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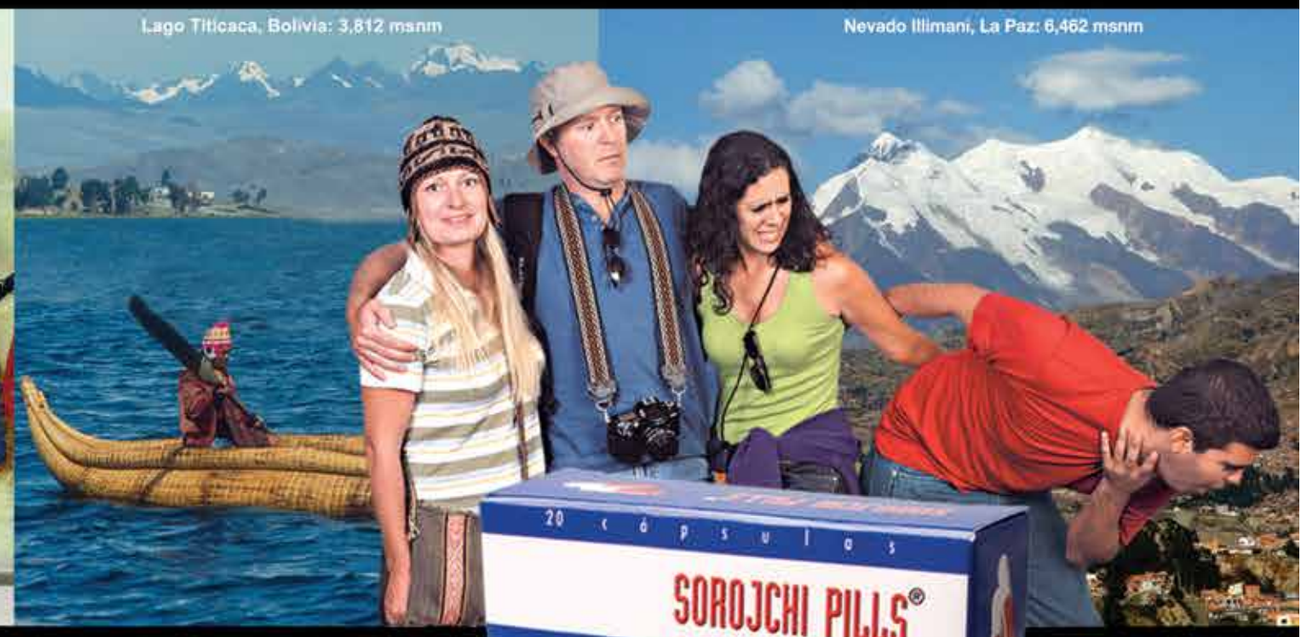

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#70

Patchworks

Editorial #70:
PatcHworks

By William Wroblewski

The **kusillo** is one of the most enigmatic figures in Bolivian folklore and dance. Most often seen as a buffoon or jester-like character, this animated clown can be found in a wide variety of traditional dances from the Aymara communities in and around the city of La Paz, always leaping and creeping in and out of packs of dancers, teasing his way through amused crowds.

The acrobatic and comic dances of the *kusillo* are unmistakable, but the most striking thing about him is his appearance. Tall and lanky, this long-nosed clown has clothes that are often sewn together with a variety of fabrics, including solid colors, pinstripes, and elaborate rainbow patterns. Even his mask is often stitched together from one or more patterns, to comic effect.

Characters in folklore everywhere are always changing, and the *kusillo* is no different. In today's festivals, including La Paz's Gran Poder and Oruro's massive annual Carnaval celebrations, *kusillos* of all colours can be found dancing in costumes that are becoming more and more elaborate and gilded. *Kusillo* costumes of the past, however, were more humbler affairs, piecing together dirty and plain fabric in a patchwork of patterns. And in some ways, such a patchwork of patterns is fitting of this character of unclear origin.

One of the most popular beliefs surrounding the *kusillo* is that the character is in fact a **mono**, or monkey; others equate him with a tricky fox, relating his history to local Ayamra folktales. Some even believe the *kusillo* is an adulterous adventurer, wandering the streets of towns and cities in search of women to seduce. Perhaps tied to this idea of 'fertility', in rural settings our jokester friend is often associated with successful harvests and agricultural abundance.

Bolivia is a lot like a *kusillo*: what you see is a patchwork of history, tradition, and modern expectations, presented as a beautiful and complete whole. And the end results are important cultural markings of unclear origins. This month we wanted to celebrate the ways in which historic and cultural diversity in Bolivia converge before our eyes to make up the wonders that make this country what it is today. With the idea of 'patchworks' in mind, we took the spirit of our loveable *kusillo*, and his unknown origin and rag-tag appearance, to look at Bolivia in rich new ways.

In this issue of Bolivian Express, we spend time with Lucia Campero at her store, Mistura, where she and the team have created a boutique shopping experience bringing together artisanal traditions and modern style. We sit down and have a beer with Panchi Maldonado, who for more than 20 years has been mixing musical styles with his wildly successful band, Atajo, which he is retiring – hopefully for the first but not last time – in April. We learn from amateur paleontologists trying to solve the mysteries behind the aquatic fossils littering the rocky slopes where the 18,000-year-old glacier at Chacaltaya once rested before completely disappearing ten years ago. We explore how a web of 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' have woven together Bolivia's current political climate, and wander the streets and galleries of Cochabamba to uncover the city's state of modern art through its many contributors.

Bolivia is much like a *kusillo*: it is full of life and energy, can always make you laugh, and is at times provocative and flirtatious. And akin to a *kusillo*, both Bolivia's tradition and modern appearance is the result of a patchwork of ideas and origins. Because of his rich yet unclear history and pieced-together appearance, the *kusillo* is very memorable, something that can stick with you for a very long time. Hopefully with this issue of Bolivian Express, you will find Bolivia to be the same.

