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Magazine

REVOLUTIONS

#78

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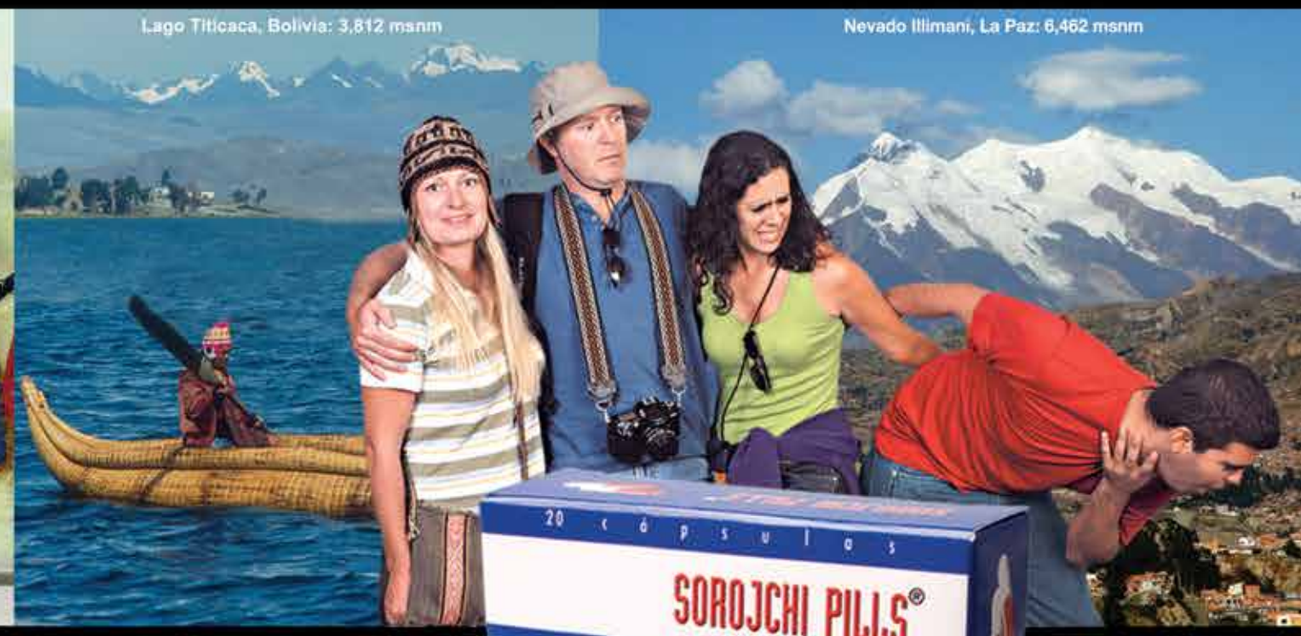

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Table of Contents #78
Revolutions

Editorial #78: Revolutions

By: Caroline Risacher

Since Bolivia became independent in 1825, the country has had more than 190 revolutions and coups d'état. Chronic political instability has plagued Bolivia since its infancy, but it has also shaped a nation of people who are not shy to raise their voices and march down the streets in protest. In fact, Bolivia was the first country in Latin America to claim its independence from the Spanish Empire, in July 1809 – even if this revolution was short-lived.

The word 'revolution' comes with a heavy political connotation; labelling a movement a revolution confers a legitimacy that a rebellion or a revolt doesn't carry. It helps sell a programme and justify political choices. (Look at the Cultural Revolution in China, which led to the death of more than 400,000 people in an effort to make the Chinese Communist Party look better after the disaster of the Great Leap Forward.) Nowadays, it can seem that if one wants to be viewed as a revolutionary, one only need display a specific rhetoric and symbolism. Anyone sporting a green cap with a red star in honour of **Comandante** 'Che' Guevara can call themselves a revolutionary.

So what does the word mean today? The word itself comes with its own contradiction. It derives from the Latin verb *revolvere*, 'to revolve.' It was originally applied to the motions of the planets and conveyed regularity and repetitiveness. It was first used to refer to human affairs in 1688–89 in England to describe the Glorious Revolution. The 1789 French Revolution solidified the word to signify the very opposite, namely, the sudden and unpredictable. Today, with the term 'revolution' comes the idea that something new and radical is happening, that whatever situation was before will be improved following the revolution. The word is instrumentalised, used when appropriate and discarded when not.

In this issue of *Bolivian Express*, we are looking back at the history of Bolivia through that revolutionary lens. The influence of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia reached Bolivia soon after but became a fully fledged political force with the creation of the **Partido Obrero Revolucionario** (POR) in 1935 following the Marxist-Trotskyist ideology. The POR never took off as a mass party but played a critical role in a key moment of Bolivian history: the National Revolution of 1952. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and to this day the Trotskyist influence in Bolivia is still very much alive. It survives in the remains of an ageing POR but also in the current government. The vice president himself, Álvaro García Linera, claims a Marxist-Trotskyist background.

9 October was also the 50th anniversary of the death of revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, a divisive name in Bolivia but one that still manages to gather and unite thousands of idealists against **el imperio**. This month, we also remember Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, a figure who, after 'Che', represents in Bolivia the fight against the many dictatorships that have afflicted the 20th century.

In the last 10 years, Bolivia has experienced a profound transformation. The past revolutions, revolts and rebellions have taken the country to where it is today, and now new revolutions are brewing. The new 2009 Constitution is one of the most progressive in Latin America, but societal changes are slow to follow. This year, the reform of the penal code has been stirring a tense debate around the topic of abortion and its decriminalisation.

Álvaro García Linera wrote about the beginning of 'a revolutionary epoch' in Bolivia following the Water Wars of 2000. There is a certain irony (or contradiction) for an incumbent government to glorify revolutions and revolutionaries, movements and people that by definition stand against the status quo and aim to dislodge it. At the government-sponsored commemorations of the Russian Revolution, Vice President García Linera claimed that 'for revolutionary processes and changes to be successful, there needs to be some control from the state, especially when it comes to outside threats.' Ultimately, the revolutionary gene, the drive to fight for a better life, is at the center of the Bolivian ethos in all political, social and economic spheres; it is something that unites the people in their differences.

