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March 2018

Thanks to: Varinia Oroz MUSEF (Museo de etnografía y folklore), AGETIC, Historiador Alexis Pérez

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#81 Perseverance

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Editorial # 81: **Perseverance**

By: Caroline Risacher

¿Y su folder amarillo?

The yellow folder, the ubiquitous sheet of manila paper folded in half that **paceños** clutch tightly and carry around and which becomes one's most treasured possession, holds weeks, months, years of paperwork and administrative documents. It embodies the perseverance, resilience and determination of people in the quixotic task of facing Bolivian bureaucracy. I carried mine for nine months last year, regularly feeding it more letters, certifications and photocopies of these same letters and certifications. My adversary was the SERECI (Servicio de Registro Cívico) in a quest to obtain my Bolivian national identity card.

One of the ways that perseverance manifests itself in Bolivia is in the endless battle against a rigid and clunky administrative machine that loves legal documents, stamps, identification procedures and painstakingly long waiting lines. On the sidewalks in the centre of La Paz in a testament to an antiquated bureaucracy, **typeadores** use clunky typewriters to fill in forms and documents for the thwarted citizen who is simply trying to pay his taxes. One of our writers went to meet them, wondering how the future looks as Bolivia enters the digital age. We then talked to AGETIC, the governmental agency whose work aims to debureaucratize Bolivia's administrative jungle, to ask them how they are tackling this daunting task.

Alongside these **typeadores** are the **caseritas**, **lustrabotas**, **aparapitas**, **afiladores** and **heladeros**, who work in thankless and grueling professions and deserve the recognition that their perseverance entails. This is what we want to celebrate in this 81st issue of *Bolivian Express*: the constant and inspiring efforts of the people around us – the people who make Bolivia the incredible place it is.

One of these people is Leonel Fransezze, whose vision and motivation is to bring Bolivia's artistic scene to the international stage. Because Bolivians have nothing to envy of their neighbours, it's just a matter of hard work and perseverance – and it's also a matter of changing a mentality of mediocrity. This can be achieved on a grassroots level, which is exactly what Simon Bongers and Ricardo Dávalos are doing with their international human-rights film festival, *Bajo Nuestra Piel*. We went to Tarija and witnessed rooms packed with school children watching documentaries about Madagascar and Cambodia and debating LGBT issues. Later on, we interviewed Bolivian trova band *Negro y Blanco*, who are working on a new album and whose mission has been for the last 20 years to paint a better future rooted in equality and love.

But, ultimately, change starts with oneself, which another of our writers experienced during parkour class in a physical show of fitness and determination as she conquered her body and environment – notwithstanding a few bruises.

My own personal and spiritual parkour (towards citizenship) involved being told that my parents had smuggled me out of the country as a baby (not true) and therefore I should start a trial against them (no), and that eventually Bolivia would adopt me with fabricated parents (that's not how it works). I can't recount the hours in line waiting to obtain some certification, legalisation, translation – which often wasn't ready. A few more unexpected developments later, my administrative nightmare eventually came to an end, and with a favourable outcome. I could finally let go of my battered yellow folder, which, as it happens, did become my most cherished possession.

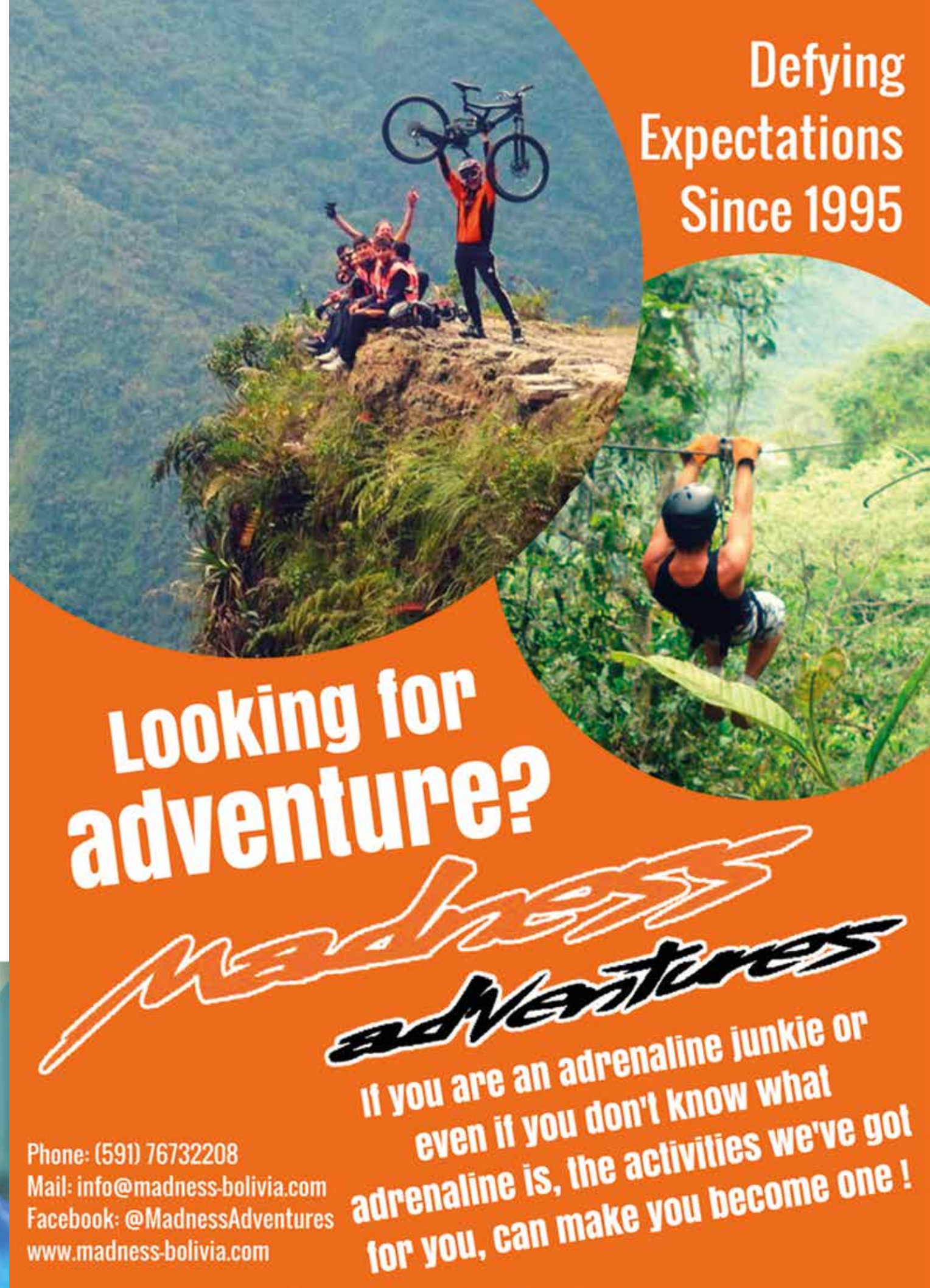
N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary.