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

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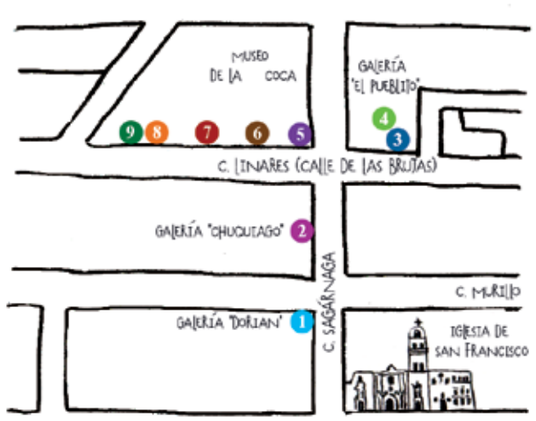

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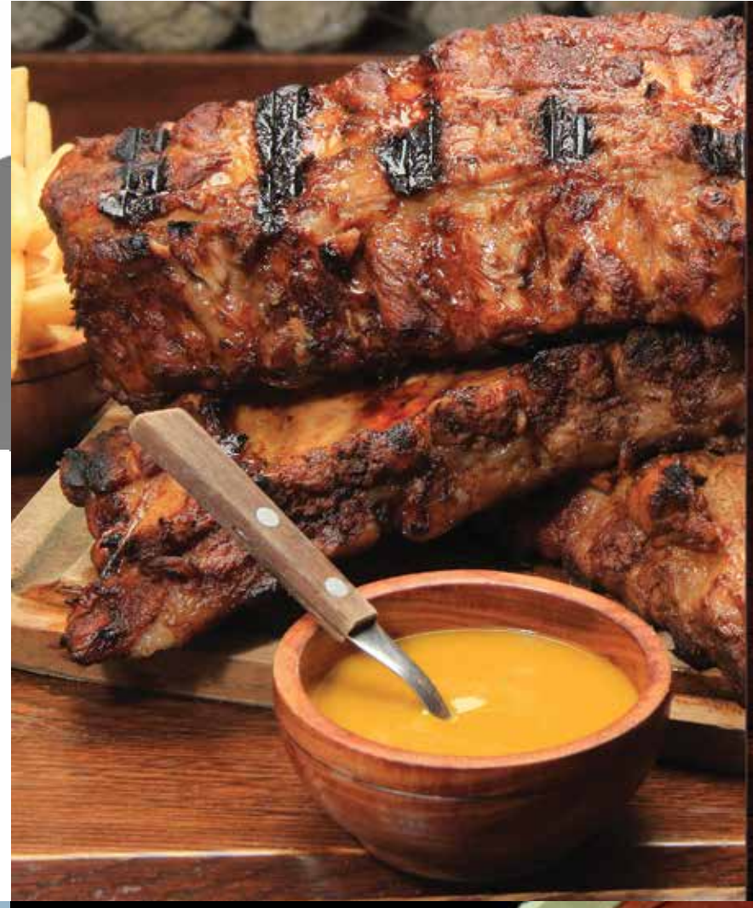

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Rehearsing with the Kory Warmis

WOMEN MEET TO CREATE THEATRICAL ART – AND TO EMPOWER THEMSELVES

Text and photos: Marianthi Baklava

'Get ready, you're going to be backed against that wall once everyone gets here,' Erika Andia warns me. Upon arriving at Calle Genaro Sanjinés 986, it seems that I have completely lost my way. I find myself having trekked up what appears to be a purely residential road in the very center of La Paz. I press my ear against the door and hear a soft purr and scratches: there is life inside.

And this is when Andia arrives, running up the street to greet me. She swings the rusty door open, and, as if through a portal, colour erupts outward.

She leads me into a small but cheerfully bright room, with playful orange-tiled recessions dotting the white walls. It is this confined space in which we are all to rehearse, although now it feels empty, expectant. I grab a tiny cobalt-blue playstool and sit down, waiting to meet everyone. Arriving in pairs, I get hugs and kisses from each woman who enters while being distracted from my mission by two resident kittens. The first women to arrive are María Paz and Jhovana Milenka Gutiérrez Hilari. We aren't only expecting women, however. Two-year-old Gabriel, Jhovana's son, runs up to hug me. He is the youngest Kory Warmi.

They are dreaming of travel and adventure.

A theatre troupe which formed in February 2015, the Kory Warmis took their name from the Aymara phrase for **mujeres de oro** – 'golden women'. It is a fitting name, as each member is a victim and survivor of violence and abuse, typically at the hands of a male.

To most of these women, rehearsing with the Kory Warmis serves as motivation to help themselves through their work week. 'They are **alteñas**,' says Andia, the Kory Warmis director and an accomplished actress herself, '**comerciantes**'. Many of the women in the group were initially members of an initiative of Pro Mujer, an international NGO dedicated to providing services to women, and joined the theatre group with Pro Mujer's support, to pursue their acting dreams. 'Now we are best friends and we are sisters,' says María.

The Kory Warmis have embarked on a new play, *Déjà Vu*, which looks at the effect that tensions between a married couple have on their young daughter. I watch as 21-year-old Brayam Machaca Aranibar contorts his face in pain and agony during an argument with 30-year-old Ana Chambi Mayta, who plays his young wife.

'We are best friends and we are sisters'
– María Paz.

This month, the theatre troupe will be performing *Déjà Vu* and another production, Kusisita, across several different **barrios** of La Paz, as well as opening Casa Mágica, their rehearsal space in La Paz, to the public.

During the rehearsal, Andia announces that the Kory Warmis will tour Peru in May. Smiles and laughter reverberate as the group is unable to contain their excitement. They are dreaming of travel and adventure.

The Kory Warmis' children line up and begin to dance, whipping themselves in the progression of what is actually quite a cheery song. I sit next to Andia, confused and uncertain how to feel. It starts to dawn on me that perhaps this is their desired effect on the audience: to make us uncomfortable, unsure, and weary.

Here, our rehearsal is suddenly cut short at the realisation that over four hours of hard work have passed. The Kory Warmis begin to make their way home, small giggles of relief but an aura of dejection hanging low in the now darkening Casa Mágica.

