BolivianExpress

Gratis

Magazine

Blurred Lines

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PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN

Bolivia is made up of a multitude of cultures, with a complex mix of racial groups as diverse as the land's topography. Many different indigenous groups have lived in various areas here for millennia, from the lowlands of the Amazon to the heights of the Altiplano. Throughout history, these groups have interacted with each other in commerce and in cultural exchange. Later, the colonial period saw the arrival of European populations who arrived with their own economic agenda. Enslaved Africans were brought over by some of these new arrivals and forced to work in Bolivia's mines, and eventually moved to its coca fields. Today, their descendants constitute an increasingly visible Afro-Bolivian community in various regions, particularly in the high-altitude tropical rainforest of the Yungas.

Over time, these groups engaged with each other more and more, and terms have come to pass to describe the progeny of this mixing of groups. These terms have carried different weights at different times, and among different classes. In colonial times, someone of means with mixed heritage may have simply been called white, while someone from the countryside or of lower classes may have been called **mestizo**. And even the significance of being **Aymara** has morphed; a word that once for many people brought an image of an indigenous farmer in a far-flung community now just as strongly can bring forth an image of a young university student in El Alto who listens to hip-hop music.

This type of racial categorization can be a messy business, as the terms and their meanings change over time and take on their own political, and too often derogatory, connotations. So like much of the region, Bolivia is a place where individual identity can be a difficult thing to unpack. One cannot simply meet a person and, upon observation of their place of birth, skin colour or last name, fully understand who they really are. As with people anywhere, to be 'Bolivian' can mean many things at once, and defining a person by their race or heritage becomes more and more difficult every day. The government has tried to recognise these complexities in a constitution that now recognises 36 original nations representing nearly any permutation of ethnicity imaginable, as well as Afro-Bolivians.

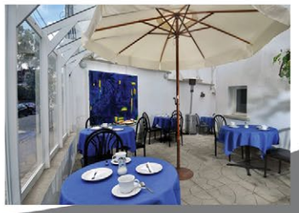
A close look shows much more complex connections between the people and places that make up this country. So in this issue of Bolivian Express, we explore the idea of 'blurred lines' to celebrate ambiguity, to bask in the grey areas, to find out when truth is anything but. We travelled to borders, physical and metaphorical, where worlds collide in big and small ways to make reality less than clear.

We visit Bolivia's **fronteras** to see how proximity to other countries can challenge communities' notions of being Bolivian. Conversely, we talk with individuals from other Latin American countries who have travelled across borders to arrive here in Bolivia, a place often adopted as their new home. We look at areas of cultural and political contention between Bolivia and its neighbours, from this country's claim to the sea to the true origins of the **salteña**. Internally, we revisit the tumultuous history of the **clásicos** between La Paz's two most prominent football teams, where each side has its own version of what happened during controversial games of the past. We explore communities that are changing definitions of their spaces, from the **Takana** people of the Amazon basin, bridging the gap between the physical and spiritual world, to the women in El Alto bringing a piece of the agrarian countryside to their urban neighbourhoods.

In many ways, ambiguity is the spice of life. One just needs to look at the rich tapestry of culture and tradition that comes from each ethnic and cultural group here, and at the results of the connections between these groups across generations. Not knowing answers is what keeps things interesting, what keeps us exploring. And Bolivia is a fantastic place to look deep to try and sort it all out.

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

By William Wroblewski



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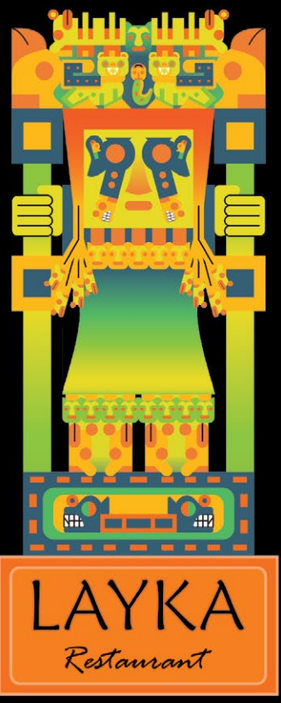

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Quality tradition

According to the National Institute of Statistics of Bolivia, the country had 562,461 immigrants living inside its borders in 2012. Yet, in an increasingly complex and intertwined world, what does it mean to be from one country versus another? Bolivian Express decided to investigate why an increasing number of **extranjeros** are not only visiting Bolivia, but learning to call the country home.

Efrain Maestre is not tall, but he stands out in an average crowd of Bolivians. In just the same way, his accent stands out because it is speckled by **yeísmo**. It instantly labels him as one of the many *extranjeros* who have recently moved to the **eje central** of Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and La Paz. Although he was born and educated in Venezuela, Maestre moved to Bolivia when a fellow Venezuelan offered him a graphic design job in La Paz he simply couldn't refuse.

According to UNICEF, the top five countries represented by immigrants in Bolivia as of 2013 do not include Maestre's beloved Venezuela. Rather, immigrants namely come from Argentina, Brazil, México, Perú and Chile. Within La Paz, there exist pocket populations of foreigners, like the Peruvian immigrant community concentrated in El Alto. In other parts of the city, like Zona Sur and Sopocachi, there are many international organisations and even more foreigners. One Chilean Sopocachi resident, Ignacio Saavedra, declared that, 'It is not unusual to hear many Colombians and Mexicans in the streets,' who are exposed, like Maestre, by their distinctive accents.

In 1976, *extranjeros* made up 1.3% of Bolivia's population. Forty years later, they make up 2% of the country. Although Bolivian immigration levels have remained relatively low and stable over time, the demographics of its immigrants has changed noticeably in the past few years. Instead of Arab, Jewish and Japanese immigrants, Bolivia now receives foreigners mostly from other Latin American countries.

According to Daniel Bordas, the Programme Director of the International Organisation for Migration, Latin American foreigners choose Bolivia as their home because 'the cost of living here is cheap, especially for people like students coming from Brazil.' Simply, more foreigners from Latin America are moving here for the economic opportunities, especially from countries currently plagued by economic crises like Venezuela and Argentina. Even so, Maestre solemnly reflects, 'Regrettably, there is a crisis in Venezuela, but that is not why I'm still here.'