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

1. RA BEAT Y PITUKO - ATIX VINYL SESSION | 2. UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON - NUEVA COLECCIÓN | 3. PROPIEDAD PÚBLICA - RESTAURANT | 4. JARDÍN DE ASIA - RESTAURANT | 5. DM HOTEL ANDINO | 6. AS YOU CHOOSE IT - OBRA DE TEATRO | 7. BAJO NUESTRA PIEL - FESTIVAL DE CINE | 8. CAPACITACIONES TÉCNICAS GRATUITAS | 9.BIENAL DEL CARTEL BOLIVIA

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50 YEARS AFTER CHE

GUEVARA'S BOLIVIAN LEGACY—AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

TEXT: MATTHEW GRACE
PHOTOS: ADRIANA MURILLO AND CHARLES BLADON

On October 9, 1967, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, famed Marxist revolutionary, was executed by the Bolivian military (with an assist from the US Central Intelligence Agency). It was the climax of an ill-fated yearlong insurgency in the remote Bolivian countryside. Led by Guevara, a 24-man band of guerrillas (of which only nine were Bolivian) – the **Ejército de Liberación de Bolivia** (ELN) – wandered for months through the mountainous scrubland and densely forested valleys of south-central Bolivia. They would alternatively attack and be attacked by the Bolivian army near their original base along the Ñancahuazú River until, depleted of supplies, starving and lost, they were ambushed in a **quebrada** not far from the impoverished **pueblo** of La Higuera. Guevara, with a bullet wound in his leg and his rifle damaged, surrendered to a Bolivian military patrol.

Dirty and disheveled, Guevara was imprisoned in La Higuera's mud-brick schoolhouse and interrogated first by Bolivian military officers. Asked why he, an Argentinian, was attempting to foment revolution in Bolivia, Guevara replied: 'Can't you see the state in which the peasants live? They are almost like savages, living in a state of poverty that depresses the heart, having only one room in which to sleep and cook and no clothing to wear, abandoned like animals...' Then a tall well-fed man in a Bolivian military uniform entered the room. Cuban exile and CIA asset Felix Rodríguez, onetime anti-Castro Bay of Pigs combatant and future player in the Iran-Contra scandal, had been sent by his Washington masters to advise the Bolivian military in its hunt for the famed revolutionary. After a few questions, Guevara sensed that Rodríguez wasn't a Bolivian national, guessing that he was either a Cuban or Puerto Rican working for US intelligence. Rodríguez confirmed he was a member of the CIA-trained anti-Castro **Brigada Asalto 2506** (which attempted to invade Cuba during the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion). Guevara, perhaps unsurprised at the long reach of el **imperio**, only replied with a 'Ha!'

Over the objections of Rodríguez, who relayed Washington's desire that Guevara be flown to Panama and transferred to American authorities for further interrogation, the Bolivians decided to execute him immediately. When told of his impending death, Guevara's face turned white but he defiantly said, 'It is better like this...I never should have been captured alive.' The Bolivian military commander (Gary Prado) in charge asked his men for a volunteer to execute the rebel commander. Sgt. Mario Terán stepped forward. Rodríguez instructed the sergeant not to shoot Guevara in the face – it had to look like he received the wounds in combat. According to legend, Guevara told Terán, 'I know you've come to kill me. Shoot, coward, you are only going to kill a man.'

At 1:10pm, shots rang out. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara – hero of the Cuban Revolution, guerrilla leader in Africa and South America, anti-capitalist icon and the man whom philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre called 'the most complete human being of our age' – was dead. The Bolivian military amputated his hands for identification and buried his body in an unmarked grave in the nearby town of Vallegrande. Not until nearly 40 years later would it be discovered on the grounds of a Bolivian military airport.

> 'BOLIVIA MUST BE SACRIFICED SO THAT THE REVOLUTIONS IN THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES MAY BEGIN.'
> **—CHE GUEVARA, OCTOBER 1966**

It is ironic, then, that at the site of that airport is a new museum celebrating the life and death of Guevara. In the 50 years since his death, Bolivia has undergone a profound transformation, in which several military dictatorships have come and gone, a process that has culminated in the 2005 presidential election of the proudly socialist Evo Morales and the appropriation of state power by his MAS (**Movimiento al Socialismo**) party.

Not surprisingly, the history of Guevara in Bolivia has been reappraised. With a leftist administration that has formed a tight alliance with both Cuba (under the Castro brothers) and Venezuela (first under Chávez, now under Maduro), the Bolivian government has appropriated Guevara's legacy in Bolivia – to the delight of Morales's allies and the consternation of his political rivals. A **Ruta del Che** tourism industry has sprung up, with stops in Samaipata, which the ELN momentarily took over in July 1967; La Higuera, where monuments to Guevara surround the schoolhouse in which he was killed; and Vallegrande, with the aforementioned museum and gravesites of other fallen guerrillas from the ELN.

On the 50th anniversary of Guevara's death, Vallegrande hosted conferences and celebrations as a tribute to the fallen revolutionary. Participants of the Latin American Encounter of Anti-Imperialist Communicators met to commemorate the fallen fighter and strategise on how to facilitate the international struggle against the creeping capitalist influence. Among others, speakers included Mewlen Huancho, a Chilean representative of the indigenous Mapuche tribe, who are battling the government of President Michelle Bachelet over land rights; radical Argentinian journalist and former **Montonero** Carlos Aznárez; and radical Bolivian feminist Julieta Paredes, from La Paz's Mujeres Creando women's collective.

Huancho spoke of her people's struggle against the Chilean state, in which the Mapuche have suffered discrimination for centuries and have sought to regain their traditional lands. Even under Bachelet (a liberal head of state after the dictatorship of 1973–90 and successive centrist governments), the Chilean government has responded with violence to indigenous demands. Aznárez spoke about the case of Santiago Maldonado, a young Argentinian who disappeared during a Mapuche land-rights protest and was last seen in the custody of the Argentinian gendarmerie (days after the conference concluded, his body was found in a river near the site of the protest). Paredes gave a rousing speech about sexism in leftist circles, and about how feminism can mitigate 'toxic individualism' – something Guevara's iconic place in history all too often embodies. Although this disparate collection of leftists is hewing to Guevara's notion of international revolution – in Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and throughout South America – they seek this transformation through solidarity and not armed struggle.

Vallegrande's 50th-anniversary celebration of Che's life, death and legacy was a oftentimes-incongruous affair. T-shirts with his famous countenance were on sale, as were guerrilla caps featuring embroidered red stars. **Mercados** were full of merchants selling local handicrafts; hotels were overpriced and booked full; and tourists stood in line and paid admission to visit the graves of Guevara's fellow guerrilla fighters. Older men walked around in freshly pressed fatigues, and a surprise appearance by Guevara's elderly brothers and their families excited bands of young Argentinians in attendance. Although their look, songs and dances were more in line with those of **fútbol** fans than salty, unwashed guerrilla fighters in the jungle, they had a youthful enthusiasm that attenuated the contradictions of the event. Sure, this was a celebration of a foreign man who tried and failed to foment a Bolivian peasant revolution; a man who rejected the wishes of the Bolivian Communist Party's leadership, which insisted that democratic reform, not guns, would lead to victory. This was a man who was willing to sacrifice Bolivia so that revolution in neighbouring countries could succeed. And 50 years later, socialist Bolivia is surrounded by neoliberal states.