The Kory Warmis are on Facebook under their name, where more information on current and future performances can be found.

AIRPLANE HANGARS

PIECING TOGETHER THE HAPHAZARD HISTORY OF BOLIVIA'S AIR FORCE

TEXT: MARIANTHI BAKLAVA - PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS

I'm speaking with Lt. Col. Heriberto Hermosa at the airfield of the Fuerza Aérea Boliviana, the Bolivian Air Force, just off Avenida Juan Pablo II in El Alto. 'That is the runway from where the first plane took off in the entirety of Bolivia,' he says. Without reacting to my intake of breath, he then points in the opposite direction. 'There we saw seven deaths with the first aeroplane crash,' he adds.

This month, El Alto will see the opening of its second public museum. The Museo Aeroespacial, situated within the Bolivian Air Force base itself, features 20 aeroplanes and three helicopters operated by the military between 1942 and 2007. The machines are housed within two sizeable hangars, constructed in 1920 and 1926 respectively, and outside on the airfield. The oldest plane on display is from 1920, a Boeing-Stearman PT-17 biplane. Originally painted a crimson red, it was changed to yellow and blue at some point during its career.

Also on display is a scale reconstruction of the Bolivia-Paraguay front-line during the Chaco War (1932–1935), in which the two countries fought for control of the northern Gran Chaco region, the scorched flatlands southwest of present-day Bolivia which were thought to be rich in oil (they weren't). In the exhibit, mannequins hold authentic firearms from the time of the conflict.

'THAT IS THE RUNWAY FROM WHERE THE FIRST PLANE TOOK OFF IN THE ENTIRETY OF BOLIVIA.'

– LT. COL. HERIBERTO HERMOSA

Of the numerous photos and portraits of aviators which are displayed in the one hangar, Amalia Villa de la Tapia (1893–1994) is the only female. De la Tapia was the first Bolivian woman to obtain a pilot's license, which she gained in 1922 after completing a year of aviation training. Despite her abilities, however, her gender and the country's patriarchal attitudes towards the 'weaker sex' prevented her from participating in the Chaco War.

The museum shows in depth the different types of planes from the past and present of the Bolivian Air Force, which include reconnaissance aeroplanes equipped with cameras and various types of sensors, experimental vehicles designed to test out new aerodynamic and structural principles, and military transports for both troops and equipment.

There are also three flight simulators that visitors can use to test their flying abilities, one of which demonstrates the difficulty lifting off from El Alto's altitudinally intense runway, battling against the unpredictable sheer force of the **altiplano**'s strong winds. 'Our own pilots have used this particular simulator,' says Lieutenant Colonel Hermosa, showing me what seems to be a simple painted wooden box.

Turning away from history and back to the present, the Bolivian Air Force currently has two reconnaissance planes in service, 11 planes primarily for transport, 21 working helicopters, and 42 trainer aircraft.

Life Beyond ATAJO

New beginnings after the break-up

TEXT: ALEX WALKER PHOTOS: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

The adage, 'It's never too late to try new things' is often one reserved for parkour pensioners or grandmothers getting to grips with what they call 'The Facebook'. When I meet Panchi Maldonado, however, whose iconic band Atajo is embarking on what seems to me a sort of trial separation from the end of April, I find a man who defines the philosophy. Over a lukewarm Paceña, I sit down with Panchi, a couple of hours before the band's gig at Roots Reggae House, to talk past, present, and future. Smuggling sporadic sips between his long, poetic soliloquies, Panchi tells me how his relentless quest for self-improvement and revolution will, he hopes, take his next chapter to new, 'more radical', fresh pastures.

Fittingly for a man who tells me, 'I learnt that rock has never been a style of music; rock is a way of life', Panchi's image is iconic. Stocky, with long dreadlocks, a shaggy grey-tinged beard and that trademark bandana, his sharp eyes pierce through a pair of magenta-rimmed glasses that look like they've been pinched from the crown of an optometrist's secretary. It seems to me that there is a certain sense of irony in the name 'Atajo'. In English, it means 'shortcut', but Panchi does not strike me as a man for the path of least resistance.

'I could never retire. Music is my life. Without it, I would die.'
– Panchi Maldonado

His father was a frustrated musician, he tells me. Music was his childhood, music was his home, music is in his blood. He formed Atajo back in 1996 with the intention of 'exchanging experiences, interests, and ideals', after a foray into blues had proved unsatisfactorily one-dimensional. In the past 20 years, the band has released nine albums, found success abroad as well as in their own country, and has even succeeded in paving its own genre in Bolivia – 'urban rock' – through a central desire to 'reflect social reality'.

One thing that marks Atajo out from its contemporaries is that, in essence, it comprises a fusion of individuals from distinct musical backgrounds who come together to innovate, combine knowledge and abilities, and create new sounds. They cite as their influences, amongst others, 'reggae, blues, **saya afroboliviana**, folk, ska, **huayno, morenada, festejo**, and rock'. Panchi posits, 'Why not have a band where you can play all types of music, without limiting yourself to a genre?' This is a challenging feat, no doubt, but Atajo's reluctance to be pigeon-holed has created a unique and eclectic archive of songs.

When I ask Panchi whether he has any regrets from his time at Atajo's helm, he cites just one: 'I only wish that we had been a little more radical in experimenting with more types of music. It is for this reason that we are separating. I want to link up with people from other countries, other cultures; to have perhaps a drummer from Senegal, a violinist from Russia, a singer from Syria. Those elements are going to change my music. So, I leave to experiment.'

While striving to embrace and incorporate such a range of sounds and genres is a trait that defines Atajo, the band maintains a strong sense of 'Bolivianness'. They struggled at first to enter the mainstream consciousness

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because tastes had emigrated to Europe and the USA, and listening to English-language songs and Western covers was the '96 modus operandi for rock fans in Bolivia.

The stories, the struggle, the subjects of Atajo's songs are grounded in Bolivian reality. 'Nobody listened at first,' Panchi explains. 'Many people criticised us because we had very controversial and critical lyrics at the time – we emerged at a difficult political time in Bolivia.'