So why is Maestre still in Bolivia, if not for economic reasons? Undeniably, the economic opportunities and low living costs in Bolivia are favourable for people looking to move. However, when you ask immigrants why they choose to remain in Bolivia, many do not initially reflect on this fact. Interestingly, *extranjeros* in La Paz mention **paceños** as the primary reason they enjoy living in Bolivia. '*Paceños* are well educated,' Maestre explains. 'They respect me. They are nicer and more caring people. When you go somewhere and you are received well, you can make it your home.'

More frequently than not, Latin American foreigners come to Bolivia and stay longer than they initially planned. Maestre thought he would stay for a maximum of one year, but he sits across from me 16 months later and asks, 'Do you like **salteñas**?' He sips on his instant coffee, takes a substantial bite into his mid-morning snack and says, 'They're a bit too sweet for me.'

THE FIRST NARCO NATION

HISTORY IS A SERIES OF AMBIGUITIES. OFTENTIMES, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POWER DETERMINES WHAT WE SEE AS TRUTH. ONE EXAMPLE OF HOW POWER BLURS THE LINE OF TRUTH IS BY DETERMINING WHICH BUSINESSES AND ENTERPRISES ARE LEGITIMATE AND WHICH ARE ILLEGAL.

TEXT: JACK WEATHERFORD ILLUSTRATION: HUGO CUÉLLAR

The United States frequently criticises Bolivia over the problem of drugs. In 2013, President Obama identified Bolivia, Burma and Venezuela as the three countries that have consistently failed to meet the objectives of the US War on Drugs. Yet it could be argued that the United States, in fact, was history's first 'narco nation'. Today, few people realise that the wealth of the United States was, in part, originally based on the sale of drugs. In the 18th century, before the advent of heroin and cocaine, the United States was the world's largest producer of tobacco and the drug nicotine.

For many centuries, prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America, indigenous people used tobacco for medicinal and cultural purposes. Tobacco had a place in these indigenous cultures much like coca still has in Bolivia. Indigenous people did not use tobacco or coca for recreation or commercial purposes.

The English colonists in North America recognised the potential profit from tobacco and created a market for it. Meanwhile, governments around the world had outlawed this dangerous, addictive drug. The Ottoman Empire banned tobacco in 1633, China in 1612, and Russia in 1613, and in 1617 even Mongolia made smoking a crime. Using the still relatively new technology of the printing press, American tobacco producers and their English marketing partners launched a massive propaganda campaign of books, pamphlets, and illustrations to promote tobacco as healthful and to portray it as fashionable in European cafés and royal courts. In a world not yet accustomed to advertising and propaganda, these false claims about tobacco succeeded. Tobacco became so wildly popular in the royal courts of Europe that the American colonists quickly became wealthy. In the middle of the 18th century, the colonies in North America produced an average of 18,000 kilogrammes of tobacco each year. The trade became so lucrative that every colony produced a crop, but production was centred around the Chesapeake Bay and in the area of the present-day Southern states.

American colonial growers sought to control not only the cultivation of tobacco, but also its sale, which required the wresting of the market away from the English and the cessation of the heavy taxes paid to the Crown. And so they revolted against British rule.

This new tobacco market financed the American Revolution, as the colonists' burgeoning army was supported with taxes on tobacco and loans from the French using tobacco as collateral. Unlike Bolivia and Mexico, which each had vast silver deposits from which to mint coins, the North American revolutionaries did not initially have their own currency and instead used tobacco as money. So important was tobacco to the revolutionary cause that the British military targeted tobacco crops and warehouses for destruction as the key to defeating the rebels. The British Navy blockaded the ports of the incipient nation and managed to confiscate 15,500 kilogrammes of tobacco bound for sale in Europe. Because of the importance of this one commodity, the war between the new American nation and Great Britain became known as the 'Tobacco War' in the area around the state of Maryland and the modern-day capital of Washington, DC. Today, the war has the more politically powerful name of the 'American Revolution', which ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

Tobacco enabled the creation of a new narco nation, the United States of America. In 1787, delegates from the 13 former colonies met in Philadelphia to write a new Constitution for the emerging country. The most powerful delegates to the Constitutional Convention represented the tobacco growers in the South, and they fought to protect their tobacco interests, in particular

Continues on page 12

the importation of slaves from Africa and the expansion of lands to the west for more tobacco plantations. Of the first five American presidents, four were tobacco growers: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe. To solidify their hold on the new American government, the Southerners moved the capital from Philadelphia to tobacco country along the Potomac River, where Washington, DC, sits today. To illustrate the importance of tobacco to the American economy, the new congressional building was decorated with tobacco plants and its columns were crowned with tobacco leaves.

In hope of finding new areas for tobacco cultivation, President Thomas Jefferson purchased the French lands along the Mississippi River in 1803, doubling the size of the United States by adding over 2 million square kilometers, an area almost twice the size of modern Bolivia. New Orleans, at the mouth of the Mississippi River, became the drug supplier to the world. As the United States grew and pushed westward, the new land was less suitable for tobacco cultivation, and slowly the country found new crops, such as cotton and maize (which was easily transformed into another intoxicant, corn whiskey).

Tobacco grower James Monroe, who negotiated the Louisiana Purchase for Thomas Jefferson and eventually succeeded him as president, extended US influence into Latin American markets by creating the Monroe Doctrine, which limited the activity and influence of Europe in the Western Hemisphere. This project established the precedent for perpetual US interference in the commerce and politics of Latin America.

These North Americans of European ancestry created the first global drug trade with tobacco, and soon capitalists around the world followed their example by expanding into the production of other drugs, such as opium. Scientists helped to create even stronger substances, such as heroin (from opium) and cocaine (from coca). But just as US citizens became some of the heaviest users of tobacco, they also became addicted to other drugs. Ironically, the United States now has a massive substance-abuse problem, and, unable to control its drug problem at home, US officials constantly divert attention by accusing Bolivia and other developing countries of being the source of the problem.

Today the United States is the centre of the international drug trade. It is the world's largest drug market, and it supplies the bulk of the funds in the international narcotics trade. For nearly 400 years, the United States has been a leading producer and consumer of licit and illicit narcotics, pointing the finger of guilt at Bolivia and obscuring the fact that it is still history's leading narco nation. If only the people and the government of the United States would look at their own history, they would understand their country's central role in the creation and maintenance of the global drug trade.

Anthropologist Jack Weatherford was born on a tobacco farm in South Carolina. He is the author of El Legado Indígena, which examines the contributions of indigenous Americans to world history.

