BolivianExpress

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Magazine

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Bolivia's Foremost English-language Publication

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La Paz – Bolivia,
August 2016

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In December 2010, Bolivia made headlines worldwide when it passed the Ley de **Derechos de la Madre Tierra**, or what became globally known as the country's 'Mother Earth Law'. The groundbreaking legislation gave legal rights to the environment. That is to say, in Bolivia, nature itself is protected by law, and in fact has its own voice within the government, via the creation of the Defensoría de la Madre Tierra, an office tasked with ensuring that the rights of nature are protected. Those rights largely encompass its relations with human society – within the law, 'ecosystem' means more than the natural world; it includes the social, cultural and economic impacts of human behaviour on the environment.

This is not to say that Bolivia's relations with nature have since been completely harmonious. Litter remains an issue in cities and towns across the country, and pollution from agriculture and mining continue to plague Bolivia's watersheds. Additionally, new government-funded programs will certainly have adverse effects on the environment. For example, in 2015 the government passed a law that opened up national parks and other protected areas to mining and oil concessions, and most recently Bolivia has broken ground on a nuclear-power research centre in El Alto. While some supporters of these projects insist their implementation can be consistent with the law protecting Mother Earth, many others question the ecological sustainability of such endeavours.

These pressing issues got us here at Bolivian Express thinking about the word 'sustainability'. This 'Mother Earth Law', reinforced (and to some extent re-envisioned) through additional legislation in 2012, is intended to promote a healthy balance between natural systems and human action; the goal is to maintain existing ecologies in the long term, to ensure the sustainability of the natural world. But beyond the common associations with the environment, the term 'sustainability' is rooted in the key ideas of time and of endurance. Sustainability isn't just about nature or ecology, it is about deep relationships; it is about politics and economics.

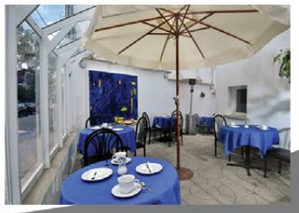
In this issue of Bolivian Express, we looked into this idea of 'sustainability' to explore not only ideas of ecological responsibility, but also ideas of consistency, of endurance, of continuation. We travelled to locales as diverse as the salt flats of Uyuni and the cloud forests of Caranavi in the Nor Yungas region to learn about technology-based solutions for litter cleanup and new strategies to support Bolivia's coffee industry. We learned about the idea of 'sustainable mining', and Bolivia's important role in the organic quinoa industry. We met people in the tourism industry invested in maintaining Bolivia's environmental and cultural wonders through responsible tourism.

A common thread we often found in our work for this issue was the idea that for anything to endure, adaptation almost invariably has to happen. And we did not fall short in meeting individuals and groups finding new ways to work with old materials to make something new. We met designers who employ recycled items, from plant material to engine parts, to create clothing and sculptures. Such art gives old material new life, and this theme of sustainability through rebirth carried itself through this issue, through the maintenance of La Paz's famous, ancient micro buses to the younger generation's interest in finding their own fashion voice through the purchasing of used clothing.

Bolivia's relationship with the environment is as complex as it is critical. The ability of the government to carry out its initiatives, from infrastructure development to social programs, is directly tied to its ability to capitalize on the bountiful resources Bolivia has to offer. But this can come with costs. Today we have the opportunity to experience how a society, taking a lead in creating legal frameworks to regulate human engagement with the environment, carries out such an initiative in the real world. We also have a chance to navigate a country where cultures and traditions stretch back for generations, even centuries. Let's see what it takes to keep these traditions alive in a constantly evolving and changing world.

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

By William Wroblewski



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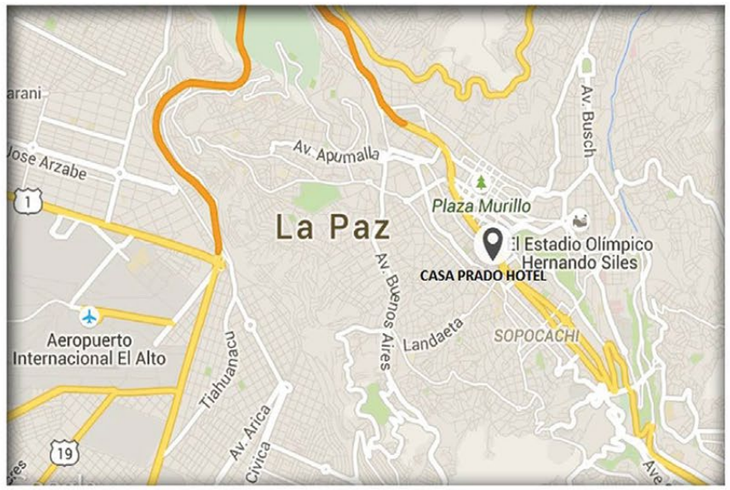

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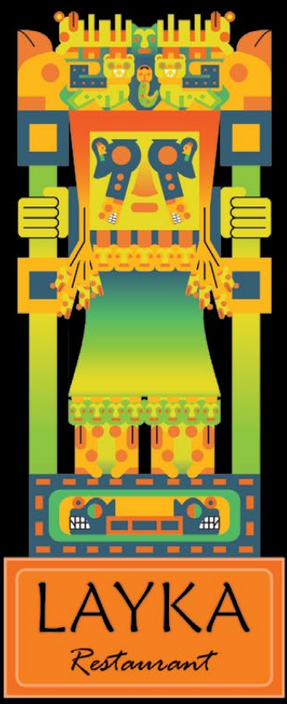