But in some small way, the spirit of Guevara lives on. His militant drive to force change – through violence, through armed insurrection – has evolved in his self-proclaimed political heirs. Instead of guns, there is coalition. Instead of a long slog through the jungles and scrub, there's a long slog to the all-too-imperfect ballot box. Instead of a monomaniacal will to power through revolutionary force, there are scrums of young people on the street, singing songs and snapping pictures, chasing the ghost of Che Guevara in the foothills of the Andes.

PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

A CULTURE OF SILENCE

ABORTION AND A NOVEL CONVERSATION

TEXT: FRUZSINA GÁL

On 30 September 2017, the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies approved a revised version of the nation's penal code that could make abortion laws more flexible in the country. Article 157 of the proposed bill gives access to safe and legal abortions to more women than ever before. Beyond cases of rape, incest and life-threatening pregnancies, the revised penal code allows abortions for women who are studying and women who take care of people with disabilities, children, the elderly or other dependants, and in cases of teenage and child pregnancies. Passing the bill would be the first significant change to Bolivian abortion laws since 2014, when the legal requirement for a judicial order to request an abortion was abolished. As a result of this, the number of legal abortions in Bolivia has increased from a total of seven between 1974 and 2014, to more than 100 since then.

Although the proposed changes to the penal code could permit safer and more efficient ways for women to gain access to legal abortions, anyone acting beyond the law could face one to three years' jail time. The possibility for change has initiated a seemingly endless debate between predominantly Christian pro-life supporters and pro-choice advocates. But is one step enough, in any direction?

According to UNICEF, Bolivia is one of the world's leading countries in maternal mortality, due to clandestine abortions or the lack of available reproductive-health information. As stated by the Bolivian Ministry of Health, abortion is the third-leading cause of death of women in the country, resulting in more than 500 deaths per year. Mónica Novillo, director of the NGO Coordinadora de la Mujer, claims that abortion is first and foremost a human-rights problem. 'Abortion is the consequence of the absence of fundamental rights. If women can't decide when to have relations, if they are raped, if they have no access to information on how their bodies work, if they have no access to contraceptive methods, then the numbers of maternal mortality will never change.'

Abortion, however, is as much a social-justice issue as it is a human-rights concern. According to the Coordinadora de la Mujer, Bolivia, which has one of the highest rates of sexual violence in Latin America, has approximately 185 illegal abortions taking place each day. Data indicates that women who die from these procedures are mostly women who can't afford safe clinical care. Naturally, women coming from privileged economic backgrounds have access to better health care. According to the Bolivian Ministry of Health, two-thirds of maternal deaths involve women from the Quechua and Aymara nations. This indicates a correlation between socio-economic backgrounds and reproductive-health safety, although women from all backgrounds deserve access to the same solutions.

Further data points at a more complex and thoroughly cultural issue: silence. In the case of indigenous girls and women, history, socio-economic position and tradition all play into a culture of secrecy regarding sexual matters. Beyond cultural heritage, religious beliefs also play a role in silencing conversations about reproductive health. And the Judeo-Christian concept of shame, paired with the indigenous culture of secrecy, makes open discussions about abortion a rare occurrence in Bolivian society. Instead of encouraging a safe, well-informed sexual life, these cultural factors foment silence, increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancies and other social issues.

According to Tania Nava, director of Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, religious fundamentalists often spread misinformation in Bolivia based on guilt and sin to discourage abortions. Even Catholics with a nuanced understanding of the issue employ sin as a tool to advocate for their positions. Bernardo Prieto, for example, who is a local researcher and journalist, sustains that 'as Jesus teaches, the true fulfillment of justice is mercy.' But the very concept of mercy implies wrongdoing. According to pro-choice activists, abortion should be addressed as a public-health issue devoid of moral considerations, because as long as it is considered a moral issue there will be reasons for silence. And silence results in death – 206 deaths for every 100,000 births to be exact. In Uruguay, where abortion was decriminalised, there are only 15 deaths for every 100,000 births. The contrast between these figures sheds light on the weight of the problem in Bolivia.

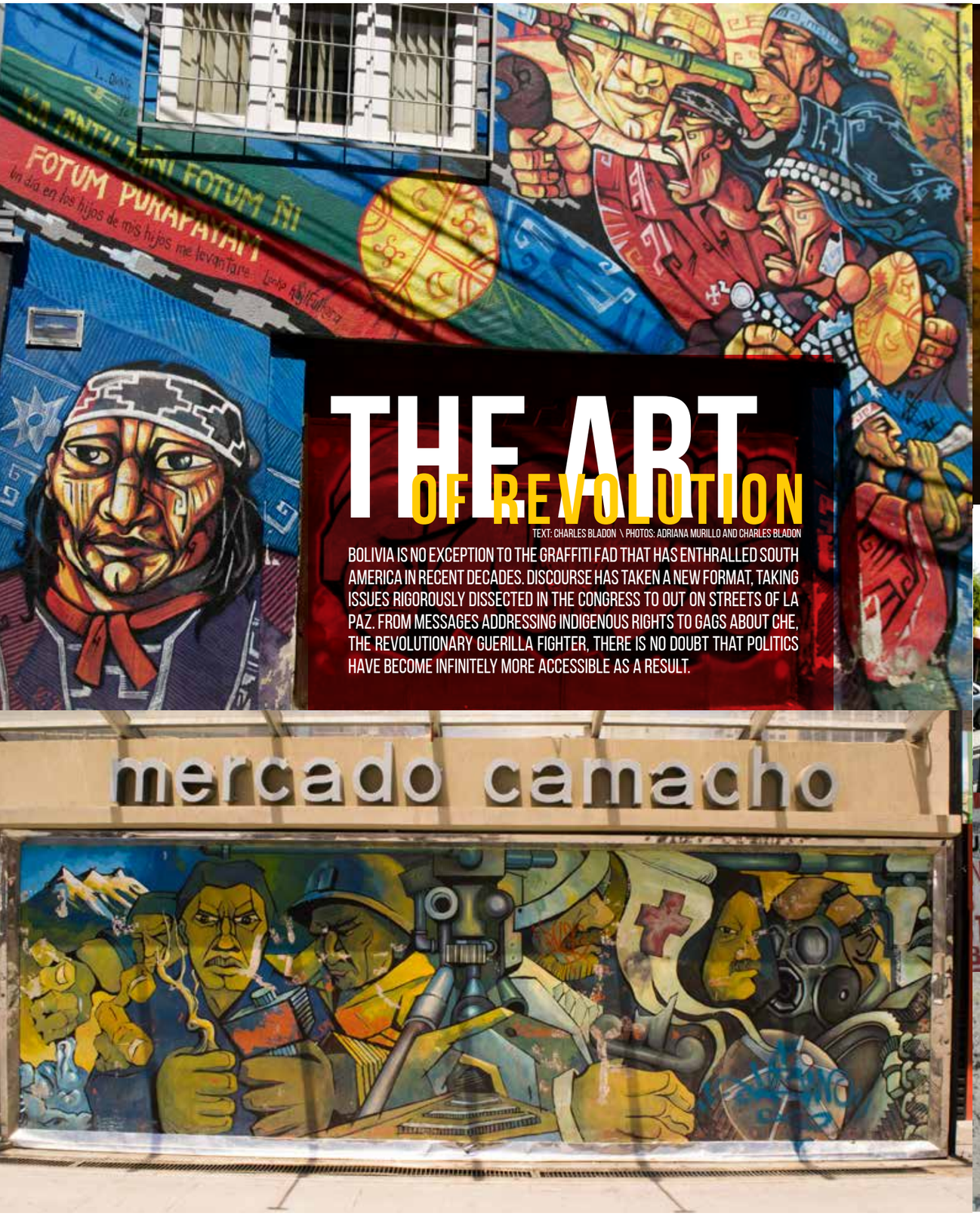
APPROXIMATELY 185 ILLEGAL ABORTIONS TAKE PLACE EACH DAY IN BOLIVIA.