HEALING SPACES

LOCAL PRODUCE FEEDS THE URBAN THRONGS

TEXT AND PHOTO: ELSEMIEKE DE BOER

On the outskirts of El Alto, peace is found when entering Doña Berta's **carpa solar**, or greenhouse, with an abundance of vegetables. It is humid and smells fresh. For a moment one forgets the dusty streets outside. All manner of produce grows here despite being 4100 metres above sea level: there are little green bell peppers, parsley, spinach, baby lettuce, cabbage and much more. The sweet cherry tomatoes are Doña Berta´s favourites. She carefully collects a handful of vegetables and we head out before the chickens can get in.

Doña Berta's greenhouse is part of a smart solution to today's global urban challenges. The rapid urbanisation rates of the last decades, especially in the Global South, have given cities little time to adapt to the large amount of new urban dwellers. Here in El Alto residents can face difficulties in meeting basic needs around issues of food security, income, social well-being and environmental sustainability. Believe it or not, urban gardens like Doña Berta's provide solutions to all of these challenges. It is a healing space within the city.

Doña Berta planted the first seeds in her garden in El Alto 15 years ago. With help of an NGO she was able to gain agricultural knowledge, something she was missing before. Though many **alteños** are rural migrants and therefore have a strong relationship with the countryside and agricultural living, many like her simply do not. But that does not stop these residents from pursuing agriculture, says Katyussa Veiga, project leader of Eco Tambo, a weekly organised ecological urban farmers' market in La Paz's Plaza Lira. 'Although some do not have agricultural knowledge, many learn very fast because they have the imagination,' she says.

The main benefit of Doña Berta's garden is secure access to healthy and fresh food. This was particularly important when her children were young. Good nutrition can be a problem within the La Paz–El Alto metropolitan area because many people don't know much about healthy nutrition and don't have the means to buy healthy products. Furthermore, most products sold in the city are produced far away, losing freshness after days in transit to the local markets. And for Doña Berta, being able to live off her own garden protects her against rising food prices, enabling her to save money and purchase other necessities.

'URBAN GARDENERS ARE IMPORTANT LEADERS AND INNOVATORS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.'
—ECO TAMBO'S KATYUSSA VEIGA

Doña Berta sells her surplus crops at local markets and to restaurants and families. On Saturdays, a number of urban farmers gather at the Eco Tambo market. In addition to selling their foodstuffs, the **vendedores** use the market as a meeting point for maintaining their network, sharing experiences and negotiating exchanges. 'Each urban farmer specialises in a certain type of products,' Veiga explains. 'This large variety of products has the advantage that they can buy products from each other, or exchange products amongst themselves when the market ends.'

The majority of the urban farmers at Plaza Lira are women. The fact that they are producers themselves, run their own business and maintain a large social network has given them stronger positions within their families, their neighbourhoods and also the city. 'They are important leaders and innovators within the community,' says Veiga.

Although Doña Berta's garden seems a promising initiative, these urban gardens face challenges too. 'There is a lack of understanding of the benefits of ecological products', Doña Berta says. 'For example, people do not understand the crucial difference between the use of chemical and natural pesticides.'

Fabrizio Uscamayta, another project leader of Eco Tambo, also stresses some improvements. 'Just two months ago a new law regarding the promotion of healthy nutrition got approved,' he says. 'This has been the first acknowledgement in the country that we are not eating healthy.' This law seeks to promote healthier nutrition of the Bolivian people by establishing guidelines and mechanisms. Health, according to the Bolivian government, is a human right and contributes to **vivir bien**.

Climate change poses a major threat to livelihoods in Bolivia, but urban gardens might provide solutions. 'This area has been pointed out as extremely vulnerable to future climate change', says Uscamayta. The region's altitude and geographical characteristics pose challenges to the biodiversity, water and ground quality, glaciers and agriculture in the region. 'It will be difficult to adapt to, but urban gardens could form a very interesting answer,' says Uscamayta. Despite the altitude and climate change, Doña Berta still manages to grow her cherry tomatoes because her urban garden has its own sustainable micro-climate and maintains fertile soil and ideal growing conditions.

These urban gardens are also known for their therapeutic powers – they are spaces where tranquility can be found. The area where Doña Berta lives has very few trees and the low oxygen level poses an issue to her health. 'The greenhouses are full of green and contain high oxygen levels; they are places of peace and silence to the women,' says Veiga.

In many ways urban gardens are healing spaces within cities. They provide economic, social and environmental solutions to today's global urban challenges. Doña Berta's garden is a great example from which others can learn. When leaving El Alto, Doña Berta asks me at least 10 times, 'My *carpa solar* has an abundance of vegetables, right?' I assure her it is a beautiful place she can be very proud of.

HECHO EN BOLIVIA

STAKING BOLIVIA'S CULTURAL CLAIMS

TEXT : ANNA GRACE
ILLUSTRATIONS: NIKOLAUS HOCHSTEIN COX

Whatever your style, whether it's strolling to the local **salteña** kiosk, sitting in one of the many *salteña*-selling chain restaurants or independent cafes, or eating out of a serviette whilst rushing to work, *salteñas* form an important part of the matinal routine if you live in Bolivia. In Colombia, I was regularly asked about the quality of Bolivian food. Keep your **empanadas**, your **tamales** and your **arepas**, I would say, *salteñas* beat them all.

I asked Bolivian cook and *salteña* enthusiast Virginia Gutierrez if *salteñas* were sold in other countries. 'I think they have them in Argentina,' she said. 'I'm not sure, though, you'd have to check.' But a Plaza España *salteña*-seller was more adamant. 'Only in Bolivia,' she told me.

Yet, it is true that the very name of this Bolivian staple locates its identity in Salta, Argentina. The creation story is as follows:

Juana Manuela Gorriti – a *salteña* of the non-edible variety – and her family relocated from Argentina to Bolivia in 1831, escaping the Rosas dictatorship. Well-known for her intellect, writing and grief-strewn life, Gorriti was also the inventor of the *salteña*, and thus named the delightful creation after her home province.

'It's all in the name,' goes the well-known phrase. Yet, in this case, all is not in the name. First created and sold in Tarija, *salteñas* belong more to Bolivia than to the Argentine province in which their creator was born and died.

A person born in one place and then raised in another is often asked where they feel they belong: the country from which they originated, or the one which has grown to be their home? Unfortunately, consumibles are unable to answer such complicated questions. So, this time, I'll provide the definitive, unbiased answer: *salteñas* are Bolivian, through and through.