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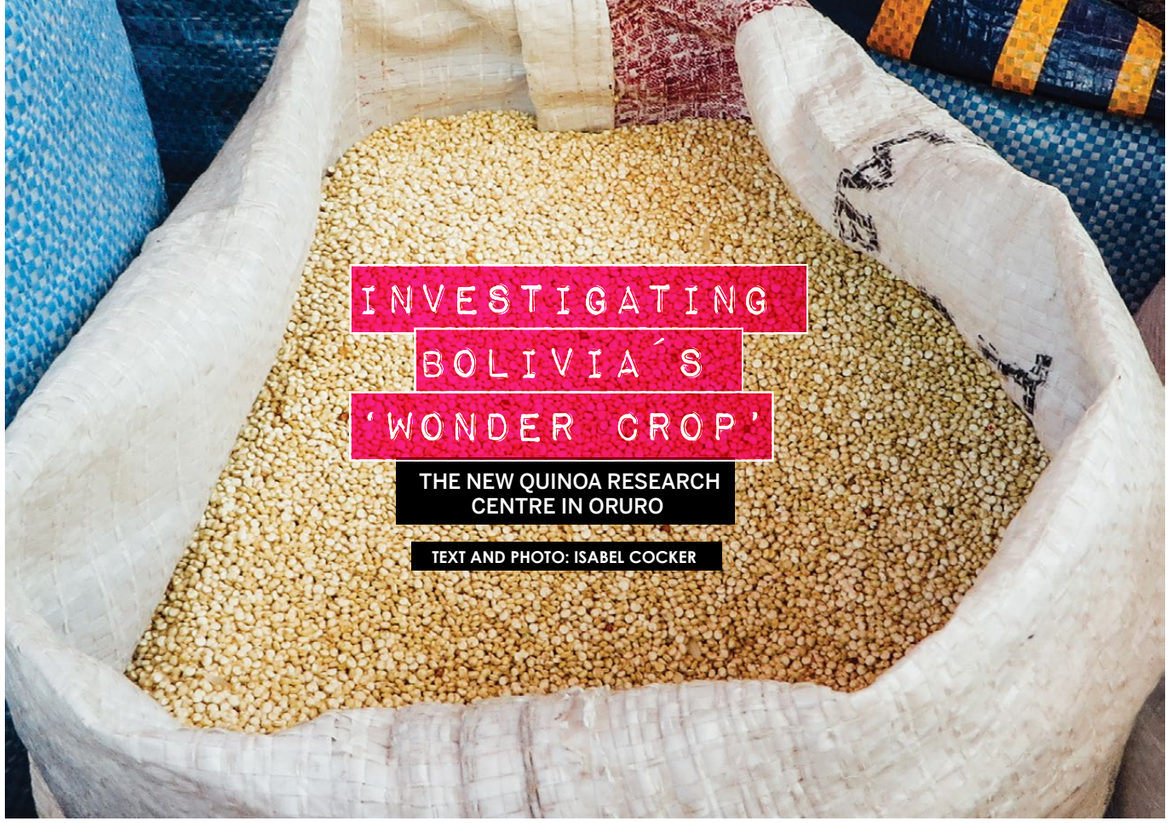

INVESTIGATING BOLIVIA´S 'WONDER CROP'

THE NEW QUINOA RESEARCH CENTRE IN ORURO

TEXT AND PHOTO: ISABEL COCKER

In England and the US, quinoa used to be the reserve of health nuts and hippies, found in stores selling tofu and hemp milk. But in recent years, this 'wonder grain' has exploded into the mainstream and is now almost impossible to avoid. Not only are more and more people eating it, but more people are taking an interest in growing the crop and finding new varieties, as well as researching everything from optimal soil acidity, potential health benefits, and the diseases threatening the crop's production.

Starting in 2018, the bulk of this research will be focussed on one site: the newly announced Centro Internacional de la Quinua. This centre will be the first of its kind, bringing together countries from across the world with a budget of $25 million. The most exciting part is that it will be located in the epicentre of Bolivian quinoa production – the city of Oruro, on the Bolivian **altiplano**.

According to archeological findings from the basin of Lake Titicaca, quinoa was first grown in the Andes as a food source over 3000 years ago. Carlos Nuñez de Arco, the Bolivian-born Commercial Director of Andean Naturals, America's leading quinoa importer, says 'Bolivia is the origin of the world's quinoa and it has been part of our heritage for thousands of years.'

Apart from a small hiatus in the beginning of the colonisation period when the Spaniards prohibited the grain because of its supposedly 'magical' properties, quinoa has always been part of the Andean lifestyle. Its potential as a powerful health food began to be recognised internationally in the 1980s. When the grain entered mainstream western diets in the 2000s, Bolivia enjoyed a huge leap in exports. There is an ongoing debate about the drawbacks and benefits of quinoa's popularity, but there is consensus around the need to address the threats facing Bolivia's quinoa production.

The growth in the exportation of quinoa in Bolivia is now slowing, but the boost in demand of the past years has caused the quantity of land used for growing the grain to increase exponentially. To keep up with demand, some farmers have discarded traditional practises such as crop-rotation and fertilization-by-llama, turning to industrialized methods using tractors and chemical nutrients. This has damaged the fertility of the already weak plains of the *Altiplano*, reducing yield and crop uniformity.

But this is not the only threat to quinoa in Bolivia. According to recent reports, climate change has bought late rains, strange temperature fluctuations and windstorms. The effects have been devastating and are another reason for the drop in average yield per hectare.

Additionally, the establishment of large, intensive quinoa farms in Peru and Ecuador have slowly knocked Bolivia off its pedestal. Nuñez de Arco admits, ´Bolivia's place in the world of quinoa is shrinking due to more countries taking an interest in its cultivation.' He then adds, however, that 'Unlike many other countries, Bolivia continues, in the most part, to use traditional organic methods of farming. This means we can carve out a specialized niche in the market, making us different from our international competitors.'