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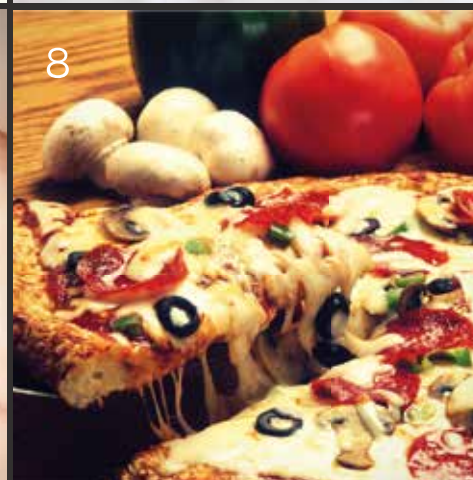
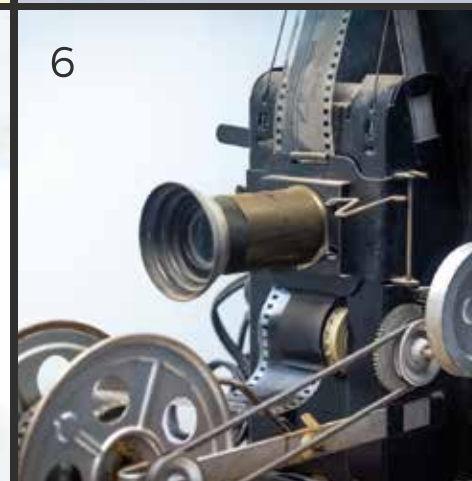
A LONGING FOR THE SEA

TEXT: GABRIEL DEASY

THE MOTIVATIONS, AND COMPLICATIONS, OF BOLIVIA'S UN BID FOR ACCESS TO THE PACIFIC

At the time of writing, it is early March. Headlines describing the construction of an originally 70-kilometre – now 200-kilometre – long **banderazo** pervade the papers; a grand poster of Bolivian President Morales backdropped against the sea overlooks Plaza Avaroa; flags symbolising the loss of el **Litoral** are draped ominously over several public buildings in preparation for **el Día del Mar** on the 23rd of the month. To the outsider, the overarching impression is greater than mere nostalgia or commemoration – around the statue of the Eduardo Avaroa, the great defender of the Bolivian coast, there is an air of optimism, a gentle breeze of hope, of expectation.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 11



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The fervour with which Bolivia simultaneously commemorates and mourns her defeat at the hands of Chilean imperialism has hardly wavered over the past century. The undeclared annexation of over 400 kilometres of Bolivian coastline during the 1879-83 War of the Pacific, and the subsequent **enclaustramiento** of Bolivia, evidently remains impressed on the national consciousness.

In light of Morales' decision to take the issue of the sea to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague in 2013, there appears to be an unprecedented sense of cohesion and strategy, a newfound competency to go with the intrinsic desire of every Bolivian for access to the Pacific Ocean. Former leaders, such as ex-president Carlos Mesa, have shelved their disputations and disagreements to aid the current government, and the Bolivian people remain united – galvanised – behind their country's determination to return to the sea.

If you read *El Libro del Mar* or watch *El Mar de Bolivia*, both connected to the government's campaign to return the sea to Bolivia, this is the overall impression you are left with. However, as with all campaigns built on patriotism, it is not until one digs a little deeper that the complexity and diversity of the issue become apparent.

In contrast to the misleading homogeneity of opinion propagated by the current government, public attitudes towards the possibility of returning to the sea are not so much divided as they are diverse. Around Plaza Avaroa, hope is intermixed with pessimism, passion with indifference, and a tangible uncertainty with new a degree of conviction.

'¿Día del Mar?' It's simply a day,' argues Julio from La Paz. 'It's a part of history and nothing more... We would have to reorganise the whole world otherwise.'

Although not many matched Julio's candidness, his sentiment was not unorthodox in spite of some concrete support for the government's current approach.

Pablo Palacios, a **paceño** who too is sceptical of the contemporary significance of *el Día del Mar*, is slightly less damning: 'For me it is more like a dream than a real possibility.' Yet, in response to the impact of Morales's recent calls for international support, he agrees that it's 'more real than before.'

This micro-sample of opinions from locals around Plaza Avaroa certainly highlights the contemporary cultural and political complications behind Bolivia's relationship to the sea, again in contravention of the government's comparatively simplified narrative. With oral hearings set to take place between 19th and 28th of March of this year, Professor Alexis Pérez, an historian who specialises in Bolivian history, stresses the complexity and difficulty of the task ahead for the Bolivian government. 'It's not evident that Bolivia is getting any closer to regaining access to the sea since the 1904 treaty [which formalised the de facto armistice between Bolivia and Chile],' says Pérez. 'The reality is [the ICJ] in The Hague has limits...It cannot touch the sovereignty of Chile. The most it can do is promote the idea of a negotiations table between Chile and Bolivia...This idea goes as far back as the 1840s, when Chile first encroached on Bolivian territory following the discovery of guano deposits.'

THE FERVOUR WITH WHICH BOLIVIA SIMULTANEOUSLY COMMEMORATES AND MOURNS HER DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF CHILEAN IMPERIALISM HAS HARDLY WAVERED OVER THE PAST CENTURY.

Photo: Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic



'THE GOVERNMENT IS USING THIS NOSTALGIA FOR THE SEA TO MANIPULATE THE PEOPLE.'
—HISTORIAN ALEXIS PÉREZ

However, according to Pérez, it is not only the limited jurisdiction of the ICJ that appears to undermine the government's calls for international support against Chile. 'Although there are countries that sympathise with Bolivia, this is mostly moral, brotherly support,' says Pérez. 'Another problem is the government's despotic nature and its failure to seriously tackle narco-trafficking – this damages Bolivia's international reputation.' In contrast, he adds, 'Chile pulls more weight internationally.'