If name does not define identity or origin, what does? An official declaration, an agreed split-patrimony, a battlefield victory – the methods used are abound. But do they work? Let's look at a few other examples of contested, multi-national treasures.

'The **Morenada** is linked in no way to the Peruvians,' claims Milton Eyzaguirre from The Museum of Ethnology and Folklore in La Paz. 'In Peru,' he explains, 'they say the dance is part of a common culture that belongs to all **Aymara** people.' But Milton contends the dance, which originated in the Bolivian municipalities of Guaqui, Achacachi and Taraco, has since been adopted by those living further afield on the altiplano. But how did the *Morenada* leave the confines of these remote communities? According to Milton, 'Part of **Aymara** logic is to expand beyond Bolivia, to undertake a cultural conquest.' Sharing is caring, is it not? Not when others try to claim shared items as their own.

Sometimes, sharing with Peru can be permitted, as is the case of the great Lake Titicaca. The independence of Peru in 1821 and Bolivia in 1825 gave way to the division of the lake, giving Titicaca a dual-nationality. It is almost perfectly divided between the two countries in a compromise that seems to compromise nobody in particular.

Another water-based, less peaceful, but certainly Pacific example, comes in the Bolivian-Chilean dispute over the sea. When Chile conquered Bolivia in the War of the Pacific, it took the country's access to the sea. All is fair in love and war, right? Wrong. Bolivians to this day are fighting to claim back what they believe is rightfully theirs. However, for Chile, the military victory equals lawful possession, so it adds Bolivia's former piece of coastline to its already vast collection.

Just as *salteñas* are unable to declare where their allegiance lies, so too are dances, lakes and bits of land. Whether it is claimed, shared or won, possession remains forever disputed as countries continue to fight over what they desperately want to call their own.

Jose Alberto Menacho Caballero is one of Bolivia's best freestyle footballers. Nearly every day he and his friends practice their skills on Plaza Camacho in downtown La Paz. Meet one of Jose's fellow freestyle footballers in the new documentary from Elsemieke de Boer and Bolivian Express.

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BolivianExpress Magazine

PHOTO: ELSEMIEKE DE BOER

DÍA DEL MAR

THE CENTURY OLD STRUGGLE FOR AVAROA'S COASTLINE

TEXT AND PHOTOS : ELLEN FRANK-DELGADO
ILLUSTRATION: NIKOLAUS HOCHSTEIN COX

In the days leading up to **Día del Mar**, Plaza Abaroa is a tranquil place. All that can be heard are the sounds of gardeners peacefully watering the surrounding grass. One man sweeps the stone pathways that transect the plaza, while others in swanky suits quietly eat lunch on nearby benches. Yet, the bitter smell of fresh black paint stands out in the plaza, and forces Sopocachi residents to stop in their tracks. The paint outlines where Bolivian dignitaries and members of the National Congress will stand in a few days, during the March 23rd commemoration.

The War of the Pacific, fought between Chile, Peru and Bolivia, began as a border dispute when Bolivia imposed a 10-cent tax on the potassium nitrate produced by Chile in the Litoral province. In the first battle, fought in Calama in 1879, 500 Chilean soldiers faced 100 Bolivian men, including Plaza Abaroa's namesake, Eduardo Avaroa, who owned property in the area. According to folklore, when Chilean soldiers asked Avaroa to surrender, in a moment of pure valour, the doughty landowner yelled back, '¿Rendirme yo? ¡Que se rinda su abuela!' (Surrender me? Your grandmother should surrender!) Since his death, he lives on as a national hero in major plazas across Bolivia and in the Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa. Even so, Plaza Abaroa's official name continues to be misspelled due to the linguistic similarity between 'B's' and 'V's' in spoken Spanish.

The War of the Pacific ended in 1883, but Eduardo Avaroa's name still symbolises hope in modern day Bolivia. The country officially lost its Litoral province to Chile at the end of the war, but to this day it insists on regaining its sovereign access to the sea. Under Evo Morales' leadership, Bolivia has taken actions to modify the 1904 Treaty of Peace & Friendship. In 2013, it filed an official plea to sue Chile at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. If the court sides with Bolivia, the landlocked country could gain back a portion of the 400 km coastline it lost 112 years ago.

On *Día del Mar*, the plaza could not differ more from the serene days leading up to it. In the morning, jets dart above the now-barricaded plaza. The crowds of **paceños** that fill the sidewalks can still see the bronze statue of Avaroa in the centre of the plaza. Floral offerings in the country's vibrant yellow, green and red, surround Eduardo Avaroa. The many blue flowers encompassing the statue remind onlookers of the true purpose of today's festivities. Local school marching bands, politicians, the Ministry of Defence, the army, and of course, Bolivia's navy, occupy the streets themselves. The navy's plain white suits greatly contrast the more whimsical and colourful costumes of the processions. Bolivia maintains a navy to surveil Lago Titicaca and the country's rivers, as well as in the hope of one day regaining its coastline.