The quinoa centre in Oruro will research practical methods to help farmers reverse the drop in production. Its scientists will investigate hardier seed varieties bred to withstand pests and natural attacks, and study the production and commercialization of the grain in order to maximise revenue. The goal is to promote quinoa as a resource in the fight against world hunger and malnutrition. As Nuñez de Arco affirms, 'Quinoa has many useful properties. We need this research to help farmers take full advantage of the grain and to provide the world with its nutrients.'

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KILOMETRES OF PETTY DIPLOMACY

THE LEGAL BATTLE OVER A RIACHUELO

TEXT: JACOB KLEIN
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

Continues on page 12

Along the southwestern reaches of Bolivia, in a desolate section of the Departamento de Potosí, a freshwater spring seeps to the surface of a grass-covered valley known as the Silala Pass. From its source the water will crawl for the next eight kilometers: crossing from Bolivia to Chile, flowing from canals to piping, and from piping to Chilean taps, bringing water to the Atacama, the driest non-polar desert on earth. Despite its seemingly insignificant size, it is the subject of a prolific regional dispute. Being a vital resource to Chile, whose private companies use the water for industry, and a symbol of sovereignty to Bolivia, which has sought recompense for water usage by Chile since the mid-1990s, the waterway stands larger on the world stage than it does in the world.

THE WATERWAY STANDS LARGER ON THE WORLD STAGE THAN IT DOES IN THE WORLD

Strained relations between Chile and Bolivia are bristling around international water policy. Bolivia's crippling loss of access to the Pacific Ocean in the latter half of the 19th century has maintained relevancy in a slew of recent conflicts. In addition to Bolivia's claim to maritime access, Chile and Bolivia have also been struggling over the use of the Silala, a case that Chile brought to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in June of this year. Though there are currently three transboundary waterways in contestation between the two states, the Silala will be the only one dealt with in the court, located at The Hague. Chile's objective is to have the waters declared an International waterway, entitling it to half of the water the spring yields. Defining the waterway and unraveling its muddled history will determine the outcome of the suit.

Diplomatic relations concerning the use of the Silala began in 1908 when the Ferrocarril de Antofagasta y Bolivia (FACB), then a British company, requested concessions to use the Silala. The request came in the shadow of the War of the Pacific and it's resulting **tratado** in 1904, and offered no recompense for the scarce resource. 'Bolivia signed the treaty with a pistol to their head,' said Leo Robles, a Chilean journalist who covers the dispute regularly. When FACB, a company vital to Chilean development, requested concessions, 'Bolivia knew there was nothing it could do... so it just signed it.' The water was used for laying railroad spikes and powering the steam engine locomotives until the early 1960's, when the locomotives were transitioned to run on diesel. 'In Spanish we say the concession is extinguished,' explained Andres Guzmán, a foreign policy analyst, on the change in fuel. FACB's concession became moot as its consumption lessened, and other companies began to rely on the Silala. From the moment FACB stopped using steam engines, 'it was illegal to use the water in Chile,' says Guzmán.

In 1997 Bolivia revoked the concession. Thereafter, it demanded payment for the previously gifted resource. The 2000s saw numerous failed attempts for both recompense and negotiation. In 2009, Chilean and Bolivian delegations convened to negotiate a 17-article agreement concerning each nation's right to the water. Though terms were agreed upon, the talks fell through. Regional petitions demanding that Chile pay its historical debt, which included recompense for water drawn from the Silala since 1908, totaling some 1 billion $USD, were accepted by the Bolivian government. 'There has been no diplomatic progress since this happened,' states Guzmán.

Since the failure of the 2009 negotiations, Bolivia has attempted to utilize the Silala in several projects. Researchers, national diplomats and regional functionaries have offered various proposals, none of which have come to fruition. 'It is difficult for us to access,' explains Guzmán. The remote location makes agricultural use disadvantageous. Water flow is too low for profitable yields of hydroelectricity. A small contingent of soldiers, manning a border outpost established in 2006, and stray llamas constitute the entirety of Bolivian consumption. Meanwhile, the prodigious use of the water by Chilean industry has not faltered.

The Antofagasta region of Chile maintains a difficult balance between potable water and water used for industry. Chile consumes an estimated 4.8 million cubic meters of water from the Silala annually. While the exact division of the volume is unknown, it is shared between various mines, owned by Corporación Nacional del Cobre de Chile, and the cities of Baquedano and Sierra Gordo for potable water.

Recent water shortages have impacted Chile's mining operation, which is responsible for nearly a third of the global copper production. The amount of water required for the extraction process and the aridity of the Atacama, make the proximity of the Silala vital to the industry. Chiquimata, the largest open pit copper mine in the world, is a State-owned enterprise that produces 500,000 tons of copper annually and relies on the Loa River and the Silala. The potable water drawn from the Silala is supplied to Baquedano and Sierra Gordo by private companies. 'They are receiving the water for free, and they are selling it,' says Guzmán.

The lawsuit will determine whether the Silala is an international waterway, but defining the water is difficult. Several factors obstruct an already complicated case. The Silala refers to 'a subterranean aquatic system that surfaces in Bolivia and has been artificially canalized to flow into Chile,' says Guzmán. Yet little is known of the aquifer. If it is discovered that it extends beneath Chilean soil, then Chile could claim partial drawing rights.

If the watercourse is defined as a transboundary river, it would be subject to a number of international laws that would also give Chile access to the resource. This outcome, however, would require proof that the water flowed naturally into Chile prior to its canalization in 1908. Though there is evidence that suggests this, the Silala appears to have done so only intermittently, which would exempt it from transboundary water law and reaffirm Bolivia's claim of ownership. The battle, then, would be over the murky history of eight kilometers of water.

