# BolivianExpress

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Magazine

*The jungle issue* **#86**

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# ROTTED IN HISTORY

TEXT: AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE ILLUSTRATION: MILA ARAOZ

***'La tierra es de quien la trabaja'— 'The land belongs to those who work it', proclaimed the Zapatistas at the turn of the 20th Century, as Emiliano Zapata spearheaded the historical movement which we now remember as the Mexican Revolution. 40 years later, this same slogan propelled Bolivian campesinos to demand broad socioeconomic changes in a country which hadn't yet granted them basic citizenship rights, let alone recognised they made up over 70% of the country's population. A broad-sweeping Agrarian Reform followed in 1953, giving these peasants unprecedented ownership and control over the land they worked on. The Bolivian Revolution of 1952 also enfranchised women and those considered illiterate (a convenient proxy for campesinos), causing a fivefold increase in the number of people eligible to vote.***

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**Directors**
Amaru Villanueva Rance, Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic, Rodrigo Barrenechea, Sharoll Fernandez, Caroline Risacher
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**Contact**
rodrigo@bolivianexpress.org

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# #86 *The jungle issue*

# *Editorial* #86: *The jungle issue*

By: Caroline Risacher

In the waters of the Beni River near Rurrenabaque live pink dolphins, a vulnerable but friendly species which locals and tourists can sometimes see and even swim with. Do not be fooled, though: legend has it that at night these affable creatures may turn into handsome men in order to seduce young girls of their choice. The pink-dolphin-turned-man then visits his loved one at night until she herself cannot be separated from the river – or gives birth to a half-human, half–pink dolphin child. Eventually she throws herself into the water, never to be seen again.

The jungle is an alluring place full of treasures and wonders, but one that can never be underestimated and still remains shrouded in mystery. It is an incredibly diverse environment containing most of the earth's biodiversity and the source of all the latest superfoods: camu camu, copoazu, açai berries, etc. These products will cure you, rejuvenate you, relieve your stress, even make your skin glow thanks to their cocktail of antioxidants, vitamins and other advertised properties. It may be that we are only learning about these now, but humans have inhabited the jungle for centuries: the Moxos in the Beni department of Bolivia were an advanced civilisation whose inhabitants shaped their surroundings and thrived in one of humanity's most treacherous and inhospitable environments.

In this issue of *Bolivian Express*, we wanted to travel away from the Andes and descend into the Amazon basin. Bolivia's share of the Amazon rainforest covers almost 75% of the country's territory; 30 of the country's 36 officially recognised indigenous groups live there, including at least two still living nomadic lifestyles. This is a region rich in history, art and culture. We've met Juan Pablo Richter, a promising young cineast from Trinidad whose latest movie, *El Río*, showcases the Beni region. Our journalists also ventured under the green canopy to find a Bolivian Mennonite community. In this edition you'll also learn about the Festival de Moxos, an exuberant display of indigenous and Catholic traditions.

The jungle is a utopian, dreamlike place that has reminded us, and still does, of a lost paradise, a place that enchants and entices the human mind. But that paradise can easily turn into an inferno, when the abundant rainforest becomes a death trap for explorers and reveals its dark side. The past centuries brought 'modernity' to the jungle and with it the transnationals looking to exploit the rubber, wood and natural gas. The region has been experiencing a modern gold rush; half of the gold exploited in the history of humankind has been extracted in the last 50 years. 'Modernity' also brought narcotrafficking, contraband and organised crime. Giant dams and highways are being built that affect the the ecosystem in unmeasurable ways.

Endemic species such as the pink dolphin are threatened, and the rates of deforestation and contamination are only increasing. Even the latest superfood fads have a dark side – their exploitation can lead to soil erosion, water depletion and land degradation. Demand increases the cost and decreases availability of these products to local populations. Cultivation of new superfoods is often not regulated and might not be the most ethical option. The impact of climate change on the Amazon rainforest is not known today, but the future of the planet will likely depend on it. And it's not just the trees that need protecting, but also the people and the cultures of the Amazon rainforest that deserve respect and recognition.

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

# MENNONITES IN THE JUNGLE

## ONE FAMILY'S GOAL TO BRIDGE GAPS BETWEEN BOLIVIANS AND MENNONITES

TEXT & PHOTO: KATHERINA SOURINE

*At 17, Justina nannies a baby named Anamaria every day on top of house and schoolwork.*

Near the border of Bolivia and Brazil, in the Guarayos province, is the community of 16 de Julio. This village has a peculiar aspect that it shares with many of its neighbouring settlements: it is home to Bolivian Mennonites, of which there are more than 50,000 in the country, some of whom have lived in 16 de Julio for several generations.

Mennonite communities are traditionally isolated, especially those that are most conservative and abide by traditional values such as abstaining from the use of electricity and motorised tools, and dressing exclusively in their traditional outfits. 16 de Julio, however, has native Bolivian residents as well as Mennonites who live in a more liberal fashion, using electricity and modern technology. Pastor Gerhard Fehr Penner, his wife Susana and their family are part of this liberal group and they are working to use their unique history to build bridges between Bolivians and Mennonites.

The Fehr family has lived in Bolivia for 21 years. Pastor Fehr was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, in a community known as the Old Colony of Mennonites. Though this colony lived in a Spanish speaking country, many of its members only spoke Low German, the language Mennonites are taught in school. As Fehr explained, this historical context gave way to the isolation of the traditional Mennonite communities.

'The Old Colony of Mennonites originally emigrated to Russia,' Fehr said. 'While the government welcomed their labour, it did not want them to spread their religion. So they were welcomed under the arrangement that they wouldn't influence Russian culture or religion.' When World War One began, Russia wanted to mobilise Mennonite men for war, which is why they began their search for another place to live. Some colonised in Canada, while others spread to Latin America. Even when Fehr lived among the Old Colony of Mennonites, however, it struck him as strange that the community was so closed off from the world. 'I do not ask that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from evil.' he said, reciting John 17:15. 'We are here to help, not to close ourselves off,' he added.

For the past years, Fehr has spent one day a week translating news he collects from online newspapers, and recording it to broadcast the translation via Radio Transmundial. Though he continues his work, he has a plan to build a functioning radio tower in his backyard.

'I was talking to a friend about the idea and he said: "Well, you already have an antenna and a computer!" which he then donated to me,' Fehr recalled.

At present, Pastor Fehr is applying for a radio licence, and procuring the materials he needs to begin construction. His goal is to finish the project in one year. The station will allow him to broadcast the news, spread the word of God, and talk about cultural events in Spanish, Low German and Quechua, which is spoken in 16 de Julio due to its members from the Bolivian highlands. The radio signal would ideally span from the town Ascensión de Guarayos to San Pablo, which is about 115 kilometres away.

'We can help with practical things too,' Fehr said, in reference to the radio station. 'Like if someone loses a cow, we can announce it over the radio.'

While the radio tower project is the current focus of the Fehr family, they participate in many volunteer projects as well. They dedicate hours to making crafts for a **retiro** near Santa Cruz, for example, where the family volunteers periodically.

Maria Casiero, who lives with the Fehr's as a close family friend, helps lead church services, tutors children and takes music classes once a week in the village. In the future, she hopes to give her children a similar upbringing, even though she knows that the path is difficult. Casiero's peers in public school used to tell her she wouldn't accomplish much if she followed the Mennonite lifestyle. Although it used to bother her as a girl, she now has a clearer perspective.

'I would like to raise my future children in a similar way to how I was raised,' Caseiro said, 'but the world changes every day. If I marry and move closer to the city, everything will be different to the lifestyle here. Despite that possibility, I want them to grow up innocent, free and happy,' she added.

The connection between the Casiero family and the Fehr family was a pivotal event for both family groups that highlights an overarching issue within the Mennonite community. Growing up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Casiero's strove to find a Christian upbringing for their children, but were dissatisfied with the practices of the school system within their reach.

The father, Sergio Casiero, found information about the Mennonites, but was continuously rejected from joining the group because his family was not considered to be of 'pure Mennonite blood.' According to Pastor Fehr, this type of prejudice is especially prevalent in conservative Mennonite colonies, even those that have settled permanently in Latin American countries.

At the time, Fehr was living in the conservative colony of Chihuahua, Mexico, as one of ten siblings in his family. Although it is common for young members of the colony to do hard labour in the fields, Fehr was assigned to work in a cooperative that managed business relations with the world outside the community as well as the colony's inventory of goods. As a curious young man, he learned much of his now fluent Spanish through books. His readings also allowed him to open his mind to what was beyond the limits of the colony. Though Fehr stands by his decision to leave the Chihuahua community, he described his early life with nostalgia.

'I was very happy in the Old Colony,' he reminisced. 'It was my world. I had many friends. But everything changed for me with the arrival of the Casiero family.'

Upon arriving in Mexico, the Casieros were never fully accepted, despite appeals from Pastor Fehr, who affirmed that the Bible doesn't support racist rhetoric, nor mandates that the Mennonites stay isolated from the outside world. After much deliberation, Fehr and his family left the community with the Casieros and moved to Bolivia.

**'WE ARE HERE TO HELP, NOT CLOSE OURSELVES OFF.' —PASTOR GERHARD FEHR**

While the Fehrs are much happier in Bolivia, the colony of 16 de Julio has its own difficulties to deal with. Though it seems that racial or lifestyle differences might create tension between community members, the majority of the clashes are rooted in territorial disputes, as the overlapping history and distribution of land lacked a legal process that legitimised ownership. The limited Spanish skills among Mennonites hinders the process of diplomacy among community members. Additionally, the general lack of resources for the community makes sustainable change hard to achieve.

Despite these setbacks, families like the Fehrs are encouraging a different rhetoric that sees diversity as an asset and the community's environment is evolving to embrace this idea. One of the mothers in the colony is encouraging her children to master Spanish at school, even though she can only speak Low German. Her goal is to help her children develop communication skills and discourage their isolation from the rest of Bolivia. A small piece of this effort was evident at a church service in which Mennonites and Bolivians worshiped side by side. The service made clear that Fehr's vision is relevant to the members who are willing to make a change in the colony. In our modern world, these communal divides can at time seem too extreme to mend. In 16 de Julio, however, the Mennonites are proving it is always worth it to invest in a better future.