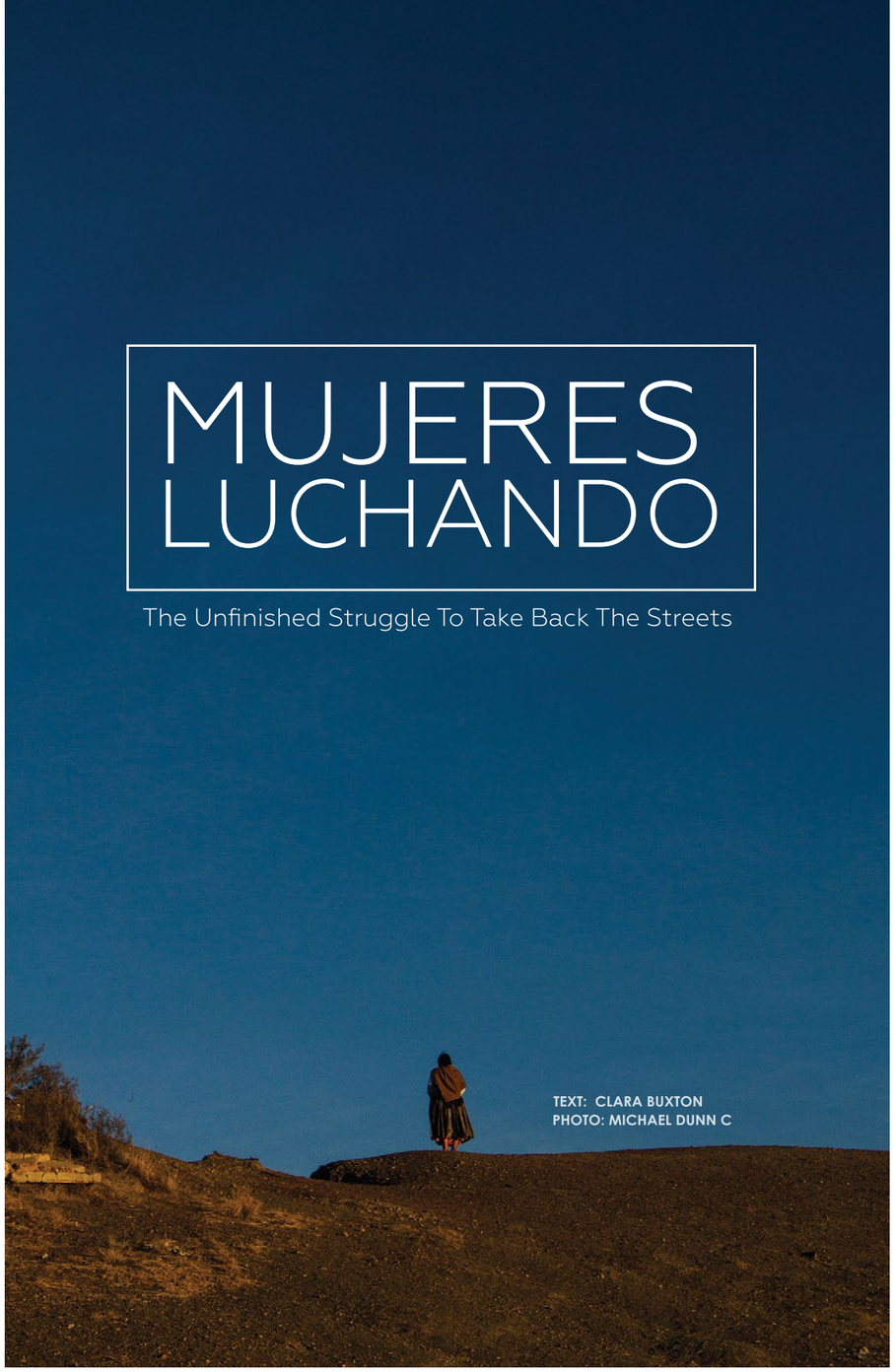
Evo Morales' stern voice rumbles over the loudspeakers as he shares his hopes of 'frank and sincere dialogue with Chile.' His sentiments are emotional but optimistic, which reflect the country's belief that one battle has already been won. In September 2015, the International Court of Justice rejected Chile's claim that the court had no jurisdiction in the case. Chile now has until July 25th to respond to Bolivia's case, while Bolivia has spent the past week analysing and preparing for different arguments Chile may make.

After a midday siesta, the streets in front of Plaza Abaroa are filled once more with parades. The marching drums seem to vibrate local buildings even more than the morning's jets. Chants and songs, in combination with the drums, fill the air and drown out the Western music of Alexander Coffee across the street, from where local barista Mirea Sandoval Rivera has watched *Día del Mar* each year behind the counter. 'In the heart of all Bolivians,' she says, when asked if Bolivia will ever gain access to the sea, 'we will always defend the story of Avaroa.'

The end of the day's commemoration is eerie. After hours of music, the drums come to an unnerving halt. No soldier or onlooker chants or even mumbles a word. There is a chilling atmosphere and no one seems to know what is going to happen next, like in the uncertain months to come for Bolivia in the Hague. Amidst a few more shouts, the soldiers precede onward, carrying the flag flown in 1879 away from Plaza Abaroa. All that can be heard is the dismantling of stages, while the *paceños* are left wondering if their country will always remain landlocked.

MUJERES LUCHANDO

The Unfinished Struggle To Take Back The Streets



TEXT: CLARA BUXTON
PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN C

'I remember I was waiting on the corner near my house and a car went by. The driver's friend whistled at me. It was so uncomfortable. They were whistling and laughing but I couldn't understand what they were saying. The next day, the same thing, the same guys, at the same time. I feel defenceless, like I can't do anything about it. I'm scared to say anything to them. So I just walk further away and pretend I haven't noticed.'

Solange is a young working professional in La Paz and her story is hardly unique. According to Human Rights Watch, women and girls in Bolivia remain at high risk of gender-based harassment and violence. An overwhelming majority of them regularly experience some form of sexual harassment in the streets. Whether it be staring, whistling and catcalling, or more invasive harassment such as unwanted physical contact – this behaviour is something that women like Solange have become sadly accustomed to.

'The whistling happens all the time,' she points out. 'They almost always do it when they see a girl alone and they are with their friends. I don't know why they do it. Maybe because they think it's cute and that girls like it. But that's just not true.'

Andreyna Gomez, a member of the Bolivian anarco-feminist collective, Mujeres Creando, has made it her personal mission to stand up against street harassment. 'In Mujeres Creando, every member has their own voice to use against what makes them most uncomfortable about this society and for me it is precisely this: the invisible violence in public spaces that is minimised, naturalised and that puts women in the position of an object of satisfaction. The fact that it is such a fleeting encounter makes it one of the most difficult aggressions to confront and to classify as violence.'

As in countless other cultures around the world, for many years women in Bolivia had been confined to a largely domestic role, barred from public spaces and expected to conform to rigid gender roles. 'Street harassment, like so many other types of violence, is a strategy for perpetuating **machismo**,' Andreyna affirms, 'and now that is being threatened and renounced. Street harassment reinforces that idea that these public spaces are the property of men only – where women who appear in public are harassed and objectified from very early ages in an attempt to intimidate them, immobilise them and re-relegate them to domestic spaces.'

María Galindo, the founder of Mujeres Creando, seconds this opinion. She argues that street harassment is a man's way of telling a woman, 'the street is not your space, the street is my space and your body belongs to me'.

A common obstacle in the fight against street harassment is the view that compared to other forms of gender-based violence, catcalling and whistling is often perceived as relatively harmless. However, for María, these micro-aggressions can easily escalate to physical violence. 'It normalises the intimidation of women,' she says. For Andreyna, underestimating this issue is a serious hazard. 'For me, violence is violence, it doesn't matter which parameters it falls within,' she says. 'Street harassment has always been presented as an innocent, roguish gesture that should be taken as a form of flattery. However, its **machista**, sexist and objectifying content is an indication of people who in non-public places are even more violent. A man who harasses women sees them as something whose only real function is satisfying him. Consequently, raping her is only a question of circumstance and the same goes for committing femicide.'