LEGALITY ASIDE, THE FIGHT FOR THE SILALA HAS AN EVIDENT POLITICAL DIMENSION

Legality aside, the fight for the Silala has an evident political dimension. For Bolivia, it is a matter of national sovereignty, a question of standing up to a historically dominant Chile. 'We are tired of hearing that Chile is using our water,' concluded Guzmán. For Chile, the Silala stands for private industry, and a manner of correcting a pestering Bolivian behavior. 'It is a matter of justice,' insists Robles, an admitted Bolivian sympathist. 'The river itself is insignificant.'

SAL & SOLAR

YOSHI HOMNA'S REVOLUTIONARY PLAN TO CLEAR UYUNI'S PERIPHERAL WASTELAND

TEXT AND PHOTO: MADELEINE POLLARD

'Close your eyes if you see any rubbish; we are really trying to work on it,' pleads our tour guide with an embarrassed smile as the jeep trundles out of Uyuni, the gateway town for backpackers touring the the world's largest salt flat. Metres from where tourists clamber over the rusting skeletons of locomotives in el **cementerio de trenes**, resting near Bolivia's famous **salar**, a less aesthetically endearing vision of abandonment colours the landscape. Litter itches at the smoothness of the horizon, containing within it waves of household waste – orange peels, used nappies, car tyres, and a jungle of multicoloured plastic bags snagged against the charred desert weeds.

This vision is what 30-year-old international developer and environmentalist Yoshi Homna was greeted with increasingly regularly during his seven years as a tour guide of Bolivia's *Salar* de Uyuni. The rubbish, which is beginning to overshadow this 'magical place', prompted him to seek a revolutionary solution.

Attracting 1.2 million tourists each year, the *salar* has become one of Latin America's most popular tourist destinations, and has been recognized as one of the world's best photo opportunities. But a scourge of rubbish is a reality in some communities near the salt flats, a vision that contradicts the flood of photos on Instagram capturing the *salar's* surreal expanse of shocking whiteness. In these images, every shard of salt defensively reflects the sun's piercing gaze back into the thin atmosphere, generating photos of phantasmagorical beauty. This relationship, that of el **sol** y la **sal**, is in fact what Yoshi is harnessing to solve the problem of waste near the *salar*.

According to Yoshi, the *salar* is not only threatened by the thousands of tourists that visit it, or even the Dakar Rally that rips through the landscape every year, but also from the inefficient waste-management system of Uyuni itself. The harshly remote city's 10,460 inhabitants bury most of their waste underground, posing another biting problem for the surrounding environment and the *salar's* remarkable beauty.

This accumulation of garbage prompted the creation of Yoshi's **autosustentable** Project YOSI, in which **solar** energy will be used to convert waste plastic into petroleum fuel. Currently in storage in a lab at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA) in La Paz, the project's machinery will heat plastic refuse into gas form, purify it, before cooling and condensing it into a liquid fuel.

A Japanese company, *Solar* Frontier, is providing *solar* panels designed to work efficiently at varied temperatures and light conditions, making the project both environmentally and economically beneficial.

The programme, Yoshi explains, will not only dispose of waste, but also generate electricity for local communities. Due to an unreliable electrical network and the dominance of large hotels that tax the system, locals frequently experience power shortages. Soon, with the project's cutting-edge technology, residents will be able to turn their **basura** into **la luz**. Depending on how talks with the Bolivian government progress, Yoshi predicts that the project will be up and running by the end of the year. He hopes that this example of sustainability can be replicated elsewhere: 'I dream of expanding this ethos of sustainability outwards, from the heart of the *salar* across the entire country.'

For the locals who live in Uyuni, the popularity of Yoshi's sustainable venture is burgeoning. Sandra Pari, owner of Full Tours G&M, noted how the lack of waste disposal vehicles renders the tarred streets a jackpot for scavenging dogs, whilst **agrónomo** Marcelino Mamani Mamani reflected on how the notoriety of Uyuni's litter is detrimental to its natural surroundings and to its image as a town. Both welcome Project YOSI with open arms, regarding it as hope for the future of Uyuni and the truly fascinating environment of the *salar*.

QUENCHING A DIFFERENT THIRST

WASH THEM OUT AND FILL THEM UP

TEXT: BRIAN WEISBECKER
PHOTO: COURTESY OF CERVECERÍA BOLIVIANA NACIONAL

'Where's your bottle?'

It was, in fact, in the bag I was told to store in a locker when I walked into this supermarket. As I continued conversing with the cashier, however, it became clear that she was not referring to my plastic Camelbak knockoff. She pointed to the large bottle of Paceña, the favorite **cerveza** of La Paz, in my hand.

'If you want to buy that,' she explained, 'you need to bring an empty bottle to exchange.'

