BolivianExpress

Magazine

Gratis

Water

#37

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CONTENTS

"¿Rendirme yo? ¡Que se rinda su abuela, carajo!" – E. Abaroa

Turn to page 25 to read more about this month's cover and the influence of the sea on Bolivian contemporary art.

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MYTHOLOGY

CLUB

EDITORIAL

Water streams vigorously down from the glaciers of the Andes, running fast through the rivers of the Amazon. Warm and thunderous showers create a blanket of steam which brings life to the rainforest in the east, and rises up ghostly and thick across subtropical valleys creating a dense and impenetrable fog.

Strangely, the national identity is defined more by the absence of water than by its abundance. Water permeates through every layer of Bolivian history beginning, of course, with the loss of the sea following the armed Chilean invasion of 1879. Bolivia became a mediterranean island surrounded by an ocean of land, closed off from the world beyond our geopolitical borders. The ocean now exists for Bolivia merely as an absence, a void which has scarred and taken hold over the national consciousness ever since.

In 1932 Bolivia went to war against another of its neighbours, fighting Paraguay to defend the Chaco region in the south-east of the country. Campesinos from the highlands, largely illiterate and indigenous, marched south-east to defend a country which barely recognised them as citizens, to defend an inhospitable land they had never before seen. Yet scores of these soldiers didn't die in battle but perished in the heat and dryness of the Chaco. As Miguel Navajo, a military officer, records in his diary: "No hay agua" - "there is no water". Navajo is the narrator of Augusto Céspedes' famous story El Pozo which follows a squadron of soldiers who spend months digging a well in the Chaco with no result. They dig 50 metres into the ground with no success. "Will this end one day?... Digging is no longer about finding water, but to accomplish a fatal plan, an inscrutable purpose", Navajo explains. The soldiers are suddenly attacked by Paraguayan forces, who are also in the search for the precious liquid. Most of the Bolivian soldiers die either digging or defending the well which never yields anything but humidity, heat, and silence.

This was not the last time Bolivians were to fight for their water or die trying to find it. Fast forward to the dawn of the 21st Century, and we find people across Cochabamba taking up banners, sticks and stones to defend their right to have access to water. This time the adversary was not an army but a multinational corporation who, with the help of the government, had secured rights to distribute and sell the water in a region where it is scarce and therefore dear. Facing the prospect of not being able to afford the most basic of human needs, several protesters died in the defense of el agua. Yet unlike the martyrs of centuries past, the fighters of the Water Wars succeeded in claiming back what was theirs.

The beginning of March 2014 saw the yearly reappearance of water wars of an entirely different type. Most of the combatants were under 18, and battles were fought across city in broad daylight. Ambushes were frequent and no civilian was safe from the menace. We are referring, of course, to the carnival season water fights. Armed with water pistols, balloons and white foam (yes, chemical warfare takes place here too), it is that time of the year when thousands of people take to the streets to engage in some fun with a good dose of tradition-sanctioned violence.

Tragically, water has also claimed several victims over the past month. The northeast of the country has seen some of the words floods in decades, leaving over 60 people dead and thousands of families homeless. Some have described it is a natural disaster but others protest there was nothing 'natural' about it, arguing that with sufficient foresight and adequate infrastructure, these disasters are preventable. We take this view, and dedicate this issue of Bolivian Express to all the people affected by the floods.

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

LOS COLORADOS DE BOLIVIA

Los Colorados de Bolivia are considered to be the most elite and prestigious unit of the Bolivian Military. But why is this? And how has their history affected their position in Bolivian society and culture.

TEXT AND PHOTO: NEIL SUCHAK

If you walk around **Plaza** Murillo in the centre of La Paz, you will probably be struck by two things: the number of pigeons that inhabit the plaza and the presence of army officers clad in scarlet uniforms at the corner of the square, guarding the Presidential Palace. These are Los Colorados de Bolivia and they are one of the most prestigious and iconic units of the Bolivian military. In their distinctive red uniforms, they immediately stand out from any other army officer you might come across in La Paz.

Since they are guarding the Presidential Palace, Los Colorados might strike you as a Bolivian version of the English Beefeater, an image reinforced by the ceremonial nature of their daily lowering of the flags, complete with barked orders, marching and a trumpet sound in the background.

But Los Colorados de Bolivia have a rich history of their own that is hardly expressed in these ritualistic performances. The Museum of Los Colorados appears to receive only a handful of visitors every day, but it colours their story as one rich in historical significance. According to Lieutenant. Luis Fernando Ester Zabala (one of Los Colorados to show us around their museum) the red ceremonial uniforms worn represent: "the blood of the enemy and the blood we've spilt".

Los Colorados de Bolivia take their origins from before the birth of Bolivia itself. They played a role as a guerrilla group in the Wars for Independence under the leadership of Bolivian hero José Miguel García Lanza. But the most important episode in their history occurs following the Wars for Independence, once they had been formally incorporated as a constituent unit of the Bolivian Army.

The story that has solidified their place in Bolivian history is set against the backdrop of the War of the Pacific and the Bolivian claim to the Litoral Province and the sea. Their notoriety is borne out of this historical context which has elevated them to the status of heroes in Bolivian history, granting them the prestigious honour becoming the acting Presidential Guard.

Following their heroic display of both military achievement and self-sacrifice at La Batalla del Alto de la Alianza (known as the Battle of Tacna in English), a military effort which forced three separate Chilean retreats and saw only 293 Colorados out of 1,000 left alive, their name and image have become synonymous with the Bolivian sense of yearning towards the sea. Despite their effort and sacrifice, La Batalla del Alto de la Alianza was a decisive defeat for Bolivia, forcing them to militarily withdraw from the conflict. Henceforth Bolivia became a landlocked nation, with this defeat causing the loss of the Litoral Province and culminating in the Chilean occupation of Lima.

Given that Bolivia lost this battle and ultimately the War of the Pacific, this may not seem like an episode worthy of commemoration, yet this is precisely the reason the figure of the Colorados is so romantic to this day—they evoke patriotism but also the specter of loss.

Still, Los Colorados continue to exemplify bravery and military prowess: outnumbered by the Chileans forces in number and artillery, they fearlessly fought and defeated three battalions despite suffering heavy losses. As well as marking the military highpoint of the war, the Colorados became immortalised by their self sacrifice.

In 2004 President Carlos Mesa declared all those who had taken part in the Battle of Tacna as National Heroes of Bolivia. And it was *this* moment in history which President Mesa chose to commemorate, rather than Los Colorados' clear and decisive military success at the Battle of Cañada Strongest in the Chaco War—roughly 50 years later.

The regimental motto of Los Colorados stands as "Subordinación y Constancia, ¡Viva Bolivia, hacia el Mar!"—which in English translates to: "Subordination and Steadfastness. Long Live Bolivia, towards the Sea!". And thus, what underpins the Bolivian pride towards Los Colorados becomes apparent: they serve as a constant reminder of Bolivia's lost coastline and of the ongoing efforts the country has since undertaken to regain access to the sea.

Los Colorados have not just won their place in history on the battlefield; many of them have also carried out their public duty within the higher echelons of Bolivian politics, with several of their leaders going on to occupy high office, including presidents José Ballivián, Hilarión Daza, and Mariano Melgarejo.