'This system normalises and tolerates acts of violence and the result is social insensitivity,' she continues. 'The system also tries to hierarchise the phenomenon of *machista* violence. We categorically reject the minimisation of street harassment that threatens the basic freedom of women.'

> 'Street harassment is a man's way of telling a woman, 'the street is not your space, the street is my space and your body belongs to me'

In terms of government action on the issue of women's rights, the landscape is unpromising. 'The government does not do anything about it,' María remarks. 'The more economically and politically powerful a man is, the more they act with impunity. Justice here is so corrupt that many incidences of violence against women are not reported.'

In an attempt to improve the safety of women in Bolivia and prevent gender-based violence, the Bolivian government passed Law 348 in 2013 that defined the crime of femicide and promised harsh sentences for men who commit violence against women. However, according to a November 2014 study by national newspaper La Razón, the law produced a conviction rate of just 4% in eighteen months, with 206 recorded cases of femicide and only 8 sentences.

'In our media, the authorities reinforce [sexism],' Andreyna asserts. 'We have mayors who publicly harass women, corrupt judicial authorities and television presenters whose acts of *machista* violence have gone unpunished. There's an endless amount of violent acts that aren't considered in official statistics, but that women experience frequently. The government has made a law that figuratively "protects women," but its protocols are still victimising for us. We've been demanding a "red alert" for the quantity of femicides, both recorded and unrecorded, for months but for the government, this is still a secondary concern whilst women are dying at the hands of their partners, dying after clandestine abortions and being constantly blamed for what happens to them.'

> 'I feel defenceless, like I can't do anything about it. I'm scared to say anything to them. So I just walk further away and pretend I haven't noticed.'

Whilst the situation in Bolivia appears bleak, María Galindo is keen to stress that the country's fight against everyday sexism is part of a much bigger, more menacing global picture. 'I disagree with the idea that sexism is unique to Latin America. I think it is a problem all over the world. It's a western problem, it's a colonial problem, it's an indigenous problem. Patriarchy is a problem everywhere,' she says.

For women like Solange, every day that passes is another day of feeling unsafe in her own neighbourhood. 'If I go out into the street in a good mood and this happens... then my mood changes and I feel angry and impotent,' she says. 'It's a lack of respect. Every citizen needs to feel safe in their home and free to step outside without feeling uncomfortable, both men and women. There should not be a difference.'

I Am A Takana And The Jungle Is My Home

WHERE SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY MEET UNDER THE AMAZONIAN CANOPY.

TEXT AND PHOTO: NIKOLAUS HOCHSTEIN COX

Parque Madidi, in northwestern Bolivia, and its surrounding Amazonian territories, is a vast collection of trees and waterways, brimming with flora and fauna. It is a wild place away from human control, whose fate is not at the whims of the Bolivian government but **El Niño**. For travellers, it offers a plethora of tourist attractions. For biologists, it provides a lifetime of research. But after all, the rainforest remains grounded in the prosaic – it is a land justifiable by science and hard fact.

For the **Takana**, however, a population of 8,400 indigenous people who live within the park's borders and neighbouring forest, the jungle is both science and fiction, history and mythology. For these rainforest-dwelling peoples, the lines between fact and fantasy become blurred when viewing the rainforest. Within living memory the *Takana* have been jungle nomads and the rainforest has both given and taken from them. Even after the Bolivian government created the national parks and the Takana became a sedentary population, the rainforest has persisted in being their sole provider.

During my travels in the area, my *Takana* guide Nilo acquainted me with three types of palms, the fronds of each have a different particular use in the construction of the thatched huts that make up *Takana* homesteads. Every tree has a different purpose – some provide poison used for hunting wildgame, some store gallons of water for drinking. The rivers seethe with fish, and as we go midnight trawling in the sluggish expanse, we capture seven ferociously barbed catfish – enough for Nilo's family to survive for a week. Money still has relatively little use out here, and Nilo vividly recalls when he was fifteen and first met tourists who tried to pay his family in cash. They ultimately made the notes into kindling. The jungle gives Nilo and his people everything they could ever want. His niece Raquel may study in the comparatively cosmopolitan town of Rurrenabaque, but even she considers the jungle her home and says it is all she needs.

But as the jungle gives, it also takes. Nilo is a guide, artisan, hunter, fisherman and carpenter, and is currently engaged in helping his brother build a new series of houses further away from the river. Serious flooding a year ago destroyed the entire community, which is why they all currently live under the skeleton of a house, covered by a blue tarpaulin. The jungle provides food for *Takana* hunters, but even experienced bushmen can vanish in its dense undergrowth. They could be gored to death by a wounded **chancho de tropa**, bitten by any of the poisonous animals that inhabit the woods, or simply get lost. For a *Takana* the rainforest is all-powerful; it gives as much as it takes, and humans are just one of the many countless organisms granted a short lease below its branches.

With this kind of perspective it comes as no surprise that the *Takana* consider the entire rainforest to be alive, as a great omnipotent organism, in which all trees and animals are connected spiritually in a symbiotic whole. Just as there are trees with practical uses for jungle life there are also those whose significance is spiritual. The most important of these is the great **Mapajo**, whose trunk can grow to be hundreds of feet in diameter. These trees are described to me as 'kings' and 'gods' of the forest, but even they are not the absolute deities in this spiritual landscape. They are simply messengers for **Pachamama**, the Andean Earth Mother. It is She who reigns supreme in the Amazon. The *Takana* annually gather around *Mapajo* trunks to dance, drink a **ch'alla** and sacrifice jungle game. This is to ensure prosperity, protection and success in the coming year.

As the spirit of *Pachamama* is in every tree and animal in the forest, the *Takana* never hunt for sport. Nilo speaks of a man who would stalk *chancho de tropa* every night for the thrill of the hunt rather than necessity. One night the man never returned and Nilo accepts this as *Pachamama*'s punishment. Conventional explanations for the man's disappearance can be construed, but for the *Takana*, when the jungle is a deity, all things are spiritually connected. The forest is adored and feared by those who live within it. Just as *Pachamama* provides rivers full of fish and springs of pure water, She can also threaten the lives of those who live within her borders.