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a brand built by the people

The classrooms of the Bolivian Catholic University (UCB), have been a space for our professionals to reflect and analyze the city and its values, based on in-depth studies carried out at local, national and international levels. These allowed to lay down the foundations for building a city brand that attracts investments and increases tourism activities in La Paz.

Three phrases developed by our professionals were put to the consideration of locals and visitors, public and private institutions, national and foreign opinion leaders, academic personalities within the field of tourism, and many others. The participation of the people allowed to choose the slogan, which better identifies La Paz and at the same time projects it to the world.

Now we have the phrase and the main concept of our city brand: "La Paz, city of the sky". Now it's time to give it color and shape. Advertising and marketing agencies have been called to participate in the process, building the visual identity and proposing a campaign to position this brand as a worldwide tourism destination, and generate pride and identification in the people of La Paz.

1



*Professor Jordi Torrents Cruz giving a lecture on Brand Development and Management*

2




*Helen Canqui Tellería casting her vote on behalf of the Hotel Chamber*

3



*The Mayor Luis Revilla announces the winning slogan*

# SHIFTING FOCUS

## APPRECIATING THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE JUNGLE WITH CAROLINA DELGADO

TEXT: RAFAELA ALFORD
PHOTO: COURTESY OF CAROLINA DELGADO

Carolina Delgado is a Bolivian anthropologist who has explored the cultures of indigenous communities in the jungles of Santa Cruz and Beni over the last 14 years. She has led the way in shifting the focus of academic research on Bolivia away from Andean cultures and towards those of the **tierras bajas**.

According to Delgado, the jungle is still considered a foreign, unknown entity, even to many Bolivians. This mystery is what first attracted the scholar, who is originally from La Paz, to the culture of the *tierras bajas*. When she entered the world of academia, Delgado identified a focus of funding and research directed towards Andean cultures in the country. This offered her a wealth of unexplored research opportunities to investigate jungle communities. Fifteen years later, the focus of academic research is shifting towards the jungle, not only validating Delgado's choices, but also placing her in a privileged position to publish and distribute her research in Bolivia and abroad. At present, she is happy to see that young Bolivian anthropologists are choosing to study indigenous lowland communities rather than the previously scripted path of Andean research.

With the mysterious reputation of the jungle comes a multitude of misconceptions. For Delgado, the jungle at first 'seemed very dangerous,' but through the indigenous communities' teachings, '…the space turned into one of life and survival.' Her initial fear of the environment waned as she established connections with the space. Delgado was struck by how the inhabitants of the jungle, especially women, understood and related to the environment. She found that the women of the Chiquitano tribe, for example, knew the names and uses of all the local plants, which allowed them to see the opportunities and resources that the jungle offers. For these communities, the jungle is not a threat. Instead, it provides resources for life and healing.

Yet these communities themselves are subject to stereotypes and discrimination. Delgado speaks of how her female 'allies' and teachers in the jungle, suffer discrimination in urban situations. 'Indigenous women are all too often treated without respect,' she explains, 'as if they were ignorant… It is assumed that because they are indigenous and poor, they are stupid and dirty. Meanwhile, when I was ignorant of how to live in the jungle, these women helped and guided me.'

From Delgado's perspective, the longevity of the 'noble savage' concept is an issue. Studying how indigenous communities combine western medicine with traditional practices, Delgado has seen how the notion that jungle communities should be isolated from the outside world can be patronising and antiquated. The isolated 'purity' of indigenous tribes, she sustains, is an obsolete idea. What should be studied now is how they engage with the modernised world, since indigenous communities need flexible and commercial ties with cities in order to be sustainable. Sustainability is vital to avoid a greater threat to these cultures: immigration to the cities.

The lessons Delgado learned from the jungle have had far reaching personal and professional applications for her. 'You begin to realise that it is a friendly place, in which you have to adapt yourself rather than the other way around,' she says. 'If you are not aggressive towards the environment, harmony can exist.' To illustrate this point, she uses the concept of 'hichi' as an example. Hichi is the spirit that protects living things, to whom you must ask permission before you cut down a tree or go on hunt. The failure to pay respect to this spirit threatens illness or even death to the perpetrator.

The connection between physical health and spiritual wellbeing is another insight that Delgado takes from the jungle. According to this view, everything is formed of connections and relationships between the different dimensions of life. This manner of thinking has helped her make sense and bring order to her everyday life outside the jungle.

Interpersonal relations are also integral to indigenous tribes. The concept of community and unselfishness can inform how one develops relationships with people and with nature. 'Everything, everything changed because of what they have taught me,' Delgado says.

THE ISOLATED 'PURITY' OF INDIGENOUS TRIBES, DELGADO SUSTAINS, IS AN OBSOLETE IDEA. **WHAT SHOULD BE STUDIED NOW IS HOW THEY ENGAGE WITH THE MODERNISED WORLD.**

Rather than feeling nostalgia about home when in the jungle, Delgado has found that the more you understand the jungle, the more you miss it. It provides a space within which you can exist; a place of companionship. Delgado says she never felt feelings of loneliness in the lowlands, just the majesty of her surroundings. 'You actually feel a huge sense of companionship and patternicity in your life that you miss when you leave,' she reflects.

Having identified the unfulfilled potential of the Amazon, Delgado tackled the frontier by studying, learning and adapting to it, rather than forcing her culture upon it. The jungle still instills fear to many outsiders, but what Delgado has learned from its inhabitants is that fear of the jungle can be mitigated by discovering or establishing one's place within it and adopting a position of respect. Currently she is relishing the opportunity to communicate the findings of her research to the world of academia, which is finally waiting with open arms and interest.

# THE FIESTA DE SAN IGNACIO DE MOXOS

## THE COLOURFUL CACOPHONY OF AN AMAZONIAN TOWN

TEXT AND PHOTOS: CHRIS LUNNON

San Ignacio de Moxos is usually a sleepy Amazonian town, but come the end of July, San Ignacio erupts into a festival of fire, faith and jubilation. This is the Fiesta de Moxos, a peculiar festival that celebrates the evangelising of the native people of Moxos, the unique local culture of the region.

The festival is bewildering. It is both a cacophony of noise, emanating from a fleet of marching bands that descends on the town plaza, and a feast for the eyes, with locals of all ages adorned in fabulous colour. It is also well choreographed. The hundreds of performers seem to know exactly where to be and when, but most onlookers appear only to be able to gauge the spectacle, as the meaning of the parades is difficult to ascertain.

The most striking aspect of the fiesta is the warrior dance of the **Macheteros**. All the *Macheteros* are male and they dance solemnly to music from their colonial roots. What's most impressive about the *Macheteros* are their phenomenal headdresses, which are adorned with effervescent Paraba feathers. Their dance is a Moxeño tradition from before the Spanish arrival and it is meant to show how everything that dies gets resuscitated. Thanks to the fusion of catholicism and indigenous Moxeño culture, the dance is seen today as a representation of the resurrection of Christ.

The festival focuses on how the Jesuit order that was founded by San Ignacio brought Catholicism to the Moxos plains and 'civilised'– from the Spanish perspective – the Moxeño people. Archaeological evidence, however, suggests the Moxeño civilisation was one of the most sophisticated in the Amazon rainforest, which raises questions about why they appear to have embraced Catholicism with open arms.

Juan de Soto, a nurse from Santa Cruz who brought Jesuit priests to the Moxos plains in 1669, had first visited the Moxos region two years earlier. He wasn't on a mission to conquer, or even to convert, but met travelling Moxeño businessmen and returned with them to distribute medicines. The initial relationship of the Jesuits with the Moxos focused on the exchange of cultural ideas. But the original Jesuit fathers grouped many of the local tribes together, which caused them to lose their languages and much of their original culture. There was then a smallpox epidemic in 1743 that decimated much of the population. The loss of language and culture, however, was more a strategy of transition to a fused cultural identity than an act of suppression by colonial overlords. The Jesuit priest Antonio de Orellana is said to have asked the first group of indians he baptised, the Casaveano Indians, whether their neighbouring groups, including the Tapimonos and Punuanas, wanted the same – though it is important to remember the reliability of sources about this period of history is questionable.

