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Magazine

Colours

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I can't count how many times I've seen it. Or maybe a better word is experience it. Whether bouncing in the crowded seats of a late bus from the **altiplano** or in the back of a taxi on my way home from an early-morning flight that just landed in El Alto, pre-dawn is the prime time to arrive in La Paz.

In those early-morning hours, there is a black blanket over the valley, hiding Illimani behind its thick curtain. You want to think the city is sleeping, but continued traffic and city sounds tell your hazy mind otherwise. But what gets you is the golden aura of La Paz, the orange, sodium glow that covers the valley in its unique nocturnal hue. The colour is a reminder of the clay bricks that make up the buildings of this city in daylight, but at night the colour has a different, soothing energy. As you approach the ledge of El Alto to begin the winding plunge down into the city's depths, the lights of El Prado call you down, as the steep slope of Villa Fatima watches from across the valley. Down below to the right, you can make out the similar glimmer from Obrajes and beyond, Zona Sur giving off its own particular colour.

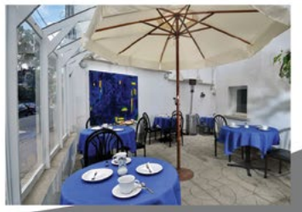
In these moments, no matter how tired I am, how dirty, how uncomfortable, I open my eyes wide to take in the fiery colour of nighttime La Paz.

In this issue of *Bolivian Express*, we were inspired by these breathtaking moments, which so many of us have experienced living and working here. In day and night, colour takes on special meanings in Bolivia. From the grand swaths of purity in Sucre, Bolivia's White City, to the rainbows of colors on towering murals breaking the greys and browns in the far reaches of El Alto, colours here continuously surprise. We see them in the blackened fingers and dark clothing of La Paz's masked **lustrabotas**, and in the painted faces of its all-too-lovable clowns. And perhaps most notably, the artisans of Bolivia deploy colors to imbue specific meanings in their works, from elaborate, handmade textiles to ostentatious masks and costumes used in traditional dance. And with all the activity throughout the country, from the millions of people here living lives and changing its landscapes to the swaths of tourists visiting its incredible sites year after year, it is people who certainly bring the most colour to Bolivia.

My frequent nighttime rides down into La Paz will always be my strongest association with colour in Bolivia, but this country's many shades and hues continue to enrich life here. Wherever one wanders, the colours are the first details to note. They contain secrets that can unlock so much of the mystery here, waiting to be understood. But for me, whether I have been gone for two days or two years, that hazy golden ride down the ridge from El Alto to La Paz conjures wonderful feelings inside me. And it reminds me of why I call this place home.

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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Quality tradition

Hidden in the Sopocachi neighbourhood of La Paz you will find La **Cueva** Boulder Gym. From the outside, the building looks like any ordinary home, but it houses La Paz's premiere climbing wall. As the name suggests, the small entry conceals a cave-like space that is perfect for bouldering.

Bouldering is a climbing sport that is characterized by its short and explosive nature, which is why you don't need high walls to practice it. When entering La *Cueva*, I was surprised by the infinite climbing possibilities that had been created. On the night I visited, it was filled with a very enthusiastic climbing crowd.

Daniel Aramayo is the founder and owner of the gym, but above all he is a very experienced climber. He started climbing at the age of fifteen, inspired by his older brother to pick up climbing shoes and give it try. His first attempt wasn't very successful, but after a few years he tried it again. From then onwards, he was infected by the climbing virus. 'In order to improve your climbing skills you need to practise a lot,' he says. 'La Paz and its surrounding mountain ranges provide multiple possibilities to climb, but you depend on weather conditions.' That is what encouraged him to build an indoor boulder gym with his climbing friends.

The gym offers sixty square meters of space and has 600 holds of all shapes and colours. They are colour-coded to mark different routes, from beginners to advanced levels. The Bolivian climbing community consists of fifty to sixty active members of different ages, but La *Cueva* is not the only place where they come together. Daniel and his friends spend their weekends climbing at a rock formation called La Galleta, close to Zona Sur. They have set up over fifty routes by drilling bolts into the rocks in an area that is open to the public.

This group of climbers also hosts an event called Bloqueando. Its tenth edition will take place from the 28th to the 30th of October at Valle Challkupunku, 220km southwest of La Paz, near the Chilean border. Preparations for the anniversary include new boulder routes set up by the team.

José Luis Claure, an organizer of the event, is expecting about 150 participants of different climbing levels. This year, Bloqueando will offer climbing lessons, giving beginners a great opportunity to develop their skills. Besides climbing, there will be side activities to sit back and relax from the rocks, including volleyball, slacklining, and movies. As Claure explains, 'It's quite tough to climb the whole day, we need to chill as well.'

The organizers have made great efforts to prepare an promising event full of climbing, great food, and parties, surrounded by a beautiful landscape in the middle of nowhere, where you will pitch your tent (if you are lucky) under a sky full of stars.

Registration for Bloqueando is open. For more information, visit http://bloqueando.com/

DRIFTING THROUGH THE WHITE CITY

THE STORIES THAT LIE BEHIND THE WALLS OF SUCRE

TEXT AND PHOTOS: ALEXIS GALANIS

The city is known by many names: Charcas, La Plata, Sucre. The uniform whiteness of its walls covers up its seismic historical shifts and complex identity. But the nooks and crannies of each building and street belie the city's pallor and reveals the colourful personality of Bolivia's 'White City'.

It's 9 am in Bolivia's most beautiful and iconic square, Plaza 25 de Mayo. The city centre is slowly waking up. **Sucrenses** sit peacefully, reading newspapers among palm trees, flowers, and the towering statue of the city's eponymous hero, Antonio José de Sucre. The morning sun shines upon the stunning white façades that frame the square. Tranquillity and fierce Bolivian pride fill the air in equal measure at the heart of the constitutional capital of Bolivia.