As Mónica Novillo suggests, in order to move the abortion debate away from the moral arena, it might be better to take abortion out of the penal code all together. That way, she says, 'It won't generate clandestine activities and profitable businesses that feed on the desperation of women. If we remove it from the penal code it becomes the responsibility of the state to provide safe abortion clinics.' Most pro-choice activists would agree, sustaining that the revised penal code in Bolivia is progressive, but that it is far from decriminalisation. Although this is a small step forward, it seems to please local interest groups involved with the issue. But why is that the case?

Julieta Ojeda, of the women's collective Mujeres Creando, responds plainly: 'From a political point of view, it isn't progressive. Even if the bill passes, it is only a neutral middle ground meant to please everyone.' According to her, the distinction to be made here is between legalisation and decriminalisation. Some activists point out that the legislative assembly has not decriminalised abortion, it has merely added exceptions for legal procedures. Others believe the apparent progress is a convenient outlet for political campaigns and manipulation. But in our meetings with pro-choice groups, most people shared a sense of victory over the possibility of progress. No one seemed to mind that it took 20 years to make this incremental improvement and might take another 20 to reach decriminalisation.

ABORTION IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A HUMAN-RIGHTS ISSUE.

The abortion debate has sparked interest and action in diverse spaces in Bolivia, from religious to secular groups, from the social to the political arena. This ongoing conversation is crucial for achieving further progress on the issue.



THE ART OF REVOLUTION

TEXT: CHARLES BLADON \ PHOTOS: ADRIANA MURILLO AND CHARLES BLADON

BOLIVIA IS NO EXCEPTION TO THE GRAFFITI FAD THAT HAS ENTHRALLED SOUTH AMERICA IN RECENT DECADES. DISCOURSE HAS TAKEN A NEW FORMAT, TAKING ISSUES RIGOROUSLY DISSECTED IN THE CONGRESS TO OUT ON STREETS OF LA PAZ. FROM MESSAGES ADDRESSING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS TO GAGS ABOUT CHE, THE REVOLUTIONARY GUERILLA FIGHTER, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT POLITICS HAVE BECOME INFINITELY MORE ACCESSIBLE AS A RESULT.

PARTIDO OBRERO REVOLUCIONARIO

THE OLD GUARD OF BOLIVIAN TROTSKYISM

TEXT: CHARLES BLADON
IMAGES: ADRIANA MURILLO

Since 1825, there have been 88 governments in Bolivia, with an average of 2.2 years per government. Chronic political instability has become somewhat intrinsic to the country over the past century with modern Bolivian history seeing the people take matters into their own hands to produce change. Irrespective of their alliance, be it with worker unions, the petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals or the military, people have strived for change. Bolivia's political landscape has been transformed by the 1952 National Revolution and the military coups that plagued the mid- to late 20th century. An ideology that played a central role in the 1952 National Revolution is the Marxist doctrine imported from the 1917 Russian Revolution that profoundly influenced Bolivian politics throughout the last century.

Trotskyism, the doctrine of the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, has had an especially influential role in the guidance of Bolivia's political direction. Manuel Gemio, a Bolivian Trotskyist, intellectual and expert in economics and planning, tells me, 'The role of Trotskyism in Bolivia is very important. It transcends its history. You can't understand the history of Bolivia without Trotskyism.' In the past century, the arrival of political parties such as the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) introduced Bolivia to Trotskyism in 1935 (before communism arrived in the 1950s) and helped garner support for the 1952 National Revolution, changing the face of Bolivia's politics.

Trotsky was assassinated 12 years before the 1952 National Revolution, but his belief that workers should determine the direction of progress in society resonated in the hearts of Bolivian workers. This, coupled with the theory of permanent revolution and the notion that socialism cannot truly work unless it is enacted globally, is the foundation of a Bolivian Marxist doctrine known as the Theses of Pulacayo. The Theses of Pulacayo was Bolivia's guidebook to Trotskyism and laid the foundation for revolutions to come. It was established by a federation of miners in 1946, with Guillermo Lora – the poster boy for Trotskyism in Bolivia – among them.

The 1952 National Revolution initiated the nationalisation of the mines, introduced land reform and allowed for universal suffrage, three important principles of the workers' movement. This was a fight started by the Bolivian bourgeoisie in alliance with the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR). But the revolution was virtually on its knees when a coalition between miners, the MNR and the POR saved the movement. The miners stormed the capital alongside armed civilians and successfully sieged La Paz, emerging as heroes of the revolution.

Although the revolution was saved, the consequences of these events were a huge failure for the POR. MNR only used the alliance to build support for its cause, ignoring the POR after seizing power. The POR thereafter declined due to a split among members who supported the MNR and those who didn't, as well as competition from other left-wing parties that introduced Marxist doctrines, such as Maoism and Marxism-Leninism. The failures of the **Guevarista** guerillas in the 1960s further weakened their position.

Today, these hardened Trotskyists have been overshadowed by Evo Morales and the incumbent **Movimiento al Socialismo** (MAS), a party that claims to be of the same Trotskyist heritage and where many Trotskyists of the old guard have moved. Although MAS draws on socialist policies, the active members of POR aren't convinced. At the POR's centenary celebration of the Russian Revolution, various worker representatives made this view clear. 'What has the **Indio** [Evo] done?', an Aymaran farmers' union representative yelled, convinced of the limited impact of Morales's time in office. 'He has made it worse, he brought hunger and despair,' he continued. The MAS rose from the ashes of the Sánchez de Lozada government, which brutally suppressed coca farmers, miners and indigenous people. The MAS attained power with the help of workers' unions that had more than half a century of experience. The current government is seen by some as revolutionary, but the old leftist guard isn't satisfied.

Outcry was rife at a recent event commemorating the centenary of the Russian Revolution. The scene was awash with adoration for Lenin, Trotsky and the iconic Guillermo Lora, their figures immortalised in banners. Farmers, miners and industrial workers alike loudly voiced their dismay towards the MAS government. Further discontent was evident in the blood-red banners calling for the forceful resignation of 'socialist pretenders'. 'We will fight for democracy,' a miner said on stage, 'fight against the oppression and the lies!' People in the crowd raised their fists and sang the party's anthems. However, despite the apparent unity and crowded attendance at the event, the POR is a party whose base comprises ageing academics, plays no political role today, hasn't managed to renew itself, and still parrots Trotsky's very same words.

‘YOU CAN’T UNDERSTAND THE HISTORY OF BOLIVIA WITHOUT TROTSKYISM.’
—MANUEL GEMIO, BOLIVIAN TROTSKYIST

The POR is certain of its goals (which haven’t changed since 1935 and include seeing Trotskyism come into fruition, following the example of the Bolshevik Revolution), but it is unclear whether the party can actually achieve them. With a question mark looming over the organisation, its lack of new, younger members provide an eyehole into its future. According to Jamie Jesus Grajeda García, executive secretary of a local student federation, today’s youth does not take much of an interest in politics. ‘The issue is that young people are more focussed on themselves than on the betterment of the country,’ Grajeda says. The global trend of diminishing youth engagement in politics is disconcerting for the POR. In the past, the party’s support network was made up of workers and Bolivian youth impassioned by the plea for change. But that support is dwindling.

Whilst the party often questions its future, it remains unquestionable that POR’s original objective, its permanent fight to revolutionise the system, is the only thing that keeps it alive. This mood of disgruntledness resonating from the theatre halls hosting the party’s conferences was well-timed. With Evo Morales pushing his reelection as MAS’s presidential candidate, a call for revision and change is prudent due to the discontent sowed by the familiar foe of past authoritarianism. Moreover, this period coincides with a centenary which acts as a time of reflection and a moment to look back at the Russian Revolution as an example. For old-school Trotskyists, it was also a time for envisioning an epic comeback for the party, like ‘the aged bear’ that revived and became a powerhouse for the people – a vision that ensnares the hopeful workers of Bolivia who still feel so hopelessly disenfranchised.

PORTRAIT OF MARCELO QUIROGA SANTA CRUZ, A SYMBOL OF BOLIVIA’S FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY

TEXT: ADRIANA MURILLO
TRANSLATION: CAROLINE RISACHER
ILLUSTRATION: HUGO CUELLAR

In the 1980s, during the dictatorships of Luis García Meza and Luis Arce Gómez, many important leaders and figures of Bolivian civil society were disappeared or assassinated, such as the Jesuit priest Luís Espinal and the writer and socialist leader Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz. Espinal was brutally murdered. Quiroga was captured, tortured and killed, his remains still missing today.

I heard of Marcelo Quiroga for the first time coming from our old kitchen radio. This was followed by my father’s comments: ‘He was brave and he fought for democracy’ and ‘He is a real revolutionary.’ At the time I didn’t fully understand what my father meant, but I could detect a melancholic tone of courage in his voice when he said that. I was studying at university then, and I understood that Quiroga wasn’t just a name, but that he represented the fight for democracy. His face was reproduced on flyers and posters. Like Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, Quiroga’s name and visage was used as a symbol to infuse a revolutionary spirit at all sorts of political

events. I finally began to understand Quiroga's message, though, when I read his novel Los deshabitados, a grandiose book in which he captures perfectly the subjective traits of his characters and describes what he called 'the representation of the disorientation of the aimless middle classes.'

Quiroga was a multifaceted man whose interests touched literature, journalism and cinema, but who was caught in the web of politics. Born in Cochabamba to a father who worked for Simón Iturri Patiño (a tin baron who was one of the wealthiest men in the world at the time), Quiroga studied law, philosophy and literature. He was passionate about the arts and listened to the music of Beethoven and read the poetry of Góngora. In 1969, Quiroga was appointed as head of Bolivia's Ministry of Energy and Hydrocarbons under President Alfredo Ovando, and he fought to nationalise the US-based Gulf Oil Company. Later, in 1971, he founded the **Partido Socialista** (PS-1), which participated in the general elections of 1978, 1979 and 1980. The PS-1 won five seats in 1979 and 11 in 1980. As a member of Parliament, Quiroga worked to bring ex-dictator Gen. Hugo Banzer Suárez to justice, a fight that would determine the course of his life (and death). 'The 1980s were hard times; money was devalued, leftist leaders were attacked, the military acted in total impunity—we [the people] were the only ones who suffered,' says Don Gerardo, a newspaper seller since 1970 who remembers those days as a time of hardship and repression.

On 17 July 1980, Gen. Luis García Meza, who had previously publicly threatened Quiroga, orchestrated a coup d'état. On that day, the CONADE (Bolivian National Council for the Defense of Democracy) met, bringing together all the country's leaders who were standing for democracy. The opportunity was too good for the putschists. Paramilitaries interrupted the meeting with gunshots, wounding and capturing the leaders, amongst them Quiroga. They were taken to the army headquarters, where they were tortured for days, and Quiroga was killed. Meanwhile, in the **Palacio Quemado**, President Lidia Gueiler Tejada was forced to sign her resignation. 'I had to renounce, my ministers were imprisoned, paramilitaries were in the streets.... And they had to humiliate me further by making me read my resignation as I was sobbing,' remembers the ex-president in the documentary Siglo XX, by Carlos Mesa (himself president of Bolivia from 2003 to 2005).

Photographic records show signs of torture on Quiroga's body, which, despite his family's petition, was never released. On 2 September 1980, Quiroga's family received a letter from Col. Luis Arce Gómez, one of the participants in the coup, informing them that the whereabouts of his body were unknown. Years later, when reading this, I could barely contain my indignation thinking that Quiroga never received a proper burial. During Bolivia's many dictatorships, '**desaparecido**' was one of the most difficult words for a family to live with, but one of the most frequently used. Only Quiroga's watch and ring were returned to his family.

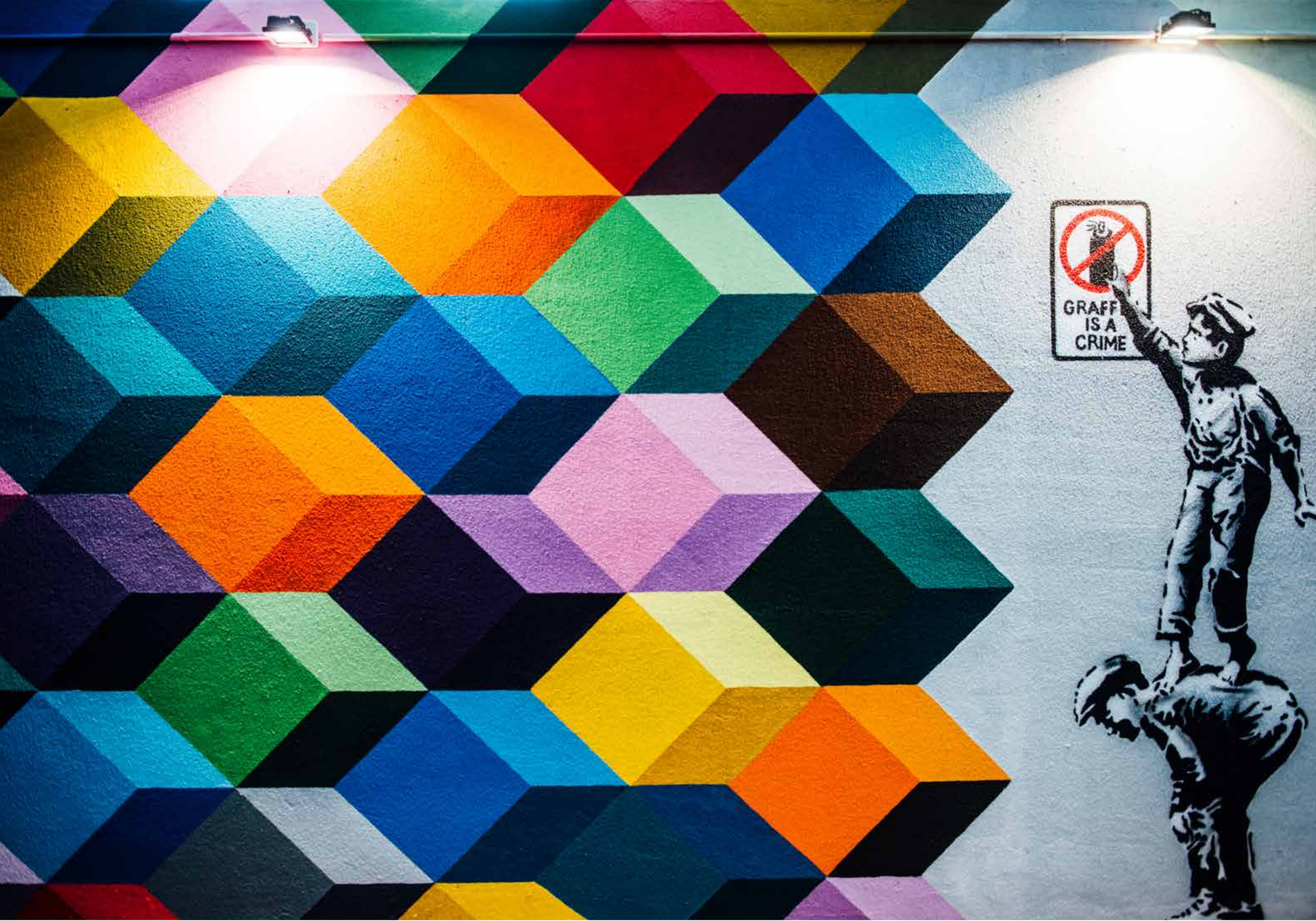
'DESAPARECIDO' WAS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT WORDS FOR A FAMILY TO LIVE WITH, BUT ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY USED.

Regarding the people responsible for the crime, and according to information the family had gathered, the mastermind behind his assassination was Gen. Hugo Banzer Suarez, carried out by the assassin Froilán 'El Killer' Molina, arrested in 2016. Molina worked in the security forces of Banzer's wife. There are different theories and versions about what happened, but the latest one, according to an interview with Luis Arce Gómez, now serving time in the Chonchocoro jail, is that Banzer himself admitted that Quiroga's body was buried on the grounds of his Hacienda Santa Clara. Banzer reportedly bragged that the man who tried to bring him to a criminal trial was now lying under his feet.

Quiroga was assassinated as he was reaching the apotheosis of his political potential. A lucid man and an outstanding speaker, he was committed to the Bolivian people's interests – and the mark he left is indelible.

Throughout its history, Bolivia has fought against many enemies of democracy. Acts of terror and repression by military dictatorships, not only in Bolivia but in other Latin American countries, were commonplace. And Marcelo Quiroga, who died fighting for a democratic ideal, is but one of many revolutionary martyrs who are now part of Latin America's genetic makeup. The Bolivian people, who have suffered and had their blood shed due of the indifference or malice of autocrats, are the heirs of those martyrs.

With time, Bolivians have become inured to the sounds of daily protests, to blockaded streets. I like to think that somehow this is a good thing, that these are not futile fights, and that the people who face it all are able to stand for the common good.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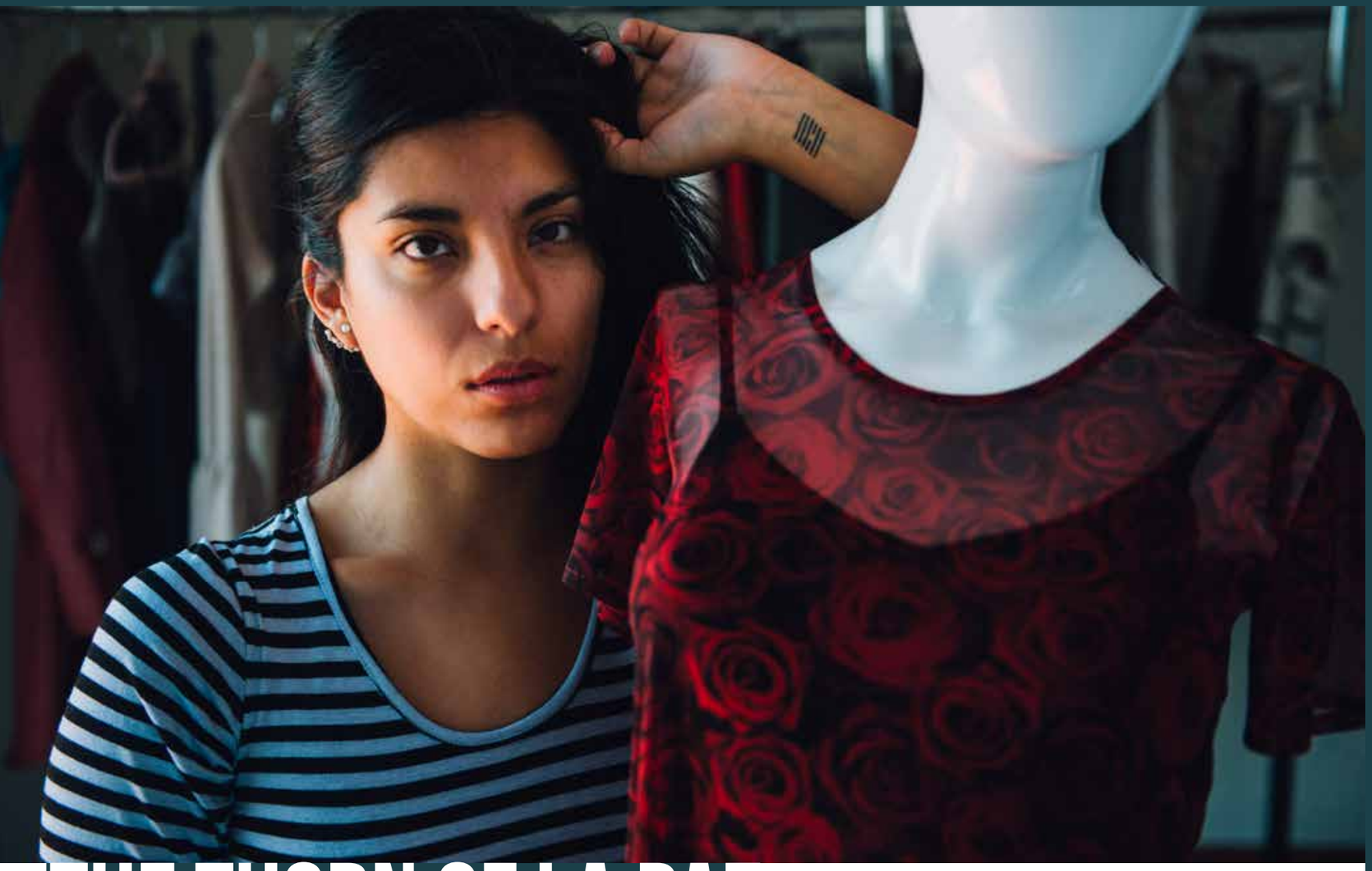

THE THORN OF LA PAZ

INSIDE THE MIND OF A BOLIVIAN FASHION DESIGNER

TEXT: FRUZSINA GÁL \ PHOTO: IVAN RODRÍGUEZ PETKOVIC

Hidden in the deceptive mishmash of eccentric apartment blocks and the bustling traffic of the Calacoto neighborhood in La Paz's **Zona Sur** district is the studio of an idiosyncratic fashion brand. Even with the accolades that the brand has received in recent years, the studio is nearly impossible to find – unless you know where to look. Sitting in the minimalistic but stylish space is Vania Rodríguez, the creator and designer of the Bolivian fashion world's extravagant secret, La Espina. Like the thorn of a rose, this **alta costura** brand stands out amidst the otherwise mostly artisanal crowd of the Bolivian fashion industry. At 27 years old, with the past three of those being dedicated to La Espina, Rodríguez finds herself in a position that she has always dreamed about. For the most part, La Espina might be hidden from the unsuspecting eyes of the general public, but for those in the know, the line has great significance in **la moda paceña**.

Prior to founding La Espina, Rodríguez studied fashion and textile design in Argentina. When she returned to La Paz, her hometown, she decided to design a line of clothing to accentuate a sense of Bolivian identity, but without the all-too-traditional motifs and styling of mainstream Bolivian fashion. 'I felt that was an old, tired image of Bolivia,' Rodríguez says, 'but I really wanted to portray aspects of our Bolivian culture, and so for my first collection I drew inspiration from dancers and artists, and from historical [narrative] passages.'

Three years down the line, La Espina still conveys a distinct sense of Bolivian identity while remaining singular in its own right. According to Rodríguez, La Espina is a fusion of both Bolivian and Western influences, and she keeps a keen eye on the current trends, fashion shows and her favourite designers, translating them into her line. Throughout the past few years, La Espina has been carried by several multi-brand stores in Santa Cruz, Santiago, Buenos Aires and, of course, La Paz. Lately, friends and colleagues have been pushing Rodríguez to open a boutique in Santa Cruz – where, she acknowledges, the Bolivian fashion industry is most developed, and people are more consumer-driven – but so far she refuses to give in. Rodríguez is happiest designing in her studio; she doesn't want to market her clothes to people who don't understand or appreciate her aesthetic. She'll leave that to others.

La Paz might be behind in the fashion industry, but Rodríguez is hopeful that this will change. As she points out, it's more of an accomplishment to achieve her goals here than in some other, more fashion-oriented city. People in La Paz are more prudent when shopping, and luxuries, such as high-end clothing, oftentimes get the short shrift here. However, this attitude is slowly changing, and an appreciation for fashion is developing. 'More and more people are asking me how or why I do certain things in my design, and in the end, that is what [my customer base] buys,' Rodríguez says. 'They are becoming more connected with the meaning of the garments. People in La Paz tend to buy less, but good-quality and interesting stuff.'

La Espina is precisely about this unique element of unexpectedness. As a designer, Rodríguez remains curious about what makes Bolivia Bolivia, and what makes fashion fashion. She draws her inspiration from those parts of everyday life that go unnoticed – hence the name, 'The Thorn.'

'When I was looking for a name for my brand, someone suggested a beautiful flower, like a rose,' Rodríguez says. 'I don't care for beauty standards, and I instantly knew I would never name it something so frivolous. I care more for investigations above and beyond, for seeing something that nobody else has seen, and I declared that, if anything, I would call it something more interesting, like the part of the rose that nobody sees or particularly cares about. And La Espina was born.'

Rodríguez says that her design process comes from this same fondness for observing the fractures and details in otherwise ordinary scenes. As an artist, she likes to look and go beyond the expected, and that is why La Espina has been a returning highlight of Bolivia's Fashion Week for three years in a row now. Rodríguez says she enjoys the atmosphere of exclusivity surrounding her brand. To her, La Espina isn't meant to be like any other brand. 'I want to be in interesting places, I want to be a secret,' she says. 'Ever since I was a little girl, I've always had this image of a huge fashion house, one that people know about but one that is so secret that you have to knock on a few doors before discovering it. I'm definitely proud of what I've achieved so far, but I still have a long way to go.'

Currently, Rodríguez is working on the costume design for a movie directed by Juan Carlos Valdivia (of *American Visa* fame) currently being filmed in Bolivia. Simultaneously, she's designing her new collection for Bolivia's Fashion Week in December. Asked about her inspirations for the collection, she says that it's going to be far from ordinary. 'La Espina is about completing an individual's personal statement,' Rodríguez says. 'I strongly believe that clothes are the skin you choose, and although my clothes can be very minimalistic, if they speak to me and they speak to you, then I have achieved my goal.'

GLOSSARY

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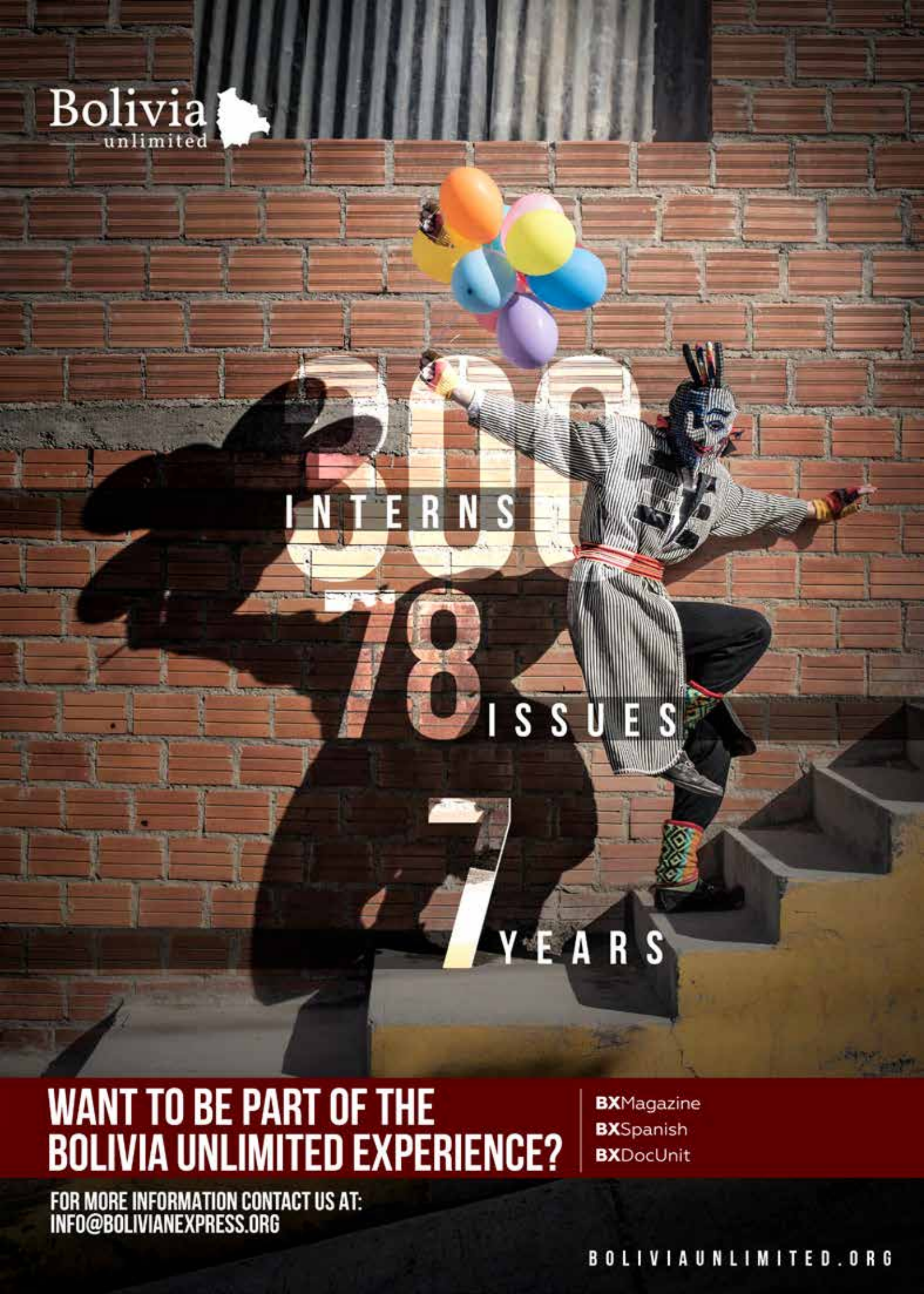
ALTA COSTURA	*Haute couture*
BRIGADA ASALTO	Assault brigade
COMANDANTE	Commander
DESAPARECIDO	Disappeared
EJÉRCITO DE LIBERACION DE BOLIVIA	Group of mainly Bolivian and Cuban guerrillas led by the guerrilla leader 'Che' Guevara in Bolivia from 1966 to 1967
EL IMPERIO	'The empire', usually in reference to the United States and its capitalist influence
FÚTBOL	Soccer
GUEVARISTA	Followers of Guevarism, a theory of communist revolution and a military strategy of guerilla warfare associated with 'Che' Guevara
INDIO	'Indian', refers to people of indigenous origin, with a negative connotation
MERCADO	Market
MODA PACEÑA	Fashion from La Paz
MONTONERO	Argentine leftist terrorist and urban guerrilla group, active during the 1960s and 1970s
MOVIMIENTO AL SOCIALISMO	'Movement Toward Socialism', Bolivian President Evo Morales's part'y
PALACIO QUEMADO	'Burnt Palace', the governmental headquarters in La Paz
PARTIDO SOCIALISTA	Socialist Party
PUEBLO	Village
QUEBRADA	Ravine
RUTA DEL CHE	'The route of the Che', the tourist itinerary following the path of Che Guevara in Bolivia
ZONA SUR	'Southern Zone', an upscale area in the south of La Paz



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