There are isolated areas in the forest where the jungle spirits roam free under the solitary influence of *Pachamama*. As Nilo quietly warns, when the *Takana* roam into these regions, into the '**corazón del bosque**,' they are confronted by the preternatural: faceless men that walk over the waters in ancient dress, unknown compelling forces that attack tourist tents in the night. *Pachamama* is the jungle and, like the rational rainforest known to science, Her forest can be kind and cruel.

For a transient passing through the Amazon, the benefits and detriments of living there are only a consequence of naturally-occurring cycles and patterns. For travellers, the rainforest is not the whole world but another stop on the tourist route across Bolivia. It is spectacle, but little more. But for those who live their entire lives within the jungle, who live for the rainforest, the trees and rivers become something more. They become a single living organism, a sentient being with absolute control over everything that occurs beneath the canopy. The *Takana* know the jungle better than anyone else. They know it has moods and feelings. They know it lives.

LIVING ON THE EDGE

LIFE IN BOLIVIAN BORDER TOWNS

TEXT AND PHOTO: ANNA GRACE

Surrounded by land on all sides, it is not surprising that Bolivia can call itself a neighbour to no fewer than five countries in total. Brazil, Peru, Chile, Paraguay and Argentina, each one of these borders is home to numerous border towns. Hotbeds of crime, points of migration, melting-pots of culture – one thing is certain, each **pueblo fronterizo** has its own story to tell.

'People who have a strong sense of identity don't kill. Mercenaries, people like that, don't have much sense of identity, that's why they can kill.' The words of journalist Domingo Abrego Faldín surprise me as we talk about the violence in the town of San Matías, located in the far east of Bolivia, on the Brazilian border. Plagued by murders which are very often linked to drug trafficking and land negotiations, San Matías is a difficult place to live in. As Domingo tells me, 'It's the most dangerous part of all Bolivia.'

In January of this year, Domingo wrote an article for the **cruceño** newspaper El Deber, focusing on problems facing the inhabitants of San Matías. The article tells the story of an elderly inhabitant of the town who, having just lost a grandchild to violence, laments the loss of tranquility. The San Matías of nowadays seems a town which innocence has forgotten.

The porous, immense, jungle-ridden Brazilian border provides an excellent setting for drugs, arms and just about any other type of trafficking. Those who live close by become collateral damage. Domingo himself has lost family to the violence. Showing me a photo of men holding a long, club-like weapon, he tells me, 'My grandmother was killed by one of these things, una **macana**. This is the type of thing that happens here.' It seems that no one is safe.

In recent years, the number of consumers of cocaine and other drugs in Brazil has increased. Its vast coastline is widely used for the exportation of cocaine to countries across the Atlantic. Bordering the three principal cultivators of the drug, supply is not hard to come by. Yet, given the levels of violence induced when trafficking and transporting narcotics, it comes at a price.

In December of last year, the killings in San Matías reached such an extent that military presence was increased drastically in a bid to control the area. The catalyst being the brutal murder of a migration worker, shot eight times by her Brazilian killer. Despite such measures, the killings continue, with reports of another life being taken at the end of last month.

A border town constitutes a sort of no man's land. Feeling neither completely Bolivian nor fully Brazilian, living in a place that many people and things – legally or not – merely pass through, must be a strange sensation. I think back to Domingo's words regarding identity. Many base their identity on nationality, or at least on pride for the city or town they live in. Those coming and going across the border surely miss out on this fixed sense of being. Maybe the border-dwelling lifestyle leads to a lessening of morality.

Another photo is presented to me. A large family standing in a line, squinting into the sun. 'Look', Domingo instructs me, 'every member of this family is a good person. Sometimes people think everyone who lives on the border is bad. It's not true, there are good, normal people too.'

Just as the border provides a dividing line between one country and another, so too does the illicit activity divide those who live there. It divides them into the bad and the good, into those who instigate the violence and those who are tragically affected by it.

San Matías, along with much of what lies on the large, poorly policed Bolivian-Brazilian border, is infamous for such violence and trafficking. Move to the west, however, and you find the crossing from Bolivia to Peru. Not without its problems, here is much better known as a tourist hotspot. With Lake Titicaca and Copacabana hitting the top of most backpackers' must-see list, this border has an altogether different feel.

In the town of Kasani, on the Peruvian border, inhabitants suffer a more subtle sort of disruption than that experienced in San Matías. Every day many tourists pass through, seeing no more than the inside of the migration office, and leave with no desire of seeing anything else.

'Look, over there!' My new friend Jhon points and I follow his gaze. 'There's my village, my school and, right there, my house.' He smiles his gap-toothed, 11-year-old child's smile as I make out the buildings he is pointing to. 'I'm getting off here', he adds. Hopping off the minibus halfway into the 15-minute journey from Kasani to Copacabana, Jhon turns, waves and continues on his way.

Kasani and its neighbouring villages are not the bleak, limbo-condemned pueblos fronterizos I had imagined them to be. Set on the shores of the magnificent Lake Titicaca and graced with green slopes and craggy rock formations, the scenery is enough to soothe even the sorest of sore eyes.

Yet, Kasani cannot escape the fate of all towns that find themselves on the cusp of foreign territory. That is, the struggle of being the only constant in a sea – or rather, lake – of transitoriness.
Arriving into Kasani, I had seen a group of tourists swarming out of the migration office before being quickly ushered onto a **Bolivia te espera**–branded bus. 'They only stay for a minute, no longer.' The lady, whose shop stands in the shadow of the grim-looking migration office, doesn't so much lament as state. 'One moment the place is full, the next it's empty.'

I can't help but think the empty moments must occur more than the full. As I sit, waiting for the minibus to fill up, I see a handful of bag-laden locals amble across the line of cones which constitutes the border. I spot a couple of migration officials looming in the customs office doorway. I spy a woman and her daughter taking their two sheep for a walk. Not much is going on.

The road from Kasani to Copacabana is to be admired in its own right – it offers a glimpse of quotidian life in the area, one which it would be a shame to miss.

I am glad when my little friend Jhon clambers into the seat beside me, burgundy sunhat on head and shiny new rucksack on back. Our small talk, covering such topics as afternoon plans and **Semana Santa** celebrations, injects some energy into this slow-paced, no-haste town.

I suppose many see the road from Kasani to Copacabana as a necessary linking of destinations, as they hurry to their first true stop-off point in Bolivia: the touristy Copacabana. However, it is to be admired in its own right. The road from Kasani to Copacabana offers a glimpse of quotidian life in the area, one which it would be a shame to miss.