It was here that the first cries of freedom were proclaimed on the 25th of May, 1809. To my right is the monument of that proclamation, the most historically significant building in Bolivia, the House of Freedom. Walking through the door, I immediately find myself in an open courtyard. To my left, I'm greeted by the recently erected statue of Apiaguaiki Tumpa, the legendary **Guaraní cacique** who fought for his people's liberty in the late 19th century.

In each room, a pivotal period of Bolivian history reveals itself. The highlight is undoubtedly the Hall of Independence: a huge open space, filled with silence, ornate decoration, momentous artefacts, and portraits of Bolivia's national heroes, that feels almost sacred. The feeling is, in part, due to the fact that the hall was constructed as a chapel by the Jesuits in 1621. Although the Jesuits were exiled from the country in the 18th century, the

fine **Mudéjar** coffered ceiling and the stunning gold-leaf altar are a welcome reminder of their lasting imprint.

The room's air of sanctity owes more, however, to the crucial events that took place here. It was here that the Act of Independence from Alto Peru was signed on the 6th August, 1825. The historical document remains the centrepiece of the hall, framed, mounted, and overlooked by a portrait of Simón Bolivar. In this room, Bolívar drafted the first constitution of Bolivia, awarded the presidency of the Republic to Antonio José de Sucre, and declared the newly named city the constitutional capital of the country.

Leaving the House of Freedom, the imperious Baroque façade of the Chuquisaca Governorship Palace and the domineering bell-tower of the Renaissance cathedral stand side by side as monuments from two distinct periods of Sucre's history. With the motto "La Unidad es Fuerza" (Unity is Strength) embossed beneath its central arch, the former Presidential Palace proudly amplifies the republican spirit of the House of Freedom. The Cathedral's bell tower reaches high into Sucre's ever-blue sky and looks out at the thirty-five churches scattered around the white cityscape, an indelible landmark that points to a pre-Republican past.

In this city, white churches have sprouted everywhere. The first of these, the Iglesia de San Francisco, is just one block from the main square. An in-depth tour takes me through the delicate history of the building, which served as the primary living quarters of Villa de la Plata after its foundation in 1538. On the rooftop stands the Liberty Bell, which tolled to signal the first cries of freedom in 1809. Every 25th of May, the President of Bolivia returns to this church to ring the bell in commemoration of the nation's independence.

It is 1 pm: lunchtime. Next to San Francisco, rather conveniently, is the Central Market. Wading my way through a sea of fruit stalls, I eventually arrive in the maze of the market's main building. After stumbling around for longer than I care to admit, I discover '7 Lunares', which I'm told prepares the best the **chorizos** in the world. Not a **choripan**, they tell me, but a *chorizo* **chuquisaqueño**. A double-*chorizo* sandwich sets me back 13 bolivianos. Was it the best in the world? Maybe.

Appetite satisfied, I make my way back to the main square via the Museum of National Ethnography and Folklore (MUSEF), housed in an impressive colonial building that used to be the National Bank of Bolivia. With no entry fee, it's a great place to learn about the history and customs of Bolivia's ethnic groups. Among its permanent exhibitions is the visually stunning mask museum on the first floor, showcasing the extravagant and colourful masks used in festivities by various indigenous groups.

The two most famous chocolate shops in Sucre are a short walk from the museum. Since Sucre is the chocolate capital of Bolivia, any chocolate lover needs to visit at least one of the two. Some will vouch for 'Chocolates Para Ti'' and some for 'Taboada'. Both can be found on the corner of Plaza 25 de Mayo where Arenales and Arce meet. In order to join the debate, I'll say that my hot chocolate from 'Chocolates Para Ti' was fabulous, an ideal mid-afternoon treat to keep me going through the day.

Pausing to look back at the white walls and terracotta roofs of the busy centre, I climb my way up to La Recoleta, zig-zagging from Calle Calvo to the charming and still streets of Grau and Dalence. As I approach the **mirador**, the streets become more narrow and quiet, and their names get weirder: 'Black Cat Street', 'Grey Cat Street', 'White Cat Street'. Untouched by the hints of modernity that brush the edges of central Sucre, this is a strange and eerie area to walk through, filled with history and superstition. During the Chaco War, part of the local population was widowed, which lead to a boom in the numbers of our small feline friends. It is said that a dark and seductive widow roams these streets at night, calling drunkards in by name and making them disappear mysteriously.

THE CATHEDRAL'S BELL-TOWER REACHES HIGH INTO SUCRE'S EVER-BLUE SKY AND LOOKS OUT AT THE THIRTY-FIVE CHURCHES SCATTERED AROUND THE WHITE CITYSCAPE

It is 5 o'clock when I arrive at Plaza Anzures, and it becomes clear why the Franciscan order chose to build a monastery here as a retirement home for elderly monks. The church sits peacefully in the folds of **Cerro** Churuquella, looking upon the open ochre space of the plaza, where school children gather in the late afternoon. I take a seat at Cafe Mirador, barely tucked beneath the arches of the lookout, and sip on a glass of red wine as the sun slowly sets on a sea of white and terracotta.

I CAN'T FEEL MY FACE WHEN I'M WITH YOU

A One-Sided Love Affair That Was Never Meant to Last

TEXT: IZABELA WLODARCZYK
PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

I cannot really explain how this love came to be. What I can tell you is the story of how we met and let you decide for yourself.

That day, I wasn't looking to fall in love. I was tasked with interviewing a clown for this publication, a clown that does not speak but only communicates in squeaks and whistles. I was told his name was Edgar but goes by Garo, that he was 27 years old, and that for the last three years he's been busking on the corner of Sagarnaga and El Prado nearly every night. I heard that he loved to get the audience involved in his routine, and that each performance was a crazy mixture of pantomime and acrobatics. He apparently channelled his inner child, mocking unsuspecting passersby and harassing vehicles stopped in traffic.

I set out to find him and to ask him the usual questions: Do clowns get sad sometime? Does it bother them that they are often feared? Do their painted faces disguise constant pain and sorrow? You know, questions of that nature.