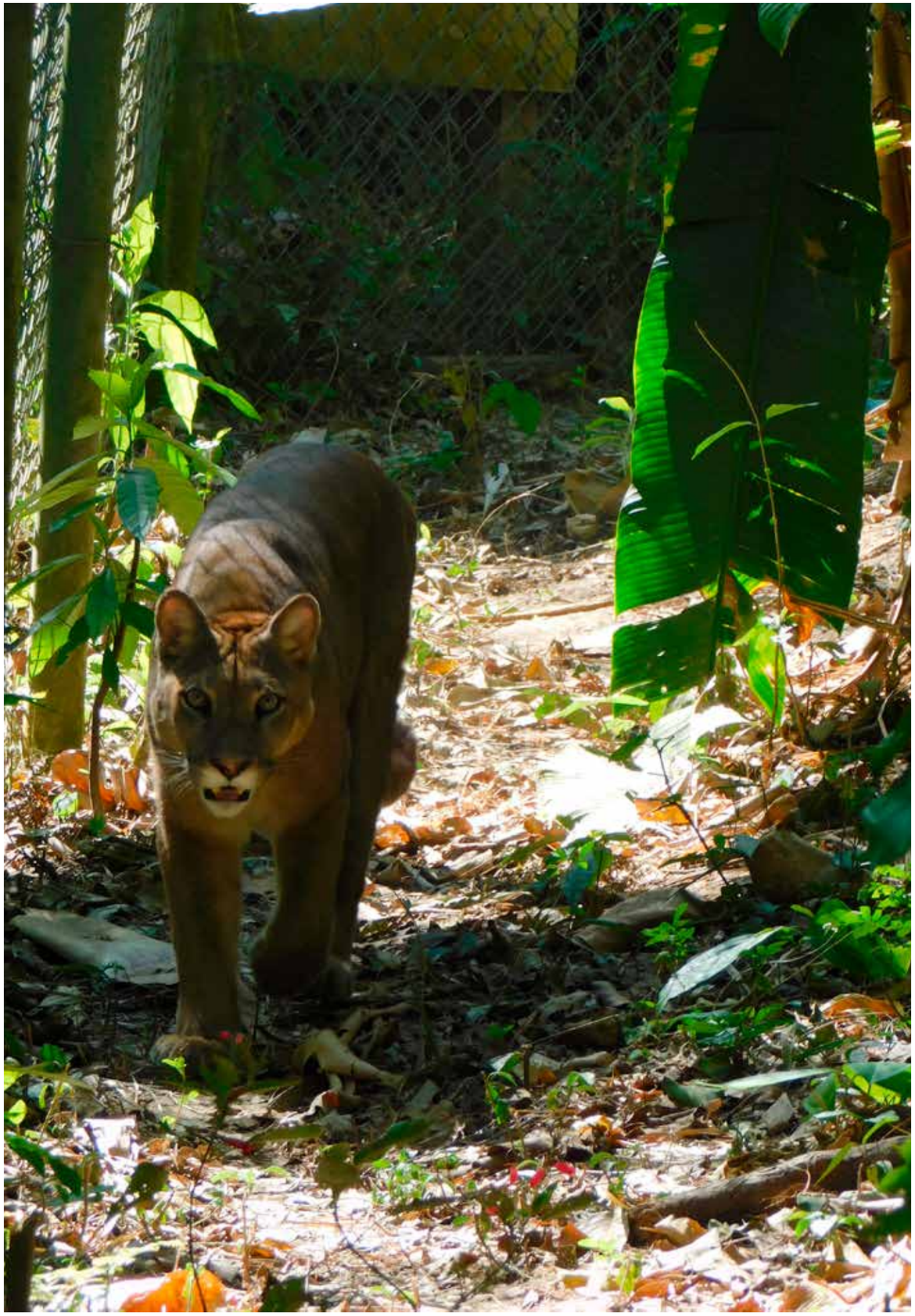
Yet, in spite of its history, the festival is still an incredible sight to behold. The main aspect is the parade, which starts at the indigenous **cabildo** in the back of the town cathedral, and makes its way all around the town. Along with the *Macheteros* are the equally striking **Achus**, masters of the forest and guardians of the flag of San Ignacio. The *Achus* wear sombresuits and have bizarre, clumsily large, wooden facemasks. Come nightfall, the *Achu*s pack their intricate hats with fireworks, before running into the screaming crowds in a sea of sparks.

Joining the *Macheteros* and *Achus* are a host of weird and wonderfully costumed locals. Their costumes seem intricate and beautiful, but unfortunately much of their meaning seems to have been lost over the centuries. Even the names, *Machetero* and *Achus*, seem to have lost their meaning over time.

The highlight of the parade is the bust of San Ignacio himself. Strangely enough, it is he, and not Juan de Soto or Antonio de Orellana, who is most revered, even though he played a marginal role in the unique fate of the town. Then, there are the old ladies dressed in pink, and 'roman guards' who parade the bust, adding colourful weirdness to the extravagance of the celebration.

The final event is the local government's parade, made up of mostly white and wealthy landowners who bear the flag of San Ignacio. Once the parade is over, most of the indigenous locals get drunk and enjoy a savage bullfight.

A visit to the Fiesta de Moxos poses more questions than it answers. At a trivial level, one wonders what on earth one has witnessed and whether this is truly the most eccentric place on Earth. Historically speaking, one may wonder about the cultures that have been lost, despite the evident fusion of the Moxeño and Spanish civilisations.



# A REFUGE FOR BOLIVIA'S MISTREATED WILDLIFE

## WILD ANIMALS ARE REHABILITATED AND CARED FOR AT THE COMUNIDAD WARA YASSI

TEXT AND PHOTOS: CHRIS LUNNON

In July 2018, a beautiful jaguar called Juancho died of old age under the care of the Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi. His life had started out particularly rough. His legs had been broken in an accident as a baby and hadn't fused back together properly. This meant that the zoo he was held in, in Santa Cruz, decided it best not to show him to the public, but instead keep him in a two-metre-square concrete enclosure. Not only that, the staff at the zoo regularly cleaned the space with fire. After an accident one day, Juancho was injured, blinded by the flames. Soon after that tragic event, he was rescued by the Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi.

The Comunidad Inti Wara Yassi looks after many wild Bolivian animals, including a rhea named Matt Damon and fierce jaguars and pumas, all of whom are victims of the illegal wildlife trade. Inti Wara Yassi was founded in 1992 by a group of Bolivian volunteers who worked with limited resources, mainly focusing on improving the social development of impoverished children from El Alto. Over time, the group's main mission evolved into raising awareness about the issues of protecting biodiversity in Bolivia. Inti Wara Yassi now has three animal-rescue refuges in the county: Parque Machia, in Villa Tunari near Cochabamba; Parque Ambue Ari, in the Santa Cruz Department; and Parque Jacj Cuisi, near Rurrenabaque in the La Paz department.

In Parque Ambue Ari, Inti Wara Yassi cares for a troupe of four howler monkeys – two brothers, Lucho and Luis; two females, Bruna and Sabrina – and another male, the lonely Biton, who, due to his aggressive nature, must be kept separate from the others. The monkeys are all former pets who were physically and mentally abused. They lacked socialisation, making them unlikely to ever be able to roam the wild freely again. They were taken from their natural environment during their childhood, and they don't possess the skills necessary to survive in the wild, including the ability to defend their territory or to attract mates.

Critically, these animals have also lost their fear of humans. Ironically, given that humans have destroyed their ability to live in the wild, these howlers see people as 'safe' because of their unfortunate childhoods as pets. 'Luis, especially, regularly pesters for cuddles,' bemoans Bella, an Inti Wara Yassi volunteer. If the animals would be reintroduced into the wild, they'd likely be attracted to nearby human communities and be at high risk of recapture. This is especially evident with

Biton the recluse, who regularly goes rogue on his walks and leaves the forest for human camps when he can.

Whilst the social effects of pethood are bad for the animals, the developmental effects are even more critical. Although the trope of a monkey eating a banana is near universal, bananas are rather fatty. Because captive monkeys are usually overfed with bananas and other unhealthy foods, most of the rescued animals at Inti Wara Yassi arrive with weight issues, either overweight from to inactivity or horrifically malnourished because they are incapable of digesting the food they were fed.

The twin howler brothers, Lucho and Luis, exhibit the neglect they once suffered from. Before they were adopted by Inti Wara Yassi, they lived as pets in Santa Cruz. They were rescued from their owners at different times – Lucho much earlier than Luis. Consequently, whilst Lucho has grown into an impressive, bulked-out, alpha-male howler monkey, Luis is much spindlier and timid. This is due to Luis's lengthier captivity and diet of sugary fruit-juice packets, which has had disastrous consequences for his health. He suffers from gastrointestinal problems and underdeveloped bones. Sadly, Luis's story is not uncommon. Pet monkeys are often discarded once they reach adulthood, when they're no longer cute and cuddly. And after going through adolescence with an extremely poor diet, their bodies are poorly developed and they are incapable of fending for themselves in the wild.

Consequently, the staff at Inti Wara Yassi are only able to reintroduce howler monkeys to the wild if they can be integrated into a well-socialised, interdependent troupe. This reintroduction mostly occurs at the organisation's Parque Ambue Ari location, in the north of the Santa Cruz department, where Inti Wara Yassi owns the land (thanks in part to a collaboration between the refuge and Jonathan Cassidy, the owner of the British travel company Quest Overseas).

The staff at Parque Ambue Ari work hard to ensure that the animals in their care have the best quality of life possible. Big cats are taken for extensive walks in their natural habitat by trained volunteers, two of them attached to ropes that secure the animal and a third for backup. Meanwhile, the howler monkeys have successfully rediscovered how to move through the trees, thanks to the tireless work of volunteers trying to discourage them from walking along the ground, a behaviour they had learned whilst in captivity.

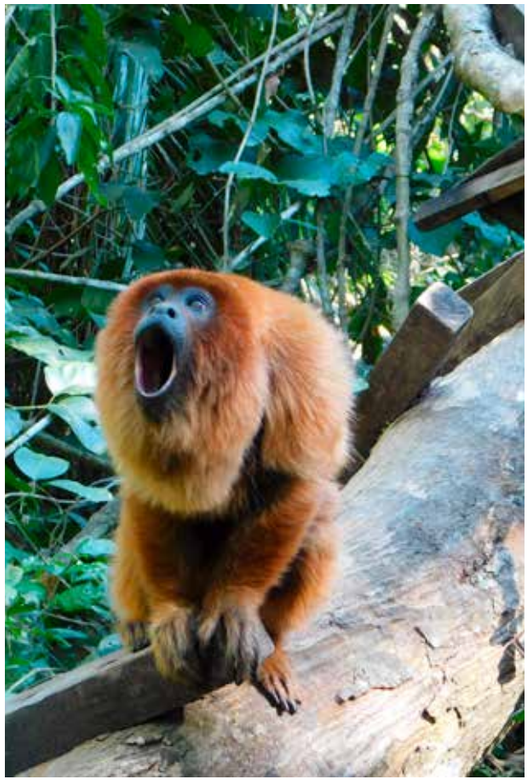
Enrichment programmes are also used to enhance the quality of life. Because captive animals are starved of environmental stimulation, yet retain a lot of their natural instincts, they often become trapped in a cycle of negative behaviours leading to a downward spiral towards aggression. The aim of enrichment therefore is to increase the number of wild behaviours the animals can carry out in spite of the unnatural environment.

UNDERFUNDING AND LACK OF RESOURCES MEANS **WE WILL LIKELY NEVER KNOW THE TRUE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE FROM ANIMAL TRAFFICKING UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE.**

'Ambue Ari has to be very careful with the enrichment activities it choses, as different cats will react wildly differently,' says volunteer coordinator Amy Rogers. For example, a common enrichment method is to wrap food in leaves and then placing it in difficult-to-reach areas around the cat's enclosure. Whilst some cats may relish the opportunity to search for food around their enclosure, others that are more possessive of their food find the experience very stressful.