It is clear that the overruling of the 2016 referendum on term limits has to a limited extent damaged Bolivia's reputation as a stable democracy, particularly as the international community observes the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, controversially tightening his grip on power. Likewise, Argentina, Brazil and Chile, all of which share a border with Bolivia and hold great weight in continental politics, have expressed concern with Bolivia's failure to suppress the cocaine trade. However, the obstacles between Bolivia and sovereign access to the sea are even more deep-seated than this. As Pérez explains, 'If our economy was strong the economic pressure would force Chile to sit down...Why is a port necessary? The transaction costs are high and this hurts our export sector. That's it.'

In terms of international trade, Bolivia ranks 100th in the world with just over US\$7 billion in exports per year. Considering that around 70% of these exports go to the Atlantic coast, while Bolivian gas is exported primarily to Brazil and Argentina, the economic arguments behind renewed access to the sea are not independently significant enough to warrant even a minor territorial rearrangement.

However, it is not only the possibility of Bolivia regaining access to the sea that is in question but also the reasoning behind the government's plea to the ICJ.

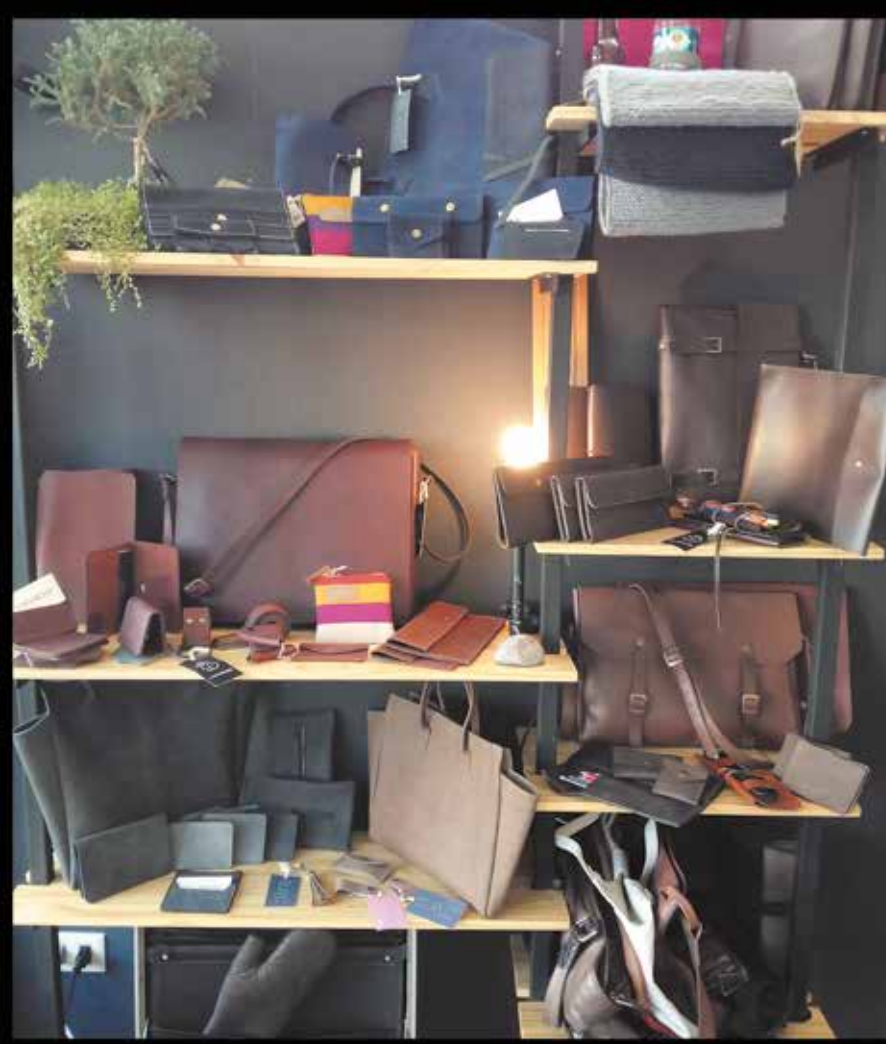
'This government has been weakened [by the 2016 referendum],' says Pérez. 'When you go to The Hague you make your plea, you send your representatives, but they are sending half the government... They are using this nostalgia for the sea to manipulate the people.'

Although the current government's original motives behind the appeal to the ICJ in 2013, two years before the controversial referendum on term limits, were most probably not rooted in a need to appease a discontented electorate, it is evident that the sea has become more important as a unifying force. As evidenced by the mass protests across Bolivia, both for and against Morales, that have commemorated the referendum of February 2016 in each of the last two years, Bolivian domestic politics are, as Pérez argues, 'very questionable.'

Considering the inextricably complex and difficult reality, and Bolivia's current democratic uncertainty, the unshakeable confidence and absolute commitment of the government in their bid to regain access to the sea appears even more politically expedient.

'Our presence in The Hague is going to cost between US\$6-7 million. It's expensive when the country has so many problems,' asserts Pérez. 'A lot of people call me a pessimist, but I think I'm a realist.'

Although it is evident that the loss of the sea carries great historical and cultural importance in Bolivia, one can be forgiven for being sceptical of the current government's capacity to find a political and economic agreement with Chile, with or without the multilateral pressure of the ICJ. Not only are there doubts to be had about the implementation mechanisms of any favourable verdict, but there are also doubts as to the competency – and motivations – of the current government. Thus Bolivia's return to the sea is neither straightforward nor simple despite the apparent reinvigoration of optimism among some Bolivians. The sea evidently remains embedded in the collective consciousness of Bolivia; however, whether this strength of sentiment will translate into a viable political solution between Chile and Bolivia remains as opaque as it has for more than a century.



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TIMELESS TROVA

TEXT: DIKSHALI SHAH
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

NEGRO Y BLANCO'S MESSAGE OF PEACE AND INTEGRATION

*'Si es que crees en mi canto haz de Bolivia tú también
y ven a unir conmigo tu esperanza y tu fe'
'If you truly believe in my song, make Bolivia yours as well
And let your hope and faith unite together with me'*

These are the powerful lyrics of Negro y Blanco's patriotic and most acclaimed song, 'Píntame Bolivia.' The song, which was a highlight of Negro y Blanco's recent performance of trova music at La Paz's La Trovería bar, expresses a sense of solidarity, a love for Bolivia and conveys a timeless pledge for equality, hope and peace.

At La Trovería, the concert was staged in a dark, small and intimate setting. Tables were covered with images of trova lyrics and seated an audience that wholeheartedly sang along to many of Negro y Blanco's classics. The band, composed of Christian Benítez and Mario Ramírez, aims to communicate universal notions of peace, love, solidarity and a respect for human rights through music. The duo's voices were calming and melodious, rendering the messages of their songs more powerful. The harmonious combination of two sole guitars and two voices added to the intimacy of the bar.