When I got to Sagarnaga, I heard him from across the square.

We made eye contact, and I felt my heart flutter. He squeaked something that sounded vaguely familiar but escaped my understanding. I'm pretty sure it was 'I love you, marry me, let's start a family' – but like I said, it was a bit squeaky and unclear.

WE DON'T PICK THE PEOPLE WE FALL IN LOVE WITH, AND I NEVER PLANNED TO LOVE A CLOWN.

We don't pick the people we fall in love with, and while I never planned to love a clown, this is exactly what happened. Many of us fall for clowns, but mine just happens to be the kind that paints his face and wears bright, patchy outfits.

He went back to entertaining the crowd and I was drawn to his confidence and the love he exhibited for his craft – things I really respect in a man. During his break, he ran up to me and squeaked in my face – how bright and promising our future seemed at that time!

Now, I am not a naïve little girl, but I know that any woman would consider herself lucky to be loved by this clown. Knowing that there are very few, if any, female clowns working the area, I asked him what he liked in a woman. Based on all the women he hit on and whistled at, I would say he seems like to women in short skirts, women holding babies, women carrying large sacks on their backs, women who are walking quickly, women who are walking slowly, women over 50, women under 50, women on their cell phones, and women with men on their arms. This clown did not discriminate, which just goes to prove the purity of his heart. Clearly I had a chance with this clown, and would just have to learn how to communicate it to him, so the following day I put on my best face and headed out to find him.

MOST NIGHTS I JUST END UP IN TEARS, WATCHING MY MAKEUP RUN IN THE MIRROR.

I won't lie to you and say it was easy when I found him making eye contact and whistling at another woman that harrowing next day. Now the squeaks that used to make my heart flip only serve to haunt me as I walk the lonely streets of La Paz. I think about how I could have been the woman who finally made him speak his first words. I think about the man who made me laugh – a man of few words and many squeaks who seemed to understand me better than any other. I think about him daily, but most nights I just end up in tears, watching my makeup run in the mirror.

As in most relationships, I guess there was some miscommunication – maybe I misread the signs, I can admit that now. I thought I spoke Spanish, but maybe not his squeaky dialect? This is something my therapist is still trying to unravel.

He's really cute actually, my therapist. I really do think he cares about me in a special way. Whenever we make eye contact, his brown eyes kind of sparkle.

DAVID ///
/LEMAITRE

In classic folk style, Lemaitre is returning to Bolivia after many years of working and musical growth abroad, to overload the box office with a series of concerts which tell the story of an entire lifetime. From Berlin, we present the Bolivian, David Lemaitre.

Photo by Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic

READING AGUAYOS

DECODING THE MYTHS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

TEXT: JET DE KORT
PHOTOS: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC
CAMIJETA IMAGE COURTESY OF MUSEF

Walking down the crowded streets of Mercado Rodriguez, surrounded by vendors selling odds and ends, I slow down my pace to avoid bumping into a **cholita**; on her back is a bulky and colourful wrap full of groceries. As I pick up my speed and observe the assortments of stalls and merchants, I notice that many of these women are wearing the same sort of wrap. When I take a closer look, I discover the variety of these colourful pieces of clothing, their patterns distinguished by different materials, symbols, and colours.

On these pieces of cloth, called **aguayos**, men and women write and paint stories of their communities, using the symbols of their culture. These stories change depending on the region, each of which has distinctive colours, designs, and techniques. The fabrics have abstract designs, indigenous and figurative representations, sometimes surreal monsters.

ON THESE PIECES CLOTH, MEN AND WOMEN WRITE AND PAINT STORIES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES, USING THE SYMBOLS OF THEIR CULTURE.

Although there are many places in Bolivia where people use authentic *aguayos*, most of the bright and colourful ones that roam on the street are likely to be industrial products. They come from Peru, and are distributed throughout Latin America for very low prices. Although these pieces are common on the streets of La Paz, you can find traditional *aguayos* in rural areas of the country, where the weavings embody the stories of a community.

1. JALQ'A

Produced by the very remote Jalq'a community near Potosí, this piece of *aguayo* is a very rich and complex textile art. The rectangular Jalq'a tissues are often characterized by a single space, without having any segmentation or strips on the side. The red and black colours represent the darkness in which these communities lived, which some say existed in a time 'when the sun was the moon'. The design is chaotic; there are figures everywhere, of different sizes. It is unclear where they begin or end. The Jalq'a pattern represents a dark world filled with strange beings that belong to a non-human society. The most common creation is a fantastic animal, called a **khuru**, which means 'wild' and 'untamed' in Quechua. Their presence indicates the unknown, a place where man is not dominating.

2. TARABUCO

In contrast to the Jalq'a weaving, this material has more real and humane representations and is influenced by the Spanish **conquistadores**. The Tarabuco community is located near Sucre, which explains why it uses occidental symbols such as horses. Tarabuco clothes are always symmetrically organized in strips of varying widths. This also applies to the symbols, which have a definite nature, including pictures of detailed animals and humans. The scenes depict important moments of everyday life, like women weaving and men playing the flute.