Atajo's first album, *Personajes Paceños* (1998), or 'Characters of La Paz', is indicative of Panchi's philosophy. 'For me it is important to speak to the hearts of the people, to touch their souls, and fire up their minds,' he says, with a fluency suggesting that this is a well-rehearsed tagline. Throughout Atajo's career, the band has achieved this by telling real, relatable stories.

For Panchi, one song in particular stands out from this, his favourite, album. 'I wrote a song that talks about the journey from El Alto to La Paz by minibus,' he recalls. 'Once I was doing this journey myself, and that same song came on the radio. The driver said, "Jefe, are you listening to these lyrics?" This was the greatest gift of the album: I realised that the people were identifying with our music, which is all I wanted, that people were listening because they understood it.'

It strikes me in my YouTube wanderings that politics are central to Atajo. At Roots, when the band starts banging out hits like 'Pulga Presidente', 'Nunca Más', and 'Que la DEA no me vea', the crowd seems to enter some sort of trance, breaking out from their dancing circles to join the battle cry in unerring unison. The notorious line 'Gringo, go home!' speaks to me on a personal level as I check my watch and realise that the time has raced to 4 am.

I ask Panchi whether, as an artist, he feels responsible for speaking out when he sees something he disagrees with. 'I don't want to fall into the cliché of the artist being "the voice of the people,"' he explains speculatively. 'I think that all human beings are responsible for telling their stories and as a musician I am lucky that I can do it through song so that message can reach more people. But it's important to note that you cannot stay quiet if you see destruction and devastation in the streets, if people are killing each other, if there is injustice around you. You cannot stay silent.' With each strand of thought, the passion behind those spectacles intensifies.

We can, suggests Panchi, safely assume that this is not the end for Atajo. The split, he stresses, is not a disharmonious one – far from it. It seems as though Panchi is sending out each of his knights to search for their musical Holy Grail. 'I want each member of the band to experiment in their own lives to see what each of them finds,' he says. Atajo will be back, he hints, stronger, better and more radical than ever. When I ask Panchi whether he personally has any long-term plans to retire, he swats me away out of hand: 'I could never retire. Music is my life. Without it, I would die.'

'I only want to say, "Listen to Atajo" and find out what it is that we have wanted to be for the last 20 years.'
– Panchi Maldonado

As we come to the end of our shared *Paceña*, Panchi leans forward in his seat as if to deliver a closing statement to his mourning fans: 'I only want to say, "Listen to Atajo". I know that lots of people have listened to the hits, but listen to the albums from first song to last, and find out what it is that we have wanted to be for the last 20 years. You are going to find many surprises. We may have decided to split for now, but the music is still there. It is never going to die.'

'Sales are good in Uyustus. I have cheese rolls, empanadas and apple pies.' - **Mercado Uyustus**

FACES OF *La Paz*

PHOTOS BY NICK SOMERS

Sometimes you need to look no further than the smiling faces of the people on the city's streets to find the beauty of La Paz. And one of the great things about this place is that it has anything but a shortage of personalities. Every corner, every market, and every place offers an opportunity to meet a new face and to hear a new story.

'I'm from La Paz and I like my work because all flowers are beautiful. And, please make me look good in the picture.'
- **Mercado Lanza**

'Every day after school I come here to play football with my friends until it's dark. I hope one day I can play for Bolívar.'
- **Sopocachi**

'My brother likes big dogs, but I'm happy I can carry and hug our dog.' - **Alto Tacagua**

'I have been a saleswoman for thirty years, but I also knit to make more money. I make sweaters, scarves, things that people ask me to make.'
- **Mercado Uyustus**

'I have a television underneath my stall so I never have to miss the football games.'
- **Mercado Sopocachi**

21F

ALTERNATIVE FACTS IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE REFERENDUM

TEXT: ALEX WALKER
PHOTOS: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI AND ADRIANA MURILLO

It is clear from my initial drive down from El Alto airport that this is a turbulent time for politics in Bolivia. Even at a bleary 6 am, the bellicose graffiti lining my descent unequivocally suggest a public at loggerheads. 'No Es No' in fresh red paint is slashed by the countering message, 'El Alto Dijo Sí'. This is not simply a hangover from last year's referendum, this is a nation engaged in a lasting debate leading up to a landmark anniversary.

More than one year on from the 21 February referendum of 2016, where a slim majority (51.3% to 48.7%) of voters decided against allowing President Morales to run for a fourth term, the scars of the polarising campaigns are etched into the fabric of the city.

My own recent political past has been dominated by two referenda: Scottish independence and UK membership to the European Union, binary votes that split the UK into opposing halves. By opening the vote up to the public, the government had hoped to draw a line under these respective debates. However, both were campaigns run on divisive rhetoric, fuelled by public hoodwinking and baseless speculation. Consequently, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the results have been marred by renewed calls for a 'free Scotland' and hope that bureaucracy could block Brexit, thus preventing any closure for the victors.

In Bolivia, President Morales has relentlessly sought to distance himself from the ubiquity of both Western politics and Western politicians. In his words, 'we are anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist'; or, to put it otherwise, the diametric opposite of our UK counterparts. However, across La Paz, last year's referendum is casting an all-too-familiar shadow.

Reflecting on his losing 2016 campaign, Morales reverted to one of his now-characteristic footballing analogies to claim the result represented merely the 'first half', and that the second was yet to come. Scarred, in his words, by a 'dirty war' on social media, the president vowed: 'This struggle will continue… It will never be abandoned.'

It was after, presumably, 90 seconds of heated discussion, that the staff of the Oxford Dictionary agreed that the

THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFERENDUM IS ALTERNATIVELY LABELLED THE 'DÍA DE LA MENTIRA' OR THE 'DÍA DE LA DEMOCRACIA' BY THOSE ON EITHER SIDE OF THE POLITICAL FENCE.

'Word of 2016' should be 'post-truth'. Following in the not-so-watershed footsteps of 'GIF', 'Selfie', 'Vape', and 'Emoji', this accolade might best be taken with a pinch of salt. Yet, day by day it seems that 'post-truth' will prove to be an era-defining term. Rhetoric and sentiment have 'trumped', so to speak, any necessity for plain honesty.