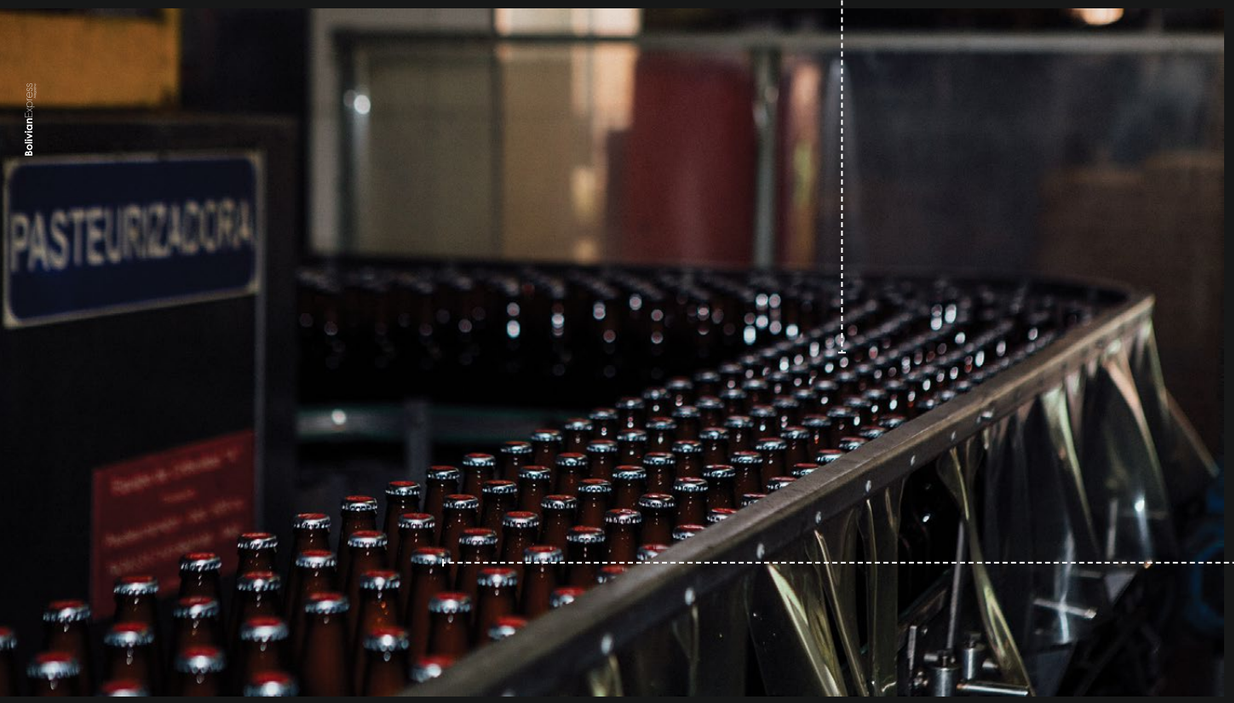
I stood there bewildered, as I instantly began to see a Catch-22: How can I bring in an empty bottle of beer without first buying a full one? I am 22 years old, and the drinking age here is 18. I recycle back home – what is the issue? Should I start dumpster-diving, just so I can enjoy a fine Bolivian beer?

Lucky for me, after some uncomfortably poor Spanish communication I was informed that this store offered a **garantía** for confused and unprepared folk like me. I paid an extra 5 bolivianos and was on my merry way.

On my walk back from the store, much before I could evaluate the integrity of the beer, the bottle caught my eye. The glass container seemed to have a little more character than I've seen in its imported counterparts. This isn't to imply that my bottle had done more community service or had seldom told a lie in its life. Instead, looking at the 620 mL bottle of Paceña, I noticed a good number of scratches, the label was pretty worn, and the glass was rather dusty.

Great, I thought, I got the loaner beer.

I was later told by local friends that my beer wasn't a loaner. Instead, I had just bought my first beer with a returnable bottle. While many beer companies pride themselves on the sleekest, sexiest, shiniest bottle for their beverages, many breweries in Bolivia have opted for a far simpler approach: **botellas retornables**, or returnable bottles.



BoliviaInExpress

In Bolivia, if you head to a **tienda** to buy a beer, your request may be denied. For stores offering the *garantía*, like the one I came across, even without a bottle you can pay an extra fee as collateral for your purchase. This money is guaranteed to be returned to you when you return your newly emptied bottle with the receipt of your purchase. This allows new customers an opportunity to enter the recycling cycle. The *garantía* is not mandated by any law, but voluntarily offered by some stores.

For this system to work, breweries like La Cervecería Boliviana Nacional (CBN), creators of Paceña, have laid the groundwork of filling and packaging the *botellas retornables*. Since the very start of their business, 130 years ago this October, CBN has offered beers out of returnable bottles. At their eight plants, they divide the returned bottles into suitable and non-suitable groups. The non-suitable group is broken down and sent over to a glass container factory to be recycled. The suitable group undergoes a three-stage cleaning process in which the bottles are reviewed seven times to analyze colour, cleanliness and if there is any remaining liquid. Once clean, they are refilled, packaged and shipped back off to vendors.

AROUND THE WORLD, RETURNABLE BOTTLES HAVE BECOME COMMON PRACTICE, AND OFTENTIMES BOTTLES CAN AVERAGE 20 TO 40 TRIPS BACK TO THE BREWERIES FOR REFILLING

SUSTAINABILITY

Around the world, returnable bottles have become common practice, and oftentimes bottles can average 20 to 40 trips back to the breweries for refilling, according to the Consumer Goods Forum, a global organization that brings consumer-goods businesses together to dictate best and sustainable practices. At my local grocery store, Ketal, they send about 120 empty bottles a week to breweries like CBN.

Not to be outpaced by their alcoholic counterparts, many soft drinks are also served out of returnable bottles in Bolivia. At nearly every kiosk and food stall in La Paz, you can be served a drink like Coca-Cola or Sprite out of a tiny returnable bottle. You will be given a colorful straw to keep your consumption more hygienic, and you will be asked not to walk off with the bottle, as the returns will take place at the stand. These bottles are taken weekly to a factory in El Alto to be cleaned and refilled.

With half of the beer produced globally being served in returnable bottles, this practice is already beginning to overshadow single-use glass bottles. In many countries, the ease of purchasing soda or beer in bottles for quick personal usage is a major draw for keeping their beverage system in the status quo. As a focus on sustainability continues to expand into the mainstream of corporate citizenship, however, it is clear that the conversation regarding returnable bottles still has a lot of usage left in it. ⊗

LOOKING BEYOND THE PLANTATION

YOUNG COFFEE GROWERS MOVE FROM THE FIELDS TO THE COUNTER

TEXT: ISABEL COCKER
PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MELEÁN A.

The main square of Caranavi, a town about four hours down bumpy roads from the capital, is filled with crowds of people out to watch the Independence Day parade. Against a background of marching youths and incessant trumpet music, the stall on one corner of the plaza seems to attract most of the attention. Not just because it is larger than most, nor because it is decked in elaborate signs and colorful awnings, this stall draws a crowd because of the gleaming equipment that its workers are professionally manning: two state-of-the-art Italian coffee machines.