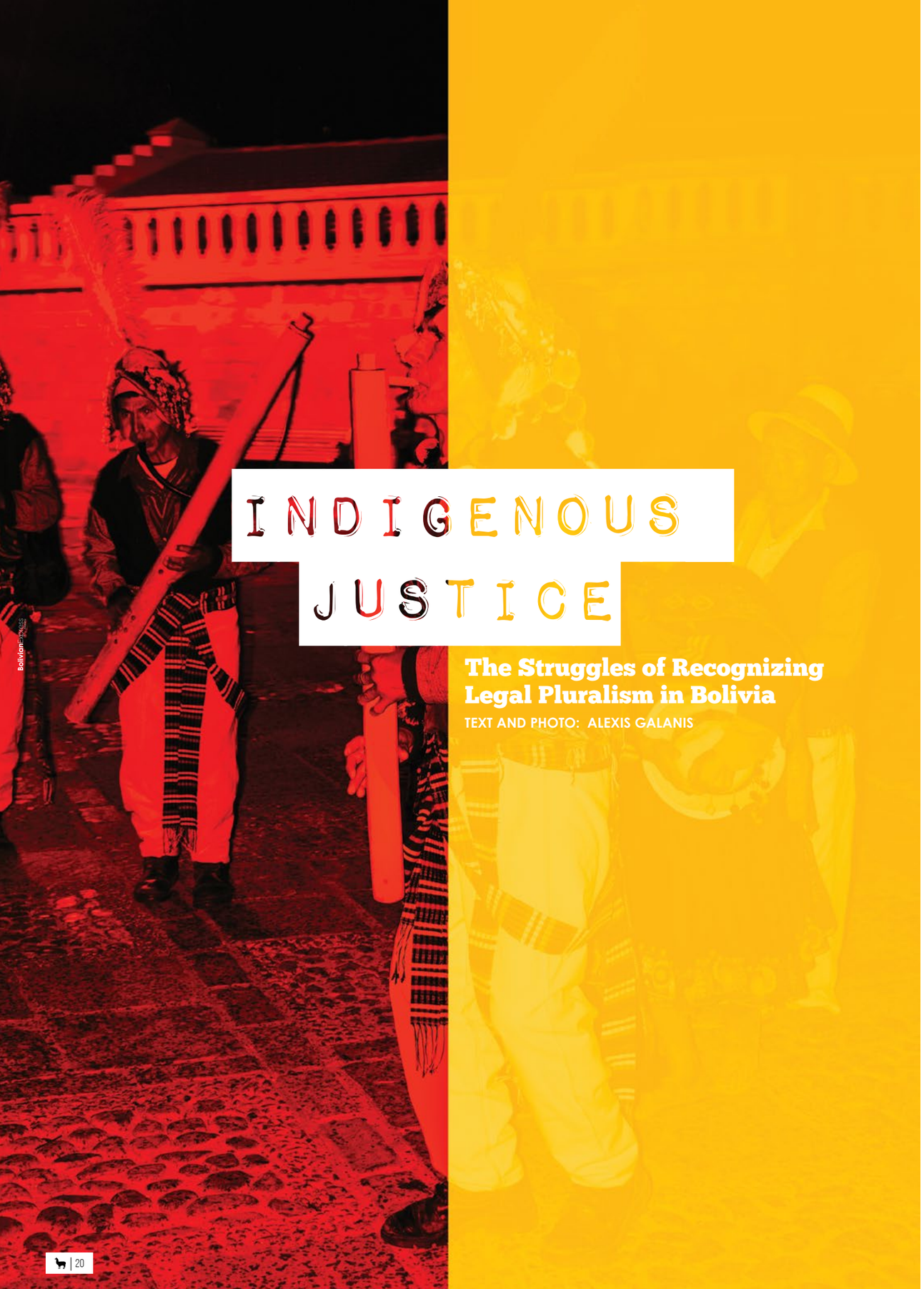
3. KALAMARKA

On the **altiplano** near La Paz, communities have been producing the same sort of *aguayos* for the past hundred years. These are characterized by the alternating use of **pampas** and **saltas**, where the plain monochrome areas are defined as *pampas*, and *saltas* refers to the areas containing symbols. The *salta* illustrates the quotidian life of these communities by using symbols of their surroundings, mainly referring to the countryside. This specific *aguayo* includes a key motif with hooks ending in sharp points at top and bottom, portraying the insignia of the local healers. Typical to this type of *aguayo* is the use of natural colours, such as white, blue, and red.

4. CAMIJETA

Far-flung in the Amazon region of Bolivia, you will be able to find this very traditional type of textile. This sleeveless tunic is worn by Yurakaré men from the Beni department in ceremonial settings. It is organized into five vertical and five horizontal rows with the same sort of design. The oval shapes resemble typical Amazonian seeds, flowers, or fruits, such as **cacao** or **achiote**. The colours vary in each row. Yellow is considered unlucky and could indicate a bad harvest. Camijetas are traditionally made from plant fibre and cotton, which give them a vegetable tone.

The author would like to thank Milton Eyzaguirre and the rest of the team at the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore, as well as the Museo de Textiles Andinos Bolivianos, for help with the research of this article.



INDIGENOUS JUSTICE

The Struggles of Recognizing Legal Pluralism in Bolivia

TEXT AND PHOTO: ALEXIS GALANIS

Blaring trumpets and crashing drums reverberate through the white walls of Sucre. On Calle Dalence, hundreds of people, adorned in an array of colours, march up the narrow street, singing and dancing their way to the picturesque Plaza de Anzures. Here the celebration escalates; the **Wiphala** proudly flies, and an ever-growing crowd looks on as performers from every indigenous community in Bolivia come together to celebrate the plurinational culture of Bolivia.

Samuel Flores, the former leader of the **marka** Quila Quila in the department of Chuquisaca, and now a permanent advisor to the the Tribunal of Indigenous Justice, says this isn't merely a celebration, but a protest against the injustices committed against the indigenous nations of Bolivia. 'The plurinational state is two things,' he says. 'It's the system of the indigenous nations of Bolivia, and the democratic, globalised system of Morales's state.' Flores' words convey a strong sense of bitterness and injustice, which arise from the apparent disjunction between these two systems. 'We have to fight so that "the plurinational state" is more than just a name.'

The Plurinational State of Bolivia comprises more than 50 precolonial indigenous nations. For centuries, they have carried out justice in their territories according to the specific customs and methods of their respective cultures. In 2009, the new Bolivian Constitution recognised for the first time the indigenous nations' rights to autonomy and self-determination as equal to that of the state's justice system. But this idea doesn't always translate to action.