Trova is a musical genre that originated in France, whereby French troubadours would sing poems in courts for the nobility or at musical contests. This genre was later adopted in Cuba as 'Nueva Trova', often expressing fraught emotions such as dissent, hatred, love and affection towards society or right-wing political regimes during the 19th and 20th centuries. Trova music became popular in Bolivia during the 1960s and 1970s, upholding the romantic and sentimental ideals that characterise Negro y Blanco's music.

Bolivia's past is marked by Spanish colonialism, racism, poverty and exploitation of indigenous people. 'Poverty has always been widespread in Bolivia,' Ramírez says. According to Benítez, since Bolivians embodied racial wounds following events in the 1960s and 1970s, self-analysis and introspection are paramount for the country's healing. Trova, Benítez believes, provides a therapy for curing such wounds.

Negro y Blanco began recording their songs during the 1990s in La Paz and released their first album in 1998. Having grown up under ex-dictator Hugo Banzer in the 1970s, Benítez remembers the challenges that his family and peers faced during that period. Popular music conveyed what was happening at the time. It was 'death and destruction,' he says. This inspired the band to promote a message of peace through their songs. Since Bolivian songwriters and singers of protest music had left the country by the 1990s, the band saw an opportunity to bring about change through its artform. Seeing Bolivia

as 'a little laboratory,' the duo believes that such change could happen through trova music.

Ramírez and Benítez started out singing and songwriting as a hobby during their university years. Benítez recalls growing up to the songs of acclaimed Cuban trova singer Silvio Rodríguez and how he immediately fell in love with them on the radio. In retrospect, he says it was his mother's way of indirectly educating him about music.

When the duo decided to pursue a career in music, both of their families were taken by surprise. But the band persisted in its songwriting and in its goal to 'demolish walls and construct bridges' through music, building a 'better future' for Bolivians.

During the 1990s and the early 2000s, the band began working with younger generations in La Paz as the founders of a movement called **Guitarra en mano**. 'We called it a **colectivo**,' Ramírez says. The aim was to write music together and constructively discuss pressing social concerns. It lent a voice to the younger generations and was a different way of seeing reality in La Paz, El Alto, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Although the band has produced three albums ('Negro y Blanco', 'Negro y Blanco en Blanco y Negro' and 'El Negro y Blanco en la Fiesta') it has also recorded compilations for social causes such as women's rights and the environment.

Now, almost 20 years later, the band is about to release an anniversary album that features new music as well as songs that were written 15 years ago but never officially recorded or released to the public. For Benítez, Bolivia is a melting pot of diverse races, cultures, customs and traditions. Both artists hope to continue promoting integration and peace through trova music that 'touches the human heart' and creates a positive future.



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21 MANERAS DE NO SUICIDARSE

A REVIEW OF A SATIRICAL TAKE ON SUICIDE

TEXT: GABRIEL DEASY

Absurdist, perverse, comical, creative, insightful: 21 Maneras de no Suicidarse, or 21 Ways Not to Commit Suicide, is both an humorous and at times deftly perceptive exploration of suicide. Conceptualised by Nicolás Ewel and Pablo Quiroga, it features voluntary contributions of 21 artists from across Bolivia and beyond.

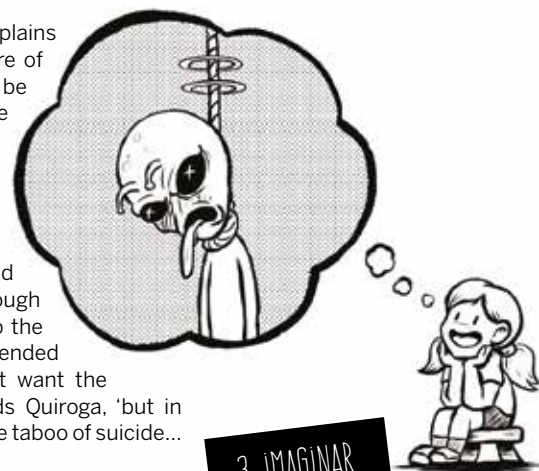
Unlike typical romantic portrayals of suicide in art, the success of this short book – eclectic as it is – lies in the comical absurdity of its ideas and the blunt surrealism of its images, with each artist presenting an unorthodox way not to commit suicide.

'There is no purpose to the book,' explains Quiroga. 'I suppose it's kind of a satire of self-help books. Nobody asked you to be alive... Death, after all, is an inevitable end.'

It is within these nihilistic precincts that the surrealism of the work, so to speak, comes to life, creating an artistic rawness so outlandish and imaginative that when flicking through the book one is almost absorbed into the comical depictions of suicide – an intended consequence of the work. 'We didn't want the pressure of having an objective,' adds Quiroga, 'but in some sense we wanted to challenge the taboo of suicide... It's black humour, I suppose.'

10. MASTURBARSE EFUSIVAMENTE

by Carmen Fonseca



3. IMAGINAR

by Juan Carlos Porcel



4. DESCUBRIR UN NUEVO OLOR

by Maz Cui

This implicit intention is reflected in the overall design of the book. Although the images are ordered 1 through 21, the chronology is largely chaotic and disordered. The simplicity of the pallet, in which all but one of the 21 works are devoid of colour, serves to define and re-emphasise the zaniness of the black-on-white images. As one moves through the various unorthodox methods of suicide, from 'Freir un Huevito' ('Frying an Egg') by Mar&Ana, to 'Masturbarse Efusivamente' ('Masturbate Effusively') by Carmen Fonseca, initial bemusement quickly moulds into immersive comedy, such is the absurdity and innovation of the body of work.

The 11th image, 'Ver El Atardecer' ('Watching the Sunset') by Perro Florindo, provides the reader with a brief respite from the black and white surreality of the other works. Mercurial shades of blue sink into one another as the golden sunset seeps from the clouds across the two-page night sky. When asked why there was this anomalous splash of colour in the middle of the book, Quiroga explains, 'It's kind of like an interval between the blackness.' It is a moment of relief and reflection before one is quickly absorbed back into the absurd and twisted imaginations that colour the remainder of the book.

Although there have been a few criticisms of insensitivity, particularly regarding the works captioned 'Patear un Niño' ('Kicking a Child') by Smoober and 'Iniciar una Familia' ('Starting a Family') by Ciello Belo, such criticisms appear to misunderstand the body of work. As Quiroga clarifies, 'The book does not give reasons to commit suicide'; it does not condone, nor condemn. It merely attempts – and often succeeds – to comically portray the futility of existence and the forever blurred, purposeless analogue between life and death.

'La muerte acompaña la vida y es constante en el vivir.' Nicolás Ewel.

'Death accompanies life and is a constant in living.' Nicolás Ewel.



11. VER EL ATARDECER

by Perro Florindo

For sale at: Cafe Typica, Calacoto and Sopocachi.
 Contacts: Pablo Quiroga: 76730194 - pablo.crepas@gmail.com
 Nicolás Ewel: nicoewelclaros@gmail.com



PARKOUR IN LA PAZ

THE DRIVE AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE CITY'S FEARLESS TRACERS

TEXT: SOPHIA VAHDATI
IMAGES: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Prepare, run, jump, soar, reach, kick, grab knees and... 'Ahhh!': I smash face-first into the crashmat, emitting an embarrassing squeal. Swallowing my pride, I slope over to my instructor.

'Look, Sophia, we're doing the Webster, that's a front-flip, but you're turning and attempting a different move, called the Side,' he says. 'Oh, sorry,' I reply, to which he quickly retorts, 'No, it's fine! I think you're better at the Side. Watch and copy.'

He approaches the mat at a trot and effortlessly floats up into the air, spinning around a couple of times and landing softly on his feet. The entire class bursts into guffaws at the idea of me imitating such grace, myself included.

This is my third parkour class at the Spazio gym in Sopocachi, and whilst I am improving, the journey ahead is long and peppered with bruises. Nevertheless, when I found out that my local gym gave parkour classes, no one could have kept me away. La Paz never fails to deliver when it comes to enthralling juxtapositions, such as an underground subculture sport being taught at a mainstream (and pretty high-end) gym.

The discipline of parkour has undertaken a long and transformative voyage to arrive in the **plazas** of La Paz. It started as a French military training technique, *parcours du combattant*. It was then developed by David Belle, the son of a military man, who brought



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parkour to fame through gravity-defying stunts and his tight-knit community. Henceforward, the sport follows the traditional narrative of a subculture: the development of principles, a philosophy, in-fighting, a split between orthodox and globally-focused practitioners and finally, a nudge into the mainstream.

However, parkour did not arrive in Bolivia by jumping and vaulting across the Atlantic, nor did its philosophy take root through the evangelisation tactics of missionaries. Parkour hitched a ride to the heart of South America on the back of social networks. Within the past decade a community has arisen from provocative YouTube videos, gifting the country several parkour and freerunning teams, a handful of academies and a one-hundred-strong community in La Paz.

One such practising **paceño** is my instructor, Mauricio Pizarro, a 24-year-old architecture student and a member of No Limits, Bolivia's first freerunning and parkour collective. His journey started just under three years ago when he came across a few videos on YouTube that sparked his interest. Pizarro then found the Parkour La Paz group on Facebook and was thrilled to discover that it was a community of parkour practitioners or 'tracers.' These people helped him develop skills as well as a new attitude towards life. 'Parkour is not solely a physical sport,' Pizarro is keen to impress upon me, 'it's also mental and spiritual. To pull off a jump you have to be physically, spiritually and mentally ready for it.'

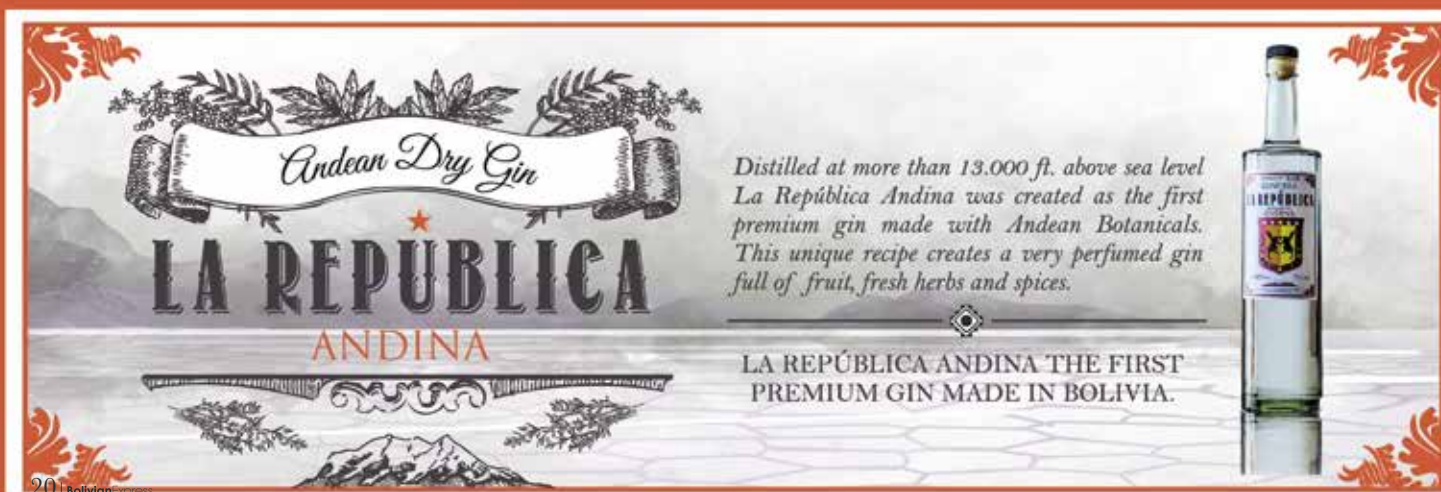
The philosophy of parkour is one of overcoming fears, competing with oneself rather than with others and seeing obstacles as opportunities for creativity and growth. It's a way of changing the way you see and interact with your surroundings. When you are surrounded by the spectacularly twisted, layered and chaotic urban landscape of La Paz, the chances to get creative are seemingly infinite. Pizarro's tone quickens and he begins to gesture enthusiastically as his two fields of expertise collide. 'Geologically,' he says, '[La Paz] is a city of ups and downs which has forced the architecture to adapt. Before the **teleférico** you'd have to go down thousands of little stairs, slopes and...' he trails off, waving his hands in excitement at the wealth of parkour-perfect areas in the city.

The defining factors of Pizarro's approach to parkour seem to be inclusivity and spirituality. The former inspires the open-to-all access of his classes and his strong sense of personal competition, while the spirituality is present in his words, his story and his resolve. When he started out he was going through a difficult stage of his life and his personal practice and the parkour community helped him surpass his fears. 'I associate [parkour] a lot with life. If you're confronted with a barrier, you don't avoid it you cross it,' he says. With this mentality it is easy to see how a person can be empowered; no longer a victim to their surroundings but an actor, interacting with and exploiting their environment.

I vault myself onto the gym horse, put out two hands and roll off the second obstacle, landing stably on my two feet. Looking down, I see two new shiny bruises on my knees from where I mistimed my jumps, and I haven't even made it out of the gym yet. Nevertheless, I am inspired by the dedication, openness and the values of La Paz's tracers. Perhaps this admiration will transcend into jumping over stray dogs and hurdling kiosks as I trace my way around Sopocachi.

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BAJO NUESTRA PIEL

A FILM FESTIVAL PUSHES BOUNDARIES IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER

On 22 February 2018, the third edition of the international human-rights film festival Bajo Nuestra Piel visited Tarija, in southern Bolivia. Having premiered in La Paz in November 2017 with stops in El Alto, Potosí and Tarija, the festival is now touring to Coroico in April, followed by Camiri, in the Santa Cruz department.

Founded in 2016 by Simon Bongers and Ricardo Dávalos, the project originated in Oruro in collaboration with the local university and schools in an effort 'to generate a debate and reflective space on human-rights topics through the artistic representation in the documentary, fiction and animation formats, of critical, socially comprised and quality cinema.' Two years later, Bajo Nuestra Piel has an international selection of over 90 movies, including some Bolivian productions, presenting them free of charge in all locations.

'THERE ARE SOME STORIES THAT CAN BE WRITTEN IN BOOKS AND OTHERS...UNDER OUR SKIN.'
—FESTIVAL ORGANIZER SIMON BONGERS

Bongers' vision and inspiration can be best summarised in the name of the festival itself: 'There are some stories that can be written in books and others...under our skin,' Bongers says. 'We are all the same...We are all connected.' He says there haven't been any major obstacles in organising the festival, but the challenge remains as to 'how to reach people who are not interested or aware of human rights.'

From its inception, a main focus

and driving principle of the festival is working with local schools to show stories that connect people. To that end, with the help of the Tarija municipality and schools, buses were commissioned to transport students to the screenings, who buzzed with excitement in anticipation of a school trip and the thrill of the unknown. One of the documentaries shown, *Iron Legs*, about lesbian girls on a Cambodian football team, introduced the students to a theme that is not usually broached in Bolivian society. Reactions were aroused during the screening and led to a slightly uncomfortable but necessary conversation on LGBT issues in Bolivia.

After the screening, Bongers led a question-and-answer session about the similarities on screen and in the teenage audiences' lives. Most showings are followed by a discussion and debate with the audience, who interact with invited moderators. Bongers hopes to reach people who wouldn't otherwise go to the cinema of their own volition. He wants to show perspectives and tell stories, which, although they are often undiscussed by audience members, are not so different from their own.

As the festival travels around Bolivia, Bongers adapts the selection to make it relevant to the different cities visited. The next stop for Bongers and his team of volunteers is Coroico at the Unidad Académica Campesina-Carmen Pampa in the Yungas, from 4 to 8 of April. Films will be shown at the university in Carmen Pampa during the day, and, if the weather allows, there will be open-air screenings in Coroico. All showings are completely free, and all are welcome.



Contact: festival@bajonuestrapiel.org

For more information, see the Bajo Nuestra Piel website at www.bajonuestrapiel.org.

DISMANTLING BUREAUCRACY IN BOLIVIA

AGETIC: THE ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT

TEXT: GABRIEL DEASY
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

The process of dismantling bureaucracy is often no less futile than erasing a sentence with a highlighter. Sometimes, in the name of debureaucratization, anti-bureaucracy bureaucracies are created, anti-bureaucracy bureaucrats are recruited, and the overall amount of bureaucracy remains the same, if not larger than before.

In Bolivia, where bureaucracy is almost as prevalent as it is in the preceding paragraph, such a process has begun. But such is the endemic and anachronistic nature of Bolivian bureaucracy, that there appears to be the possibility of genuine and significant change.

The arduous and lengthy task of modernising the Bolivian state is being undertaken by AGETIC (Agencia de Gobierno Electrónico y Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación) – a government department created in September 2015 for the specific purpose of debureaucratization. Nicolás Laguna Quiroga, the director of the agency, is clear and frank about the reality of Bolivia's superfluity and inefficiency, as well as the aims of AGETIC.

'It's true the state is stuck in practices from 20, 40, sometimes a 100 years ago,' he explains. 'From now on it is a process of penetration, change and transformation...We are trying to transform the technological reality and logic of the state.'

Since its inception, an open data system, a centre for security, and over 20 new information systems for various institutions to work with have been developed, to replace the considerably smaller 15-staff ADSIB (Agencia para el Desarrollo de la Sociedad de la Información), setting the foundations for what the agency terms: '**El Gobierno Electrónico Soberano**.'

As Laguna points out, AGETIC, being a part of the **Ministerio de la Presidencia**, now has the institutional and financial support for significant change: a type of change, argues Laguna, that comes from the people of Bolivia.

Although still a nascent organisation, there has been enough progress with AGETIC to vindicate Laguna's optimism. Since it became operative in January 2016, a platform for paying online has been developed along with an identification system for people to have the same ID and password for all state-related issues – tools intended to facilitate easier interaction between the people and public services.

The typeadores

Amid the bustle and busy bureaucracy of La Paz's administrative centre, tucked away among small market stalls and purposeless tourists, the **typeadores** sit at their antiquated typewriters, typing up impuestos and other official documentation. Their clients are pedestrians, their offices are the streets.

Showcasing his new typewriter, engraved 'Made in the Democratic Republic of Germany', Benancio Maica, 60, explained the role of the typeadores:

'What we mostly do is fill forms, tax forms, everything related to taxes.'

Despite the mundanity of their work, the *typeadores*, who have been working in the streets of La Paz since 1986, certainly add a quirkiness to Bolivian bureaucracy, working all year through 'the cold, the wind and the rain.'

When asked if he believed the *typeadores* were under threat from technological advancement Maica was both confident and resolute:

'Typewriters are easier and more practical than computers – we can take them anywhere. Our clients know us...The typewriters will live on.'



'[AGETIC] comes from the necessity of the state to adapt to the changes in society...67% of Bolivians are internauts. People want results,' Laguna explains.

However, although methods of communication and social interaction have fundamentally changed for many Bolivians in recent years it remains to be seen whether this will translate into an overhaul of economic and political practices. According to government figures, though 83% of Bolivian internauts use the Internet to connect with friends and family, only 4% of them shop online.

This disparity in the uses of the internet certainly poses challenges to AGETIC's aims for 2025, coinciding with the bicentenary of Bolivia, which even Laguna admits are 'ambitious.'

'Everything will be online,' he says. '70% of Bolivians will interact with the government online and the proportion of Bolivians using online payments will rise from 10 to 70%. There too will be a significant rise in electronic commerce which will help economic growth.'

These targets are made yet harder by the existence of several bureaucratic obstacles – embedded in tradition and routine of the public service – that remain stubborn and rigid, particularly regarding public organs independent of the executive, such as the judiciary. Thus, although various software and technological instruments have been developed, their implementation has in some cases stalled. 'The public authorities are very closed, they only think about themselves,' Laguna continues. 'They manage their own administration, their own procedures and they don't care about the citizen.'

This sentiment encapsulates the outlook of AGETIC. Not only is the deconstruction of bureaucracy necessary in the increasingly globalised and tech-orientated world in which we live, but it is also a process rooted in the tumult of Bolivia's history.

As Laguna explains, '[bureaucracy in Bolivia] is a legacy from colonial times, a bureaucratic apparatus that the republic inherited, a nucleus of Spaniards and criollos that ignored the indigenous world.' But for him, 'the priority is the citizen.'

This too is reflected in the approach of AGETIC. 'Everything we create is turned into free software with the purpose of public use,' Laguna says. 'For us this is more than just a project. What we want is to serve the people... We want to learn and do it ourselves.'

Thus, the process of debureaucratization in Bolivia, although long and inevitably attritional, is underway. Whether AGETIC can retain its focus and coherence of approach in the face of both tradition and systematic stubbornness remains to be seen. Laguna, however, is positive that the change will come: 'The future is here.'

'BUREAUCRACY IN BOLIVIA IS A LEGACY FROM COLONIAL TIMES, A BUREAUCRATIC APPARATUS THAT THE REPUBLIC INHERITED.'

THE ACHACHILAS | PARENTS AND PROTECTORS OF THE ANDEAN WORLD

TEXT: ADRIANA L. MURILLO ARGANDOÑA / TRANSLATION: NIAL FLINN / PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC



Tatituy! iPapituy! These are the words that the **yatiri** repeats, referring to the ancestral spirits and protective parents from the mountains. He graciously makes a blessing to bring good fortune in work, study and love. Ramón Quispe is an Aymara yatiri who believes in the protection and blessings of the mountain spirits called **Achachilas**.

The *Achachilas* are supernatural spirits of the Andean world and the protectors of Aymara communities. These spirits inherently exist or reside in the mountains and the snow-covered **altiplano**.

The city of La Paz is stunningly located, picturesquely positioned in a canyon surrounded by mountains in the western cordillera of the Andes, with the Cordillera Real lying to the northeast. There are three magnificent summits which stand out along the mountain belt: the snow-capped Illimani, Illampu and Huayna Potosí. These mountains are spirits with a mighty jurisdiction. According to Ludovico Bertoni, a Jesuit priest and linguist who was a pioneer in the study of the Aymara language, the *Achachilas* are grandparents, ancestors or the sage of the household.

One of the most important *Achachilas* is Illimani, a snow-covered peak at 6,438 metres above sea level. The name derives from the Aymara word *illa*, which means 'generator of plenty', and *mani*, which comes from mamani, meaning 'protector'. This was the name bestowed by the various **ayllus**, or Aymara communities, that once inhabited the vicinity of Chuquiago Marka – now the city of La Paz.

The *Achachilas* are of great importance, and the Aymara believe in a hierarchy of deities. However, all the spirits that form part of the Aymara belief system are worshipped through different rituals, such as the **Challas** festival in August and **Carnaval**, as well as the dinners or offerings that are made to **Pachamama**, and the *Achachilas* are similarly conjured for protection.

'On 3 May in Puerto Acosta [a town near Lake Titicaca], there is a festival dedicated to the **Auki Auki**, who represent the *Achachilas* in human form; the *Aukis* embody the *Achachilas* so that they can share and partake in the community. Three or four people are chosen to

personify the *Achachilas*, which allows them to celebrate and dance in the earthly world,' Varinia Oroz, a curator at La Paz's National Museum of Ethnography and Folklore, says. The *Aukis* make sexual gestures, indicating that they are fertilising the land to ensure a good harvest. These notions of fertilising the earth and the agricultural calendar are present in various community celebrations, whereby the gods are summoned and personified to protect and enrich the earth.

When walking along the traditional calle de las Brujas, or 'Witches Street,' in La Paz, you can find figurines in the form of elderly figures, men and women who embody the *Achachilas*. People

place them in their houses for blessings and protection. Likewise, there are songs and dances of adoration for these figures.

As one of seven designated wonder cities of the world, La Paz is undoubtedly becoming an enigmatic and unique realm to explore.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ACHACHILAS IS ILLIMANI, A SNOW-COVERED PEAK AT 6,438 METRES ABOVE SEA LEVEL.

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JUMATAKI AND THE WORKING WOMEN OF LA PAZ

AN ENTREPRENEURIAL COOPERATIVE SUPPORTS SMALL-BUSINESS WOMEN

TEXT: DIKSHALI SHAH / IMAGE: JUMATAKI



The **mañaneras** set their cloth and artisan goods up on **calle Illampu** by 6.30am in the early morning, sell throughout the day, and then, upon their dismissal by the police (for occupying space not belonging to them), they carry their loads back to El Alto, or even farther into the **altiplano**. The strong work ethic of these women, their dedication to bartering and business, can be an inspiration to all.

Many other empowered Bolivian women are now inspired to find new ways to make their living through a cooperative called Jumataki. Initiated in May 2014, its name means 'for you' in Aymara. Two of the cooperative's 30 members, Maruja Laura Gómez and Olga Bustillos, sew impressive, intricate designs onto **telas** that can be used for tablecloths or bedspreads. Other Jumataki members produce other creative goods and administer the business side of the members' ventures.

Another member, Virginia Condori, runs a laundry service in the Centro de Modas in the Calacoto neighbourhood of La Paz's **Zona Sur**. Jumataki grants women the flexibility to work from home as well as in its office on calle 21. This allows its members to look after their families as well as to learn new skills from each other.

Jumataki offers flexibility for women and encourages them to use their creativity in an entrepreneurial manner.

Artisan Olga Bustillos appreciates this flexibility of lifestyle that Jumataki offers to its members. Having worked in this field since 1985, when she was 13 years old, she mentions that she does not need to sacrifice family time to her job. The ease of seeing her children and working from home when she wants to give her a comfortable lifestyle. 'I don't lose out either way,' she says.

Bustillos and Laura Gómez say their clients appreciate the skill involved in their work, which can be time-consuming. For example, a bedspread or tablecloth can take up to one month to complete. 'It's a killer,' Bustillos says about her work that requires so much skill and concentration.

For Bustillos, what she values most is the social aspect of her job, in which she negotiates with customers and works with women who share similar lifestyles to her. The members of Jumataki have solidarity with one another, and, as Bustillos says, 'no one abandons us.' Her customers come every day to purchase her goods, and her job she says, is so much more worthwhile than 'being trapped between the four walls of my home.'

LEONEL FRANSEZZE, MEDIA MAESTRO

THE IMPRESARIO WANTS
BOLIVIA'S CREATIVE COMMUNITY
TO COME INTO ITS OWN

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC



If you live in La Paz, chances are you've walked past a picture of Leonel Fransezze on a billboard advertising **mentisan** or sunglasses, or maybe you've seen him on TV as a presenter on ATB, or in the newspapers' society section. His ubiquitous presence is hardly surprising once you've met the man. His energy, charisma and insatiable ambition make him one of the most notable people of his generation.

Born in Buenos Aires in 1985, he grew up in La Paz before leaving to study theatre in Argentina at 18, coming back to Bolivia in 2013. His last five years have been prolific, to say the least. His first vocation is in the theatre. His roles have included Dracula and Javert from *Les Misérables*, but his ambition extends much further. His goal is to 'make

Bolivia and Bolivia's talents known in the world.'

To do this he started the company Macondo Art with Claudia Gaensel in 2014. It's a multidisciplinary enterprise that dabbles in theatre, audiovisual arts and event organising. The company's goal is to promote Bolivian arts, producing quality shows and raising the standards of the creative arts in Bolivia. In the last four years, Fransezze says, 'We have more than tripled the public of the municipal theatre in La Paz...We have increased the level of quality of national shows.'

Fransezze is now working on another project: a Bolivian TV miniseries, *La Entrega*. According to him, it took 16 weeks of filming,

one of the longest shooting projects in Bolivia, and will comprise 10 episodes. *La Entrega* tells the story of human trafficking in Bolivia, and, says Fransezze, 'It doesn't have anything to envy from foreign productions.' Fransezze is aiming to sell it to international networks like Fox and HBO, but, in any case, he says, 'I can assure you it will come out internationally.' He also has a movie in works for later this year, about which he can't say much.

When talking to Fransezze and seeing the determination in his eyes, it's clear that he's achieved all of this through raw effort and perseverance. His motto, he reveals, is that 'When people tell me I can't do it, it means that I will be able to do it.' 'You have to go ahead without expecting someone to push

you,' he says. Making mistakes and failing aren't to be feared, as 'failing is the only way to grow.'

I ask how Fransezze overcomes all the challenges on his way to achieve his many artistic visions. The answer is simple: 'With perseverance. With failures and perseverance. You have to remove these mental paradigms: There are walls, barriers against success – we put them up ourselves.' One of the main obstacles he aims to overcome is changing the default setting for Bolivian mentalities. 'One thing is to change the mind-set, remove the chip that says that because we are Bolivians and it's a small country we can't do great things. We've all said something like "This is good...for Bolivia." We've all said it, and there's nothing

more mediocre than saying this. When we ourselves put up this barrier – "Bolivia low-quality" – we're lowering our ceiling so we can't stand up. We have to stop talking like mediocrities, and we have to start talking like winners.'

And there's also been personal fights that Fransezze has had to overcome. Because he wasn't born in Bolivia, people who want to attack him use this as an excuse to deride him. This was hurtful at first but not anymore, as it's pretty clear for Fransezze who he is and where he belongs: 'I am en **mi tierra**. I lived in Bolivia since I was six years old. I am Bolivian according to the law and in my heart. In Argentina they called me **bolita**, I've always been the stranger. I can't go to any place without being the stranger. I am never in my country, according to people. **Gaucha** [in Bolivia], **bolita** [in Argentina].'

Ultimately, Fransezze concludes, 'The hardest is to start something...because then it's like a snowball effect. At the beginning it was difficult to show sponsors that we had quality products.' Now Macondo Art is a well-established company which was involved in projects amounting to US\$700,000 last year. Fransezze's hard work and perseverance has been paying off, but he doesn't take all the credit. He says that the most important secret to success is to have 'a good team to succeed. And to surround yourself with people more capable than you.' Today, for Fransezze, 'the future looks beautiful, very promising...I am anxious, I want to see results already, but it's a process that takes years. What you need is patience, and to have a very focused objective.'

GLOSSARY BX81

BolivianExpress Magazine

ACHACHILA	Ancestral spirits and protective parents from the mountains
AFILADORES	Knife-sharpener
ALTIPLANO	High-plateau
APARAPITAS	Men whose profession is to carry heavy objects on their shoulders
AUKI	Achachila in human form
AYLLU	Traditional form of a community in the Andes
BANDERAZO	A 200-kilometre flag organised by the Bolivian government as part of their campaign for the sea
BOLITA	Pejorative way to refer to Bolivians
CALLE	Street
CARNAVAL	Carnivale
CASERITA(O)	Shopkeeper of a kiosk or market stall
CHALLA	'Blessing to the Pachamama'
COLECTIVO	Collective
CRIOLLO	A person from Spanish South or Central America, especially one of pure Spanish descent.
DÍA DEL MAR	'Day of the Sea', celebrated on 23 March
EN MI TIERRA	'it's my homeland'
ENCLAUSTRAMIENTO	Locked-in
GAUCHO	Pejorative way to refer to Argentinians
GOBIERNO ELECTRÓNICO SOBERANO	'Sovereign Electronic Government'
GUITARRA EN MANO	'Guitare in hand'
HELADEROS	Ice-cream vendors
LITORAL	Coast
LUSTRABOTAS	Shoe-shiners
MAÑANERAS	Women who work in the mornings
MENTISAN	Pain relieving ointment
MINISTERIO DE LA PRESIDENCIA	'Ministry of the Presidency'
PACEÑO(A)	From La Paz
PACHAMAMA	Mother Earth
PAPITUY	expression to address a fatherly figure with affection
PLAZA	Square
TATITUY	Diminutive of dad in Quechua and Aymara
TELA	Fabric
TELEFÉRICO	Cable-car
TYPEADORES	People who type on old typewriters
YATIRI	Medical practitioners and community healers among the Aymara people
ZONA SUR	Area in the South of La Paz



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