The people behind the counter are the beneficiaries of a programme sponsored by the Federacion de Caficultores Exportadores de Bolivia (FECAFEB) that aims to connect young people with the productive stages beyond the cultivation of coffee. The group of 32 students between the ages of 16 and 30, have just finished a '**curso de barismo**' in which, over a short period of 10 days, they have perfected the art of working these machines. The celebratory atmosphere around this stall is not only due to the excitement of the fiesta, but also to the graduation ceremony we have just attended for the new baristas.

Even though the young graduates received formal certificates, what really matters are the monogrammed black aprons they are now sporting proudly. They move with confidence. They can fashion the bean into anything from traditional espressos and cappuccinos, to the frappes that are so popular on this humid night and even into caffeinated cocktails. The workshops, which are the first of their kind in Bolivia, have clearly been a success.

This young group of baristas comes from coffee-producing families, but its members have very different backgrounds. Some are still in school, some are running their own farms, and some have spouses and children who they bought along to each class. What unites them is a love of coffee, a passion for the bean that they have all grown up around.

´Most Bolivians don't know how to appreciate their country´s own coffee,' commented Ariel Ramos, a 30-year-old plantation owner who dreams of owning a coffee house in Cochabamba. The stall had run out of milk and I accompanied him to a local shop as the baristas struggled to keep up with the demand. Ariel added, ´Coming to these workshops has taught me all the skills I need for the business so I can introduce more people to their own coffee.´

Caranavi is known across Bolivia as the centre of the ´**Zona Cafetalera**´, so it may seem surprising that these young baristas are causing such a stir amongst those crowds flocking the square. However, although the province of Caranavi produces more than 90% of Bolivia's coffee crop, the majority of it is exported to the United States and little stays inside the country. This is partly due to the taste of Bolivian consumers, most of whom are used to drinking instant Nescafé. But there are also very few people trained in the art of making the perfect espresso, which translates into a dearth of proper cafes that take full advantage of the Bolivian bean.

This is where large organizations have stepped in. FECAFEB is a national federation that aims to increase the popularity of the Bolivian coffee bean nationally and internationally. It set up these workshops to persuade current coffee growers of the commercial viability of the bean in all stages of production. The aim is to get them more involved in the region's main export.

Other than forging connections between farmers and international markets, FECAFEB offers technical and monetary assistance to 25 coffee co-operatives that support more than 20,000 families. In Bolivia, the majority of coffee is produced on small-scale farms that are run with traditional skills and values. That's why FECAFEB ensures that its members obtain fairtrade and organic certifications that yield a greater profit margin for the growers.

The *curso de barismo* took place at the coffee laboratory in the Caranavi Institute of Agro-industry. As I walked in, my eye was drawn to a whiteboard along the wall with a table detailing each coffee drink, its exact ingredients, their prices and the total cost. This was then contrasted with the average selling price of the drink, which revealed the opportunity for profit. After factoring in the cost of using the coffee machine and the service provided, the average barista could stand to make up to 350% profit. Every time a new drink was taught in class, a new row was added to the board, as students diligently copied the figures into their notebooks.

THEY MOVE WITH CONFIDENCE. THEY CAN FASHION THE BEAN INTO ANYTHING FROM TRADITIONAL ESPRESSOS TO THE FRAPPES THAT ARE SO POPULAR ON THIS HUMID NIGHT

It is important for students to learn the economics of coffee so they can understand the opportunities that lie in the later stages of the coffee chain. For Deysi Ramos, a 30-year-old coffee shop owner from Caranavi, these sessions confirmed what she already believed about the state of the Bolivian coffee industry. ´Making the coffee itself adds a value to the bean that is lost if you sell it abroad,' she points out. 'We need to keep it here if we want to have a successful business.´

Daysi hopes to open up new cafes around the country, using beans cultivated on her family's plantations. She hopes that some of the new baristas will want to help her with the project, as they all showed such enthusiasm during the training.

Back at the fair, watching the crowds milling around the stall, watching Ariel confidently knock out cappuccino after cappuccino, it is obvious that there should be a large market for Bolivian coffee. These new initiatives by FECAFEB will be successful, not just because of the skill taken to ensure their outcome, but because of the people involved in the project. They understand the commercial and practical elements of the coffee trade, but most importantly, they have the desire to share the Bolivian coffee bean with their own country and the world. Forget the Colombian bean, the Bolivian crop is the one here to stay.

LEAVING A PAPER TRAIL

MARIÓN MACEDO'S QUEST TO MAKE ART FROM THE UNWANTED

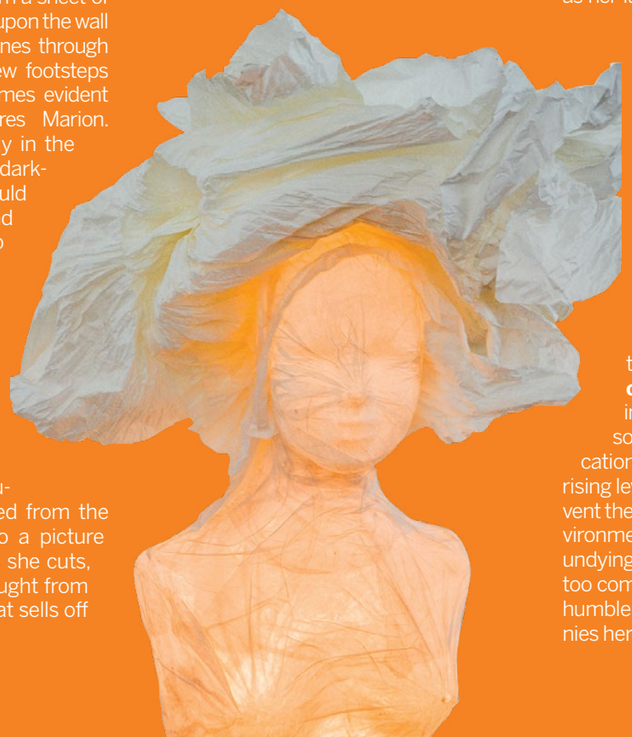
TEXT AND PHOTO: GABRIELLE MCGUINNESS

Each day we fill our bins to the brim with scraps of paper, cardboard boxes and bundles of packaging, a clear sign that paper, an essential resource, is being inefficiently used and abhorrently neglected. For Bolivian artist Marión Macedo, however, paper can be reincarnated beyond the recycling bin.