After an intense morning of constructive discussion and debate, the summit breaks for lunch. In the central market, Mama T'alla Florinda González Pérez, the elected indigenous leader from the *marka* Salinas, in the department of Oruro, explains the challenges of her role. 'Our authority is recognised by the state, but the Ley de Deslinde Jurisdiccional ('Law of Jurisdictional Delineation') works against us,' she says.

Introduced in 2010, the Ley de Deslinde demarcates between the state and indigenous jurisdictions and sets up the terms of coordination and cooperation between them. Articles 8, 9, and 10 of the law impose certain limitations upon the exercise of indigenous justice, dictating that it may only be applied when certain criteria are fulfilled, including that the person involved must be from the same nation as the indigenous authority and the issues at hand must have taken place in the territory of the indigenous authority. The 10th article is the most strongly contested. It establishes that certain crimes, such as child abuse, rape, homicide, and drug trafficking, are exclusively under jurisdiction of the Bolivian state.

'The law essentially means that we are only allowed to deal with disputes over land, whereas before we dealt with everything,' Florinda says. She argues that who commits a crime and what type of crime is committed are immaterial and that these restrictions contradict the authority conferred to indigenous leaders in the Constitution. 'If something happens in our territory, that's it; it should fall within our jurisdiction.'

Additionally, says Florinda, the constitutional guarantee of equality between indigenous justice and the state is not being observed. 'We don't have a house of justice, technical support, or any kind of budget,' she says. This makes the job of the **mallku** more or less impossible to carry out. When a case does fulfil the criteria identified by the Ley de Deslinde, the *mallku* frequently doesn't have the economic or bureaucratic resources to pursue a case.

Florinda's complaints are vehement and well-argued, but is her complete dismissal of the Ley de Deslinde entirely fair? The Ley de Deslinde not only sets limits, but validates the Jurisdiction of Indigenous Justice and sets up the terms of coordination which facilitate its application. Moreover, the limitations have an essential function: ensuring that the laws and principles of the state are upheld above all else. It is within reason that the state should wish to control issues as serious as rape and homicide. More importantly, its desire to do so does not, according to Marcos García-Tornel Calderón, an expert in constitutional law, undermine indigenous authority or the equality accorded to their jurisdiction. 'I don't think it violates the principle of jurisdictional equality, because a jurisdiction can exist with a limited field of application and still maintain an equal status.'

> THIS ISN'T MERELY A CELEBRATION, BUT A PROTEST AGAINST THE INJUSTICES COMMITTED AGAINST THE INDIGENOUS NATIONS OF BOLIVIA.

However, García-Tornel believes that the extent of limitations listed in the Ley de Deslinde is excessive and problematic. 'If you look carefully at the list,' he says, 'the scope of matters within the Jurisdiction of Indigenous justice is reduced to a bare minimum.' In this respect, the law does violate the Constitution, although not in a strictly legal sense. 'It's more a violation of the spirit of the Constitution and its plurinational nature, and a lack of due respect for the indigenous nations of Bolivia.'

On the last day of the summit, the indigenous leaders announce their conclusions: to mandate the plurinational constitutional tribunal; declaring the Ley de Deslinde unconstitutional; and demanding the adequate financial support to fortify coordination and cooperation between the jurisdiction of indigenous justice and the state. 'The state needs to understand that we, too, have a right to help build this Plurinational State of Bolivia, and we're not merely acting on an impulse or desire,' says Tata Francisco Ibarra Ortega of the Q'hara Q'hara nation, from Potosí. 'This is a reality – an official decision made by an official jurisdiction of the state. We needn't be afraid; we are prepared to help build this state in this critical moment when we are needed most.'

But others aren't nearly as accommodationist. 'The state is the one common enemy of the indigenous nations of Bolivia,' says Samuel Flores. 'An enemy against whom we, the indigenous communities, need to fight.' For Flores, the severe limitations imposed by the Ley de Deslinde constitute a form of subordination, fomenting scathing views towards the concept of plurinationalism. 'How can we continue to be a part of a state in which we continue to be subordinated? The state is just using us to put on the poncho and the **pollera** and talk about the indigenous communities on an international level,' Flores continues. 'But in practice? Little, if anything at all.... That's why we're here, fighting.'

Flores maintains that the many indigenous nations represented here at the summit are all on the same page. His words, however, suggest a relationship of conflict with the state and a desire for autonomy that contradicts the proposal of strengthened collaboration widely promoted at the press conference.

Conflict or cooperation? Indigenous autonomy or plurinationalism? The Ley de Deslinde, and the controversy it has stirred, has exposed the frighteningly fine line between division and unification in the complex politics of Bolivia.

Through the Eyes of Outsiders

THE TRAVELLERS PASSING THROUGH BOLIVIA AND WHAT THEY SEE

TEXT: TOBY CLYDE

There are always people passing through here. Travellers trickle down through the Peruvian mountains, backpack up from Argentina, or emerge from the Amazonian rainforest. The foreign faces come and go, they have many more miles to cover, a continent still to see; Bolivia is often just a brief stop. Unlike in many of this country's neighbours, for some here the sight of visitors is still a strange one, these distant people who have journeyed thousands of miles from their own homes to stand under a curious local gaze. Yet as international tourism only continues to increase across South America, perhaps it is worth asking: What do these strangers see when they look back at Bolivia?

I am working at Jaguar House, a quiet hostel in the center of Cochabamba. Guests don't usually stay long, maybe a few days. But skip them and you potentially miss a story that spans across countries and oceans. After the 2012 Olympics in London, Keith Banbury arrived in India at the start of his travels, having quit his job and dropped his few remaining commitments. Three continents and four years later, he's still going. He's volunteered for a month in the jungle; had all his valuables stolen in Argentina; and has eaten, as far as he's concerned, an ungodly amount rice and chicken in South America.