Inti Wara Yassi must also fundraise to keep the animals in its care safe. The food and medication necessary for the lifetime of a single howler monkey can run up to 7,000 USD. And the refuge's infrastructure costs even more. Rupi, one of the jaguars, received a new 25,000 USD enclosure after he outgrew his old one. The funds were raised through a broad fundraising network, which includes the UK-registered Friends of Inti Wara Yassi charity, as well as contributions from the refuge's largely European volunteers.

Lack of funds and a general ambivalence to the issue are common obstacles for wildlife-rescue organisations. The Bolivian government has its own law-enforcement agency, POFOMA, that is tasked with the confiscation of illegal wildlife from pet markets and people's homes. However, the agency is chronically underfunded and under-resourced. And even once POFOMA rescues an animal, the agency is challenged with finding an appropriate refuge. Wildlife refuges across the country are increasingly overcrowded and underfunded. Recently, Inti Wara Yassi's Parque Machia location lost space to a new highway-construction project nearby, which limited its available land for wildlife.



Parque Ambue Ari has the opposite problem. The 800-hectare sanctuary is so large that it's difficult to patrol. It's also at risk for forest fires, due to local farmers regularly setting fire to their tinder-dry farmland during the dry season. The fires pose a serious risk to the park and are increasing in size because of climate change.

Furthermore, a recent court case in Santa Cruz highlights the ambivalence held by the authorities towards wildlife trafficking. Two Chinese traffickers were apprehended whilst trying to sell the body parts of 60 jaguars on the black market, but the case didn't go to trial – the judge skipped out to take a university course instead.

But there are some positive developments too: The number of wild animals kept as pets has decreased lately, the result of an educational programme – although a lack of accurate statistics makes the picture of the whole situation very murky. And therein lies another daunting problem: When it comes to animals being seized for the global black market, underfunding and lack of resources means we will likely never know the true extent of the damage until it is too late.

# THE LOST CITIES OF AMAZONIA

NEW TECHNOLOGY PROVES THAT THIS REGION, ONCE THOUGHT TO BE UNINHABITABLE, WAS HOME TO ADVANCED CIVILISATIONS

TEXT: ROBYN KATE POLLARD
PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CARLA JAIMES BETANCOURT

It's a well-worn tale: Lured by accounts of forgotten ancient civilisations hidden deep beneath Amazonian forests, an explorer bids farewell to his loved ones for the final time, setting off with his fatal obsession to discovering evidence of one of the great mysteries of the 20th century. Enchanted by such tales, English explorer Percy Harrison Fawcett entered the jungle in 1925 never to return, spurring countless rescue missions and inspiring men and women alike from around the world to venture into the unknown to no avail.

Is there any factual basis behind the myths of glittering empires with fabulous treasuries of gold?

With deadly predators roaming the jungle floor, poisonous insects ready to attack any poor wandering soul and nutrient-poor soil, the Amazon region has for years been thought of as an impossible location for any advanced civilisation in which to thrive. However, new archaeological sites are rapidly being discovered which unequivocally upend the belief that the region was uninhabited. Buried beneath hundreds of years worth of jungle growth, cobwebs of roads and bridges reveal the existence of what were once large-scale complex societies. Unlike the stone monuments of the Incas, the ruins produced by these civilisations have been lost beneath the rainforest, but the ecological footprint they left is proving to be much larger than ever imagined.

THE RUINS PRODUCED BY THESE CIVILISATIONS HAVE BEEN LOST BENEATH THE RAINFOREST, **BUT THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT THEY LEFT IS PROVING TO BE MUCH LARGER THAN EVER IMAGINED.**

According to research conducted by the Royal Society, the catastrophic depopulation from epidemics caused by migration from the Old World, and the sheer brutality of the conquistadors devastated an Amazonian population once as large as 6 million people. The abandonment of many settlements resulted in substantial reforestation, which henceforth concealed the evidence that those civilisations ever existed.

Carla Jaimes Betancourt, a Bolivian archaeologist and assistant professor at the University of Bonn, focuses her research on the Moxo plains in northern Bolivia. This tropical savanna ecoregion is home to extensive remains of pre-Columbian agricultural societies. 'These areas were well-organised, densely populated settlements from around 400 AD,' Jaimes Betancourt says. 'Through the analysis of macro remains and human dietary patterns in the area, we've realised that from as early as 400 AD, **maíz** already played an important role in alimentation.'

The indigenous communities that settled in these regions knew how to manipulate the lands in order for it to be inhabitable. Mark Robinson, associate research fellow at the University of Exeter, explains that **terra preta**, or Amazonian dark earth, found in the Reserva Forestal Iténez provides evidence of advanced cultivation of the land which would not be possible without a human presence. 'The remnant signature of these communities is how they manipulated the soil in order to grow crops such as corn. Human presence was needed to grow such nutrient-demanding crops, as the natural red or orange soil found throughout the Amazon is low in nutrients,' Robinson says. '*Terra preta* has very high nutrient values; to achieve this, [pre-Columbian Amazonian civilisations] had to enrich the soil, which they did by burning it, to increase the charcoal content, and by adding waste from cooking. This allowed them to cultivate crops despite the thin, easily weathered soil that is native to the region.'

Interestingly, the Moxo plains suffer from flooding, sometimes for prolonged periods of time. 'The biggest concern for the communities of this area was water management,' Robinson explains. 'They created big earthworks, huge man-made mounds of soil, on which they settled so that they would always be above water level when it floods. They created linear mounds on a huge scale, some as long as 100 kilometres, with small entryways to direct the water into select areas. This way they were able to trap fish in pondlike areas.'

'What we can learn from these discoveries is that man and nature aren't enemies, they can live together in harmony,' Jaimes Betancourt states. 'These indigenous populations knew how to handle their environment, and did so without causing it harm.'

The key to these new discoveries is the implementation of lidar technology, which is greatly aiding research in dense, previously unseen areas of the Amazon region. 'This technology allows us to see the transformations and modifications of the land through the trees, without having to destroy the habitat or do investigations by hand,' says Jaimes Betancourt.

Lidar is remote-sensing technology that fires rapid pulses of laser light at a surface, then measures the amount of time it takes for each pulse to bounce back to create complex 3D models and maps of environments. The data provide incredible topographical detail over vast areas.

Pre-Columbian indigenous communities may not have left behind quite what the conquistadors had dreamt of so dearly – an El Dorado, or city of gold – but they had an incredibly innovative history of agriculture and a biodiversity of plants and animals that we are still discovering. Most important, the implications for indigenous cultural heritage are significant. Proof of life in Amazonia before European conquest helps to remove the racist typecast that the indigenous were primitive or backwards, and it helps to establish a history and identity for these communities who for centuries have been robbed of it.

# PROYECTO ROSITAS

## BALANCING DEVELOPMENT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: LEIGH ANDERSON

Proyecto Rositas, the plan for a 600 megawatt hydroelectric plant in the Bolivian jungle, is stirring up controversy among activists, conservationists, and indigenous communities in the country.

Set to be located in the department of Santa Cruz, near the convergence of the Grande and Rositas rivers, the project will reportedly infringe on three protected areas of the jungle, affecting nearly 2,500 species of plants and 570 species of animals, according to Bolivian newspaper *Página Siete*. It is also expected to displace hundreds of families in twelve indigenous communities due to flooding.

According to a recent report by the non-profit Mongabay, these indigenous communities have filed a lawsuit against the Empresa Nacional de Electricidad (ENDE) for signing the contract for the project without consulting the locals, a right guaranteed to indigenous populations by the Bolivian Constitution.

'We have not been taken into account,' said indigenous representative Ena Taborga, in Mogabay's report. 'They have not consulted us at the beginning, before or during [the planning of the project].'

The river conservation organisation Sierra Rios has posted a petition on change.org to 'Save Río Grande and the Grand Canyon of Bolivia!' The campaign urges people to 'Say NO to the Rositas Dam project,' and argues that 'the river carries one of the highest sediment loads in the world and would fill in a reservoir with dirt within 30 years, meaning the life of the dam and project is so short as to make it a terrible investment.'

The Comisión Mundial de Presas (World Commission on Dams) acknowledged in a study that dams have significantly contributed to human development, but that 'to obtain these benefits, a very high and unnecessary price has often been paid, especially in social and environmental terms, for the part of displaced people, downstream communities, taxpayers and the environment.'

According to ENDE's website, the project is still in the 'studies' phase and is currently undergoing 'social management' and 'environmental evaluation.'

The three protected areas that would be impacted are: the Parque Nacional y Área de Manejo Integrado Serranía del Iñao, the Área de Manejo Integrado Río Grande-Valles Cruceños and the Área Protegida Municipal Parabanó.

Law 2727, which protects the Serranía del Iñao region in Bolivia, states that its objectives include: 'to conserve the biological diversity of the ecosystems' of the region, to 'conserve outstanding values and richness of fauna, flora, genetic resources and wild species in danger of extinction' and to 'preserve the natural areas for the development of studies and scientific research and environmental education.'

*Página Siete* reports that the contract for the construction of the plant violates legal stipulations at national, departmental and municipal levels. The paper also states that the project's flood area, which comprises 45,000 hectares, will adversely affect the habitats of thousands of species, some of which are endangered.

Reuters reports that the goal of the Rositas Project is for Bolivia to 'become South America's leading energy powerhouse' and to 'export more than 8,000 megawatts beginning in 2025.' The $1 billion plan is being financed by Chinese firms.

'What will happen to our country?' asked Ely Zarate, leader of the one of the 12 affected communities, in Mongabay's publication. 'We only think about money, but we do not think about the future of our children and grandchildren that will come later.'

While the government has promised to help relocate the indigenous communities affected by the project, constitutional lawyer and indigenous rights expert Nelson Lamadrid was indignant about the issue.