Dangling from the ceiling on the far wall of her studio is a striking life-sized stencil of the tree of life, carved from a sheet of canvas that casts shadows upon the wall behind it. The soft light shines through each leaf-shaped gap. A few footsteps into the room and it becomes evident that nature deeply inspires Marion. 'There is too much tragedy in the world for art to be about darkness,' she utters. 'Art should be something beautiful and inspiring that teaches us to be better.'

Every element of Marion's artwork reflects her entrenched respect for the environment. The moulds she uses for her delicate, softly glowing lamps are discarded mannequins from her studio. An old drawer is saved from the skip and transformed into a picture frame. The German books she cuts, folds and draws on are bought from a local Lutheran church that sells off its unwanted literature.

Marion's career as an artist began just 10 years ago, when she left her job at a Swiss marketing firm in La Paz for London, to study interior design and English. After five years abroad, she returned to La Paz to pursue a career in the art world. She established herself as an eminent artist through the growth of her old shop in Zona Sur, where she sold paper flower arrangements and jewellery.



When the French company Salon de Chocolat collaborated with the high-end Bolivian chocolate brand to improve their recipes, Marion was invited to design a fairy dress that was presented at the launch party in Paris. She made the dress using almost every element of the cocoa tree, from the bark to the bean. For four years, she has held free open-air fashion shows, modelling clothing made from reclaimed materials. This venture has left a lasting impression upon the public, earning her the blessings of complete strangers and the honor of judging an upcycled fashion catwalk at a local school.

Her attraction to environmentally friendly projects stems from her upbringing. Marion reminisces about her parents and their expansive garden, blooming with trees, flowers and fruits in abundance. Her father nurtured her creativity while her mother warned her about breaking flowers or leaves out of respect for nature.

'THERE IS TOO MUCH TRAGEDY IN THE WORLD FOR ART TO BE ABOUT DARKNESS.'

—MARIÓN MACEDO

This explains Marion's choice of paper as her favoured artistic medium, a stepping stone between art and nature. Like the endless variety of the natural world, her experimentations, which vary from cutting, sticking, dyeing, shredding, folding, ripping, painting and even knitting, demonstrate that paper actually possesses an inherent versatility and raw beauty.

Beyond its initial aesthetic appeal, her artwork radiates the values associated with **Pachamama**, in the hope of sculpting a more loving and ethical society. She believes art and education can help **paceños** deal with the rising levels of stress in the city and prevent the destruction of her country's environment, for which she professes an undying pride. Although she may seem too compassionate to be human, she is humble to a fault, which is why she denies her evident creativity.

RUNNING ON MANPOWER

MAINTAINING THE MICROS OF LA PAZ REQUIRES MASSIVE INGENUITY

TEXT AND PHOTO: BRIAN WEISBECKER

On the streets of La Paz, vehicles large and small breeze about. Speedy taxis pass cars whenever possible, honking at anyone that might block their path; minibuses crawl down the avenues, their colorful **letreros**, or signs, declaring their destinations; and slow, lumbering tourist buses and commercial trucks dare the steep passes of the city. But perhaps one of the most memorable vehicular sights in La Paz are the **micros**, colourful school buses providing cheap transport for the urban masses.

Dressed in different shades of red, green, yellow and blue, the buses are decorated with brightly painted model names and shiny ornaments, either stock or personally adorned. The *micros* of Línea 2, which have been running from Sopocachi to the bus terminal in Zona Challapampa since 1938, can be found in various hues of dark and light blue.

The inception of the line began with the move away from the city's old **tranvías**, or trolleys. From that time, Línea 2 has grown to 120 drivers strong, working 365 days a year. Línea 2 grew into the union known today as the Sindicato Eduardo Avaroa, which currently runs 19 lines in La Paz.

The sector chief of Línea 2, Nilo Linares, says that his drivers are also accomplished mechanics, allowing them to fix whatever issue the difficult roads of La Paz bring to their vehicles. Showing the extent of the changes the buses have had to undergo to survive, Linares said, 'All of this' – pointing at the body of the vehicle – 'this, and nothing else [has stayed the same]'. He continued, emphasising, 'The engine, the internal gears, the brakes, the transmission – all of this has been changed.'

Linares states that a new Dodge, Ford or Chevrolet bus of the type they use costs between $80,000 to $89,000. 'We can't pay that with the fares we charge,' he says, which come out to about 30 US cents per customer. Instead, Linares says the drivers will buy the necessary parts and fix whatever breaks down on their vehicles, some which have been running for 45 years. He explained they service their approximately 65 buses weekly, and have been doing so for the past 78 years. The people of La Paz rely on these buses for work and city travel; the drivers know this and work to make sure they are always ready and running.

The blue micros of Línea 2 are a fixture of life in La Paz, and are emblematic of the colourful, resilient nature of Bolivia. Through tough road conditions, traffic congestion and vehicle frailty, it is clear that it is the spirit and ingenuity of these drivers that sustain these buses on their long journeys home.