His reasons for this global odyssey, however, are really quite simple. 'I don't want to be carrying a backpack when I'm 70,' Keith said. Tall and thin, his concerns are certainly legitimate: his backpack is nearly twice his size. Yet this specter of old age reared up in the motivations of all I spoke to, whether they were in their mid-40s like Keith, or barely into their 20s. Seigfried Fuchs, a young German man travelling with his Irish girlfriend Rebecca Caulfield, had the same thing to say: 'Better do it when you're young than when you're old with a stick in your hand.' Broad-shouldered and confident, it's hard to imagine he'll ever need one.

These folks are certainly more than holiday goers; they are on a journey that demands something of the invincibility of youth. Jeffrey Plume, an easygoing American from Missouri, anecdotally described with considerable relish the chaos of his hostel in Cusco, from the in-house cocaine dealer doubling up as a male stripper to the backpacker pregnant from her **ayahuasca** shaman. 'I meet a lot of crazy people,' he said.

What do these strangers see when they look back at Bolivia?

There is also a sense of intense forward motion in this place, of moving away not just from previous places but also from earlier selves. Silja Studóttir, an arts graduate from Iceland, had good reasons to leave home. Slight, ethereal, and almost fairy-like, she has the kind of blue eyes and long blond hair that comes only from Northern Europe. She travelled to leave her small island and an abusive relationship behind far behind her. 'The word for "stupid" in Icelandic means "if you're always at home"', she said. 'That's the reason I want to travel. I don't want to be stupid in that sense.'

Some left even more at home when they decided to head south. Jeffrey is a PhD graduate in neuroscience and had a burgeoning career in the field. Dissatisfied and impatient, he quit his job, sold pretty much everything, and got on a plane to Latin America. Whilst waiting for his connecting flight in Miami, a fellow passenger asked why on earth he wanted to leave; after all, the United States has mountains and beaches – why travel so far? 'You don't get it, it's different,' Jeffrey told the man.

It is this difference that so captivates the people passing through here, something Rebecca and Seigfried were very clear on. They had spent a year working in Australia together, and as far as Seifgried was concerned, 'They are spoilt there.' It felt to them like a poor mimicry of somewhere else, a bland combination of other places. In comparison, Rebecca said, 'There is so much history, culture in South America.' Of course, there is always surprise at how varied Bolivia is compared to its neighbours. Travelling overnight from La Paz to Jaguar House, Sija described it as taking 'a bus back in time', waking up to find clerks in the bus station using typewriters. In turn, faced by the tall banking towers along Cochabamba's El Prado, Jeffrey felt like he was back in glossy concrete sheen of Miami.

For these visitors, just as hard to pin down are the local people themselves. How long does it take to understand the people of a country? A month? A lifetime? If there was 'hesitancy', as Jeffrey put it, in those he met, this was overshadowed by the plethora of stories these new people had to tell, usually on an overnight bus ride. On his way up to Rurrenabaque, he got into a long discussion with some government officials who alluded to a secretive mission they refused to fully disclose. Keith chatted with a relative of a restaurant owner who was famous, so he claimed, for owning the only vegetarian restaurant in Potosí. The man extended a casual invitation for Keith to visit and a month later he actually arrived at the Manzana Mágico. 'I think he was surprised that I really turned up,' Keith said, although that didn't stop the man giving him a full tour of the city.

It is these stories of connection and involvement that the people I met seemed to enjoy talking about most. In one regard, there is a profound disconnection expressed by these travellers, from the places they left behind to the items they brought with them. 'I don't have anything which is irreplaceable; they're just things, you know, things you carry around,' Keith said. 'You can just move on.' Few I spoke to had come to stay in Bolivia specifically; they had just ended up here, or were only passing through. Yet to travel thousands of miles, to leave boring jobs or difficult relationships behind, is to seek something more than a nice photo. Perhaps it is in search of a place to belong.

'I don't want to be carrying a backpack when I'm 70.'

– Keith Banbury

THE MAN BEHIND THE MASKS

SATURNINO IBAÑEZ AND THE FACE OF BOLIVIAN FOLKLORE

TEXT: ELLEN WEAVER
ILLUSTRATIONS: ALEXANDRA MELEAN

Calle Los Andes is a hidden gem of La Paz. Located just off Avenida Buenos Aires, this colourful incline will take you on a whistle-stop tour of Bolivian folklore. All of the outfits and accessories you may see during a traditional parade are condensed into this hefty hill. Between traditional dress and the odd gorilla costume, however, you will find the **talleres** of artisanal mask makers, who cut, mould and solder the main attractions of Bolivian folklore.

In one particular workshop, 73-year-old Saturnino Ibañez Paredes has been making masks for over fifty years. He is the **maestro** of all *maestros*. 'Young, right?' he jokes. The front room of his workshop is dizzying to the eye. Piles of masks and materials cover the walls, leaving a slim walkway to where his son is preparing a mask. Starting out as an **ayudante** himself, Ibañez worked for thirteen years to learn the tricks of the trade and become a *maestro*.

A single mask will take four days to make, with a day of preparation using moulds to cut the metal. 'You can't do anything without a mould,' Ibañez says. 'Every mask has a set of moulds, and there are many types of masks, all with a name and a dance.' Picking up a mask, he describes how ten different moulds are needed to make the characteristic features of a **moreno** mask: bulging eyes, an oversized panting tongue, and a pipe hanging from the mouth. The mask represents the African men that the Spanish took as slaves. It is worn in a dance called the **Morenada**, to mock the Spanish.

Hundreds of men in these masks dance in troupes at the big festivals, such as La Paz's Gran Poder, where **folkloristas** like Ibañez most thrive. From mask makers and boot makers to musicians and locals selling food, artisans live for these national festivities. 'Everyone brings money to Gran Poder,' Ibañez explains, reminiscing about how he would spend his savings there in his youth. 'People come from all over the world to dance the *Morenada*. Americans, Japanese, French, Chinese – everyone dances here.' People come to Bolivia, rent a **tienditа**, integrate into Bolivian life and learn the dances. 'Bolivians, we are not selfish,' he points out. 'If someone wants to dance, go ahead. It doesn't bother us at all!'

> 'FOLKLORE IS NOTHING WITHOUT A MASK. YOU ARE NOTHING WITHOUT A HEAD.'
>
> – SATURNINO IBAÑEZ

The modern world of migration and globalisation has spread Bolivian folklore all over the world. Bolivians living abroad want to celebrate their culture through these traditional dances and they want to wear Ibañez' masks to do so. Just as appreciation for Bolivian folklore is traversing national borders, it is breaking the boundaries of local generations. According to Ibañez, the change began about ten years ago, when more youths began to take part in the dances.

'Folklore is growing,' Ibañez claims. 'It will never fall.' As new generations join the trade and methods and materials change over time, so do the designs. 'There is no school where you can study these designs,' he explains. Ibañez learnt his trade from his *maestro*, as his juniors will from him. 'I design the masks myself, de mi **computadora**,' he jokes, pointing to his head.

Suddenly, he blows a whistle that scares the life out of me – and then again. Ibañez laughs. He is testing the whistle to sell it to a customer waiting outside his shop. 'Did that frighten you?' he chuckles sitting back down. 'What else...?' he asks, as he roams from one piece of folklore to another among the piles that surround us. Then he focuses again. Taking a deeply genuine tone he says, 'I am the proudest man in the world. I am the only one who makes such good masks.'

Ibañez is humble. Like a true artist, he lives through his art. 'It is a beautiful job. Thanks to this trade I now have a house and children,' he says.

'Folklore is nothing without a mask,' he continues. 'You are nothing without a head,' he says, grinning. This *folklorista* cares about what he makes, but above all he cares for the people around him – from his family to the safety of drunken festival-goers. Working with other artisans, he has managed to ban costume materials, such as tinsel and rope, that can become hazardous during the festival's celebrations. To him, 'folklore is entertainment, nothing more'. But it is artists like Ibañez that keep this entertainment alive. After all: 'Who doesn't like to dance a *Morenada*?'.

LAKE TITICACA

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

AUTHOR: JET DE KORT
PHOTO: ALEJANDRO LOAYZA GRISI

Making my way down to Copacabana by bus, leaving behind the crowded streets of La Paz, I see the landscape changing. From an urban jungle of diesel-spewing minivans, dust, and rubbish, to a place where natural beauty and fresh air is the norm. As I wander along the shores of Lake Titicaca I am struck by an intriguing and serene feeling, but my excitement over the lake's many allures is disrupted by the amount of rubbish I walk by. Further along in my stroll, I find more junk that pollutes the lake. No one seems to pay attention to this sad and worrying situation. Children are playing carelessly in the water while their parents enjoy **trucha criollas** on the lakeside.

This dichotomy is representative of the future of the country's flora and fauna. The lake is a great example of Bolivia's extraordinary beauty and is home to a phenomenal and colourful biodiversity. Its future, however, is at risk. Climate change and pollution are some of the culprits devastating the Bolivian environment, but how do we, as a society, connect with these issues?

This is the question behind *Planeta Bolivia*, a collection of short films that shows the country's beauty in contrast with shocking images of the damage that has been done to ecosystems in Bolivia. The series was made by former president Carlos D. Mesa, anthropologist Ramiro Molina, environmentalist Juan Carlos Enríquez and film producer Marcos Loayza. It warns of climate change and denounces environmental contamination. It creates a feeling of confrontation and shame in regard to our personal environmental footprint.

The protagonists of this complex environmental reality are water, land, climate change, and population density in Bolivian cities. The images of Lago Titicaca are telling. 'People throw all kinds of human trash into the rivers that drain into the lake,' Loayza points out. 'The problem starts in El Alto, where most people pay little attention to the degradation of water resources.' As a result, the image of the world's largest high-altitude freshwater lake is characterized by dirty shorelines full of soda-cans, rubbish, and animal waste.

The first film in the series shows discarded bottles floating in the lake, causing plastic pollution and disturbing the fish population. It captures green algae extending towards the shores of the peaceful agricultural islands that are home to indigenous communities. It displays rust-coloured rivers fed by wastewater from mineral processing.

On top of pollution, its water level is decreasing. The lake suffers from severe drought and the glaciers that fill it are retreating. 'It is a process that has developed much faster than we expected, and it is likely to become the most important effect of climate change,' says former president Mesa. The polluted water that flows downstream from El Alto has reduced the availability of clean water for irrigation and domestic use in the area.

The filmmakers adopt a bold and unusual approach in their filmmaking. The documentaries don't rely on traditional techniques, such as a voice-overs or testimonials of people explaining a wrongdoing. 'We present the problem,' Mesa says, 'and insist that people think about how they can face these big issues. We are not pointing at the guilty, we are not proposing solutions, we want to change the people's perception of environmental problems.'

'TO BE REALISTIC, WE ARE NOT GOING TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD OR BOLIVIA WITH OUR FILMS, BUT WE THINK WE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A NEW ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS.'

– CARLOS D. MESA.

'To be realistic, we are not going to transform the world or Bolivia with our films, but we think we can contribute to a new environmental awareness,' Mesa says, optimistically.

'At this moment, Bolivians have a tendency to think that environmental issues are problems of the other,' says Loayza. 'Not only the United States, Europe, or even big industries are facing and causing these dilemmas. We also have a fragile ecosystem.' According to Loayza, resilience is key to a changing environmental perception. He believes that if one person changes his or her mind-set, it can inspire other people to follow.

As important as personal responsibility is, Mesa doesn't rescind the importance of collective accountability: globally, nationally, and locally. 'For example,' he explains, 'the government of Bolivia has to adopt a much more committed position in this environmental dialogue. The current government is favourable to this discourse because it claims to defend and to be a brother of the environment,' he says, in reference to the **Ley de Derechos de la Madre Tierra**, which defines **Pachamama** as a collective subject of public interest.