The Bolivian Day of the Sea is commemorated on the 23rd of March. On this day, the Colorados take centre stage, parading and clamouring the Bolivian claim to the sea. During such events their significance is no longer just military, but cultural and symbolic, serving to remind Bolivians of a painful and heroic historical episode. Whether standing in front of the Government Palace or marching to solemn sounds produced by a military band, their displays of courage and sacrifice in the War of the Pacific, and their continued role in safeguarding the Head of State, have guaranteed them a place in Bolivian history. For centuries to come they are sure to remain the pride of the Bolivian military and people.

[OUR UNIFORMS REPRESENT] THE BLOOD OF THE ENEMY AND THE BLOOD WE'VE SPILT""THEIR NAME AND IMAGE HAVE BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH THE BOLIVIAN SENSE OF YEARNING TOWARDS THE SEA

THE BEACHES OF SANTA CRUZ

Three New Developments Promise Seaside Living to Bolivians Who Are Willing to Pay for It

TEXT AND PHOTOS: FINN JUBAK

'In five years, there will be a city there,' Francisco Cirbián tells me from behind his desk, his eyes glassy with a mix of admiration and exhaustion.'Right now, it's difficult to imagine because there's not much of a road to get there. But the climate is cool and the landscape is beautiful. It's perfect', says Cirbián, who is an athletic, young-looking man with a mullet.

Francisco Cirbián is the general manager of the Puerto Esmeralda project, a $40 million housing development that will soon rise on 200 hectares of virgin soil in Urubó, right across the Rio Pirai from where we sit in his office in Equipetrol, Santa Cruz.

Puerto Esmeralda is no port at all. It is one of three new developments in Urubó that will include a man-made lagoon (otherwise referred to as 'the sea'), along with a stretch of sand around it (read: 'beach'). It is an ambitious idea, one that has been executed with success in neighboring countries like Chile and Argentina, as well as across the world. The hope is that projects like these will put the city of Santa Cruz on the map as a holiday spot on an international level. Cirbián tells me the project's land has already been sold to people in the United States and Switzerland, who plan to use their property in Puerto Esmeralda as a second home, or a 'beach house'.

The idea of living by the ocean isn't only being marketed toward wealthy foreigners. As the country goes through one of its best economic moments in its 189-year history, many Bolivians are coming to new riches. The members of these rising classes are eager to show what they have. One outlet is real estate. The rapid growth of the newly rich —not just in Santa Cruz but in Cochabamba and La Paz as well— is the reason expensive developments seem like a good idea, especially if they can deliver the ultimate prize: the ocean.

'The housing boom here in Santa Cruz has been going on for five years', Cirbián told me. 'It's been happening for so long that people are thinking, "It's going to burst, it's going to burst. It can't be that expensive". But prices keep rising. And the reality is that there is a demand.'

'People in La Paz and Cochabamba want to have beach houses. And they can get in their cars and have a vacation right here', he continued.

Unlike its competitors, the Puerto Esmeralda project is proudly local. All the investment comes from Bolivia. The owner, Pedro Antonio Gutierrez, is a **cruceño** and one of the most powerful men in the city.

When I visited their office, I was struck by its lack of distinction. Like the rest of the neighborhood, it was located in a low, whitewashed building with abundant plantings of palm trees and other tropical plants in the yard. Inside, it was sparse, with the exception of framed advertisements, showing caucasian families laughing on the beach or sailing in Caribbean-clear water. I couldn't help but think I had seen the same pictures in advertisements for Club Med in the Bahamas.

WE CAN'T SPEAK ABOUT CLASS ANYMORE IN SANTA CRUZ. EVERYONE HAS MONEY.

Outside his office, Cirbián showed me a scale model of what Puerto Esmeralda will look like when it is completed in 2016. 'I have heard of people going on trips to places like Punta Cana for their weddings', he said. 'But here we have our own island...I'm not saying it will be like Punta Cana, because the ocean is the ocean. But the option is there'.

The option is there indeed, and developers are betting that rich Bolivians will take it instead of travelling abroad to go to the beach, or investing in a second home in another country. So far, it seems that they have placed their bets correctly. The culture of consumption in Santa Cruz is vigorous: fancy clothes, fancy cars, fancy houses. As the Puerto Esmeralda saleswoman in La Paz described their target clientele: 'There they care about their looks, about being tan, about their bodies', she said, as she outlined an hourglass figure in the air in front of me.

Santa Cruz is the most populous department in Bolivia, inhabited by over three million people. And the city is growing—fast. Last year, Santa Cruz was by far the largest consumer of cement in Bolivia, accounting for 32% of all the cement used in the country, a testament to the construction boom it is undergoing. The city is expanding outwards in all directions from the **casco viejo**, which is run down by comparison. **Anillos** are continuously added to the city's system of concentric highways. In outer areas of the city, a block can contain as many as three construction sites for condominiums or apartments.

I came to Santa Cruz to see this massive increase in construction for myself. According to the construction council of Santa Cruz, $500 million were invested in new construction projects in the city in 2013. No one I talked to seemed able to explain where the money or the interest was coming from. I heard rumors that Bolivians who got rich off of the country's drug trade were deciding to invest in construction projects to launder their money. But this is development in name only. Some new buildings do not even have sidewalks in front of them, as if they are for show, to be admired and then passed by.

In equal measure to active projects that lined the avenues —with billboards projecting what the buildings will look like and imploring passersby to start buying— I saw many half-completed, abandoned husks of concrete in Santa Cruz, looming above their younger brothers, netting waving in the wind as a warning of what was to come.

Francisco Cirbian, General Manager of the Puerto Esmeralda Project

The utopic Urubó is not immune to these problems. I visited a house in Urubó Green, a gated community, that had been under construction for three years. There was no sign that any workers had been there recently. The half-formed garage was flooded from the past week's rain, and broken bricks lined the floors. It was a shell, nothing but walls and piping. No one knew when it would be finished. 'These people are so rich, they keep changing their minds about what they want the house to look like, and the builders have to re-do it', I was told. The perfect house seemed to exist only in theory.

When I arrived in Santa Cruz, I was surprised to discover that Puerto Esmeralda was not the only project centered around a an illusory ocean. Two more, Playa Turquesa and Mar Adentro, were announced at around the same time. All three feature apartments on the 'beach', as well as lots that go down in price as they move away from the waterfront.

Not much distinguishes one project from the other, despite what their marketers say. Playa Turquesa, which will enclose the largest lagoon out of the three (at 12 hectares, or 120,000 square metres), and Mar Adentro —the smallest— are being built by the same company, Crystal Lagoons. Crystal Lagoons is a Chilean contractor responsible for 160 similar projects worldwide. They are notable for having built the lagoon at San Alfonso del Mar in Chile, which for a time held the world record for the largest in the world. The company is currently working on a $7 billion lagoon development in Dubai that will set the new record at 40 hectares. It is due to be completed by 2020. Until another project of this magnitude comes along, Playa Turquesa will lay claim to be the second largest.

The three projects, of course, step on each other's toes somewhat. Although two are owned by the same company (as suggested by their brochures which feature the same model in identical goggles, flippers and bathing suit), there is still friendly competition. "We usually don't like to talk about the others", Cirbián told me.