'What we do not want is to lose the culture and the indigenous peoples that we have in Bolivia, and we don't want them to be treated as objects,' he told Mongabay. 'They cannot just be moved from here to there.'

Both the Department of Energy and the Ministry of Environment and Water in La Paz declined to comment for this article because they were not authorised to speak about a project in progress.

# FUNDACIÓN VIVA'S PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

## A COMPETITION TO SAVE ENDANGERED SPECIES

TEXT: RAFAELA ALFORD
PHOTOS: PROVIDED BY FUNDACIÓN VIVA

*Steffen Reichle, Contest Winner, 4th*

*Daniel Alarcón, Contest Winner, 2nd*

*Alvaro Montes, Contest Winner, 6th*

In early August of this year, the entry deadline for the National Photography Contest of Endangered Bolivian Species passed. It is an annual competition held by Fundación Viva, the charity branch of Bolivia's popular telephone company. The photographs of the winners, featuring some of Bolivia's most endangered species, will be printed on over 10 million prepaid phone cards for national distribution.

Claudia Cárdenas, Fundación Viva's manager, says that distribution of these images will spread awareness of Bolivia's endangered species. 'People can't love and care for animals whose existence they aren't aware of,' she says. The first release of cards in 2011 featured images by foreign photographers. For the next year, Cárdenas saw the competition as an opportunity to involve Bolivian people in conservation efforts. She hopes that an awareness and pride in Bolivia's wildlife will help support efforts to protect them by forming a relationship between the average Bolivian and endangered Bolivian species.

The competition's past winners successfully captured the freedom of the animals in their natural habitats. 'The photo must not only be a good photo, but a respectful one,' Cárdenas emphasises, 'where the animal is not being maltreated, mishandled or ridiculed.' It should inspire people to want to protect the animals. A photo where a monkey is attacking a child, she helpfully points out, would not be good publicity for the animal.

*Daniel Alarcón, Contest Winner, 6th*

As for the future of the competition, Cárdenas points out that they still have a great many species to photograph. 'We have at our fingertips one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet,' she says, 'so this contest still has a long way to go.'

Thinking of applying next year? Don't be dissuaded if you're an amateur photographer. 'New technology allows anyone to take a lovely photos without having to be a professional,' Cárdenas says. 'Sometimes one can be a professional, but they haven't been able to capture the animal in the perfect moment.'

'WE HAVE AT OUR FINGERTIPS ONE OF THE MOST BIODIVERSE COUNTRIES ON THE PLANET.'
**—FUNDACIÓN VIVA'S CLAUDIA CÁRDENAS**

And if you're travelling in the Bolivian jungle and witness or suspect any illegal trafficking or maltreatment of the local animals, please call this free landline, run by Viva.

*Free landline: 800142052 (Santa Cruz); 800140270 (Beni)*

*David Grunbaum, contest winner, 7th*

*Mara Arias, Contest Winner, 5th*

# EL RIO

## A FILM ON TOXIC MASCULINITY IN BOLIVIA'S FARMLANDS

TEXT: MILO CLENSHAW
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Set in the Beni, in the Northeastern lowlands of Bolivia, Juan Pablo Richter's feature film, *El Río*, tackles rocky family relationships, toxic masculinity and the emerging identity of 16 year-old Sebastian, played by Santiago Rozo. Richter's debut film follows the teenager as he struggles to fit into the traditional conservative world in which he finds himself after being sent from the city to his father's logging ranch. Tensions rise when Sebastian fails to conform to his father's vision of the macho boss' son, but Sebastian is not immune to the pressures of this hyper-masculine world either. Pensive shots of the breathtaking countryside are juxtaposed with images of intense violence, which allows *El Río* to deliver a prime example of Bolivia's artistic potential and its political disposition.

When I met Richter to talk over coffee, he seemed far too cheerful to be the director of a thematically dark piece of film-making. As Richter delved into his creative process, however, he revealed some of the motivations behind the film, reminiscing about the moment in which he decided to make *El Río*.

'It was 2012,' he said, 'and I was a producer for a kids news network. We covered the news of a young girl who was kidnapped downtown and, in that moment, I don't know how, but the story came to me. I've very much inherited machismo because I live in a machista country and I have a very machista family. It's like a generational chain.You inherit, you learn and you live surrounded by this. So in that moment I decided I needed to explore this subject. I needed to put my masculinity on the edge and try to defy it. That's why I started to write *El Río*,' he explained.

Although Richter grew up in La Paz, he is originally from Beni. The story's deep personal resonance comes across in the treatment of its characters, each of which develop into a complex, three-dimensional role. Although it is generally the case that rural areas tend to be conservative, *El Río* confirms this phenomenon in Beni. 'It was hard to face my family, to see our ghosts, and to see that we're doing something wrong,' Richter said. 'So I wanted to make this film in Beni because of that and I also wanted to explore a new environment. I wanted to discover the visual imagery that comes from that side of the country.'

According to Richter, one of the film's most important artistic choices was to draw a comparison between the violence of nature and naturalised violence in people. Nature is beautiful and awe-inspiring, but also an irrepressible force. In the film, Richter repeatedly returns to wide, expansive shots of the river, which make the audience suspect that there is an ominous presence lurking beneath the water.

After talking about *El Río*'s upcoming release, Richter shared his impressions on the overall condition of Bolivian cinema. Despite the difficulty of securing funding and government support for independent projects, Richter was very humble about his efforts, emphasising the importance of relying on a trusted team. He specifically stressed the input of Paola Gosalvez, his producer, in bringing the six-year project to completion.

> RICHTER'S DEBUT FILM FOLLOWS A TEENAGER WHO STRUGGLES TO FIT INTO THE TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE WORLD IN WHICH HE FINDS HIMSELF.

To illustrate the intimacy of his relationship with film-making in Bolivia, Richter compared it to something that is almost equally as close to his heart: the national Bolivian football team. Even if they lose, he said, you have to show up and put on the jersey to support your team. He also spoke about the inherently political nature of film-making, arguing that any film, be it artistic or purely commercial, takes a political stance. Despite his view on the matter, Richter admits that *El Río*'s political dimension took him by surprise. 'The things I want to do right now,' he explained, 'I think they're very political. For many years I was denying that, but I think I now need to assume that I make political films... There's nothing more valuable than someone who talks to you from the heart, and not from the mind, the body or from the pocket,' he said.

Richter's first inroad into the world of Bolivian feature films was released on the 2nd of August, and it will be interesting to see how the film performs in the long run. It is a bold, opinionated work that is likely to cause controversy. 'It is a very dark and tense movie because violence is dark and tense,' he said. 'As David Lynch once said,' he continued, "if you're looking for light, you need to go to the darkest places to find it." Maybe my generation is lost, but we need to guarantee that the next generation will not deal with violence and toxic masculinity, with inequality and all those things. We need to recover lost time. We're facing it and we're making things change.' Richter's passion and conviction in his work suggest he will succeed in this mission. It certainly seems that he is not slowing down for anything.

# INTO THE JUNGLE

## GAP YEAR GONE WRONG

TEXT: RAFAELA ALFORD
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA.ORG

Madidi National Park is one of the most biodiverse parks on the planet, hosting, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society, 8,000 plant species, 1,000 bird species (a staggering 9% of all the planet's birds) and 2,000 vertebrates, as well as an array of endangered wildlife. The wildness of the park is one is its primary attractions for thrill-seeking tourists, with an array of agencies in Rurrenabaque offering tours from one to 20 days in the jungle. These offer tourists an exhilarating opportunity to experience the jungle without the actual danger.

*Jungle: A Harrowing True Story of Survival*, written by Yossi Ghinsberg, shatters any illusion that the park is simply a picturesque tourist destination rather than a formidable and truly wild forest. The firsthand account was adapted into a film last year, directed by Greg McLean and starring Daniel Radcliffe as Ghinsberg. The film depicts the harrowing story of Ghinsberg's survival after whimsical notions of self-discovery and adventure lead a group of young travellers into the Bolivian jungle. The film reopens a discussion about the relationship between tourist and forest and the problems that come from romanticising real danger.

Ghinsberg arrived in La Paz in the early 1980s, a young Israeli fresh out of military service in search of adventure. Whilst there he was approached by Karl Ruprechter, who claimed to be an Austrian geologist. Ruprechter offered to take Ghinsberg and his two friends on a 'once-in-a-lifetime' adventure to find gold and Indians in the Amazon. The group were taken in by the colonialist dream and, without a second thought, traipsed into the Amazon. Predictably, things deteriorated. Disagreements within the group led to Gale and Ghinsberg splitting from the group, going ahead by raft, which was then destroyed. Whilst Gale was rescued after five days; what followed for Ghinsberg was three weeks alone in the jungle, suffering from hallucinations and performing self-surgery among other gruesome survival experiences. He was eventually rescued thanks to the efforts of Gale and the local community of San José de Uchupiamonas. The fate of the other two remains unknown to this day, appropriately steeped in conspiracy. It was later discovered that Ruprechter – shock! horror! – was not in fact an innocent geologist but a criminal wanted by Interpol, but this revelation still has provided no insights into his actions or intentions with the young travellers.

Considering the difficulty of going astray in the jungle accidently and the foolishness of doing it on purpose, there have been quite a few notable cases of outsiders getting lost in the Madidi jungle. After Ghinsberg, there was the case of Lars Hafskjold, a Norwegian biologist, in 1997. He disappeared whilst searching for the fabled Toromona tribe, the same community that had so intrigued Ghinsberg. Most recently, in 2017, a young Chilean, Maykool Coroseo Acuña, found himself lost for nine days in the same area. The whole event was shrouded in mystery, from his reasoning for leaving his tour (blamed by the locals on an angry **Pachamama**) to his alleged story of being saved by a tribe of monkeys. All the stories share inexplicable elements of mystery in the men's decisions, experiences and survival.