Shortly after Jhon bounds off the bus, a **campesino** hauls three sacks of potatoes and a pick axe onto the seat next to me, brushing off his dusty worker's hands in satisfaction.

A father speeds past on a bicycle as his small son struggles to keep up.

A mother strolls along, clutching a tiny, child-sized hand in each of her own.
It is easy to forget during the **momentico** most of us spend in places like Kasani that, for some, this is more than a transient crossing point. This is home.

So, next time you're passing through a typically dreary, dangerous or characterless border town, take an extra *momentico* to look around. You may be surprised by what you find.

CLÁSICOS AND CONTROVERSY

PENALTIES, DISMISSALS AND DISALLOWED GOALS

TEXT: CLARA BUXTON
PHOTO: JUAN MANUEL LOBATÓN

Passions always run high in South American football, but never more so than in the derby, or **clásico** games, taking place between local rivals. La Paz's *clásico*, contested between the city's two principal teams, Bolívar and The Strongest, is no exception. Boasting more than a 50-year history of official matches, this sporting fixture has had its share of highlights, lowlights and controversy over the years. Here are a few of the more notable events from its history:

The *clásico* **paceño** has always promised plenty of goals. The highest-scoring *clásico* ever occurred in 1978, when Bolívar defeated their rivals 6–3 and went on to defeat them again 6-0 the following year. However, in 2004, after an agonising wait of over 25 years, **el tigre** exacted their revenge on Bolívar for the humiliation and thrashed them 7–0. Strongest fans would perhaps say that it was worth the wait: this result remains the most decisive victory in the history of the fixture. Of course, ask a Bolívar fan, and they'll say it was because Bolívar had put out a team full of inexperienced youngsters that day.

Strongest fans have reason to feel aggrieved over the controversial refereeing that marred the 158th league *clásico* in 2008. On the half hour, a Strongest goal was correctly disallowed for a previous foul on Bolívar goalkeeper Carlos Arias. However, soon after the referee missed a clear penalty claim when Bolívar's Martínez fouled Strongest striker Miro Bahía in the penalty area. Things looked up for The Strongest when they converted a deserved penalty 48 minutes into the second half, but it wasn't to be. As additional time came and went, the referee allowed extra minutes of play that facilitated a late Bolívar equaliser courtesy of veteran Colombian midfielder Arnulfo Valentierra.

One of the most fondly remembered clashes for Strongest fans occurred in December 1999 when *el tigre* managed to win the game 1-0 despite having played the entire second half with 10 men. Popularly named "The Last *Clásico* of the Century", the victory was made all the sweeter seeing as the win earned The Strongest a return to the Copa Libertadores, Latin America's most prestigious club football competition, for the first time in six years.

This year, in the 199th meeting between the two sides, The Strongest blew a 2–0 lead as Bolívar came back for the draw with 10 men. Controversial from the outset, an early penalty claim was dismissed by the referee when Bolívar's Ivan Borghello went to ground in the box. A red card for Walter Flores for obstructing a goal-scoring opportunity and the late equaliser in the form of a Bolívar penalty made this *clásico* one to remember.

Better luck next time, ref.

GLOSSARY

ALTEÑOS: People from El Alto

AREPAS: A savoury pancake made from maize dough or cooked flour

AYMARA: An indigenous group of the Andes and the Altiplano of South America

BOLIVIA TE ESPERA: The slogan of the Vice Ministry of Tourism campaign promoting Bolivian tourism

CAMPESINO: Someone from the countryside

CARPA SOLAR: Greenhouse

CH'ALLA: A ritual of adoration for Pachamama; the Ch'alla involves the pouring of an alcoholic libation to appease the Earth Mother

CHANCHO DE TROPA: Medium-sized hoofed mammals, commonly called 'bush pigs'

CLÁSICO: The Latin American equivalent of a derby football game, contested between local rivals, often two teams based within the same city

CORAZÓN DEL BOSQUE: The 'heart of the forest'; how Takana describe the isolated center of the jungle, purported to be the physical realm of Pachamama and of spirits

CRUCEÑO: A word used to describe people or things from Santa Cruz

DÍA DEL MAR: March 23, a day of military parades celebrating Bolivia's claim to the sea and marking the anniversary of the death of Eduardo Avaroa, a hero of the War of the Pacific

EJE CENTRAL: A term used to refer to the Bolivian cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz

EJÉRCITO BOLIVIANO: The Bolivian land-based armed forces

EL NIÑO: Annual weather phenomena in South America which can provoke both intense rainstorms and droughts

EMPANADA: A fried dough parcel stuffed with meat and potatoes or a variety of other fillings

EXTRANJEROS: Foreigners

FRONTERA: 'Border'; often refers to international boundaries

GRINGO: Colloquial expression used to describe a foreigner

EL TIGRE: Another name for The Strongest, one of La Paz's two major football teams

MACANA: A club-like weapon

MACHISMO: A word that describes a strong, aggressive form of masculinity

MACHISTA: The adjective form of machismo

MAPAJO: The local name of the Ceiba Pentandra, a species of large tree found throughout tropical regions of South America; a sacred tree thought to have connections to the spirit-world or afterlife

MESTIZO: Term used in Central and South America describing someone of both indigenous and European descent

MOMENTICO: A moment

MORENADA: A Bolivian dance with costumes based on the African slaves brought over to work in the mines of Potosi

PACEÑO: A word used to describe people or things from La Paz

PACHAMAMA: The Andean Earth Mother; a deity of the natural world and fertility across South America, widely worshipped by many cultures including the Aymara, Quechua, Inca and Takana

PUEBLO FRONTERIZO: Border town

SALTEÑA: A baked empanada that is a specialty in Bolivia

SEMANA SANTA: 'Holy Week'; the week running up to Easter

TAKANA: An indigenous group in Bolivia numbering around 8,400 living in the rainforest at the headwaters of the Amazon River

TAMALES: A corn parcel stuffed with meat and vegetables, wrapped in banana leaves and boiled

YEÍSMO: A linguistic feature of some Spanish speakers whereby the letters 'll' and 'y' represent the same sound

VENDEDORES: Street vendors

VIVIR BIEN: 'Living well'; refers to living in harmony with nature and takes into account the principles of the indigenous people of the region

BolivianExpress Magazine

The solution for high altitude sickness
La solución contra el mal de altura
La solution contre le mal d'altitude

Die Lösung gegen die Höhenkrankheit
A solução contra a doença de altura
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Altura ciudad de Potosí: 3,900 msnm


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