The biggest irony is, perhaps, that the Bolivian 'beach' experience will be provided by a company from Chile, the country responsible for annexing Bolivia's coastline following the War of the Pacific in 1879. According to the World Resources Institute, Chile is number five on the list of countries with the longest coastline, whereas Bolivia is (tied for) last with 0 Km of coastline. Bolivians still hold a grudge against their neighbor to the west for this aggression that has left them without a beach or access to the ocean. It has long existed in the realm of fantasy for many Bolivians to have a beach of their own. As it reads on the Crystal Lagoons website, they 'can transform any destination into an idyllic beach paradise'. That is what they are doing in Santa Cruz.

I became interested in the Puerto Esmeralda project for this reason. Announced in September of 2013, it will be built further to the northwest than most of the development so far executed in Urubó. The plan is to sell 1,400 lots, each with a surface area of approximately 7 hectares. For those who are willing to spend even more, apartments are available in a dozen buildings directly overlooking the water, which includes a scuba diving area, man-made island, restaurant boardwalk and, of course, 20,000 square meters of 'beach'.

The cheapest lots in Puerto Esmeralda start around $30,000, and apartments start at $60,000. 'Nowadays 30,000 dollars, many people can afford. There really isn't any land that's cheaper than what we are selling. They have raised prices here, but it seems that there are people who are still paying, no?' Cirbián told me.

Pre-sales for Puerto Esmeralda started in October of last year, and about 30% of the lots are already sold. This, in a country where the average income is about $7,000 a year, and a city where 72% of families cannot afford a place to live. With these figures in mind, it was hard to understand who was buying.

With newfound riches, the people of Santa Cruz are constructing a fantasy world in Urubó. Here, Bolivia is not poor, but rich. And it has an ocean. Even the developers responsible seem to be a part of this fantasy. 'We can't speak about class anymore in Santa Cruz. Everyone has money', insists Claudio de La Rosa, Head of Marketing for Playa Turquesa.

The problem is that at present this world only exists in their collective imagination. None of the three developments has yet to start construction. Nothing is there yet, not even a sign. The 40 Km road to Puerto Esmeralda from the Urubó bridge has yet to be built. Even if it were built, though, the road would lead to nothing but grass. Yet 30% of it has already been sold. As has 70% of Playa Turquesa.

Can Bolivia's small upper middle class sustain development on such a large scale? Are there enough of them to buy up the whole beach?

Francisco Cirbián thinks so, or at least he hopes. Money from pre-sales is necessary for the project to begin at all. And the hope is that Urubó will keep growing, until Puerto Esmeralda no longer seems far away from the city. There are plans to locate a hospital, a hotel, a school, nearby. 'It will be its own city, its own island. Sort of like Manhattan.' This is the dream of the newly rich in Santa Cruz: to create a new world, closed off to anyone who cannot afford it.

SNOWBOARDING BOLIVIA'S GLACIERS

MAKING THE MOST OF A DISAPPEARING WATER SOURCE

TEXT: LAURA VAN ANTWERP
PHOTO: DAVID FLORES

Loose rock and snow crumble beneath my feet as I struggle to keep up with David, my leader, who is gliding effortlessly up the mountain ahead of me. I'm wheezing for air, my lungs cry out for oxygen. My body craves that vital molecule, which is scarce up here at over 5,000 meters above sea level.

My snowboard, which is loosely strapped to my backpack, constantly slides to the right. This shift in weight causes me awkwardly to teeter in that direction, like a poorly-manufactured doll that refuses to stand upright.

I glance up and reassess our destination. I swear it is moving away from us! My eyes dart over to the peak, which juts sharply from the snow and towers proudly at 5,400 metres. 'Ah yes', it appears to say, 'you really should see the view from here. It's lovely, simply lovely. Tea anyone?' David shouts back at me with words of encouragement and I use them, as well as the mental image of a steaming cup of chai, to muster the resolve and keep moving.

I am hiking up Charquini, a glacier located in the Andes between the Chacaltaya and Huayna Potosi mountains; about an hour's drive from La Paz. My source of transport, a rickety mini-bus filled to the brim with young Bolivians, somehow managed to surmount bumpy dirt roads and gushing creek bed crossings during our tumultuous journey here.

Today's excursion was organized by Addiction Xtreme Bolivia, a relatively new snowsports adventure tour company based in La Paz. On weekends, Addiction takes a group of ambitious participants to one of the many glaciers that surround La Paz for a day of skiing and snowboarding. Charquini, however, has been Addiction's choice hot-spot for these outings. This is primarily due to its proximity to the city, as well as the accessibility of the terrain to individuals of all fitness levels. As I've come to find, all it takes is a rickety vehicle, your own two legs, and some determination. A ham and cheese sandwich might be advisable as well.

Just a few miles south of Charquini, however, is the Chacaltaya glacier, which happens to host a ski lodge, a chair lift, as well as the longest ski run in South America. So why bother setting my lungs on fire laboring up Charquini when all of the facilities of a ski resort are right next door, and with a parking lot no less? We would most likely be there, of course, were it not for one small detail, one missing factor in the recipe: snow.

Let's rewind, shall we, to thirty years back to when the Chacaltaya glacier was in its heyday. It was a weekend haven for Paceños to escape the congestion of city life and regain peace-of-mind by carving turns in snow high above the clouds. It was a time when tens of thousands of peripatetic souls would migrate from far and wide for the bragging rights of having skied the highest ski resort in the world.

Things have changed since, and significantly so. In 1998 Dr. Edison Ramirez, head of an international team of glaciologists that focused on Chacaltaya, predicted that the glacier would disappear by 2015. He was much too optimistic. According to the World Glacier Monitoring Service, the 18,000 year old glacier was officially pronounced 'dead' in 2009, six years before its projected demise.

A threefold increase in the rate of thawing among Andean glaciers appears to be the culprit of the glacier's death, with the majority of fingers pointing blame to the usual suspect: global warming. In fact, according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which scientifically tracks and reports human-induced changes on the environment, climate change could melt away most of Latin America's tropical glaciers between 2020 and 2030.

So what exactly are the implications of our glaciers' rapid disappearance? The most immediate problem is that the thaw is putting a vital source fresh water at risk. Eighty percent of the drinking water supplied to the 2 million-plus population that live in El Alto and neighboring La Paz is provided by a reservoir under the Tuni Condoriri range. What portion of that reservoir water is glacial melt responsible for? The majority: 60 percent. It doesn't end there. This epidemic also jeopardizes the future generation of hydropower, which Bolivia depends on for half its electricity. Not a quarter, not a third: half. That's a big chunk and a stark reality.

When we finally reach the summit the view is breathtaking, not that I have much breath to give at that point. I will admit, the somewhat desperate scramble to get here was well worth it. I haven't felt this accomplished since I resisted the red velvet cake at my friends wedding last year.

As I take in the stunning panorama of wispy clouds caressing snowcapped mountains, I can't help but feel a slight tinge of sadness that this might all be gone within my lifetime. It's a disturbing thought. Then I bring my mind back around to the present. I am right here, right now, on this beautiful glacier. I will focus on appreciating it while I am able to do so.

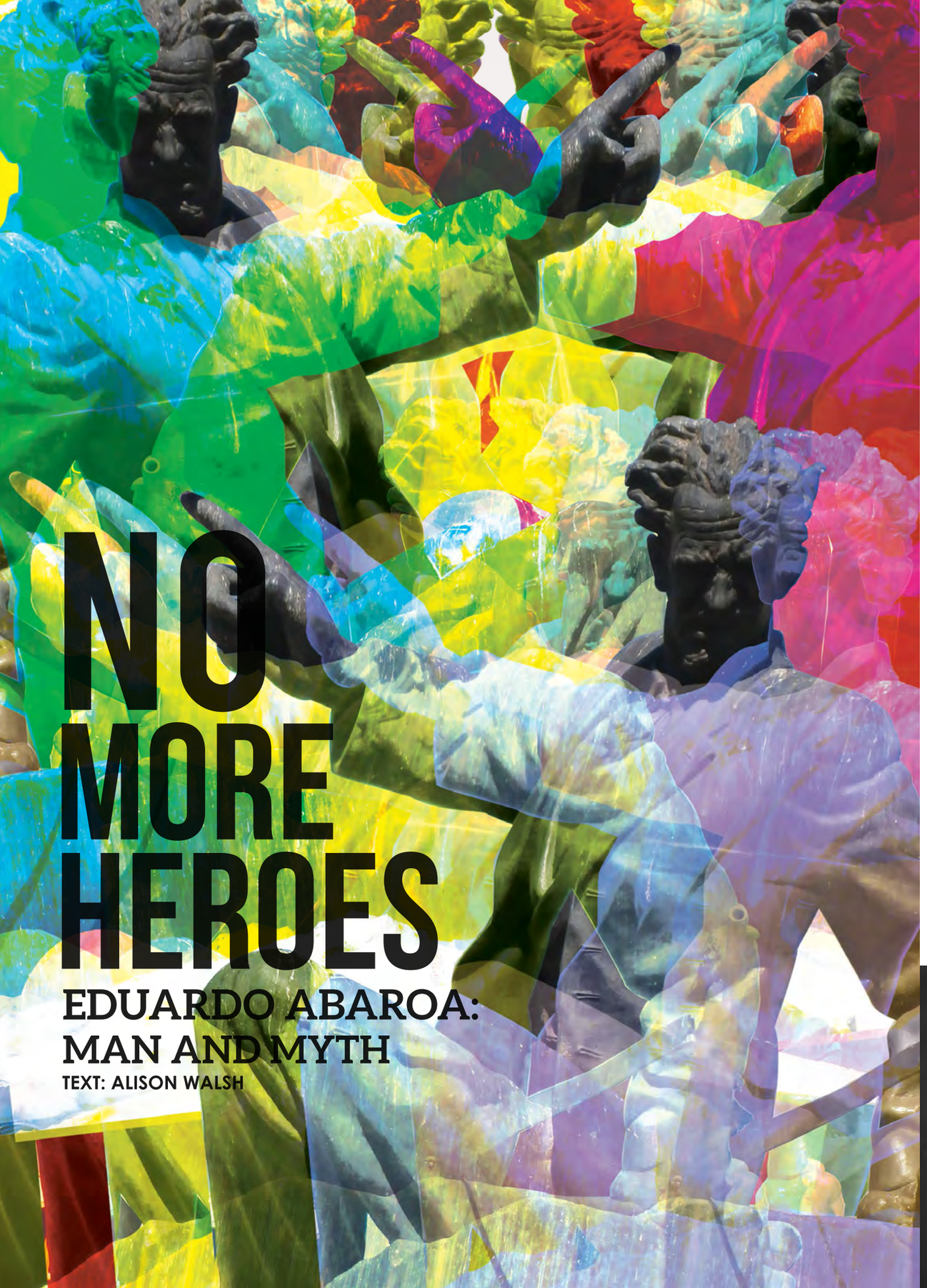
So we strap in. Within a few moments we are sailing down the untouched terrain, making fresh tracks 5,200 meters above sea level. Now, how many people can say they've ever done that?

What can we do about our melting glaciers in the meantime? Addiction Xtreme seems to have the right idea. 'There's really not much we can do [about the melting glaciers], except for enjoy and take care of them while we can', says David, who manages Addiction's photography.

As we approach the group, I pan my view to take in the smiling faces and the chorus of laughter being shared by all. I agree with David. Sometimes, one must simply make the most with what is available and enjoy it while we can. That is exactly what we are all doing here. And I'm glad - glad to have the opportunity to be a part of it. ×

WITHIN A FEW MOMENTS WE ARE SAILING DOWN THE UNTOUCHED TERRAIN, MAKING FRESH TRACKS 5,200 METERS ABOVE SEA LEVEL.

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN CACERES



NO MORE HEROES

EDUARDO ABAROA: MAN AND MYTH

TEXT: ALISON WALSH

In the centre of the main square of the Sopocachi district of La Paz there sits a man. Perched on top of his plinth, he is a Bolivian hero, a symbol of national pride and patriotic self-sacrifice. But this is no Horatio Nelson brandishing his sword, nor Simón Bolívar astride his charger. This is Eduardo Abaroa, the landowner and engineer who died in defence of a strip of coastline that Bolivia lost in the War of the Pacific in 1879, the sea that people here are still taught to believe is theirs.

Every nation has its military heroes and Bolivia is no exception. And yet in some ways the glorification, the idolisation, the hero-worship of Abaroa is more excessive and inexplicable than that of other warriors. As François Schollaert, a historian specialising in this war, explains, 'Abaroa had extensive lands in Antofagasta, and that is why he volunteered for the War of the Pacific, to defend his property'. In a country with a largely indigenous population and high rates of poverty and illiteracy, the image of this wealthy, well-educated landowner as a national hero somehow rings false. Stranger still, Abaroa did not die on the beaches. Instead, he died 200 km inland, something Alexis Pérez of the Universidad Católica Boliviana describes as a 'tragic paradox'.

And yet Abaroa is, as the plaque on his eponymous square describes him, a 'symbol of the return of the sea': intimately associated with the struggle to defend the Bolivian coastline and its ultimate loss. The anniversary of his death, the 23rd March, is the Bolivian Day of the Sea. It is commemorated with a military parade, a show of defiance and celebration of the maritime history and culture of this landlocked nation.

In many ways, the story of what happened on that 23rd March is the stuff of a perfect myth. As a history book designed for Bolivian schoolchildren puts it, the Chilean army had swept away all resistance as far as the Carvajal pass across the river Loa. Abaroa (who, Pérez reminds me, was a civilian, with no military training) and his men 'not only didn't let the enemy across the bridge, but drove them back three times and forced them to use their artillery'. With all of his men killed and wounded himself, Abaroa was ordered to surrender, to which he replied with the immortal words:

'¿Rendirme yo? Que se rinda su abuela… ¡Carajo!' ('Surrender? It's your grandmother that should surrender… you bastard!')

These words have been repeated and reprinted and embedded into the Bolivian consciousness ever since; appearing in books, on a set of commemorative stamps (minus the expletive), on statues across the country and on postcards, posters and portraits of the hero himself. For many Bolivians, this simple phrase sums up the attitude of their nation towards its powerful neighbours: you may be stronger than us, you may subjugate us, but we will never respect you. A defeated man, but not a defeated spirit.

As is the case with all stories of this kind, however, there is another side to it. Abaroa's opponents remember history rather differently. According to Chileans, the valiant Bolivian warrior, the heroic defender facing up to certain death, simply replied to the order to surrender with 'What, me?'. There cannot, of course, be any definitive proof of what Abaroa's final words actually were. The Bolivians have their martyr and for Chile he was simply another man who died in the war, a precursor to their ultimate triumph.

According to Pérez, Abaroa was not considered a national hero until 'many years after the events of the War of the Pacific'. The historian argues that the creation of this quasi-mythical figure was simply a way of binding together the population. A nation needs heroes and it needs enemies, and the story of Abaroa and the loss of the coastline fulfils both. In a similar way, the underlying causes of Bolivia's defeat - its weak economy and lack of industrialisation, its low population and poor communications systems - are turned from faults to unfortunate circumstances, making Bolivia the underdog up against a more powerful rival, Chile.

From whichever side you look at it, whether Bolivia's accusation that its people were victims of an aggressive invasion or form Chile's claim that they were simply responding to an unjust tax raise enforced by their neighbours, this was a war about greed. Though only few could actually benefit from any possible outcome, many died. And perhaps it is because of the senseless nature of the slaughter, of a warring set of neighbouring nations killing one another's young men, that this conflict is remembered as much for the fallen as for the victors.

In now-Chilean Iquique, it is Arturo Prat, shot dead on the sinking warship *Esmeralda*, who is remembered and celebrated for his defiance; not his compatriot Condell who won a great victory on the same day. The remembered patron of the Peruvian army is Francisco Bolognesi, who declared his intention to defend Arica 'hasta quemar el último cartucho' ('until the last bullet has been fired') against a Chilean opponent who outnumbered his forces by a ratio of 3:1. Bolognesi, of course, was defeated. Turns out Eduardo Abaroa is not the only celebrated loser.

THE CARNAVAL WATER WARS

TEXT: LAURA VAN ANTWERP
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

THWACK!

I knew the minute I felt it hit my backside. I has just experienced my first globo attack. I spun around to find myself face to face with a grinning boy, no older than ten years of age, clutching an oversized water gun in one hand, a bag of globos in the other, and exuding an almost disturbing level of pride with regard to his latest aquatic conquest. Unequipped to return fire as I was, I instead sprinted to the nearest stand with the intention of investing in the finest and most valuable of Carnaval weaponry: water.

Water is the most common form of ammunition during the sopping wet days of Carnaval. It would be impossible to take a stroll down **El Prado** and not encounter the classic array of water war artillery: oversized water guns, water-filled bags which, with a carefully cut corner, shoot water at impressive distances, and, of course, the most lethal of them all: globos. These makeshift grenades have managed to turn a seemingly harmless and rudimentary substance, water, into an effective firearm.

But how exactly did these water wars become such a ubiquitous aspect of Carnaval tradition?

According to a local Paceña woman I spoke with, the tradition dates farther back than most presume. Think Pre-Andean times, long before the 16th century arrival of Spanish colonizers. During this time cultural communities would celebrate between potato harvests with song, dance, food, and, of course, plenty of water. But they were not alone in their festivities.

The indigenous people believed that when pulling their potatoes from the soil, spirits were released from the ground. During their time of liberation, the spirits were free to join in on the debauchery. And so began the fun and merriment, during which rituals were performed with the intent to give back to the fertility goddess, **Pachamama**, who essentially governed the quality of the forthcoming harvest.

Once the festivities were over, however, it was important to ensure the spirits returned to the soil. The method of doing this was to throw water. Where? How? Using what? She couldn't say, but water was thrown, thus inciting spirits to return to their usual business. The business, that is, of producing a plentiful harvest.

Interesting. I don't suppose all of those engaged in Carnaval water play today -from the youngsters with their duck-shaped water pistols to the villainous teenagers powerfully throwing globos- realise they are actually performing a noble act worthy of their ancestors. With the abundance of water that flies around nowadays, I couldn't imagine a single spirit overlooking the memo to return to the ground.

Since that time, and with the cultural influence brought about by Catholicism, the water traditions have continued to evolve. From eggs filled with perfume or coloured water, to water buckets being poured from balconies, to globos and water guns, anything goes during the Carnaval water wars!

It's not always fun and games, however. The evolution of water artillery also brought with it more aggressive forms of participation. Individuals have become increasingly vicious in their balloon tossing tactics, opting to freeze the globos, or filling them with very little water so as to create smaller projectiles which travel farther and inflict greater pain on impact. The choice of weapons is also plentiful: the pear-shaped Payaso-brand balloons are known to be softer and larger compared to the pepino variety which creates small, hard and almost-perfectly spherical projectiles: perfect for bruising at a distance. Chemical warfare takes place here too, with Rey Momo foam used by carnival guerrilla fighters to blind victims and mark them with a white viscous fluid, making them ripe targets for further attacks. Skin rashes are frequent side effects.

Because these weapons have become so destructive, the Mayor of La Paz created a city ordinance that bans any and all sales of the liquid missiles. According to the Commander of the Municipal Guard, Miguel Zambrana, "[We] will not allow water balloons to be sold during the period of Carnaval. If found, we will proceed with their destruction".

He wasn't kidding. As I set out on the first Friday of Carnaval to observe water fights on **El Prado**, I was taken aback by the scores of officers present on the scene. How many officers does it take to keep a street full of teenagers in line?

A lot, apparently. Everywhere I turned, there was a cluster of uniformed men and women, all of whom were either speaking heatedly into their two-way radios or confiscating water-filled contraband. Confiscation, in this case, involves seizing the bag of globos and then squashing them one by one in front of the young, and usually wide-eyed, offender. Water balloons, a gateway weapon. Best nip that in the bud before it spirals out of control.

We stopped to ask the officers some questions, and were met with reluctance and vague responses. Not even two minutes passed before they suddenly took off on an 'urgent call'. I saw them moments later tackling some very serious business: the confiscation of more globos. Duty calls.

A few days later I managed to find a woman in possession of two large bags filled to the brim with water balloons. My assumption was, of course, that she was involved in the black market for water weapons. I ought to handle the situation delicately, I thought, since by that stage I was only too aware that the sale of globos during Carnaval is prohibited.

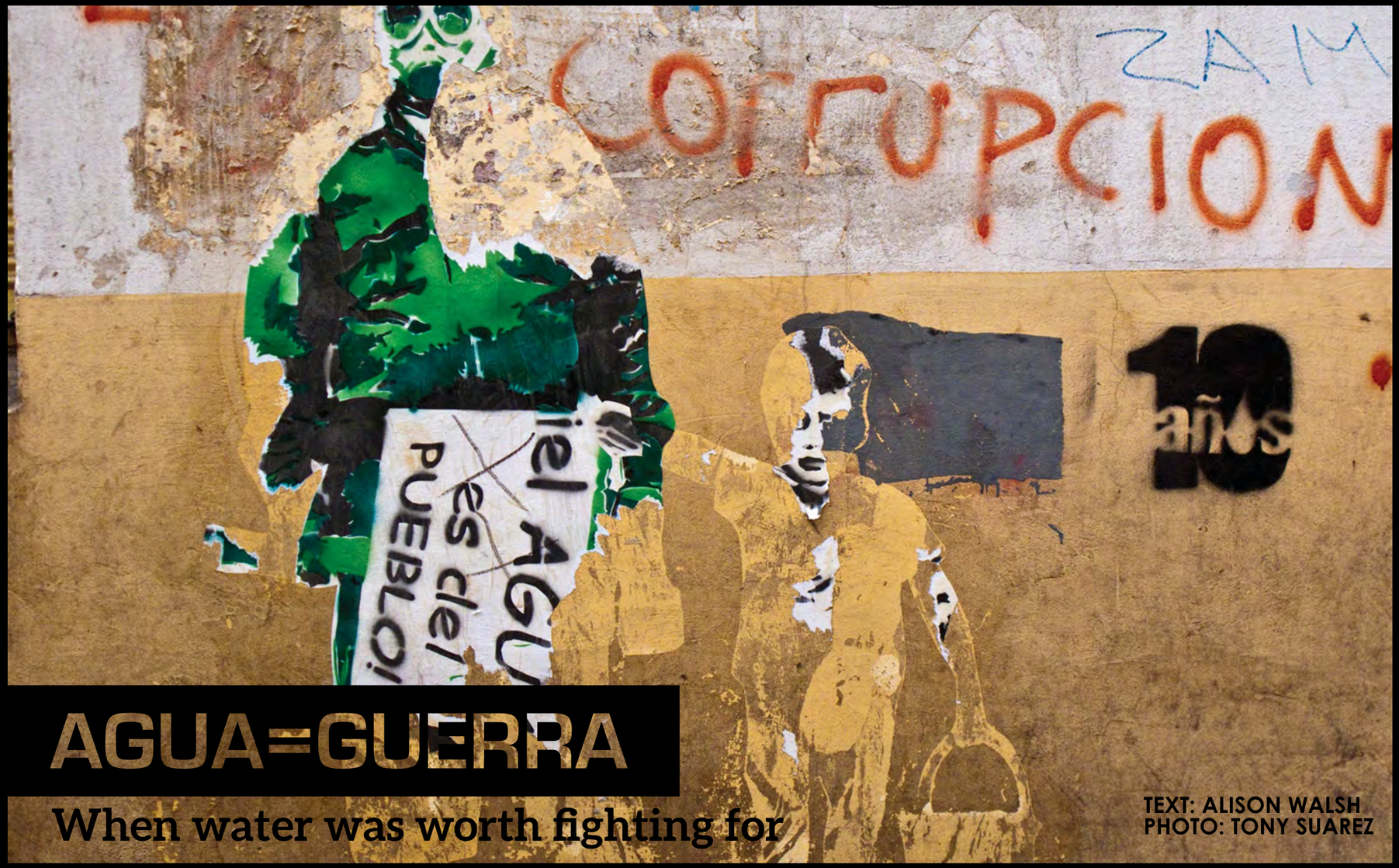
I approached her and asked for the price for three water balloons. She shot me a confused and slightly disturbed look, and then informed me that they were not for sale. Approximately a half hour later I spotted her again, albeit in a more discrete area, selling a batch of globos to an eager trio of boys. I suppose I don't blame her. In hindsight, I wouldn't have trusted me either. A grown woman requesting globos without donning a poncho would give me reason to suspect.

Once the madness of Carnaval had dissolved away, I was surprised to find myself overcome with relief. Don't get me wrong, I had a great time - but I can only indulge in my heathen ways for so long. In fact, I've never been more eager to return to my structured life. And who knew there would come a day I looked forward to going back to work - good, hard, honest work! By the depleted-yet-relieved looks on people's faces as they returned to their routine Wednesday morning, it appeared I was in good company.

I think the Andeans had the right idea when they introduced this cathartic form of celebration. Take four days to shed your inhibitions and unleash that repressed need to attack strangers with water, and you will be rejuvenated for another round of structured life and hard work. That is, until next year - when tradition beckons for another round.×

THE EVOLUTION OF WAR

The past 25 years have seen the gradual appearance of expensive imported water guns boasting oversized water reservoirs and borderline-legal blast potency. With some 'Super Soakers' costing over ₰100 (half the minimum national wage), water wars have also evolved to reflect the deep socioeconomic rifts across society. Yet before the turn of the millenium the poorer sectors of society were not to be left behind. Up until last decade it was still possible to buy bombas for under Bs 30 (₰4-₰5). These makeshift water pumps were made by hojalateros using old milk cans, rubber recycled from car tyres, and a good dose of craftsmanship. With some skill and practice it was possible to shoot water at high power from these machines, the force of the blast relative to the strength of the person operating them. Sadly they are no longer on sale, as BX Reporter Claudia Mendez learned when she visited the row of shops on Chorolque and Av. Buenos Aires. Doña Berta explained that they no longer sell them as they have been pushed out of the market by plastic imports. Now Super Soakers are left to compete with their cheaper imported Chinese counterparts.



When water was worth fighting for

TEXT: ALISON WALSH
PHOTO: TONY SUAREZ

In the year 2000, the streets of Cochabamba were turned into a battleground, as the city's residents protested against the privatisation of their water supply, and met with brutal opposition from armed police. This demonstration of people power and the shocking realisation that everything, even the water we drink, is for sale, has inspired a whole host of cultural references to the events in Cochabamba.

After a scene involving a dramatic plane crash and last-minute parachute opening, James Bond scrambles over a few rocks in the Bolivian desert and discovers a dam. And it is then that the spy suddenly realises what is going on, why the villain of Quantum of Solace is supporting a military coup by a character cast as the stereotypical Latin American dictator. '[He] isn't after oil. He wants the water. He's creating a drought.'

It sounds like your typical far-fetched action film plot. But there is more than a grain of truth in this whole story, and it is not just pure fiction that, as stated in the film, 'there are people in this country spending half of their paycheck just to get clean water'. It only takes the smallest amount of research into the events of 2000 in Cochabamba to realise that water is and was a commodity like any other, to be bought, sold and traded.

Yet as Daniel, the troublemaking protester in 2010 film *También la lluvia* declares, 'Sin agua no hay vida' ('without water, there is no life'). And perhaps this is why what happened in Cochabamba has captured the attention of the world, not to mention the dozens of films and documentaries made since that have drawn on this case of corporate greed and overwhelming people power to make statements about the state of our global society.

Jim Shultz, who is a long-term resident of Cochabamba and director of the Democracy Center, an organisation that uses investigative journalism and international campaigns to raise awareness about the impact of public decisions on our lives, has written about the water wars in his book *We are Everywhere*. He explains that the privatisation of the water was simply the latest in the series of instances of services and utilities being sold off to foreign corporations. Yet this time, there was one key difference: 'Water was something essential to life… People knew that if they lost control of their water they lost control of their lives'.

The iconic slogan adopted by the protestors was straightforward and to the point: '¡El agua es nuestra, carajo!' ('The water is ours, damn it!'). For it wasn't just that Bechtel had bought the right to supply Cochabamba's water officially: as recounted in the chapter on the water wars in Benjamin Dangl's *The Price of Fire* (AK Press, 2007); Water Law 2029, which allowed for the privatisation of water supplies, 'also prohibited the function of alternative systems of water distribution… People were billed for everything from the water piped into their houses, to water collected in rain gutters, to the water in community wells'.

In a dramatic scene in *También la lluvia*, Daniel demands the crowd to ask themselves 'what will they take next? The vapour from our breath? The sweat from our bodies'. An angry crowd of women confronts the workmen and their police escort, who have come to block off their well: 'You take our lands, you take our wells. Are you even going to take the air from us?'. As Canadian author Maude Barlow, who has served as Senior Advisor on Water to the UN, describes in 2003 documentary *The Corporation*, 'There are those that intend that one day everything will be owned by somebody… human rights, human services, essential services for life. Education, public health… water and air'.