All it takes is a quick search online to find 'What to do if you get lost in the jungle.' The first step is that you shouldn't wander into the jungle in search for the elusive 'adventure' – that's just plain stupid. Furthermore, it is incredibly hard to do accidently. A common feeling shared by indigenous groups who actually live in the jungle is a profound respect for the environment. It is not a place where you can survive indefinitely on what you have gleaned from a Friday-night binge-watch of Bear Grylls. One thing that the film adaptation of *Jungle* does capture is the sheer multitude of bad decisions made by the young men. From following a strange Austrian into a forest without telling anyone to splitting from the guide in the midst of that forest with absolutely no prior jungle training – simply in an attempt to achieve the most unique and fulfilling gap year experience – there were some severe errors made. This naïve romanticism about the jungle is at the heart of most jungle-survival experiences. As Ghinsberg himself admitted, 'Karl saw how I drank up every word that he said. I was naïve and begged him to take me with him.'

After his ordeal and subsequent recuperation, Ghinsberg returned to Madidi. Upon discovering that the people who had come to his rescue, the community of San José, were struggling economically, he worked with the Inter-American Development Bank and Conservation International to set up the Chalalán ecolodge in 1999.

Whilst most of the planet has been tailored to host humans, Madidi Park retains its wildness. True wildness is a unique and rare occurrence in most of our everyday lives, and it can remind us of the formidable power of nature. The stories of these men are not supposed to deter tourists from experiencing the jungle, but instead provide examples of where misplaced pride and confidence can be dangerous. Hopefully the Hollywood adaptation will inspire a new wave of adventurers to explore the Bolivian rainforest whilst reminding them of their human limitations.

## SURVIVAL TIPS FOR THE JUNGLE

- Don't panic; stay as calm and collected as possible.
- Keep as orientated as possible; stick to a single direction or find a river to follow – do not just wander aimlessly.
- Don't follow a mysterious Austrian into the jungle.
- Don't split up.
- Follow animal trails as they may lead you to water sources/food, etc. (Acuña claimed that following a group of monkeys helped him survive in the jungle.)
- Be careful with your feet (this was the downfall Ghinsberg and Stamm; whilst sores are inevitable, it is vital to keep your feet dry and aired-out to prevent foot rot).
- If faced by a jaguar, spray insect repellent into a lighter to create a flamethrower (according to Ghinsberg, he learned this trick from a James Bond movie).
- Do not try to kill the worms that crawl under your skin; they'll get infected and you'll probably die
- Final tip: just don't get lost in the jungle!

# THE SOUND OF THE JUNGLE

## HOW *SAYA AFROBOLIVIANA* PRESERVES THE TRADITIONS AND CULTURE OF AFRICA IN LAS YUNGAS

TEXT: ROBYN KATE POLLARD
PHOTO: ADRIANA L. MURILLO

Hidden away in the tropical paradise of Coroico, in the Yungas region of Bolivia, is the Afro-Bolivian community of Tocaña. Amongst the folkloric celebrations found in this community, the culture of music and dance, particular to the Afro-Bolivians of Tocaña, is one of a kind.

Saya, based on drumming, singing and a hip-swaying sidestep, is an amalgamation of African and Bolivian traditions with distinct characteristics. The men play the drums, **cuanchas** and maracas alongside women who dance and sing about their African descent. Rhythmic and sensual, the women's short steps and hip movements are magnetic, almost hypnotic. Dressed in white outfits, the women adorn their indigenous white skirts trimmed with multi-coloured belts and accessories. In saya tradition, the captain of the dancers wears a set of bells around each leg to lead the dancers, symbolising the chains and shackles once worn by their ancestors.

Preserved since the arrival of African slaves who were brought to Bolivia to labour in the mines, the saya rhythm has served as a tool to communicate the hardships faced by black people. Through song, they express their needs and desires. In spite of emancipation, in 1851, and the right to own land, granted by the agrarian reforms of 1952, Afro-Bolivians have long faced discrimination and been ignored by the Bolivian government. In a nation in which only two percent of nearly 11 million inhabitants are black, Afro-Bolivians are a forgotten minority.

'Africans have always been seen as slaves,' Nilo Vázquez Rey explains, who is president of an Afro-Bolivian saya ensemble. 'We have always been discriminated against for the colour of our skin, and saya has always been used as an instrument to fight.' Due to discrimination and racism against Afro-Bolivians, saya was forgotten about for some time, only to be revived in 1983 by a group of school students. Since then, it has reemerged as an instrument to be listened to.

'Our main weapon has always been to create music, which we can use to achieve our goals,' Vázquez continues. 'Tocaña, for example, is now recognised as an Afro-Bolivian town, but before we had always been marginalised.' Article 32 of the 2009 Bolivian Constitution, recognises Afro-Bolivians and their economic, social, political and cultural rights.

'The principal idea of saya is to preserve our culture to ensure it is always alive and present so that our history doesn't die,' Vázquez says. 'We have three children between the ages of six and eight who dance with us. There is no age limit. Saya is danced virtually from the mother's womb.' Passed down from generation to generation, saya has integrated a part of African culture into the Bolivian way of life.

'WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST FOR THE COLOUR OF OUR SKIN, AND SAYA HAS ALWAYS BEEN USED AS AN INSTRUMENT TO FIGHT.'
**—NILO VÁZQUEZ REY, PRESIDENT OF A SAYA AFROBOLIVIANA ENSEMBLE**

# BOLIVIA – A MODERN-DAY EL DORADO

## BUT THE COUNTRY'S MINERAL RICHES COME WITH A PRICE – SOCIETAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC

TEXT: ROBYN KATE POLLARD
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA.ORG

Gold prices have risen steadily since 2000, increasing nearly fourfold and changing the conditions in which it is extracted and marketed – lamentably, this includes methods that evade mining and financial regulations. The current boom in the illegal extraction of gold is the result of various factors, including profitability driven by demand from emerging markets, notably China and India, and investment pressure, particularly after the financial crisis of 2008. The imbalance between supply and demand resulted in gold prices increasing by an average of 18% per year from 2000 to 2010 alone, for a total increase of 360% over the decade. While prices have fallen significantly since then, they are still relatively high. Simultaneously, pressure from the US 'War on Drugs' has cut into the profitability of drug trafficking from Latin American. As a result, criminal networks have diversified into the gold-mining sector, a move that was greatly facilitated by the fragmented nature of an artisanal gold-mining industry.

The Amazon basin in which Bolivian mines are located has facilitated an increase of the illegal exploitation of gold. The Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime, a Geneva-based international civil-society organisation, estimates that 30% of the gold mined in Bolivia is obtained illegally. Bolivia has been, and still is, particularly vulnerable to large-scale exploitation of gold and other precious minerals due to the wealth of natural deposits it enjoys. At a local level, informal mining is often socially accepted because of the employment and income opportunities it generates. Furthermore, the reserves themselves are located in regions far from densely populated areas, lacking a strong state presence to monitor conditions and enforce laws. Research conducted in 2016 by the Global Initiative found that since 2006, around 68 tonnes of gold, valued at 3 billion USD, had been illegally extracted from the Amazon and northern border areas and smuggled out of Bolivia.

Illegal gold mining brings with it a plethora of problems. The human cost of the expansion of illegal mining is extensive. An estimated 13,500 children work in the illegal gold-mining sector, and half are unpaid. Despite a lack of official governmental data, human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of women and adolescents is a growing problem – particularly across the borders of Peru and Brazil. Sexual trafficking is commonly generated whenever there is a large migration of men for the purpose of employment. Peruvian police estimate that up to 4,500 Peruvian and Bolivian girls are trafficked for sex work in bars frequented by miners.

'THE IMMENSE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE WILL CONTINUE GROWING, AND FUTURE GENERATIONS PROBABLY WON'T GET KNOW THE BEAUTY OF THESE IDYLLIC SITES.'
**—PROFESSOR AGUSTÍN CÁRDENAS REVILLA**

There are steep environmental costs associated with illegal gold mining too, including deforestation and illegal trafficking of wood. Without enforced regulations and guidelines, mining contaminates and degrades local ecosystems. In places where alluvial gold is extracted from riverbeds, mercury is often used as a separating agent. Mercury is highly toxic to human health; it can cause developmental and neurological problems, especially to foetuses and small children. Gold reserves are often exploited this way in the departments of Beni and Pando and in the Madre de Dios, Beni and Orthon Amazonian rivers. For every kilogramme of gold that is produced in Bolivia, 36 kilogrammes of mercury are released into the environment, according to the Global Initiative, affecting not just the earth but also local communities. The damage that occurs during the gold-separation process is incalculable and irreversible.

Agustín Cárdenas Revilla, emeritus professor of metallurgy at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA), warns that this type of illegal mining will have adverse consequences for the communities that are involved. What's more, he says, 'The immense social and environmental damage, currently unevaluated, will continue growing, and future generations probably won't get to know the beauty of these idyllic sites, the beautiful rivers or the great biodiversity that very few countries have the privilege of having.'

In May 2014, under President Evo Morales's government, Bolivian legislation regarding gold mining activity was replaced by Law No. 535. A controversial aspect of the law lies in Article 31, which declares productive mining agents as the state mining industry, the private mining industry and mining **cooperativas**. It fails to recognise the work of local communities, many of whom exploit mineral resources in their areas. These communities have legal titles to the mining sites, but no formal permission or contracts. Thus, this law leaves such communities with no choice but to privatise or engage in illegal mining activity. The Sociedad Peruano de Derecho Ambiental (SPDA), in their investigation into illegal gold routes, suggest that the policies in Bolivia encourage the proliferation of informal and illegal mining operations. The contradictions, ambiguities and voids in state policies encourage even legal operators to take advantage of them, often resulting in violations of mining laws.

In the La Paz department, which contains the largest gold deposits in the country, there are more than 50 companies that produce gold, but only five that work legally, according to the Instituto Boliviano de Comercio Exterior. Additionally, there are approximately 1,100 mining cooperatives that extract gold in the department, producing roughly 10 to 12 tonnes per year. Bolivian law requires that all mining actors obtain a mining identification number and register it with the national mining bureau. Of the 1,100 cooperatives working in the department, only 126 are registered.

