEEMS MORE BEFITTING TO THINK OF THEM AS ORIGINALS PRODUCED FOR THE LOCAL MARKET, WITH DESIGNER LABELS SEWN ON TO BOOST THEIR MARKETABILITY

GLOSSARY

POLLERA	Long multilayered skirts worn by cholitas
VESTIDO	Dress or skirt
MESTIZO	Mixed race, generally refers to a person with a white/indigenous background
MODA	Fashion
YORUBA	Indigenous Nigerian tribe and culture
TIENDA	Small neighborhood shop
TOPO	Large brooch, central to an elegant cholita outfit. Worn on the hat or used to hold the shawl in place.
FANTASIA	Less expensive alternative to gold in cholita jewelry
FARDO	Large bundle, or bale of goods
ALTEÑO	El Alto native
PANDILLA	Gang
MARICA	Pejorative term used to refer to gay man, but more colloquially used to denote a coward.
PELUQUERIA	Hair salon or barbershop
CORONEL	High ranking military officer
TRIQUINOSIS	Disease caused by eating pork infected with worms
PELUQUERO CLÁSICO	'Classic' or traditional hairdresser
LA CEJA	Literally "The Eyebrow". The area which covers downtown El Alto

PHOTO: CHRISTINA GRÜNEWALD.

PHOTO. IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC