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EDITORIAL

BX 54: LABELS

As we explore Bolivia, we use words and labels to understand the people and landscapes we encounter. We use them as tools to quickly communicate ideas and experiences with people around us. Similarly, companies and organizations manufacture logos to visually represent what they are about; they use images, colors and symbols to transmit their brand essence in the blink of an eye. Even the food we buy increasingly comes with labels which summarize their contents, sources, nutritional benefits and prices. These representations speak to us, and provide instant information we use to make assumptions about who and what we are engaged with.

Social theorist Stuart Hall has written extensively on the idea of representation, which he defines in the simplest terms as 'using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people.' He also points out that when we identify people or things through language, we are exercising power.

In this process, culture is key. Labels do not stand alone. They are loaded with meanings defined as much by the intentions of those who create them, as by those who interpret them. And this is what makes them powerful.

In this issue of Bolivian Express, we take a look at the idea of 'Labels', and how they shape our understanding of how we see the world. We wrote about some of the labels we frequently see and hear about in Bolivia, and try to dig under the simplest definitions to gain a broader understanding of what they mean. We share stories behind the labels we see every day: who is identified by what labels? Who creates them, why and how? Our writers, acted on the belief that by not accepting labels at face value, we can gain a deeper and closer understanding of people and the forces that drive everyday life.

We wrote about some of the ways in which we label people to make a quick reference point – by calling someone an orphan, an elderly person, a mother. We looked at stereotypes of being from the country and the city, and of being a **gringo**. And we dug below the labels that come at us every day, from corporate logos and food packaging to the destinations displayed on La Paz's minibuses. These labels are all around us and in Bolivia, we found, they can have some very interesting and important origins and meanings.

The process of understanding our environment beyond labels can be difficult as we challenge prejudices and assumptions within ourselves. But it can also be fun to play with the novelty, to take these labels to extremes and see how absurd they can often be. But most importantly, the process can be enriching, as we offer ourselves an opportunity to see the people and the world around us in more complex, beautiful ways. ×

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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TOWN AND COUNTRY

Rural Migrants in Urban Bolivia

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATION: CELIA DYSON

Adjacent to La Paz sits the sprawling urban mass of El Alto, a city whose existence centres on the movement of Bolivians from urban to rural areas. Since the National Revolution of 1952, internal migrants in Bolivia have travelled to urban areas seeking work, financial gain and better education. And looking at El Alto's ever-expanding waistline, little has changed today.

Author and social communicator Adriana Murillo describes the impact of this movement from country to town. She talks about previously unseen behaviors such as people sleeping and eating in plazas, and how they're now common in the city. On a greater scale, she describes how migrants have brought a stronger sense of community to urban areas. 'In the city, you're not really interested in what happens to your neighbour,' Murillo explains. 'But it's different in the country. You work as a unit. In other words, your neighbour is important because they affect the community.'

This community spirit is evident in organisations known as *juntas vecinales*, or neighbourhood committees. A model that began in rural areas and spread to the city, the *juntas* play a key role in representing each district's inhabitants and communicating their specific needs to the government.

Yet often the simple move to an urban area poses a danger. Murillo believes that people living in the country can be tempted by the prospect of work in the city or other countries, and instead trafficked for forced labour or sex. 'I think it's a problem that we're just recently starting to analyse,' Murillo says. In 2012, the government enacted a law prohibiting all forms of trafficking with penalties of 10 to 15 years imprisonment. However, in the countryside the issue is particularly difficult to fight. 'In a very isolated area, no one realises what's going on,' Murillo explains, although 'people are starting to be more vigilant about it, little by little.'

Even migrants safely arrived in the city can also be subject to discrimination. Many girls migrate to become domestic workers at the ages of 14 or 15. In 2011, the Bolivian government ratified the International Labour Organization's Domestic Workers Convention of 2011, which seeks to guarantee domestic workers basic rights and certain levels of living and working conditions. But many, particularly the young, remain unaware of their rights. This allows some employers to force them to work full time rather than receive an education. Thus, though many families send their children to the cities for a better education, these children often end up slipping through the cracks, instead becoming part of a cycle of poverty.

Nonetheless, much has changed for Bolivia's rural migrants. In the past, the stigma against indigenous people and their native **Quechua**, **Aymara** and other languages meant that many parents sent their children to the city to learn Spanish. Nowadays, particularly with the **indigenismo** of Bolivia's **Aymaran** President Evo Morales, people from the country feel pride rather than shame in their native languages – they migrate not out of social pressure, but rather in search of better economic and educational prospects.

At the same time, workers' unions and recently passed laws continue to improve the rights of rural migrants. Likewise, Murillo believes that nowadays people are more readily suspicious of working in the city, as well as more easily able to empower themselves in negative situations.

Whether or not those from the country really do find better lives in the city, they will never stop moving to urban areas in search of better opportunities, bringing their rural traditions and culture with them. And whilst they continue to do so, the city of El Alto will continue to grow. ×

COUNTRY QUIRKS

ANDEAN MYSTICISM

Within Andean cosmology, every object, whether manmade or natural, is believed to have an energy. If a 5 boliviano coin is spotted on the floor, many believe that the money is there for a reason and shouldn't be touched.

COMMUNITY JUSTICE

In isolated areas la *justicia comunitaria* – community justice – occurs when a community enforces its own justice independent of local police or courts. This justice can often be severe, with communities having been known to lynch the perpetrators of crimes as minor as robbery.

PACHAMAMA

Widespread throughout all of Bolivia, the belief in the indigenous earth mother is particularly strong in the countryside. Pachamama gives everything – work, love, family – so giving back to her is important. If something is accidentally spilt and lost on the ground, that person can at least be safe in the knowledge that it has gone to Pachamama.

STICKS AND STONES CAN BREAK MY BONES AND **WORDS** MAY ALSO **HURT ME**

TEXT AND PHOTO: MEGAN E SUNDERLAND

'What is self-esteem?' asks Beymar Soto, a staff member from the **Alcaldia** of La Paz to a roomful of schoolchildren.

I am at *La Escuela Corazón de Jesús de Fé y Alegría,* a primary school in La Paz participating in '**Constructores del Buen Trato**', a project developed by the **Defensoría del Gobierno Municipal de La Paz** and is being supported by Save the Children Bolivia . In the classroom are fifteen 5th and 6th grade students, all shooting their hands up in the air, trying to get Beymar's attention, who is dressed in a yellow jacket, the standard uniform for La Paz´s **Alcaldia** staff.

'Respecting yourself!' shouts out one student. 'To like yourself, to love yourself and to respect yourself!' shouts another.

'There are three types of self-esteem,' Beymar explains to the children. 'The first is false self-esteem, the second is low self-esteem and the third is healthy self-esteem.' According to Beymar, a bully has false self-esteem, a victim low self-esteem and an ideal individual has healthy self-esteem.

Beymar is a psychologist. Part of his work is not only educating children on different topics but also identifying children at risk of bullying schools. His team works in primary schools with children from 4-12 years old.

Alfredo Juaniquina Ajhuacho, project coordinator at Save the Children, says it is essential to start working with children at a young age. 'The earlier the messages and behavioral patterns are noticed,' he says, 'the more likely we can get the children to put positive actions into practice in their lives so that these practices last into adulthood.'

A group of fifteen children was selected at the school to represent their classmates in the course. By doing so, the team from '**Constructores del Buen Trato**' aims to empower the chosen students so that they may make a difference within the culture of the school. The information is passed on to these young individuals in the hope that they will lead by example and disseminate what they have learned amongst their peers, teachers and families.

'For me the focus is on the family. The change has to happen within the family,' says Dr Consuelo Torres, the Director of the *Defensoría* Indeed, the largest influence on cultural attitudes begins with parents, which is why intercepting potentially damaging and violent attitudes in the home is essential in helping children grow into active, peaceful citizens, who will improve their community as a whole.

'Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me' is a common children's rhyme that teaches young victims to ignore being affected by verbal abuse. It is a poignant phrase that illustrates the normalisation of cultural attitudes towards the issue of bullying. It denies the victim of his or her feelings and promotes the idea of bullying as a 'character-building´ experience. The phrase infers that physical violence is worse than verbal violence, although both can have longlasting effects into adulthood.

With the use of technology and the ability to create a 'digital self', cyber-bullying has become an increasingly common phenomenon. According to Nadia Eid, Head of Communications and Corporate Responsibility at TIGO, one of the largest telecommunication companies in the country, six out of ten children in Bolivia are victims of cyber-bullying. Nadia believes that preventing bullying is essential for Bolivian society because bullying can 'affect the way children relate to each other. There are victims and witnesses of bullying who can develop low self-esteem or violent characters in the future.'

Luckily, local programs are being developed to counter the prevalence of bullying on and off-line. TIGO has recently launched, ´Convivencia sin Violencia', a project that is part of its larger initiatives to promote a 'healthy digital lifestyle'. This program was created alongside an international christian foundation called, World Vision Bolivia, and it informs children, parents, teenagers and professors about how to identify and prevent bullying in all of its forms.

Back at *La Escuela de Corazón de Jesús de Fé y Alegría*, in La Paz, Beymar is leading the students through a number of workshops. Through cartoon videos and group discussions, the activities question preconceived notions of gender, sexuality and violence, hoping to slowly change the culture of various communities in the city. In a way, they are treating these children as adults; not hesitating to cover contentious issues like 'Gender Constructs' and 'Sexuality', or complex issues such as, 'Self Esteem' and 'Human Rights.' The subject of 'Bullying' runs across a number of the work modules.

The idea is to build a culture of peace, respect and better understanding through each individual. In order to reach a larger number of Bolivians the *Defensoría* will launch a digital platform for the program by 2016. With this information online, similar programs could be implemented in other departments, to prevent widespread bullying and change cultures of violence.

CAMBAS AND COLLAS

TEXT: ANNA BELLETTATO
ILLUSTRATIONS: OSCAR ZALLES.

Take the quiz to guess the differences!

1) If you are walking down street and you hear a sonorous *yaaaa*, it's sure you are in:

a. Santa Cruz
b. La Paz

2) *Elay puej* is 'there you go' for:

a. **cruceños**
b. **paceños**

3) To say 'let's have a drink' they say *chuparemos* if they are:

a. **cambas**
b. **collas**

4) *Peladingo* and *pelada* are friendly ways to address a boy or a girl in:

a. Santa Cruz
b. La Paz

5) They wear flip-flops, but they are not **gringos** in:

a. La Paz
b. Santa Cruz

6) If you reply *ñeeee* to someone you are a:

a. **camba**
b. **colla**

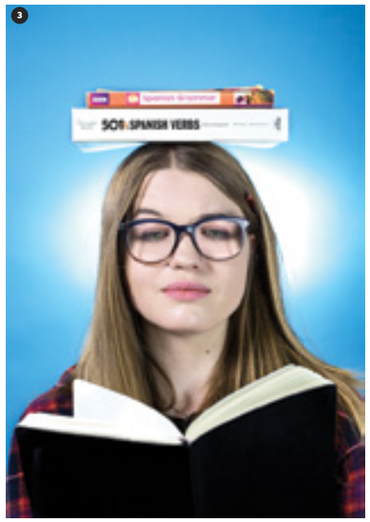
7) If you feel cold, you exclaim *alalayyy* when you are from:

a. Santa Cruz
b. La Paz

Answers:
1) b
2) a
3) b
4) a
5) b
6) a
7) b

La Paz and Santa Cruz, the two largest cities in Bolivia, could not be more diverse – both in terms of geography and culture. **Paceños** are also known as **collas**. They are those who shaped the traditional image of Bolivians abroad – people of medium height with dark complexion and prominent facial features. **Cruceños** are called **cambas**. Living in diverse climatic conditions and the product of the interaction of Europeans with Guarani culture, *cambas* are described as taller and leaner than their **colla** counterparts, with typical mestizo traits.





THE 5 TYPES of GRINGOS

TEXT: OLIVIA HYLTON
PHOTOS: ALEXANDRA MELEÁN A.
PRODUCTION: BX TEAM

Since the 18th century, the term '**gringo**' has been used to refer to foreigners in Spanish-speaking countries. Although **gringos** come from all walks of life, there are five archetypal *gringos* that are easy to identify.

1 THE BACKPACKER

Typically found in popular tourist haunts such as the Wild Rover hostel and Oliver's Tavern, this **gringo** is likely to have visited most places on the **Gringo** Trail.

2 THE QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS

This *gringo* is among an increasing number of twentysomethings fleeing the stresses of the 'real world' by travelling halfway across the globe in a quest to find out who he really is.

3 THE LANGUAGE MINOR

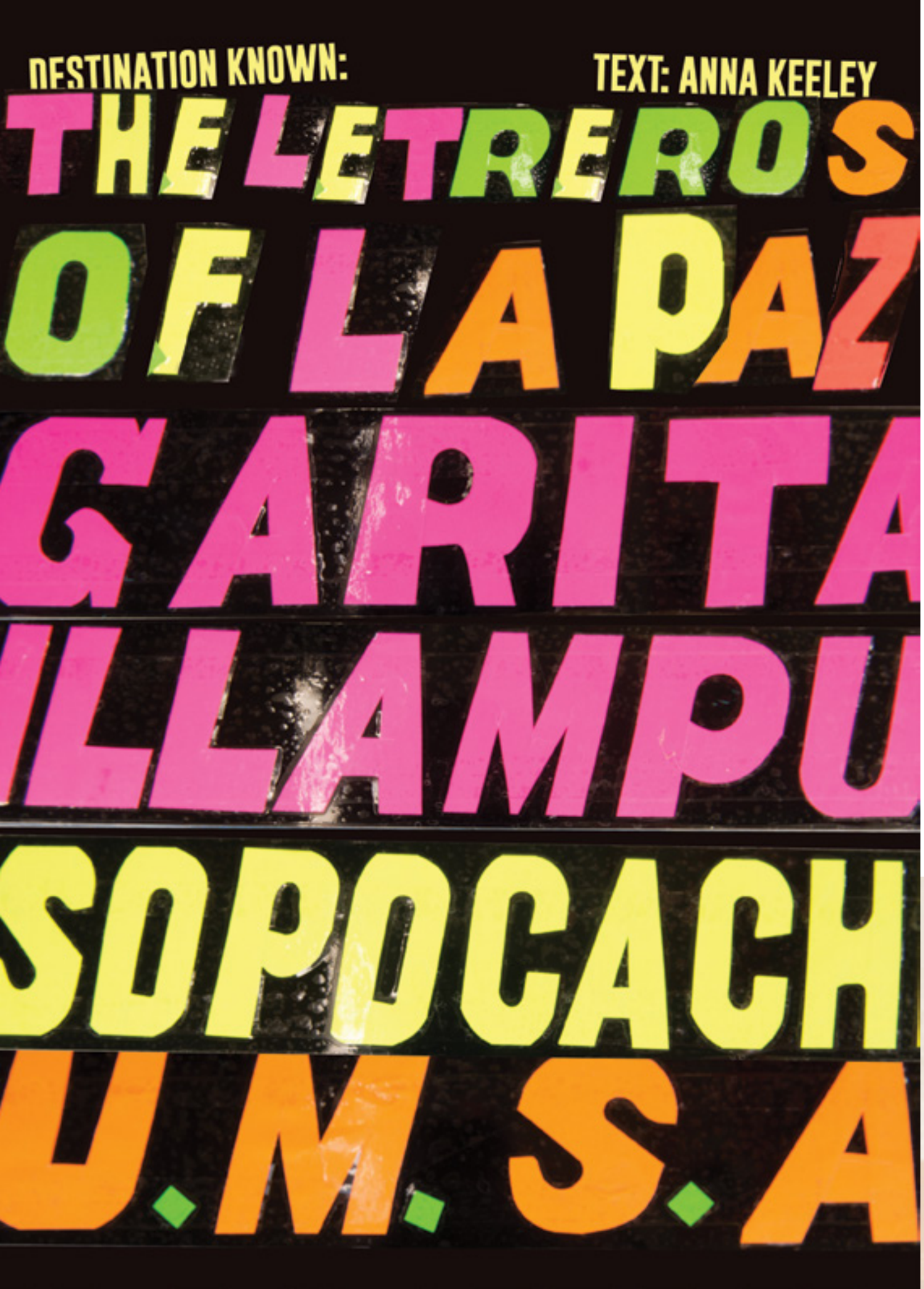
A language enthusiast, this *gringo* is often seen striking up conversations with everyone from taxi drivers to stallholders in an attempt to practice her grammar.

4 THE GRINGO TURNED EXPAT

Once upon a time, this *gringo* may have fallen into one of the above categories, but not anymore. Passionate about his new country of residence, he often works for NGOs trying to improve the welfare of the citizens of his adopted country.

5 THE GRINGO WHO WILL ALWAYS BE A GRINGO AT HEART

Working at an embassy, importing food from his native country and never stepping foot out of his diplomatic community, unlike the archetypal *gringo* turned expat, this *gringo* has no intention of becoming one of the locals (or mixing with them… unless he has to!).



In the windscreen of every minibus and **trufi** in La Paz sits a handful of **letreros** indicating geographical locations; simply catch sight of your destination, walk out into the road and climb aboard. These colourful letters mounted on strips of black cards are some of La Paz's most striking visual images. Amidst the sprawl of congested avenues at rush hour, blurs of pink, green and orange represent the energy and disorder of the city's public transit system.

As these handmade signs are universal across hundreds of vehicles in La Paz, surely it would be easy to find the craftsmen behind such labels? Wrong.

After travelling all over the city with inconclusive leads from **taxistas**, bus drivers and even a transport union leader, it became clear that the **letristas** of La Paz were few and far between. However, internet cafes, stationary shops and street vendors alike advertise with the same visual aids. Despite the high demand for **letreros** in La Paz, their production is managed by a small number of individuals, an imbalance that didn't make sense.

Among a line of kiosks on Avenida Perú in the Zona Pura Pura, I eventually found Raul Valero Angles, nestled behind a display of his colourful *letreros*. He was cutting letters out of paper at breakneck speed while assuring a **cholita** that her order of labels advertising **pie de manzana** was spelt correctly – a Spanish reading could be 'apple feet' as opposed to the desired 'apple pie.'

Raul explained the scarcity of letristas in La Paz: 'Here in Bolivia people are used to buying and selling, not producing. We produce right from the start – buying, painting and cutting material. That's why people don't want to get involved.' He added lightheartedly, 'We have to have a great deal of patience. It's not easy making a letrero.'

> 'TO SEE YOUR OWN WORK OF ART, SOMETHING THAT YOU HAVE CREATED – IT'S A JOY.'
> —RAUL

Another factor making the *letristas* a rare sight may be the growing trend amongst businesses for **la gigantografía**, digitally designed signs that favour kitsch typefaces over the artisanal work of Raul and other *letristas*. Raul said, 'The problem with las *gigantografías* is that they don't stand out. That's why customers come to us, because we use phosphorescent colours that people remember.'

Marcos Huanca is one of the city's older *letristas*, his workshop located in the northern suburb of Villa Fátima. He began producing *letreros* 30 years ago, after growing up with a father who painted basketball courts. Looking out onto the Plaza del Maestro from a kiosk with just enough space for himself and a variety of coloured cards, Marcos has witnessed the evolution of La Paz's transport system.

He remarked, 'There are more buses than before; anyone can buy a van, sign up to a union and suddenly they're a bus driver.' Like Raul, his main source of business is making *letreros* for new drivers.

Marcos admitted that he no longer enjoys his business. In four years' time, he hopes to move to the **altiplano** to grow rice and coca, for as he says, 'Life is more peaceful there.' For Raul, however, changing career paths is not an option. 'You feel a special satisfaction when you spot one of your *letreros*, most of all when you see it on television,' he said. 'To see your own work of art, something that you have created – it's a joy.'

If La Paz eventually moves away from collective minibuses, following in the steps of the Puma Katari bus and the **teleférico**, it will satisfy most **paceños**' wish for a better transport system. At present, however, a La Paz without letreros and their distinctive colours is almost impossible to imagine.×

Lidia, a delightful person to talk to, was very proud of her **zapallos** and fresh **ajíes**. She wanted to know where I was from and why I was at the market that day.

Beatriz, a matronly woman who kindly allowed me to admire her composure and hard work, smiled at my camera and laughed out loud.

Graciela, a vendor and a mother, posed excitedly with her son, Juan Gabriel. This child, with his dry cheeks and black smiley eyes, thought my camera would become his once he could see himself on its screen.

Juana sold delicious tomatoes from the **Yungas**, along with red and yellow **ajíes**, in addition to lentils, rice and **tuntas**. When asked how she determined the price of a particular product, she made clear that she does not have any decisional role, but simply sells what she buys from the producers. She blessed me and reminded me to pray to her God.

Mercado Rodriguez is located on Calle Rodriguez near the corner of Avenida Llampu in the San Pedro neighbourhood, open from 5 am to 9 pm.

New Era For The Afro-Bolivian?

FOR CENTURIES, THE PRESENCE OF BLACK PEOPLE IN BOLIVIA WENT UNNOTICED AND UNAPPRECIATED. NOW THEY ARE MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD. BUT WILL ANYTHING EVER CHANGE?

TEXT: OLIVIA HYLTON
PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN C.

I arrive at Malegria, a club in La Paz's happening Sopocachi neighbourhood, in the early hours one Friday morning and it is buzzing. Music pumps from all corners and hundreds of people are packed in tightly like sardines. They are all here to see **Saya** – an Afro-Bolivian artistic expression of song and dance originating in Bolivia's **Yungas** region. For the past 10 years, an Afro-Bolivian troupe has had an agreement with Malegria that sees them playing *Saya* to the crowds on a weekly basis. It has proved a huge hit, with tourists and locals alike flocking to see them in action.

The pop music fades and performers begin to appear on top of the bar in cream outfits with trimmings akin to colours related to the Rastafari movement (red, green and gold). Drums, güiros and maracas are just some of the instruments that are used during *Saya* performances, and, like fans at a concert, the audience sings along to their favourite songs.

Amid the excitement, I get chatting to an expat. Originally from America, she is working in La Paz as a social communicator and by her own admission is a 'nigger-lover'. The expression shocks me, as the n-word is a huge taboo, having originated as an ethnic slur to refer to black people during slavery. To this day it is still sometimes used in a pejorative way. As a black person, it disgusts me that Afro-Bolivian men (and women) are still fetishised by those from other races. Although Bolivia has made great strides to recognise Afro-Bolivians as people, it seems that these efforts may have been in vain.

Over the past 30 years, there has been an emergence of leaders in the Afro-Bolivian community such as Jorge Medina, Marfa Inofuentes and Monica Rey, and grassroots organisations such as MOCUSABOL (the *Saya* Afro-Bolivian cultural movement) and CADIC (the Afro-Bolivian Centre for Integral and Community Development), all fighting for the right for Afro-Bolivians to be treated equally to other Bolivians.

I meet Jorge Medina at the offices of CADIC – which he founded in 2006 and is currently director of. Medina greets me with a huge smile, dressed in a bright green tracksuit. His office walls are plastered with numerous accolades and posters of iconic black figures including Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela and Bob Marley.

Born in Coroico, in the **Yungas** region, it wasn't until Medina came to La Paz that his passion for working towards the recognition and respect of Afro-Bolivians was ignited. He tells me that when he arrived in the city, it was devoid of Afro-Bolivians. Back then, it was not uncommon for other Bolivians to be oblivious to the existence of black people living in Bolivia, as there are were and are still no predominantly black neighbourhoods and blacks were not included in Bolivian history books, nor were they counted in the official census.

'Barack Obama is president of the United States; why should an Afro not be able to be in Parliament here in Bolivia?'
—Jorge Medina

A portrait of Pedro Andverez Peralta, an Afro-Bolivian soldier in the early-20th-century Chaco War, holds a particular place of pride in the CADIC offices. For his service to Bolivia, Andverez Peralta was awarded several medals of honor but received no further recognition from the government, and is only included in books written by Western scholars interested in the African diaspora.

Black people have lived in Bolivia for over 500 years, the vast majority being descendants of slaves brought to the country in the mid-16th century. Thirty thousand African slaves were taken to Potosí, Bolivia's mining city, to work as human mules in the royal mint. As most slaves were unable to adapt to the cold weather in Potosí, a number were forced to work under new ownership in the warmer *Yungas* region, where most of their descendants live today.

After slavery was abolished in 1851, exploitation of Afro-Bolivians by **hacienda** owners in the *Yungas* region continued until the agrarian reform of 1953. The reform allowed Afro-Bolivian communities to become owners of the land that they and their forefathers had tended to for generations. In spite of freedom from slavery and ownership of land in the *Yungas*, for decades Afro-Bolivians were discriminated against by fellow Bolivians and ignored by the Bolivian government. Where acknowledged, they were treated as objects of superstitious desire, with the widely held belief that pinching a black person would bring about **buena suerte**.

In 2009, Medina said, 'Barack Obama is president of the United States; why should an Afro not be able to be in Parliament here in Bolivia?', and in 2010 he was the first ever Afro-Bolivian deputy to be voted into the Bolivian parliament, winning the election in La Paz with 92.83 percent of the overall vote. For five years, he served as a deputy, working tirelessly for the rights of Afro-Bolivians and helped to introduce three laws specifically supporting the cause.

With the introduction of Law 200 came the requisite that Bolivia had to recognise Afro-Bolivians on future censuses, an action that had been omitted for over 100 years. As a result of this, the Bolivian census of 2012 reported that there were over 23,330 Afro-Bolivians living in Bolivia, the vast majority inhabiting the *Yungas* region, particularly in the towns of Chicaloma, Chulumani, Muranta and Tocaña. In addition to newly created laws, Afro-Bolivians also feature in Article 32 of the Bolivian Constitution of 2009 that states: 'The Afro-Bolivian people enjoy, in everything corresponding, the economic, social, political and cultural rights that are recognized in the Constitution for the nations and the rural native indigenous peoples.'

Since 2011, September has been dubbed 'Afro-Bolivian Month' and is host to a range of activities including sporting and cultural events. The pinnacle of Afro-Bolivian month is 'Festival de *Saya* Afrobolivian', which until 2011 was held in Coroico but now takes place in La Paz.

Life for Afro-Bolivians has changed considerably over the past 15 years with racism and discrimination far less noticeable than before. More Afro-Bolivians are in higher education and working in professional jobs, and rather than being referred to as "*negros*", more and more people are acknowledging them for what they are: Afro-Bolivians – Bolivians of African descent.

I ask Medina what is next for Afro-Bolivians, and he says that they need to keep working hard for access to positions of power in the public sphere. Since Medina, there have been no other Afro-Bolivian deputies. While Bolivia has come a long way to integrate its Afro-Bolivian citizens into society, there is still a lot of work to be done.

This year's Festival de Saya Afroboliviano will take place on September 25 in Plaza San Francisco, La Paz. Further information about the festival can be found on Jorge Medina's official website: jorgemedina.org/p/editorial.html

As well as being the first Afro-Bolivian deputy in Parliament, Medina is the host of African Roots, the first radio show solely about Afro-Bolivians. He can be heard on 98.5FM or qhana.org.bo on Friday evenings from 7 pm to 10 pm.

Thanks to Paola Inofuentes, Richard Contreras Peralta and Jorge Medina for their help with this article.

Law 200 – Introduced December 14, 2011: Declaration of September 23 as the National Day of the People and the Afrobolivian Culture', in order to reaffirm the identity and value the culture of those in Bolivia who are of African descent.

Law 138 – Introduced June 14, 2011: Recognition of the artistic expression **'Saya** Afroboliviana' as belonging to Afro-Bolivian people and having originated from the **Yungas** region.

Law 045 – Introduced October 8, 2010: Law against all forms of racism and discrimination in all areas of life, with the explicit mention of Afro-Bolivians as a group of people for whom the law should take into consideration.

-LA REINA-

Growing Old with Grace
(and Dignity, Respect, Support and Freedoms)

TEXT: MEGAN SUNDERLAND
PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

What does it mean to "be old"? For "**La Reina**" of the Maria Esther Quevedo Care Home, otherwise known as Alicia Abigal Flores Burgoa, it simply signifies advanced age, a point at which all will arrive in their lives. She associates the word largely with pain and incapacity, confessing her fear of being unable to look after herself, as she witnesses day to day peers who need help with simple tasks such as washing, dressing and eating.

I am speaking to Alicia at her care home, nestled at the end of Calle Jaén, a beautifully preserved colonial street in La Paz near Plaza Murillo. Today, the centre has planned a variety of activities to commemorate the Day of Dignity for the Elderly. Every 26th of August in Bolivia is a day to celebrate the elderly and promote their right to live respectably.

This year, the day's activities included a marathon for the elderly and a fair on Plaza San Francisco named "Recuperating traditions of days gone by", along with a **llajua** cooking competition.

When I met "*La Reina*", she was dressed in a grey **pollera**, a beige shawl with flowers, and a **sombrero de cholita** marked with a pink sequined crown. She had been elected Queen for the day and people were showering her with pink flower petals as she sat alongside her "**Amigos Predilectos**", a select group of residents who were being honored. However, "**El Rey**," who had also been elected, was nowhere to be found during the party. Upon asking Alicia of his whereabouts, she tells me, 'My King died 30 years ago.'

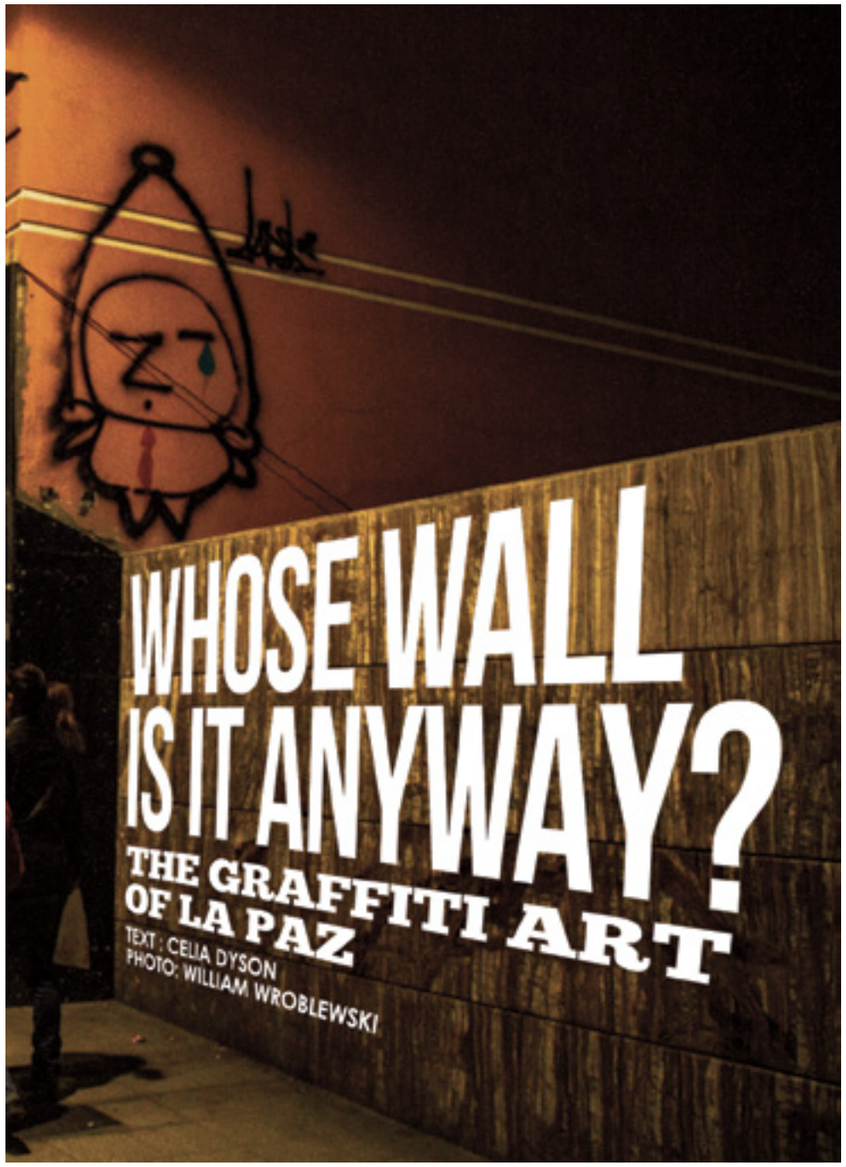
Many residents at the home have lost spouses and other family members. The centre cares for elderly people who are poor, homeless and without family, due to loss, abuse or abandon. During my visit, I met a man who asked me, while weeping, if I could help him find his son before he passes away. He was placed in the home by his son more than 12 years ago and has not been visited since.

There are different programs at the Quevedo care home that aim to improve the lifestyle of the residents and redefine the social "label" of old age. One such program is called, "**Adoptando un Abuelito**", which invites volunteer families to spend time with the residents. Another is called, "**Abuelo, Cuéntame**" and consists of a video competition in which the elderly share life stories on camera. This last initiative not only aims to recuperate the city's memory but also to encourage empathy toward the elderly and boost their self-esteem, helping them feel connected to surrounding communities.

Indeed, these "grandmother stories" enable us to learn and grow through the experiences of others. Alicia is 86 years-old and will turn 87 this month. '**Jovencita,**' I say, in a joking manner. Then I ask, 'What advice would you give to someone who is 21, like me?' 'That you respect yourself, that you don´t lie. That you are assertive and that you don't accept bad things, otherwise people will take advantage of you,' she responds. 'If you respect yourself, others will respect you and become fond of you'.

This, she says, is important to gain many friends in life, who will support you. These are the friends that visit her regularly at the home. Her main source of happiness. 'You need to plant the seed to reap the harvest,' she points out, meaning you only get back what you've given in life.

The elderly may be frail, they may look impaired and increasingly unable to physically achieve what they want to. But, in this image-centric world, let us not forget that there is more to an individual than what is visible on the surface. Inside an ageing body is wisdom, knowledge and experience that we can all learn and grow from.



Public Notice: Rubbish Kills. The Pope Is the Antichrist. Evo 2015. What do these three statements have in common? They are all found written on the walls of La Paz – a city whose graffiti stands out not only for its ubiquity, but also its great diversity.

La Paz seems to welcome street art – in 2012, artists from all over Latin America were invited to come and paint 16 murals on the theme of 'Myths of Mother Earth.' Yet above, alongside and sometimes on top of brightly coloured commissioned pieces, spreads a tangle of everything from tags to political slogans to personal confessions of love. And the hazy legality of painting on someone else's property, whether public or private, often hides both the artists and the artistic process from the public eye. So who's really behind the paint on La Paz's walls?

El Marsh is the pseudonym of a street artist living in La Paz who paints murals and graffiti across the city and the rest of Bolivia. Unlike in much of Europe and the United States, he explains, in Latin America the government pays little attention to the already vague laws concerning illicit graffiti, due to more pressing social and economic problems. The result is a city in which blank walls are a rarity. 'There are walls of houses that are so graffitied on that the owners no longer mind; they have lost the perception that this is their wall,' El Marsh says. Not that the owners of houses have much choice in the matter; a fresh coat of paint will disguise all but the faintest shadows of just-covered graffiti, right up until a new mark is made the next day.

As El Marsh puts it, this invasion of space gives rise to a public forum for dialogue and freedom of expression. Political groups such as Mujeres Creando, an anarchist feminist group supporting the liberation and autonomy of women, writes quotes on the wall in curly script such as "Nor the earth nor women are territories to conquer". At the same time, the names of political figures stretch wide across walls in block capitals. The large quantity of affirmations of political support around the city might make it seem that the ordinary people of La Paz are very engaged politically, yet El Marsh explained that groups affiliated with political parties are often paid to promote the names and messages of politicians.

But what about the most common marks on the city's walls? Tags are ubiquitous not only in La Paz but in urban spaces around the world. El Marsh himself has his own tag – a pointy-nosed boy wearing a **chullo** – that has made its way to the streets of La Paz, Cochabamba, Potosí and even onto the bottom of local skateboards. According to El Marsh, the taggers of La Paz are mainly young people struggling to establish their identities, particularly those who have very little. He compares a young person tagging a wall to taking up smoking, stating, 'It's something where you can say, "This is mine."'

Some might think that tagging or any other form of graffiti on someone else's property is simple vandalism, far different from the polished murals that adorn La Paz's nurseries and public parks. But in many ways the scrawling words and pictures that cover the walls of the city, like El Marsh's small Andean boy, are far more important than any slick piece of street art: for many, a small spot on a wall is one of the only spaces they can truly occupy.×

PHOTO: "Creative Commons BEAUTIFUL ORPHAN" by James Southorn is licensed under CC BY 2.0

found lings

ABANDONMENT AND ADOPTION IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: RAFAEL BERTOLI-MITCHEL

Alfredo is nine years old. He enjoys spending time with his friends, playing outside with his toys and wants to teach sport when he's older. Three years ago, he was abandoned by his aunt and arrived at Fundación Arco Iris, an NGO whose mission is to fight the social exclusion of poor and homeless children in La Paz. But the orphans at the foundation never speak to each other about their pasts. It seems some things are best left alone.

According to UNICEF, nearly 10% of all children in Bolivia are orphans. Thousands of women choose to abort or abandon their children every year out of poverty, shame or fear. With abortions remaining illegal and expensive throughout Bolivia, often the choice to have the baby is a necessary – and much safer – evil. In spite of this cruel reality, most deserted children in Bolivia survive.

Caring for these children is of primary importance for organisations such as Arco Iris. Founded in 1994 by German priest Father Jose Maria Neuenhofer, the organisation is divided into three parts: social projects, which encompass a number of orphanages and rehabilitation schemes; productive units, including a bakery, artisanal and carpentry shops; and a hospital, one of the best-known free healthcare centres for minors in the region.

'The intention has always been to work with the most vulnerable sectors of the population,' says Jorge Toledo, a senior psychologist and the foundation's Executive Director. 'We work with children from dysfunctional families, victims of abandonment and sexual abuse, as well as those in extreme poverty and illegal labour.'

Infant abandonment in Bolivia can take many forms. Policemen who find an abandoned child rarely attempt to return the baby to its birth family; a trip to the orphanage is less futile. For Mr Toledo, the ever-increasing abandonment rate relates to a worldwide crisis of familial values. 'Economic problems are one of the main things that jeopardise family unity and lead to desertion, but the sense of family as a whole is broken,' he explains. 'Many couples are incapable of having a discussion and arguments now lead to separation, with each parent thinking the child to be the responsibility of their partner.'

Even after settling into their foster homes, children like Alfredo often remain stigmatised for the rest of their lives. As Mr Toledo reveals, the reality for orphans is longstanding. 'They are branded as people who are not responsible for their actions and who have no one to look after them. Many people mistreat them when they leave Arco Iris, exploiting their vulnerability.'

Learning of some of the cruelest experiences of abandonment quickly revealed the harsh realities of the life of an orphan. Mr Toledo tells me of babies left in rubbish tips and nylon bags. It was his next story, however, that I found most affecting. 'A nine-year-old boy walked here all the way from Santa Cruz,' he tells me. 'His stepmother beat him with a hammer and made him eat rubbish. When his father, a policeman, found out, he said nothing. There is a hardness in the boy's gaze unlike anything I have ever seen.'

> 'We are teaching him to laugh, cry and – above all – feel.'

Arco Iris is clearly much more than a foster home. Healing these psychological wounds is at the top of Mr Toledo's agenda. 'Many children come to us with a nihilistic view on life, without dreams or anyone whom they can call Mum or Dad,' he says. 'We try to give them a new lease of life and renew their sense of family.'

This process seems to be helping even the most damaged orphans. The young boy I learn about is now seventeen, and has gone from a state of feeling nothing to one of emotional discovery. 'We are teaching him to laugh, cry and – above all – feel.'

In spite of the efforts of orphanages, the sense of family remains almost impossible to replicate outside of the birth home. For the children, it can be difficult to live with more than 100 "siblings", and foster homes must deal with issues such as teenage pregnancy and underage sex. Infants at Arco Iris' homes may be physically held on a daily basis, but parental love and belonging are hard to reproduce.

Furthermore, a lack of funding continues to threaten the existence of orphanages in Bolivia. Financial aid from the government has been stagnant and insufficient since the 1950s, but the number of orphans and the rate of inflation – which rose 14% in 2009 – keep growing.

To make matters worse, the Bolivian adoption culture is one of hope and frustration. In other countries, changes in its public perception have made adoption a viable way to start – or make – a family, but here there is still ground to be made. Finding families for orphans is a challenging feat, and many children's hopes at adoption are shattered by a flawed system.

Mr Toledo recognises the need for reform. 'The adoption process lasts years,' he explains. 'We have children who come to us after having stayed at previous foster homes – they have lived a completely institutionalised life.'

International adoption was banned in Bolivia in 2002. Today, U.S. parents wishing to adopt here must first become legal residents, which lengthens the process drastically. Such was the case of the Wieseman family from Colorado, who recently made headlines for waiting over three years to bring their adopted HIV-positive daughter home. Visa issues and other obstacles have resulted in five times fewer US adoptions from Bolivia over the past decade.

For the lucky few who find a home abroad, adopted life is not as blissful as one might hope. Former Bolivian Express interns, Catey and Christof, both wrote personal articles mapping the search for their birth parents, admitting to feeling caught between their Bolivian and adopted identities – 'a limbo of sorts', as Catey put it.

For all 320,000 orphans to find homes with Bolivian families, one out of every 13 people aged 15 to 62 (who live above the poverty line) would have to adopt a child. With limited foreign adoptions and too few families in Bolivia to adopt, many orphans will never find a home.

Yet the children I meet at the foundation seem untouched by these issues. Shouts of '¡Mano! ¡Mano!' ring through the playground and into the suburbs. A group football match on a pitch nearby follows my conversation with Alfredo. I realise that he is not an exception. All of the orphans here possess a zest for life unlike others of their age. Years of hardship and abandonment have left them with a unique vivacity. Families come in all forms, and surely these brothers form part of one.×

STARBUCKS: A NEW HOPE?

TEXT: BENJAMIN COOKE

Globalisation is happening now. That's why I'm here. It's happening every minute, every day. You can't stop it,' Angela tells me, before sipping a cappuccino as cold now as our conversation has been heated. We've discussed the arrival of American companies here in Santa Cruz, and the pros and cons of globalisation for Bolivia as a whole. I find it hard to disagree with her verdict, sitting here six thousand miles but only twenty hours away from home, in the first Starbucks to open in Bolivia.

Beyond the green-aproned baristas and the chocolate liquor coloured décor familiar to coffee drinkers the world over, I can see American cars and trucks circling a roundabout, and a huge sign for a Burger King.

It is unimaginable that in the near future the highstreets of La Paz will accommodate as many international chains as those of Santa Cruz, but change is coming. In May last year Starbucks announced they intend to set up ten stores within Bolivia by 2020, and their longer term plans are no doubt more ambitious.

The question I've been asking Angela, who says she comes to Starbucks for the atmosphere rather than the coffee, is whether global chains such as Starbucks can be made to serve Bolivia's interests, rather than Bolivia just serving theirs; specifically,

Starbucks is not high quality but it's better than the status quo – it'll move Bolivian coffee culture in the right direction.

whether the arrival of Starbucks will be a good or a bad thing for Bolivian coffee culture. She thinks its effect will be positive; that it will get more people interested in coffee and help Bolivian cafes thereby. Globalisation, she also reminds me, 'is a two way exchange. It is not the case of a large country like America dominating smaller countries. It is exactly the opposite. Perhaps tomorrow a Bolivian coffee shop will go to the United States and open up there.'

But not all coffee lovers in Bolivia are as unabashedly optimistic about what Starbucks' arrival means for the country's coffee culture. The beans roasted for the coffees Angela and I are enjoying came not from Bolivia, but from Brazil, Colombia and Paraguay, like all those Starbucks use. This makes perfect sense considering the international reputation of Bolivian coffee isn't nearly as high as it might be, though up to 2009 the Cup of Excellence project did much to promote it as a speciality crop.

Indeed a few Bolivian farmers have produced coffee beans of exceptional quality. In 2004 the cooperative CENAPROC sold its produce for eleven dollars a pound, at a time when the average price was just sixty cents. The **Yungas** region could be the ideal location for large scale production of similarly high quality coffee, if only sufficient capital were invested in it. As delightful as it would be to think, like Angela, that Starbucks will enrich Bolivia's coffee culture, it will certainly not do so by ignoring this promising industry and treating Bolivia only as a consumer, not a producer, of coffee.

Perhaps the people with the most insight into Starbucks' arrival are those who will be most affected by it, for better or worse: the owners of independent coffee shops.

Starbucks might be an easy way to learn about coffee, but it is not the only way.

Fabian, who has just set up Tipica café in the San Miguel neighbourhood of La Paz, is absolutely convinced that the quality of service small establishments like his provide will safeguard them against Starbucks.

'La Paz does not have a big culture of coffee yet,' he tells me. 'Starbucks does not provide quality, but it does get people interested in coffee. These people, after a time, will want to investigate other coffee shops, and then they will discover that Bolivian coffee is the best.'

The idea of small businesses like Fabian's benefiting from a general uplift in public interest is not as wishful as it might sound. In Mexico, Starbucks' massive expansion has been accompanied by a one hundred and fifty per cent increase in the consumption of coffee as a whole, and cafes like Tipica have much to recommend them that Starbucks does not. For example, Fabian tells me, 'Starbucks roasts coffee in very large machines, but we are able to roast in very small ones. This gives us more control over the roast, more flexibility.'

Stefan, the owner of MagicK café in Sopocachi, also thinks that Starbucks' arrival can benefit small coffee shops. 'If we can get people to drink quality coffee – Starbucks is not high quality but it's better than the status quo – it'll move Bolivian coffee culture in the right direction,' he says. 'That's how I see that Starbucks' arrival might be a good thing, as a mechanism for recruitment of coffee lovers, because it's kind of an easy way to get into it.'

Starbucks might be an easy way to learn about coffee, but it is not the only way. What struck me about my conversations with both Fabian and Stefan was how eager they were to impart their knowledge about the coffee they sold. This seems to me the best evidence of a thriving coffee culture in La Paz at least, if not in Bolivia as a whole. Within twenty minutes of arriving in Tipica, Fabian was beckoning me to lower my nose a millimetre above a newly roasted cup of unfiltered coffee. Raising my head after a good, long whiff – feeling a warm blotch on the tip of my nose – I smiled to myself at the thought of ever receiving this kind of hospitality from a Starbucks manager. ×

It was 3 am at digital art collective Oí Más Bass' club night, La Bass, at Roots Reggae Bar in Sagarnaga, but people weren't getting tired. Heavy drum & bass pounded through the crowd and the DJs' silhouettes were hidden behind a screen of psychedelic projections. 'I'm playing **juke** for the first time tonight,' explained music producer DJ Quien between sets. Smiling, he added, 'I think people will like it,' before disappearing into a group of dancing **paceños**.

'All artistic activism in Bolivia stems from the same roots,' DJ Quien later explains over coffee at MagicK Café in Sopocachi. DJ Quien, whose real name is Bernado Resnikowski Beltran, is the cofounder of the OMB digital art collective and record label. For the past nine years, Oí Más Bass has provided Bolivian and international DJs with a platform to share their work and is the first Bolivian collective to have paid DJs in Europe.

Unsatisfied with the lack of support for digital artists, DJ Quien and four other friends founded OMB in 2006. 'We took a DIY approach to bass and electronic music,' he says. 'We wanted to show that there are great things happening on this side of the world.' Distributing a variety of genres from tropical bass to techno, OMB inspires followers 'who want to be part of an intimate music scene and whose tastes don't depend on fashion trends.'

After expanding to more than 25 artists, the collective founded its record label in 2013. The label releases music not exclusively produced by members of the collective and has signed producers from Venezuela, Chile and even Russia.

DJ Quien remarks, 'OMB's artists are aware of Bolivia's financial reality. I think we're part of a generation in which we make music because we love it, not for the money.' Yet talented Bolivian artists often fear committing to their music whilst studying or working a job. DJ Quien admits, 'It's difficult when an artist needs to know they'll have enough to put food on the table.'

'The goal,' he adds, 'is to keep the dream alive and not lose track of our artistic vision amidst pressure for money and fame.' The label hopes to eventually release its artists' work in physical format, which leads me to visualise an OMB vinyl on the shelves of London record stores.

Bass music from Latin America has a strong identity worldwide due to its revival of native elements of Latin American music,' comments DJ Quien. It isn't simply a case of including samples of **cumbia** or **chicha** on a track as a novelty addition. Instead he describes its creation as an 'internal personal search in the artists' blood.'

At La Bass, the devotion of OMB's followers was obvious, highlighting the importance of the collective's presence in La Paz. Aside from putting Bolivia on the map for bass music, OMB brings like-minded people together to talk, listen, share music and dance. It can only be described as a positive cultural force within Bolivia.

Check out OMB's music at ombrecordlabel.bandcamp.com or follow oimasbass.tumblr.com and @oi_mas_bass. Also head to Proyecto Kiebre/El Encuentro Latinoamericano de Arte Digital, co-founded by DJ Quien (Bernado Resnikowski Beltran) and Ninho (Adrian Cortez). El Kiebre runs from September 1 through 26 with the closing concert at the Parque Urbano Central.

GLOSSARY

AJÍ - chilli, **ABUELO, CUÉNTAME** - Grandpa, tell me, **ADOPTANDO UN ABUELITO** - adopt a grandparent, **ALCALDIA** - Mayor's Office **ALTIPLANO** - high plateau above La Paz, **ALTO BENI** - municipality of the Caranavi Province in the La Paz Department, known for its cacao cultivation **AMIGOS PREDILECTOS** - Favourite Friends, **AYMARA** - a native South American language from the Andes **BUENA SUERTE** - "Good luck" **CHICHA** - a Peruvian style of cumbia originating in the country's rainforest areas **CAMBA** - a person from the eastern lowlands of Bolivia, an area characterised by jungle-like and lush vegetation typical of Amazonia. It includes the regions of Pando, Beni and Santa Cruz. **CASERITAS** - a polite way to call the female sellers at the market, **CHOLITA**- indigenous woman, **CHULLO** - a traditionally andean hat, made from wool and with ear flaps, **COLLA** - a person from the western region of Bolivia - the altiplano - which includes La Paz, Oruro and Potosi. Collas include the Aymara and Quechua population, **CONSTRUCTORES DEL BUEN TRATO** - Building good behaviour, **CRUCEÑO** - inhabitant of Santa Cruz **CUMBIA** - an infectious Latin rhythm identifiable by its percussion, originating in Colombia, **DEFENSORÍA DE LA NIÑEZ Y ADOLESCENCIA DEL GOBIERNO MUNICIPAL DE LA PAZ** - The Defence Office for Childhood and Adolescence of the La Paz Municipal Government, **LA GIGANTOGRAFÍA** - a computer designed sign used by shops and other establishments for advertising, **GRINGO** - term used primarily in Spanish-speaking countries to refer to foreigners, particularly those from North America, **HACIENDA** - A large farming estate, **INDIGENISMO** - a political ideology which attempts to build the relationship between the state and indigenous minorities, **JOVENCITA** - very young, **JUKE** - a genre of house music from Chicago with a fast rhythm (160 beats per minute), **LETREROS** - handmade labels with fluorescent letters mainly used in bus windows to announce routes, **LETRISTAS** - the people who make these labels, **LLAJUA** - a spicy Bolivian sauce consisting of locoto pepper, tomato and bolivian herbs **PACEÑO** - inhabitant of La Paz, **PIE DE MANZANA** - apple pie, **QUECHUA** - a native South American language from the Andes, the most spoken indigenous language in Bolivia, **LA REINA** - the Queen, **EL REY** - the King, **POLLERA** - traditional Bolivian skirt usually worn by cholitas **SAYA** - an Afro-Bolivian artistic expression of song and dance originating in the Yungas region, **SOMBRERO DE CHOLITA** - a traditional hat usually worn by indigenous Bolivian women, **TAXISTA** - taxi driver, **TELEFÉRICO** - the cable car system introduced in La Paz in 2014, **TRUFI** - small van or car used as public transportation in La Paz, **TUNTA** - potato that is frozen, dried and washed for a time; after this process it becomes white **YUNGAS** - a tropical forest zone northeast of La Paz that is the transition between the Andean highlands and the tropical lowlands of Bolivia, **ZAPALLO** - pumpkin

BREASTFEEDING IN (LA) PAZ

TEXT: MEGAN E SUNDERLAND

ILLUSTRATION: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

The vegan restaurant Red Monkey, in La Paz's San Miguel neighbourhood, has started offering mothers a free cup of tea as they breastfeed in the restaurant. The offer is meant to celebrate International Breastfeeding Week (from the 1st - 7th August) and has been praised in various newspapers in Bolivia as well as on social media.