What strikes me about this anniversary of the vote, or 21F in the local shorthand, is that it smacks somewhat of Republican Counselor Kellyanne Conway's now-notorious pivot phrase, '*alternative facts*'. As if to reinforce this, in an example of somewhat ironic polarisation, 21F is alternatively labelled the '**Día de la Mentira**' or the '**Día de la Democracia'** by those on either side of the political fence. The past year, it seems, has served to divide the Bolivian public into two separate camps: those who believe Morales to be the victim of a dirty campaign, and those who believe he is the architect of a conspiracy to devalue the referendum result.

Much of the controversy and contention is centred around one woman: Gabriela Zapata. Martyr, scapegoat, hostage, the peroxide-blonde pin-up girl for contradiction has played many parts in the past year, most with less credibility than her adopted hair colour.

First, she alleged that Evo had fathered her son. He confirmed, claiming that this son had died in infancy. Shortly afterwards, Zapata told the press that her son was alive, later appearing in public with a young child claimed by the government to be 'a fake'. After an inquest, Zapata was arrested and charged with influence-peddling, illicit enrichment, and money-laundering, and accused of colluding with the opposition to soil the president's name. Two days before the one-year anniversary of 21F, a weeping Zapata was interviewed for TV network ATB. In the interview, which was edited by Jaime Iturri, the network's major shareholder with perceived ties to the government, Zapata debunked all of her previous claims, stating that her son had never existed and absolving the president of any wrongdoing. Samuel Doria Medina, Eduardo León, and Walter Chávez were instead blamed for orchestrating the scandal.

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If last year's referendum, following Morales' football analogy, was the 'first half' of the piece, the two marches on its anniversary felt a lot like its penalty shootout.

At midday, I linked up with staunch Morales supporters in their parade from Plaza San Francisco to Estadio Hernando Siles. The first impression I got from this lunchtime show of solidarity was that many were going through the motions. Initially, those I spoke to seemed to have convened here as a matter of course, as representatives of their respective politicised factions. Indeed, there seemed a more pressing threat provided by the midday sun than the people's indignance.

Yet, as we approached the stadium, where just moments before the **cocaleros** had wreaked havoc with official preparations, the emotional temperature among the crowd intensified. There, I spoke to a long-haired man in his 30s sporting sunglasses and a fitted leather jacket: 'This is the inevitable culmination of a decade of lies,' he barked over disjointed chanting from sections of the crowd. 'We are here to say that we support Evo and we do not believe this conspiracy.' These true Evo supporters had converged in number to defend their man, their president – a victim, in their eyes, of a mud-slinging scandal that warped the results of the referendum.

WE ARE NOT MERELY DEALING WITH ALTERNATIVE FACTS BUT WITH ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES; TWO VERSIONS OF EVENTS UTTERLY AT ODDS WITH EACH OTHER.

Hours later, after sunset had been and gone, I joined the '*Día de la Democracia*' pilgrimage to Plaza San Francisco. A year ago, the cities of La Paz and El Alto voted in favour of enabling President Morales to run again in 2019. That evening, this could not have seemed further from the case. Firecrackers exploded in all directions; effigies were burnt in the streets; a deafening loudspeaker riled up the crowd with battle cries of, 'No Es No! Bolivia Dijo No!'

Above the stage there was an electronic advertising billboard that seemed entirely out of place. That is, until the new Samsung Galaxy arrived on screen: much like the phone's predecessor, this march had the feeling that, at any moment, it could spontaneously combust. Judging by the volume of posters, banners, and chants featuring Gabriela Zapata, the ATB interview had merely poured petrol on this fire. This riotous crowd was at least twice as large as its afternoon opposition. The masses, it appeared, had converged to defend their fundamental right to a respected democratic voice.

With anti-**MAS** chanting ringing in my ears, and the faint echo of firecrackers following me back to Sopocachi, I found it impossible to reconcile these two jarringly opposed marches. More than anything, they served as an unambiguous illustration that, where 21F is concerned, we are not merely dealing with alternative facts but with alternative narratives; two versions of events utterly at odds with each other. Yet, marchers from both sides tell an edition of the 'truth' with such untempered conviction that it is impossible to see any common ground between the two.

As things stand, the final official word – '*official*' in the loosest possible sense – has come from the side of the government, courtesy of Gabriela Zapata's most recent U-turn. The case, though, as the anniversary marches will testify, is anything but closed. Zapata's starring role as eponymous anti-hero of 'The Blonde Who Cried Wolf', whether willingly or not, has so effectively evaporated any value of the truth that either side is able to choose the version of reality that fits their existing opinions.

When the 'truth' is left up to the eye of the beholder, it merely serves to reinforce the already established prejudices of the public. In such an environment, political polarisation can only intensify. And that is exactly what I witnessed on 21 February, 2017.

Amateur Fossil Hunting in Chacaltaya

A DISAPPEARING GLACIER PEELS BACK TO UNVEIL AN OCEAN OF SYMBIOSIS

TEXT: MARIANTHI BAKLAVA
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS

Chacaltaya Mountain (30km from La Paz) is the site of a 5404-metre-high, 18,000-year-old glacier of the same name, which an international team of scientists observed beginning to disappear due to global warming around 1992. Now, 25 years later, the glacier is completely gone. Chacaltaya was also home to the world's highest ski resort: what remains of the resort is cared for by Samuel Mendoza, the former ski lift operator. Visitors can no longer ski, but there are tours to the site every day.

I had the chance to hike up Chacaltaya on one of the rare days on which it actually saw snowfall, although on our descent, the snow had already melted. We ascended the mountain along a rickety dirt road, holding on for dear life until the vehicle was overwhelmed by hail and its wheels no longer found grip. Unsurprisingly, I was soon told it would be safer to disembark and go the rest of the way on foot. With me were Giovanni Rios and his team.

You only have to mention fósiles for his entire face to light up as he reaches into the bag of goodies he has brought in preparation.

Giovanni is a **paceño** architect and amateur fossil enthusiast. You only have to mention **fósiles** for his entire face to light up as he reaches into the bag of goodies he has brought in preparation. His passion for palaeontology began in his early kindergarten years when he was always to be found drawing dinosaurs. After that, he joined a science club in his primary school. His first science project was at 11 years old, when he managed to get into contact with the then-director of paleontology at the Museum of Natural History in La Paz, Federico Anaya. 'It was hard because in Bolivia there isn't a lot of information. I just got lucky,' he says. Through this project, he tells me that this expert took a liking to him and allowed him to stay in the museum to work closely with the collection of fossils, cleaning them. 'He also told me where to find them,' he adds. And this is why we are here at Chacaltaya.

Giovanni says, 'The site of Chacaltaya was once a sea that resembled what is now the Arctic Ocean.' He is here to understand what the aquatic communities living in this place were like. 'Books only show diagrams without explaining how the organisms lived and interacted with one another,' he laments.

Walking together across the mountaintop, despite fighting altitude sickness and slight vertigo, we did find some samples at Chacaltaya, including the fossilised remains of a starfish (in the Asteroidea class). Giovanni explains, 'Due to the overlapping pattern visible on the surface of the stone, there could be more organisms contained within,' something that he hopes scientific analysis, such as 'the use of an x-ray machine, will uncover'.

Giovanni imagines that in the deep ancient ocean, giant squids, of the genus Architeuthis and family Architeuthidae, would have been at the top of the food chain. Together we found a piece of sediment on which were imprinted the suckers which line each tentacle. They were formidable predators because they could use their tentacles to prise open shells and eat the organisms inside, and also due to their huge size. Trilobites, however, found a way to protect themselves from the squids: by hiding in the forests of **lirios del mar**.

The first to study the fossils at Chacaltaya was Roman Kozłowski, a Polish scientist who had studied at the University of Paris and later received the position of Director of Geological Sciences at the Mining School in Oruro. He stayed in Bolivia from 1913 to 1921 before returning to Europe, and collected the first trilobites; **conchas**, or seashells; and starfish at the site. Trilobites are a fossil group which show an extinct invertebrate with an exoskeleton, extinct sea arachnomorpha arthropods forming the Trilobita class. It is the pattern of this exoskeleton which we saw in one of our rock samples, and trilobites are known to shed their exoskeleton. It is rarer to find an entire body, but Giovanni had such samples in his collection.

There are many skeptics in Bolivia who doubt the confirmed scientific reason for the appearance of sea organisms at the top of the mountain, believing it to be the result of some great biblical Flood. Giovanni tells me that it happened when the Nazca tectonic plate (Oceanic) collided with the South American (Continental), forming the Cordillera de los Andes. This is still ongoing, and happens when the collision causes the rocks on the edge of the continental plate to fold, thereby producing fold mountains. In this manner, the fossils at Chacaltaya were raised 5000 metres high, even though before they had been far below sea level.

*The fossils at **Chacaltaya** were raised **5000m high,** even though before they had been **far below sea level.***

In his collection, Giovanni has over 7000 fossils, collected from all over Bolivia. He privately catalogs and organizes them, hoping to contribute to some future scientific studies. 'I hope that someone will come along to continue my work, my dream: to display each discovery, and to open museums on the most important palaeontological sites in Bolivia,' he sighs wistfully.

A **GIANT** DESCENDS

Uber's introduction to La Paz is turning. . . not that many heads

TEXT: SOPHIE HOGAN PHOTOS: SOPHIE HOGAN AND NICK SOMERS

It would be rare for one not to have heard of it. Founded in March 2009, UberCab, as it was then known, quickly expanded in its birth country of the United States and gave way to a new kind of easy and safe transport. Riders could now use a smartphone app to hail a ride, and pay too. Later renamed Uber, the transportation app has subsequently planted its roots all over the world. La Paz isn't the first city of Bolivia to be introduced to it – Santa Cruz's Uber fleet has been plying that city's streets since November of last year. Now a month old in La Paz, it seemed time that I gave it a try here. It was easy enough, as many drivers in La Paz had adopted the new system. The car that picked me up was clean and well-kept, the driver courteous, and there were no problems with payment. What's more, my ride actually turned out to be cheaper than the city's traditional taxi service. The idea seems simple and spotless.

THE IDEA SEEMS **SIMPLE** AND **SPOTLESS.**

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'WE HAVE STEADY WORKING HOURS, **UNLIKE UBER...WHICH IS WHY I ONLY WORK WITH UBER ON SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS. IT ISN'T A STABLE JOB.'**
– MANUEL, PEDRO DOMINGO SINDICATO

Of course, no company this massive can flourish throughout the globe this quickly without some pushback. Theoretically, Uber possesses the power to damage La Paz's venerable taxi fleet. In the United States, this problem didn't seem so toxic (at first – the company is now knee-deep in allegations of unfair business practices and technological skullduggery), but in other countries where Uber has made its mark, local taxi populations are incensed. In 2014, when Uber was introduced to the streets of Paris, that city's drivers took a stand, coming out in force to block the streets of the French capital and postponing the company's arrival.

After years of tumultuous success, Uber has faced more competition in the form of an ad-hoc alliance among Ola Cabs in India, Lyft in the United States, and Didi Kuaidi in China. Together, these companies have acted as a check to Uber's meteoric growth. But Uber wasn't about to stop. . . In 2016, it expanded into South America, moving into Buenos Aires despite strong protests from the taxi firms in that city, and then, in early 2017, Uber came to La Paz.

'It's my first week on the job and it's good,' says Enrique, an Uber driver new to the trade. 'There were a couple of clients who cancelled at the last minute, but after that it was pretty simple.' Enrique's car is nicer than many of the city's traditional cabs (Uber has strict rules on cleanliness and how new a car must be). 'For me, Uber is just safer, too, because it's all done on the app,' Enrique says. He's right: I felt much more secure getting an Uber than I have when hailing some of the other taxis around the city. 'I think it might take time,' Enrique tells me, 'but Uber will have an impact because we're just advancing with technology and all that stuff.'

There have been hiccups, though, in Uber's expansion. In late February, the city imposed fines on and confiscated registration plates from five Uber drivers, deeming the service 'illegal in the city of La Paz'. However, just days later, the municipal government held talks with the company, finally allowing it to operate in the city. This quick turnaround left many people confused, but it continues to operate for now. Most drivers I've spoken to suggest they don't feel threatened by the ride-sharing behemoth from the north. 'I have heard about it coming here, yes,' says a driver from a private taxi company when asked about his opinion on the transport giant. 'Honestly, I'm not well-informed about Uber,' he says. 'I know it works through a cell phone, but that's about it. I think it's giving us an opportunity to improve our company more than anything else.'

There are some people who might have had a stronger opinion on Uber: members of the various **sindicatos** in La Paz and El Alto that have traditionally controlled the taxi industry. *Bolivian Express* visited one of the members of the *sindicato*, Pedro Domingo Murillo, to get his take on what could be big competition for them. 'We have microbuses, minibuses, **trufis**, taxis – so it's running all the time, we are always busy. I don't think Uber will affect us that much, because really it seems to be more for private vehicles, sort of for particular people,' says Manuel, the secretary of the *sindicato*. He's even installed the app on his own smartphone – as a driver. However, he continues to defend his *sindicato* and the benefits of working with one. 'I work with the *trufis*, and I'm on from seven in the morning until midnight. We have steady working hours, unlike Uber. . . which is why I only work with Uber on Saturdays and Sundays. It isn't a stable job.'

Far from what would normally happen when Uber comes to a city, both radio and street cab drivers are relatively unalarmed. But, judging from Uber's history in other markets, perhaps they should be. Three years after Uber started operations in San Francisco, Time magazine reported that Uber had 'pretty much destroyed regular taxis' in that city. So the question is: will La Paz's transport industry suffer the same fate? In most cities, people were reluctant to move over to the Uber model at first. But both customers and drivers find the Uber model to be easier and more secure, and if so many people here in La Paz seem unperturbed by its presence, perhaps Uber will grow more quickly than in other markets. It will be interesting to see if any protests regarding the transport giant crop up in the coming months.

Uber is available for download on the App Store and Google Play.

Contemporary *Crisis*

Cochabamba's struggle to put art back on the map

TEXT AND PHOTOS: SOPHIE HOGAN

The dawn has bloomed just enough for a beautiful orange sky as I step off the bus. Walking through the streets, which are bathed in soft light, I notice people appear gradually as the minutes tick by. I find myself eager to begin my search for what I have come for: the contemporary art scene that this sprawling city in central Bolivia has to offer.

Cochabamba is no stranger to art. It has been a centre for some of Bolivia's most interesting and mesmerising pieces, dating back to the nineteenth century. During the battle for independence, religious art quickly became popular and depictions of Jesus appeared more frequently within the city and its surrounding towns and villages. Traditional art, although still popular in Cochabamba, isn't the focus any longer. These days, it's more common to see modern and contemporary art adorning the galleries here.

There are some galleries scattered around the city, but many of them are hidden and difficult to find. The gems that one can come across in such places, however, are hardly taxing to behold. The problem lies in the amount of local art that can truly be found here. Increasingly, it's become more of a rarity to see the work of actual cochabambino artists in their own city.

Alejandra Dorado is a contemporary performance artist who knows all too well about the industry, which seems to be suffering under the surface. 'I think Cochabamba is suffering a crisis in art,' she frowns. 'A very, very strong division exists here between traditional art and modern art.'

We are sitting in her ultramodern studio, her own contemporary pieces thrown into the mix around the room. In one corner lies a t-shirt rack covered with intricate modern designs, while in another is a beautiful selection of small tapestries she has created. Next to the tapestries there are books she features in and books she has written. Furthermore, from her full-length window there is a view of the green mountains in front and the bustling city running smoothly below.

IT'S BECOME MORE OF A RARITY TO SEE THE WORK OF ACTUAL COCHABAMBINO ARTISTS IN THEIR OWN CITY.

'I've put together a piece with a friend for the only performance art festival there is here in Cochabamba,' Dorado says. 'It only happens once every three years, because there simply aren't enough artists to fill the festival. There is an extremely small number of contemporary artists here in Cochabamba; we are talking about those who work with concept, with context, about the times now. Here, there just aren't enough for the scene to flourish.'

It is clear to me that Dorado takes her work extremely seriously. She believes it impacts others and helps people understand issues through a type of art that is uncommon in a city such as this. Her pieces are usually based on gender issues, and she has recently worked on projects with a more political stance to try and give her view and promote that of those who inspire her art. However, according to Dorado, the issue is that there just isn't an audience.

Alba Balderrama is the Cultural Coordinator of the Palacio Portales, an art museum in the heart of the cultural centre of the city. She agrees that, despite her museum's continuing popularity, the scene is definitely having its problems. 'We invite both contemporary and traditional artists to our gallery, and our popularity remains mostly 50/50 when it comes to preference between the two. Our most popular international artists come from Argentina, and in recent years the amount of artists, especially Bolivian, that we have had featured has decreased.'

Elsewhere, Cochabamba's Casa de La Cultura, a local house for artists and different types of recreational activities, is hosting an exhibition for the artist Mario Unzueta. The majority of his pieces are paintings that focus on people and animals with varying flares of colour. His work seems tame compared with Alejandra Dorado's studio. In particular it is not as exciting, although outrightly Bolivian, but it is clear that such art draws people in the city. It seems they prefer to hold on to tradition instead of exploring new forms in the art they choose to pay attention to.

In Cochabamba, both traditional and contemporary art seem to be trumped by another emerging type: the beautiful, bustling world of street art. Over the last three years, Cochabamba's Proyecto mARTadero, which is a street art project in the city, has gained huge popularity worldwide and attracted hundreds of different street artists. During my morning exploring the streets, I saw beautiful, free-spirited art that was clearly less tied to any sort of convention than their traditional and contemporary counterparts. Not only the time frame makes them modern, as the murals tackle political, gender, and succinctly Bolivian issues. One notable example is a cholita who looks to the side with a quote written underneath: 'All that I had and all that I was, without testament, is lost to the wind.' It is a rather apt quote for the plight of people like Dorado, who continue to fight to have their art recognised here.

I SAW BEAUTIFUL, FREE-SPIRITED ART ON THE STREETS THAT WAS LESS TIED TO CONVENTION THAN THEIR TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY COUNTERPARTS.

Proyecto mARTadero does not only deal in street art. The organisation has a website dedicated to providing a platform for art – whether it be contemporary or traditional, musical or literary. For those who believe the art scene here is failing, it is a welcome tool to bolster cochabambino art. After the recent years of struggle, perhaps Cochabamba's art scene may flourish sooner than one can predict. The immediate future looks difficult, but the long-term could be much brighter.

The Palacio Portales Museum is located on Calle Potosí, just off Avenida América. Find out more about Proyecto mARTadero at www.martadero.org.

Mistura

TEXT: SOPHIE HOGAN
PHOTOS: SOPHIE HOGAN AND NICK SOMERS

A CONCEPT STORE FOR BOLIVIA'S BEST AND BRIGHTEST

Mistura's name comes from the word 'mixture'. When one walks in the door of the store on Calle Sagarnaga, La Paz's most touristy street, it is clear why. Lucia Campero, the young and ambitious leader of this concept boutique takes Bolivia's unique and impressive blend of cultures and amalgamates them into a gorgeous array of products. Although the items scream modernity and innovation, they still highlight the most beautiful aspects of traditional Bolivian culture. From designer alpaca garments, to books, to Bolivian-style hats and beautiful bath products, this place has everything necessary for a supreme artisan shopping experience.

Lucia has a strong, business-like manner, but not enough to deem her unapproachable. She looks like a successful young woman who has worked hard to get to the floor she stands upon now – and so she has.

'It was 2013, and we started the shop as four women,' Lucia says. 'I was the one who was mostly in charge of the creation, but I was always in contact with them and keeping them updated.' We are sitting in the neighbouring Café Banais which, along with the Hostal Naira upstairs, is linked to the store. Customers drinking their coffee can take a sneak peek at the wonderful products on display at Mistura through a large window.

Mistura opened with offerings featuring 14 designers. Now, as the shop has developed its relationship with other artists, it is working with small firms and people who are just coming out of university, as well as with larger companies. 'These days, we work with over 80 designers from all over Bolivia, and only Bolivia,' Lucia says. 'We are constantly renovating, constantly innovating.'

Mistura's location on Calle Sagarnaga is ideal because nearly every tourist who visits La Paz visits the street to buy souvenirs, be it llama sweaters, silver earrings, or paintings. 'The only problem with being here is that we can't really expand,' she says. 'We have the creative minds and the ideas for design, but there is the issue of managing the business.' The shop is rather small for the amount of amazing products hidden within; as I walk around I see the most odd mixture of things. In one corner sits a **cholita** hat, fashioned to be a little smaller and a touch more modern. As I walk past it, a tourist excitedly bounds over to try it on. In the secluded back section, there lies artisan soaps, the most gorgeous collection of Bolivian-made jewellery and a wealth of books about Bolivia's rich history and culture.

It isn't only the shop itself that represents the idea of mixture. The logo that Lucia and her associates eventually chose also expresses the store's vision. 'We had a series of old, precious Bolivian photos,' Lucia says. 'There was a special one of a boy from the country and a boy from the city standing side by side. The details of the two represent Bolivia perfectly. It's the idea that Bolivia has this air of diversity, the mix of cultures behind it, which is why we decided to use it as our logo.' The full logo isn't often used, but it is an apt portrayal of the store's identity.

After more than three years of pouring her heart and soul into this concept store, it's only fair for one to be curious about Lucia's favourite selling point. 'I think my favourite product would be the t-shirts we have by all the designers,' she says. 'They are really creative. There's one with the Valle de La Luna that I really love, and another with the *cholitas* walking along the road. These designs are just incredible; the garments are made of Alpaca wool, and the sweaters we have in the store are wonderful. It's not just their designs that are great, but the quality is also super.'

Lucia's vision for the store has most certainly come to fruition. Although her mantra is 'keep changing and moving forward', what doesn't seem to change is her desire to help the people of Bolivia through the sales in her store. 'One of the things I've loved most about this shop is promoting the local talent, and we're always discovering something new to work with,' she says. With exclusively Bolivian designer products adorning the shelves, that is exactly what she has achieved.

Mistura can be found on Calle Sagarnaga 163, La Paz

GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress

ALTEÑA - a woman from El Alto

BARRIO - 'neighbourhood'

CHOLITA - a traditional Bolivian indigenous woman of Aymara or Quechua descent

COCALERO - a coca farmer

COCHABAMBINO - a person from Cochabamba

COMERCIANTE - 'merchant'

CONCHA - 'seashell'

DÍA DE LA DEMOCRACIA - 'Day of Democracy'

DÍA DE LA MENTIRA - 'Day of the Lie'

FESTEJO - an Afro-Peruvian genre of music high in energy and improvisation

FÓSILES - 'fossils'

HUAYNO - a type of music of Quechuan descent, popular across the Andes

KUSILLO - a jester-like character of Aymara folkloric dance, sometimes perceived to be a monkey, a fox, or a flirtatious man

LIRIOS DEL MAR - 'sea lilies'

MAS - Movimiento al Socialismo, the ruling party of Bolivia

MONO - 'monkey'

MORENADA - the so-called 'Dance of the Black Slaves', a traditional music of Bolivia

MUJERES DE ORO - 'golden women'

PACEÑA - a popular beer manufactured in La Paz

PACEÑO - a person from La Paz

SAYA AFROBOLIVIANA - a type of music played by descendents of African slaves in the Yungas region of Bolivia

SINDICATO - 'labor union'

TRUFI - a mode of public transportation using automobiles

PHOTO: NICK SOMERS