'The *cooperativas* don't have access to resources; mining requires a lot of capital and machinery,' explains Carlos Jitton, president of the Chamber of Exports of La Paz. 'So although it may be prohibited, they have no choice but to work in partnership with **rescatadores**' – companies that invest in the cooperatives, many of which are foreign – 'to enable them to continue working.' Notably, Chinese and Colombian interests frequently invest in small mining cooperatives.

Drawn to the perceived rewards of mining, workers willingly abandon their traditional livelihoods, but the reality isn't so fruitful. 'The cooperative workers live a life of survival,' Jitton says. 'One gram of gold may cost around 20-25 USD to produce, and the middle man, let's say, may only pay them between 25-28 USD. So maybe they'll make a profit of around 1 USD, potentially nothing. The profit margin is very low.'

STATISTICS REVEAL A TROUBLING TRUTH BEHIND THE PRODUCTION AND EXPORTATION OF GOLD IN BOLIVIA.

'The life of a gold miner is precarious,' Jitton continues. 'They use very old technologies and work in questionable conditions. It would be a huge risk to smuggle gold across borders themselves, so they are left with no choice but to work for or sell to companies that know the appropriate routes across the border.'

According to the Bolivian Institute of National Statistics, 6,000 kilogrammes of gold were produced legally in 2014. Meanwhile, 40,000 kilogrammes were exported. A very important difference lies between these two numbers, reflecting the contraband that is smuggled into the country in order to be exported, in addition to the illegal mining of gold. Airing on the side of caution, one must account for a margin of error given the difficulty in quantifying such data in the informal conditions in which gold is produced. Nevertheless, these statistics reveal a troubling truth behind the production and exportation of gold in Bolivia.

# BOLIVIAN TRADITION, DRUG CRISIS

## THE DUALITY OF THE ANDEAN COCA LEAF

TEXT: LEIGH ANDERSON

A stealthy trip into the jungle. An underground deal. Secret messengers. The transformation of a harmless substance to a deadly one. Border crossings. Overdoses. This is how the story is often told.

Like its neighbouring countries of Peru and Colombia, Bolivia, the third-highest-ranking producer of coca in the world, is all too often labeled as a hopeless narco-state, riddled with poverty and stricken by rampant illegal drug trafficking. The reality, though, is much more complicated.

The cultivation of the coca leaf is a centuries-old practice in the Andes, dating back to the precolonial era of the Inca empire. In Bolivia, the leaf is legal and used primarily for tea and for chewing – which induces a mild stimulating effect – but is also added to products like shampoo, soap and ointments. It's been shown to be beneficial for one's health, particularly in terms of boosting energy and alleviating the effects of high altitude.

'It's undeniable that the traditional consumption of the coca leaf is part of the Bolivian identity,' said Jean Paul Benavides Lopez, a sociologist and teacher at the Instituto de Investigaciones Socio-Económicos (IISEC) in La Paz, who did doctoral research on the coca producers of the Chapare region in central Bolivia. 'It's a consumption so rooted in Bolivian culture that to think of a complete eradication of the coca leaf is naïve.'

Attempts at complete eradication have failed in the past. In 1988, Bolivia criminalised cultivation of the coca leaf, according to a *New York Times* report, and a US-funded forced-eradication policy began soon after. The US Drug Enforcement Administration was present in Bolivia until President Evo Morales expelled it in 2008, as its tactics of spraying herbicides and engaging in violent altercations with farmers did little good for alleviating poverty or decreasing cocaine production.

'Families need diversity to support their crops, not prohibition,' Sanho Tree, a drug-policy expert for a Washington-based think tank, told Vice News in 2016. 'You can't coerce families into not being hungry.'

According to a report by *El País* in 2014, the crop of a coca grower in the valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers in south-central Peru supplied him with barely enough money to support his family for the year. The situation is not so different in Bolivia.

'The people that arrived in the Chapare region to produce coca were people that suffered levels of poverty in other areas,' Benavides Lopez said. 'Miners were forced to give up their work by neoliberal politicians, and ended up in the Chapare.'

> 'YOU CAN'T COERCE FAMILIES INTO NOT BEING HUNGRY.'
> —DRUG-POLICY EXPERT SANHO TREE

Predictably, stealing away their livelihood through forced eradication wasn't the answer. In an interview with *El País*, Alberto Hart, a representative of Peru's National Commission for the Development of a Drug-Free Life, said that in order to solve the problem, the answer is to provide 'infrastructure, health, education [and] security' rather than stripping away the coca plant without an alternative or any form of stability.

'The only thing that eradication does is translate the conflict to a different region, fragmenting it and making it more difficult to address,' Ricardo Sóberon of the Center for Research on Drugs and Human Rights told *El País* in 2014. 'The problem is social. Narcotrafficking has become the only way for excluded populations to insert themselves into the global economy.'

In forcing out the DEA, President Morales, a former coca grower himself, implemented the '**coca sí**, **cocaína no**' policy, which allows for the cultivation of the coca crop on approximately 20,000 hectares of the Yungas and Chapare regions in order to meet the demand of legal markets. The policy still criminalises the production of cocaine – which is made by treating the coca leaves in gasoline-filled containers and then converting the substance to a base paste.

Morales's policy also aims to decrease the production of coca by providing alternative options, such as the cultivation of pineapples or bananas. The plan was met with skepticism by foreign powers, but was ultimately funded by the European Union, reported *The Times*.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, coca production in Bolivia has decreased every year for the past five years, with just over 20,000 hectares now in use for the crop. In 2000, that number was 48,000. And progress can be seen in the increase in hectares of the alternative crops that farmers have been given the support to cultivate, according to Benavides Lopez.

Still, only 14,700 of those hectares of coca are used for legal purposes, reported *The Guardian*, leaving the remaining third for the illegal market.

'The economic power and motivations of cocaine production are so rooted in certain parts of the country that, in practical terms, I don't believe it's possible to just cultivate coca and really fight against cocaine,' said Benavides Lopez.

The complexity of the legal cultivation of the plant combined with the inevitability of some of it ending up in the drug market has historically thrust farmers into a tricky position, and has fueled the false assumption that coca is equivalent to cocaine.

'By identifying a product as an enemy, it renders invisible those who produce and consume it by giving legitimacy to very perverse policies, which tend to concentrate on the weak links of the process: the peasants at one end, and the small traffickers and consumers on the other,' said Roberto Laserna, a Bolivian economist and writer who authored *Twenty (mis)Conceptions on Coca and Cocaine*.

'Not by coincidence, both are very similar socially: young, poor, pressured by aspirations and expectations, facing few opportunities,' he added.

While farmers are given some freedom under Morales's policy, they still face limitations and harsh punishment if they produce more than their allotted amount of coca. Essentially, coca is legal, but only to an extent, and those who grow it legally – and often have no connection to the illicit activities that happen once the plant is out of their hands – are the ones who face restrictions.

'It's a bit of an unjust relationship,' said Benavides Lopez, 'But obviously, what's easier to control? The consumption of millions of people, or the cultivation by hundreds or thousands of people?' Having restrictions on the farmers that produce the plant just makes more sense, and is perhaps justified.

In a *New York Times* article from 2006, before the DEA was kicked out of Bolivia, a regional leader of coca farmers was quoted as saying, 'What blame do we have when we don't make cocaine? They should chase down the people who make cocaine.' But as it happens, that wouldn't bode so well for farmers either.

With approximately 7,000 hectares of coca plant being used for the narcotrafficking industry, farmers partially rely on it for their livelihoods. If the demand for cocaine didn't exist, a large portion of the crop would have no market – and prices at the legal market would be much lower, explained Benavides

Lopez, which would result in significantly lower incomes for farmers.

The argument has been made that if other countries legalised and accepted the coca leaf as a harmless substance, the legal market in Bolivia would prosper.

In 2017, Ricardo Hegedus, manager of operations of the coca-tea producer Windsor, told *The Guardian*, 'If we could export legally, coca farmers' incomes would improve. It wouldn't eliminate drug trafficking but it would make it harder and more expensive for traffickers to get coca.' A *New York Times* article also detailed one man's hope to one day sell his coca-infused granola in China.

But Laserna wasn't so quick to accept that assumption, as legalisation of the leaf would also imply the legalisation of its cultivation. 'If cultivation of the coca leaf were legalised in other countries, competition would increase and prices would fall, which would adversely affect the Bolivian **campesinos**,' he said.

While Benavides Lopez thinks there is a possibility of other countries legalising coca, he doesn't believe they have much incentive to, and he has reservations about the effects it would have on narcotrafficking. 'You can transform coca leaf into cocaine wherever,' he said, which would in turn lead to public health problems.

The question of controlling public health and curbing consumption should perhaps be directed toward the United States and Brazil, the top two consumers of cocaine in the world.

'We can turn the debate to say that liberalisation of drugs is better,' said Benavides Lopez. 'But perhaps it is too much of a cliché to think that individuals can be responsible for themselves, without a state that decides for them.'

Alleviating the narcotrafficking problem whilst also providing support for farmers and de-stigmatising the Andean usage of the coca leaf in other parts of the world is a long process with no clear-cut solutions. But Laserna believes in a progressive future that prioritises liberalisation over control.

'In the long run,' Laserna concluded, 'I think an atmosphere of greater freedom and tolerance will be established, founded on trust in people and especially in their ability to decide what they consume.'

# THE DICHOTOMY OF CHACHA-WARMI

## IN BOLIVIA, ALL THINGS MUST HAVE THEIR COMPLEMENT.

TEXT: ADRIANA L. MURILLO
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

In Andean philosophy, everything has a complementary partner; that is, everything is composed of the concepts of male and female – people, animals, plants, and even objects such as rocks. At a specific point, these two aspects are joined together to build a relationship that is equal and complementary. This is the case with **chacha-warmi**. (*Chacha* means 'man' in Aymara, and *warmi* means 'woman.')

In her article 'Chacha-Warmi: The imaginary ideal a daily practice', Mireya Sánchez, a Bolivian philosopher, states: 'To better understand the concept of chacha-warmi, you need to understand that the fundamental principle that Inca society was built on was one of duality, established since mythic times around a divine pairing (sun/moon–*chacha/warmi*).'