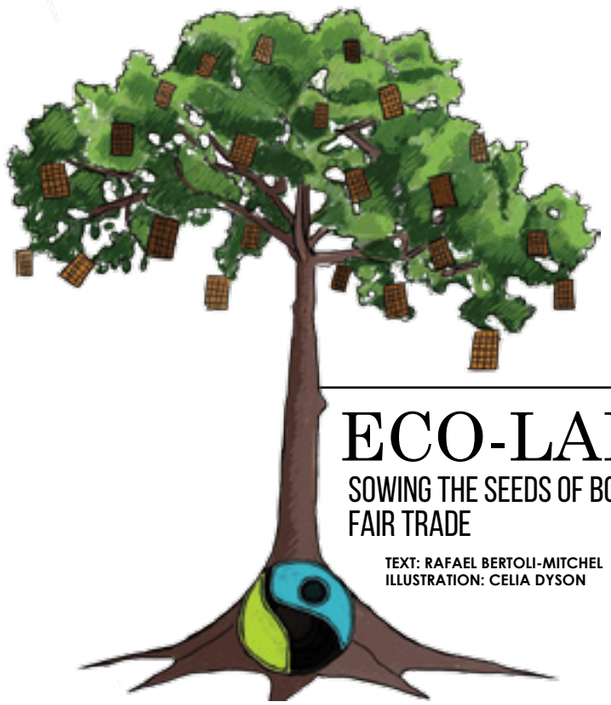
Katherine Ascarrunz, who is the leader of Liga de la Leche Materna, an international NGO dedicated to supporting new mothers, is in full support of the restaurant's move, explaining, 'When a mother goes out with her child, she feels that there is not a comfortable space to breastfeed. [This offer] is a great support,' she says.

In the UK, women are made to feel uncomfortable when breastfeeding in public due to unnecessary comments or stares from people around them. Some private venues explicitly prohibit breastfeeding altogether.

Although in rural Bolivia, breastfeeding in public is the unquestioned norm, mothers in urban environments here experience similar pressures to those felt by mothers in the UK. Some women from Liga de la Leche say it's rare for anyone to make a comment while a Bolivian woman is breastfeeding in the city, but mothers are often made uncomfortable by harsh stares and whispering.

The social stigma surrounding public breastfeeding is apparently becoming more common. As is the case in most countries, a woman's breasts are widely accepted as sexual objects of consumption in advertising, but publicly unacceptable when they are used for their natural purpose. As Katherine points out, 'People are shocked when they see a mother breastfeeding but not when a woman has lots of cleavage.'

Unfortunately, the subject is part of a larger issue, that of a woman's ability to decide what to do with her body without being judged, isolated or controlled.



ECO-LABELS

SOWING THE SEEDS OF BOLIVIAN FAIR TRADE

TEXT: RAFAEL BERTOLI-MITCHEL
ILLUSTRATION: CELIA DYSON

Amid smells of dust and car engines, the scent of chocolate is unmistakable. Here in the sprawling mess of El Alto stands El Ceibo, a chocolate factory that has been growing, processing and exporting Bolivian cacao beans for over three decades.

As a member of the Fair Trade Platform, El Ceibo forms part of a national initiative that groups eighteen farming associations to meet the needs of small producers in Bolivia. Today, it has more than 1,200 members and generates direct employment for over 100 people. For Hernan Siñani, Production Manager at El Ceibo, the objective of fair trade is clear. 'We promote the products of farmers who own under three hectares of land,' he explains. 'In previous years, if you wanted to produce organically, the costs were too high; consumers were not willing to pay extra.'

After being carefully selected, the beans are fermented and dried on farmers' plots and at El Ceibo's facilities in Sapecho, **Alto Beni**. Regular visits from technical staff ensure that organic farming methods are observed at every stage of production. Despite the saturation of the fair-trade industry in South America, the factory's processes remain unique. 'We transport the beans in clean vehicles to avoid contamination, travelling across some of the world's most dangerous roads,' explains Mr Siñani. 'They are then kept in a controlled environment to prolong their lifespan, something that isn't possible in the humidity and temperature of the region of cultivation.' Seeing no part of the bean as expendable, the factory dissects each one into shell, liquor, butter, paste, and cacao. All five of these products are certified as organic.

Cooperatives such as the Fair Trade Platform seek to secure more equitable revenues and better living conditions for their members in an attempt to revolutionise the grey market, or informal economy. More than 60% of the working population in Bolivia is involved in this sector; indigenous producers are paid little for their work, and remain excluded from any public initiative. Indeed, a lack of access to markets has kept 82% of rural Bolivians below the poverty line, according to a recent report by the United Nations.

El Ceibo remains, however, a modest piece in a larger puzzle. The rise of fair-trade coffee, clothing, charcoal and even gold in Bolivia marks a determined attempt to use eco-labelling as an indicator of the environmental and social responsibility of companies in an age of conscious consumption.

Yet the effectiveness of eco-labels is increasingly being called into question. On a corporate level, the risk of 'greenwashing' (deceptively using marketing to present an environmentally responsible image) is becoming dangerously high. Indeed, the Rainforest Alliance was recently criticised for certifying products that contained only 30% fair-trade ingredients, damaging the credibility of the eco-label. As a result, a number of companies have begun to establish their own certification schemes. Educating producers about the objective of fair trade has been an ongoing challenge for its promoters; El Ceibo's long-term emphasis on community sustainability goes against many farmers' cash-in-hand reflexes. On a consumer level, the sheer quantity of labels has diminished their role as an accessible information tool.

For manufacturers such as El Ceibo, cost-efficiency poses the greatest threat. 'The price of fair-trade cocoa is no more than $4000 per metric ton,' reveals Mr Siñani, 'but we pay $4800 with transport costs. It's not worth it at the moment.' With strict criteria and fair trade certifications each costing over $9000, it's easy to see why.

The foreign market has further complicated the situation. '85-90% of our products used to be exported, but now the emphasis on the domestic market and internal investment means that only 15% of our products are sold abroad,' Mr Siñani points out. Increasingly accessible contraband means that working with high-quality raw materials is no longer a requisite for a company's success. 'There are synthetic chocolates out there that can be sold very cheaply, and our clients cannot see the difference; for them, it's just a chocolate.'

The future of fair trade is not as bleak as it may seem, however. The Platform is still young, and has yet to transform its general objectives for fair trade into clear-cut proposals with which to address the government. By learning from the work carried out in neighbouring countries with government agencies dedicated to fair trade, including Brazil and Ecuador, Bolivia's domestic lobby is gathering pace. Change at the top is needed, and Mr Siñani is confident that this will come. 'The factory is named after the folkloric Ceibo tree, known for its regenerating qualities. In spite of adversity, we will always come back to life.'

PHOTO: ANNA BELLETTATO

BolivianExpress