THIS WAS NOT JUST A CASE OF A FEW PEOPLE GETTING ANNOYED ABOUT PAYING A LITTLE MORE FOR A SERVICE

This concept of ownership of basic resources was utterly alien to the **cochabambinos**, many of whom believed that water was a gift from the **Pachamama**: a precious commodity, certainly, but not one that could be bought and sold. And in the context of this belief, the statements by Bechtel and the World Bank that charging market prices for water discourages waste (a key policy in an area like Cochabamba which is prone to shortages) seems utterly ridiculous. As Elaine Bernard asks in *The Corporation*, 'Why does [something] only become wealth when some entity puts a fence around it and declares it private property?'. In *Quantum of Solace*, we see that water can be as important and as profitable as oil or gold, once it is scarce enough. That might seem far-fetched or excessive, but the **Cochabambinos**' willingness to put their lives on their lines for it is surely proof enough of its value.

For a brief period, Cochabamba became the focus of world attention, as this standoff between David and Goliath was played out amidst a growing realisation that the Bolivian government was far more interested in defending its investors than its own citizens. Oscar Olivera, one of the figureheads of the Cochabamba protests, says that 'the only legitimate authority was the people… they made the decisions… we were able to taste democracy'. It may seem hyperbolic to talk of an affinity between corporations and the 'regimented structures of fascist regimes' as *The Corporation* does, but in a situation where the government declared martial law and sent in troops to fire on teenagers, it is hard to come to any other conclusion. And as Shultz says, many of those who went out onto the streets to protest were facing 'people knew they were in a standoff with a guy who'd been Bolivia's Pinochet… people were going out to the streets who'd had their brothers disappeared… people who had been tortured'. This was not just a case of a few people getting annoyed about paying a little more for a service.

In the words of Noam Chomsky, 'Privatisation does not mean you take a public institution and give it to some nice

person. It means you take a public institution and give it to an unaccountable tyranny'. When the World Bank pressured the Bolivian government to privatise its water supplies and Bechtel arrived in Cochabamba, this was exactly what happened: a multinational corporation prepared to make profits whilst the poorest residents of the city struggled to decide between paying their bills and buying food or clothes, or sending their children to schools. It is no wonder that the situation inspired such a dramatic reaction, in Bolivia and across the world.

The people of Cochabamba succeeded in throwing out their invaders, and as the Democracy Center found in a recent investigation, they are proud of having saved their water system, even if they do accept that it is still corrupt and fraught with problems. As Olivera says, they proved that 'the power of the people cannot be underestimated'. And yet this one victory cannot stem the global tide of privatisation, and the exploitation that inevitably comes with it. As *También la lluvia* demonstrates, the indigenous people of South America were sold for profits and private interests more than 500 years ago. Bolivia is incredibly rich in natural resources, and yet somehow its people have never gained anything from the fabulous wealth that lies in their land: you only need look at Potosí, from whose Cerro Rico it is claimed the Spanish extracted enough silver to build a bridge back to Europe (and have some left to carry over it), a city that is now amongst the poorest in South America, populated by miners who work in abysmal conditions scraping at what little metal is left under the collapsing surface of the hill.

However, if the water wars prove anything, it is that ordinary citizens do have the power to take control of their lives. Shultz describes the events of 2000 in Cochabamba as 'revolutionary': people's concept of politics, how they thought about who ran their lives, was irrevocably changed. No-one is saying that the current system is perfect, and Cochabamba's water supply is as unreliable as ever. But the difference is one of attitude: the **cochabambinos** faced down a multinational corporation, an ex-dictator and the military, and proved their power. To themselves and to the world. ×

TIMELINE

- **1967** – Washington-based Inter-American Development Bank grants a $14 million water development loan to Cochabamba. One of the requirements is the creation of SEMAPA (the Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado).

- **February 1996** – The World Bank offers an urgent $14 million loan to expand water service in Cochabamba, on the condition that SEMAPA is privatised.

- **June 1997** – It is decided that $600 million of foreign debt relief is also dependent on the privatisation of Cochabamba's water.

- **September 1999** – Cochabamba's water system is put up for private auction. One company comes forward: Aguas de Tunari, a subsidiary of San Francisco-based Bechtel. The 214-page contract signed with Bolivian officials hands over control of the city's water for forty years, with an average guaranteed profit of 16% a year.

- **October 1999** – The Bolivian Parliament passes Law 2029 (Drinking Water and Sanitation), which allows for the privatisation of drinking water and sewage disposal services.

- **November 1999** – The Federation of Irrigators stages a one day blockade of the roads leading to and from Cochabamba, in protest against the water privatisation. They meet with Oscar Olivera, president of the Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers, and together form the Coalition for the Defence of Water and Life (the Coordinadora).

- **11th January 2000** – In response to average rate increases of more than 50%, the Coordinadora launches a full blockade of the city.

- **4th February 2000** – A peaceful rally is planned for lunchtime. Regional governor Hugo Galindo declares this illegal, and more than one thousand armed police are sent to occupy the city centre. Violent confrontations rage across the city for two days, with riot police armed with tear gas facing protesters with stones and slingshots. More than 175 people are wounded, including two blinded by tear gas.

- **22nd March 2000** – An unofficial referendum is organised by the Coordinadora. 96% of 50,000 voters are opposed to Aguas del Tunari and the privatisation of their water.

- **6th April 2000** – Oscar Olivera and his Coordinadora colleagues agree to meet government officials to discuss the situation. They are arrested and released in the early hours of the morning.

- **7th April 2000** – 10000 people gather in Cochabamba's main square. Galindo recommends that the water contract be cancelled, and informs Archbishop Solari, who tells Olivera. The celebrations are cut short when Bechtel's representatives refuse to confirm their departure. Galindo resigns at midnight, declaring that he does not want to be responsible for a 'blood bath'.

- **8th April 2000** – A 'state of siege' (a situation similar to martial law) is declared by President Hugo Banzer. It allows for arbitrary arrests and detention, as well as imposing a curfew and travel restrictions. A 17-year-old bystander, Victor Hugo Daza, is shot dead by a captain of the Bolivian Army.

- **10th April 2000** – The Bolivian government signs an agreement with Oscar Olivera handing control of Cochabamba's water over to the Coordinadora. Bechtel officials had fled the country.

- **November 2001** – Aguas del Tunari makes an application to the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (an arbitration body created by the World Bank), claiming that the revocation of its contract in Cochabamba was a violation of a bilateral trade agreement.

- **25th February 2000** – Aguas del Tunari and Bechtel seek $25 million in damages for breach of its contract.

- **24th April 2002** – Oscar Olivera accepts the Goldman Environmental Prize Award.

- **August 2003** – More than 300 organisations from 43 countries send an International Citizens Petition demanding that the Bechtel v. Bolivia case be transparent and open to citizen participation. It is rejected.

- **19th January 2006** – Bechtel and Abengoa, the main shareholders in Aguas del Tunari, agree to drop their ICSID case against Bolivia for a token payment of Bs. 2

PORTRAIT OF A VOID

How has the loss of the sea influenced Bolivian contemporary art?