We can understand chacha-warmi as a dichotomous concept, of two objects that are different but that complement each other and create the same energy. This idea has been passed down, generation to generation, in the Andean tradition to the modern day. For example, in certain communities when a leader is chosen, they must be accompanied by a partner so that they can govern according to this concept of duality.

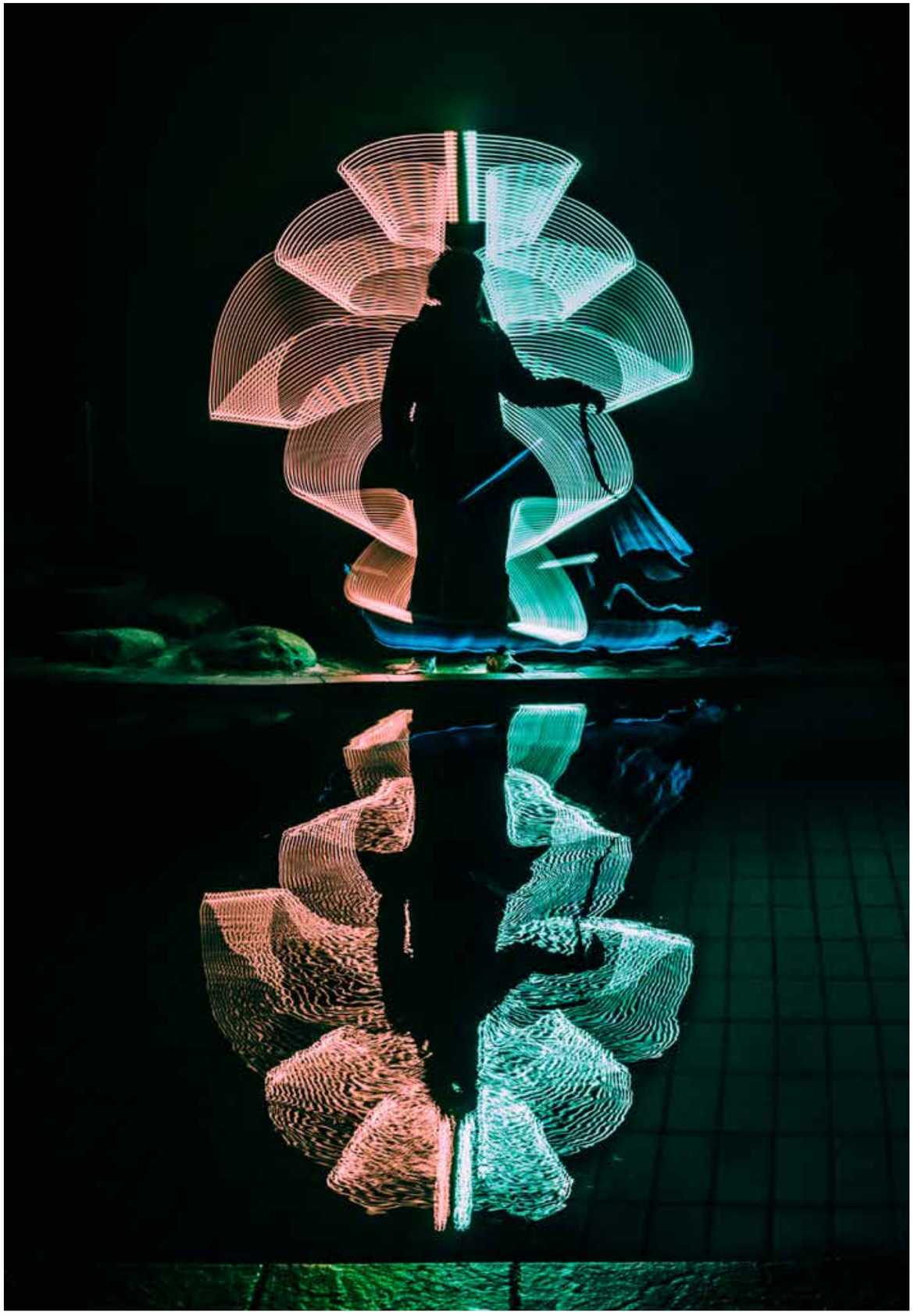
In the 21st century, certain elements of the practice might seem questionable to us. 'If you are going to be a **mallku** and you don't have a partner, then you have to unite with either your mother or your sister, or vice versa. Everything and everyone must be paired. This is *chacha-warmi*, the two elements of **jaqi**,' says Elias Ajata Rivera, founder of the Aymara Yatiqaña group. The *jaqi* would be each individual that, when they marry, conform to **jaqichasiña**.

Bolivia's identity is based on the values of multiculturalism and multilingualism and, as a result, its ancestral practices are considered invaluable. On one side, the Bolivian Constitution stipulates that men and women are equal before the law. On the other, the concept of gender doesn't solely refer to men or to women; there exist various national, community and familial norms.

In recent years, the pride in and the empowerment of ancestral customs has reemerged in people's everyday lives. Of course, La Paz, also known as the city of wonders, as the seat of governmental power has a responsibility to ensure the support, recovery and analysis of the county's diverse cultural practices.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE THAT INCAN SOCIETY WAS BUILT ON WAS ONE OF DUALITY.
**—PHILOSOPHER MIREYA SÁNCHEZ**






# GLOSSARY

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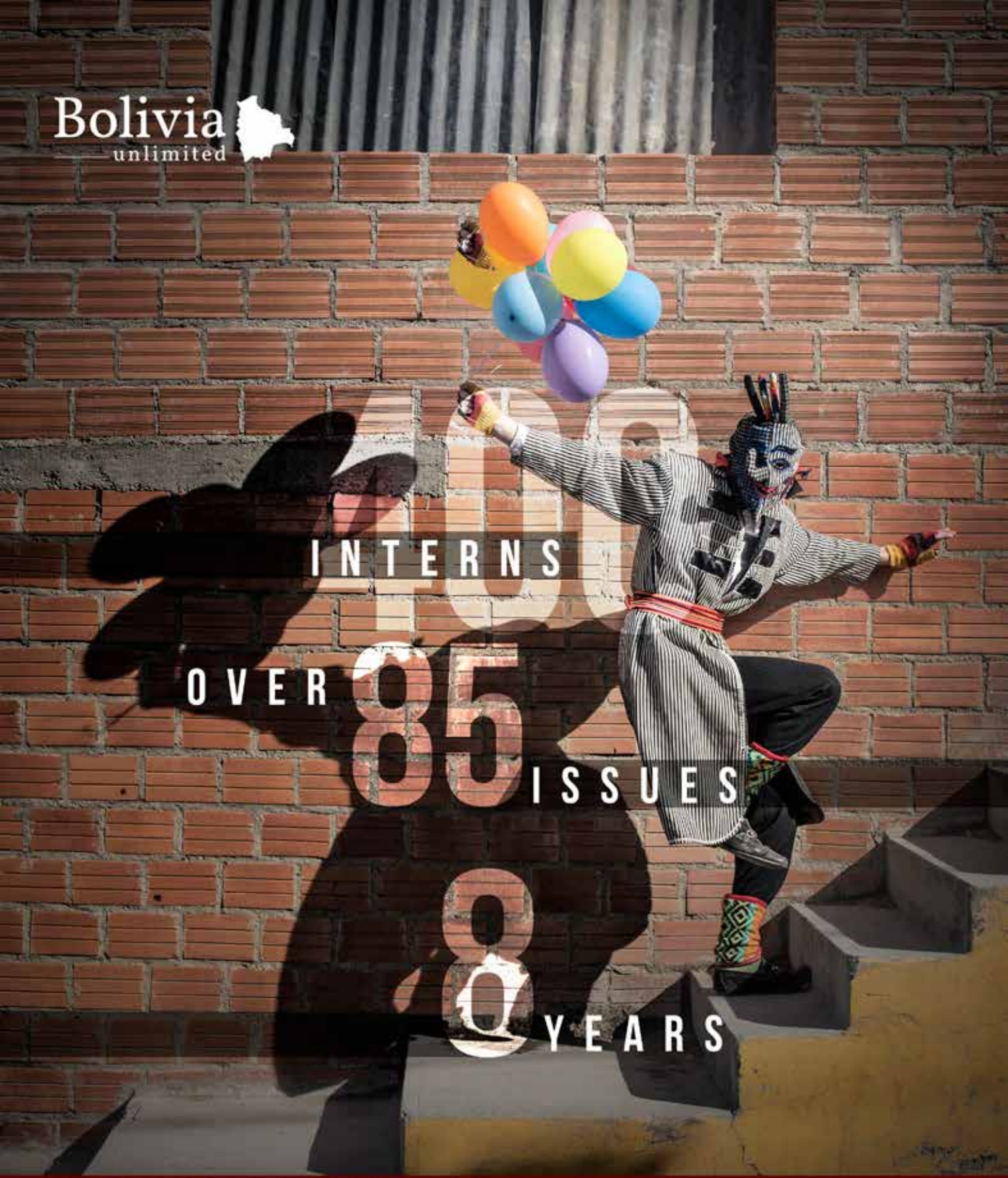
|---|---|
| ACHU | Master of the forest and water |
| CABILDO | Town council |
| CAMPESINOS | Farmers |
| CHACHA-WARMI | Man-woman |
| COCA SÍ, COCAÍNA NO | 'Yes to coca, no to cocaine.' |
| COOPERATIVAS | Cooperative |
| CUANCHAS | Type of drum used in Saya |
| FIESTA | Party |
| JAQI | Human being in Aymara |
| JAQICHASIÑA | Marriage in Aymara |
| MACHETERO | Dance of the sun warriors performed during the Fiesta de Moxps |
| MAÍZ | Maize |
| MALLKU | A leader of an Aymara community |
| PACHAMAMA | Mother Earth |
| RESCATADORES | Rescuer |
| RETIRO | Retreat |
| SAYA AFROBOLIVIANA | Afro-Bolivian saya |
| TERRA PRETA | Amazonian Dark Earth |
| TIERRAS BAJAS | Lowland |

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