Mesa critiques the government for its lack of rigorous policies that protect Bolivian nature. 'The state is in a very preliminary position when it comes to collaboration with other stakeholders,' he says. Although, one should take into account its position; natural resources are crucial for the country, and demanding that they are not extracted deprives the country from economic development other nations have enjoyed from doings in the past.

And the private sector also has a share in pushing the environmental systems towards their limits. As an answer, Mesa argues that countries, companies, and communities should share responsibility and have better relations in order to work collectively on environmental protection.

In the case of the lake, which borders Peru and is home to several communities, cooperation is crucial for its future. By using different media platforms, including social networks, the filmmakers developed a mechanism that allows anyone to participate interactively in this debate and exchange their opinions. In order to reach a younger audience, the films are shown at schools. 'If they change their lifestyle now, it will give hope to the future,' Loayza says firmly, referring to the next generation.

I think about my experience on the lake and its polluted waters and recall the people I saw there. They seem unaware that Copacabana's unique territory is exposed to contamination. Two images come to mind, that of a dirty shoreline and people enjoying comfort.

Sometimes people seem to go on without thinking about the future. I can see a lack of environmental consciousness in some people, and understand why it is necessary to promote this conversation. The lake allowed me to see the face of environmental degradation. Mesa and his team have been able to capture this bitter development, and the pictures presented in the films are almost frightening. The country's physical beauty and its impurities are impressive and have the same effect on the viewer as the lake had on me. This contrast will hopefully make people aware of their role in the environment and inspire them to contribute to a healthier lake.

COLOURS AMONG THE DESOLATE BEAUTY OF THE ALTIPLANO

CELEBRATED ARTIST MAMANI MAMANI'S TOWERING MURALS

TEXT AND PHOTOS: ALEXIS GALANIS

As you drive through El Alto to **zona** Mercedario, the landscape becomes stark, and the hectic hubbub of La Ceja softens to silent desolation. Clouds of dust from the occasional passing vehicle seep through the car window as paved roads give way to dirt tracks. Over the horizon, seven towering multicoloured buildings at the heart of this neighbourhood emphatically break the terracotta monotony of the barren suburban landscape.

The greens, reds, whites, yellows, blues, oranges, and purples of the **Wiphala** swirl around, loudly but delicately singing of Andean heritage across 14 stunning murals in this astonishing, unprecedented project undertaken by the artist Roberto Mamani Mamani. As the afternoon sun pushes through the subsiding clouds, these sky-high kaleidoscopic figures come to life. The walls glimmer, their colours enliven, and each window becomes its own work of art, dozens of canvases of reflected paint set within these colourful giants.

GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress

ACHIOTE - a shrub or small tree originating from the tropical region of the Americas, used as both a spice and a food colorant

AGUAYO - a traditional, colourful weave

ALTIPLANO - Bolivia's high plain

AYAHUASCA - an Amazonian psychoactive brew and traditional spiritual medicine often taken by tourists

AYUDANTE - 'assistant'

CACAO - cocoa or chocolate

CACIQUE - a leader of an indigenous community, derived from the Taino language

CERRO - 'hill' or 'mountain'

CHOLITA - a term of endearment for indigenous Aymara and Quechua women

CHORIPAN - a pork sausage sandwich, one of the most popular snacks of Bolivia

CHORIZO - a kind of pork sausage widely consumed around Latin America

CHUQUISAQUEÑO - of or relating to the department of Chuquisaca

COMPUTADORA - 'computer'

CONQUISTADORES - soldiers and explorers of the Spanish Empire

CUEVA - 'cave'

FOLKLORISTA - 'folklorist'

GUARANÍ - an indigenous population of South America whose territories span much of Paraguay and parts of Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil

KHURUS - Quechua for 'wild' or 'untamed'; a fantastic animal that appears in traditional textiles

LEY DE DERECHOS DE LA MADRE TIERRA - 'Law of the Rights of Mother Earth', a Bolivian law passed in 2010 which defines Mother Earth as a collective subject of public interest.

LUSTRABOTA - 'shoeshiner'

MAESTRO - 'master' or 'teacher'

MALLKU - an elected indigenous leader of a marka (see definition below)

MARKA - territories into which Bolivia's indigenous nations are subdivided

MIRADOR - 'viewpoint' or 'lookout'

MORENADA - a folkloric dance of Bolivia mostly associated with the Afro-Bolivian community and the history of slave ownership in the region's past

MORENO - brown

MUDÉJAR - a style of Spanish architecture influenced by the Moors

PACHAMAMA - a Mother Earth figure in Aymara and Quechua cultures

PAMPA - 'prairie' or a flat area of land; plain, monochrome area of an aguayo

POLLERA - a traditional pleated skirt worn by many indigenous women around Bolivia

SALTA - area of an aguayo containing symbols or images

SUCRENSES - people of Sucre

TALLERES - 'workshops'

TIENDITA - 'little store'

TRUCHAS CRIOLLAS - rainbow trout, a delicatessen from Lake Titicaca

WIPHALA - a multi-coloured flag representing the many indigenous nations of Bolivia

WORKING IN SECRET

THE SHOE-SHINE BOYS OF LA PAZ

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MELODY CHAN

In bright, crowded streets, La Paz's **lustrabotas** wear dark clothes to blend in. It's much too sunny for heavy black masks and jackets, but they choose the heat of anonymity over exposure, protected from discrimination and recognition while in their dark colors, their disguise. They are shoe shiners, carrying around small wooden boxes filled with polishes and smells that accompany their cries to lure in passersby.

Twenty years old, he likes to walk up and down El Prado, parking his wooden stool and sitting in front of each customer. He's lively and vibrant, hugging his fellow masked brothers and dancing with street performers along the way. He greets the avenue like a familiar friend, having spent 10 years working and growing in the area.

He keeps his job a secret from friends and family. Only his eldest brother and his father know that he walks from El Alto after classes to pick up his supplies and mask from where he stores them overnight. With the coins he earns he attends university, with bright plans for the future: he will graduate and start looking for full-time work in a mechanic shop.

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Photo: Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic

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