TEXT: NEIL SUCHAK

To those of us who come from a country surrounded by the sea, the plight of a landlocked nation, like Bolivia, is almost unfathomable. To us, the sea is simply a banal blue mass at the edge of a beach; something that represents very little. For Bolivians, however, the sea has a very different meaning. The sea represents a void, and a stretch of coastline endures to this day as a painful yearning.

That much can be gleaned from the events surrounding the Day of the Sea commemoration (every 23rd of March), or by viewing the giant poster in La Paz's Plaza Avaroa —outside the Ministry of Defence— which reifies President Evo Morales' stance on Bolivia's "sovereign right to access the sea".

In this context, it would only seem natural that Bolivia's relationship with the ocean —which evokes such strong emotions— would transcend the politics and rhetoric of Bolivian-Chilean exchanges to permeate the world of Bolivian art and culture. Whether it is through painting, photography or video depictions of the Bolivian coastline, allusions to the sea are everywhere present in contemporary Bolivian art.

It might appear to outsiders that Bolivia is really no different from any other landlocked country. But it seems that it is one thing to have no sea at all and another to have had it taken away. When asked why other countries —such as Paraguay— do not have such a romantic relationship with the sea, Alvarado states that this is "perhaps because they've never had it". You can't, after all, mourn something which you never had in the first place.

The sea may not be the only element steering Bolivian contemporary art in a more melancholic direction. According to Alvarado there also exists a deep sadness ingrained within Andean culture. Indeed, the idea that living in the dry, cold, and at-times inhospitable environment of the Altiplano has psychological repercussions of this nature, has been hypothesised by several Bolivian authors from Arguedas to Francovich. Coupled with the indoctrination-like nature of Bolivian education system surrounding the maritime loss, the result is a sentiment of nostalgia, melancholy and helplessness which finds various manifestations in Bolivian contemporary art.

With the Bolivian Day of the Sea quickly approaching it is easy to see Bolivia's relation with the sea as a largely political matter. However, the loss of the sea has had a far reaching impact on Bolivian culture and contemporary art. The rise of new media, such as video and digital drawing, have given artist new ways to depict this feeling.

"What's past is present" says Alvarado— and this definitely seems to be the case in Bolivian contemporary art. While it may be difficult for a citizen of a country surrounded by water to even comprehend the Bolivian attitude towards the sea, the contemporary art scene here certainly brings you as close as you can possibly get can to understanding it.

NARDA ALVARADO

In general I would say that [the relationship between Bolivia and the sea] is very sentimental" says Narda Alvarado, one of Bolivia's preeminent contemporary artists. Alvarado has employed the sea as a motif in a variety of her works, from digital drawings to video. This is most notably the case in the video she made showing members of the armed forces being given a bucket of water from the ocean, a gesture that emulates the sense of loss and yearning for the sea in Bolivia.

When talking about the representation of the sea in Bolivian art, Alvarado states: "I don't think artists do it on purpose, I think it comes naturally. We have such a strong feelings on this topic that we feel that we need to do something with them". Indeed, looking at the paintings, photographs and videos of local artists it becomes evident that much of Bolivian contemporary art about the sea is driven more by emotion than by an attempt to depict the ocean or assert a claim. This art is not based on politics, but on sentimentality.

ALEJANDRA ALARCÓN

In Bolivia, there is a culture centered around picking a beauty queen for almost every part of Bolivian life and, as Alejandra Alracón's art shows, the sea is no exception. Alarcón created a video segment surrounding the Miss Pacífico beauty pageant that highlights the Bolivian nostalgia for its lost coastline. It shows young female contestants dancing to the tune of a military march titled Recuperemos Nuestro Mar (*Let's Reclaim Our Sea).*

Through the implied superficiality of the event, Alarcón's lo-fi video representation seemingly shows the popular trivialisation of this historical event, traditionally construed as solemn and tragic. Her work also shows how this longing has permeated every last sphere of popular culture. As Alarcón tells BX: "is as if the sea represents all that is missing. I wonder: If we had a sea, where would it go, that longing for everything we don't have?"

ROBERTO UNTERLADSTAETTER

Another Bolivian artist, Roberto Unterladstaetter, has managed to capture a different side of Bolivian emotion towards the sea. Unterladstaetter's image of a human arm extending across a picture of the sea in order to raise a middle finger t o the coastline discharges the pent-up resentment Bolivians feel over this historical episode.

Unterladstaetter portrays the malaise caused by the loss of the sea, which has had a profound economic, cultural and psychological impact on the country. This feeling of bitterness towards the sea —and more so towards the Chileans that stole it from Bolivia— is so pervasive that it was immortalised in the title of Agassi's film about the maritime loss, **Amargo Mar**. Animosity between both countries continues, from Bolivia taking Chile to the International Court of Justice in the Hague, to football matches where Chileans fans taunt the bolivian crowd by singing '**vamos a la playa**'.

But the bitter feelings extend beyond the loss itself, and spill over into the way the topic is hijacked and appropriated with ulterior motives. As Unterladstaetter tells me, 'The topic of the sea always resurfaces as a smoke curtain during moments of crisis, and the parties in power always dream with "solving" the issue to become enthroned as eternal heroes. As you can see, I now realise the issue affects me, as I already start to show resentment for some reason'.

RAQUEL SCHWARTZ

This is certainly the case in Raquel Schwartz's art piece 'El mar no existe' (which in English translates to *The Sea Does Not Exist*). In her piece, these words are illuminated against a backdrop in a sea-blue luminescent glow. It is a piece that conveys a dry and distant sense which the ocean now evokes for Bolivians, painting a bleak picture of the emotions felt by Bolivians when considering their loss. It captures the alienation caused by a sea which is always there, but always out of reach.

There is a sense of helplessness in Schwartz's work that is expressed through a portrayal of insularity. Her work depicts a country that has been isolated from the world as a result of its landlocked nature, a country that can be seen as an island surrounded by an ocean of land. When asked how the loss of the sea has affected her work, Schwartz replies: "it doesn't affect my artistic work, it nourishes it". ×

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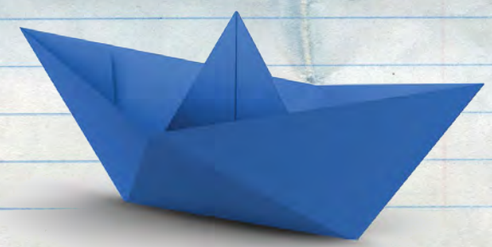
GLOSSARY

PLAZA	Square
COCHABAMBINOS	A native or resident of the city of Cochabamba
PACHAMAMA	Mother earth
CRUCEÑO	Native or resident of the city of Santa Cruz. Also known as 'cambas', some believe that 'el camba nace donde quiere' - 'cambas are born wherever they please'.
CASCO VIEJO	The old town, in the case of Santa Cruz it is located inside the perimeter of the 'primer anillo'
ANILLO	Literally meaning 'ring', in Santa Cruz it is used to denote the concentric ringroads which originate outwards from its centre
AMARGO MAR	'Bitter sea'. Also the name of a Bolivian film directed by Agassi.
VAMOS A LA PLAYA	Meaning 'let's go to the beach', it is also the name of Italian duo Rhigeira's hit single written in 1983 and used by Chilean fans since to taunt Bolivians.
EL PRADO	Meaning 'meadow', 'lea', or 'park', it is the name commonly given to the area covering the central artery of La Paz made up of a long walkway which includes a fountain, benches, greenery, and statues.



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