SUSTAINING BOLIVIA'S BASKETBALL BOOM

The Challenges of Creating a Basketball Culture

TEXT AND PHOTO: EDUARDO BAPTISTA

June 30th 2016 marked a historic date for Bolivian basketball. By beating Ecuador 75-74, Bolivia's national basketball team broke a winless drought of 27 years against South American teams. This was no fluke. Bolivian basketball has been growing since 2012, with the creation of the Libobasquete, the first organized national league. After this watershed moment, the sport began to take its first steps towards professionalisation. For all the progress made, however, there are serious issues that could halt the future growth of the sport.

La Paz may be Bolivia's political capital, but basketball-wise it is miles behind other cities. According to José Luis Revollo, head coach of La Paz's premier league team Bolmar, 'No hay canchas, no hay espacio, no tenemos condiciones.' ('There are no courts, there is no space and we don't have the right conditions.') It is obvious why the the state of basketball in la **Ciudad Maravillosa** is anything but marvellous.

Jaime Méndez, a veteran basketball coach and La Paz native, says the problem is not so much the lack of courts, but their inaccessibility. It is clear he resents the schools that refuse to lend their courts to La Paz's basketball clubs, describing their attitude as selfish and money-oriented. The only solution would be to build new courts, but as Revollo notes, requests made for new sports pavilions have been ignored by local officials.

LA PAZ MAY BE BOLIVIA'S POLITICAL CAPITAL, BUT BASKETBALL-WISE IT IS MILES BEHIND OTHER CITIES.

Courts are an issue particular to La Paz. Other cities such as Cochabamba, Tárija and Oruro have a good supply of basketball courts, with the unsurprising consequence that their teams, in all age categories, usually dominate those from La Paz. Nevertheless, there are other issues affecting the development of the sport, even in these basketball-friendly cities.

The sustainable growth of a competitive sport requires investment. Marco Arze Mendoza, president of the Bolivian Basketball Federation, says there is a shortage of private and public investment in Bolivian basketball. He believes the same applies to all sports in Bolivia except football, where private investment more than compensates for the lack of state support. In basketball, however, private investment plays no such part.

I listened in shock as Revollo tells me that the costs of maintaining Bolmar come out of his own pocket. In spite of the noble sacrifices made by passionate basketball lovers such as Revollo, this is no sustainable way of funding organized basketball.

On a national level, many clubs are crippled by their inability to pay Bolivian players a salary they can live off. This is often due to the high salaries of foreign players, usually from the US, who are needed to elevate the quality of the game. Their athletic and exciting style of play attracts large audiences and increases the revenue made from ticket sales.

Mendoza points out that progress has been made, with four or five national players currently earning US$1000 per month, close to the US$1200 most foreign players earn in Bolivia. But this is the exception rather than the rule. In Revollo's team, US$300 is the maximum amount a Bolivian player has ever earnt. Most earn US$50 dollars per month, which barely covers travel costs. As Mendoza concludes, a player that is concerned with putting food on the table for his family cannot possibly improve as much as a player that focuses solely on his sport. Without money, results are hard to come by.

However, Jacqueline Dordoyo, the first Bolivian woman to achieve a FIBA Level 3 coaching accreditation, says that money can be as much of a problem as it can be a solution. Her coaching background is centred on the younger categories. In this respect, she has strong words on the side-effects of professionalization. I listen to Dordoyo recount story after story of young, talented players who develop serious attitude problems after getting paid to transfer clubs, even if for a measly fee. One 15- year old player demanded that he receive a pair of shoes in return for participating in Cochabamba's regional team trainings. It is easy to understand what Dordoyo means when she states that young players nowadays lack 'amor por la camiseta' ('love for one's club'). Simply pouring in money is not a sustainable solution to the problems facing Bolivian basketball either. The issues are as much cultural and organizational as they are financial.

One of the most important points made by Dordoyo is that senior teams, particularly those in the Libobasquete, have to be examples to the communities they represent and inspire younger players. In order for children and teenagers to commit hours of training with no material remuneration they need to fall in love with the sport. Dordoyo asks me to imagine the effect that a Libobasquete team could have if it paid a visit to a local court in Cochabamba and played with the kids there.

After watching the Cochabamba classic between La Salle and Universidad Mayor de San Simón later that night, Dordoyo's point made perfect sense. As soon as the game was over, hundreds of people flocked to the court in hopes of getting a picture with the players. These players are idols, and they should do more than simply eat, sleep and play at the club's cost. Cultivating el amor por la camiseta demands influential role models, not money.

Inspiration must also be provided by coaches and parents. Revollo, Méndez and Dordoyo all coach the youngest age categories, and are firm believers that at such a stage, basketball has to be first about fun, then about winning. Bolivia's poor level in relation to other South American countries makes the thirst for results understandable. This often leads coaches, however, to burn through stages in the development of young players, including the player's love for the sport.

Revollo remembers a father who complained about his training methods after watching his 8-year old son play tag during his first training session and hardly grab a basketball. For Revollo it is essential that the child associates basketball with play, not duty. Too often, parents push their children to play a sport without the child wanting to, a problem found all over the world, not just in Bolivia. As Dordoyo observes, 'You can't build a solid house without good foundations.' A positive first experience with basketball could significantly increase the chances that a child pursues the sport in the future, at an amateur or professional level.

If Bolivia is to make ground with Latin American basketball powerhouses such as Brazil or Argentina, it needs to understand its own basketball reality, not that of the NBA or the Spanish Liga. In the absence of state support and private investment, Bolivia's basketball organizations have to focus on correcting the problems that can be solved without money. Only then will future financial investments act as a blessing for the sport, rather than a curse in disguise.

LET THEM READ

HOW HARRY POTTER IS SAVING THE BOOK WORLD AGAIN

TEXT: MARIA MAYBÖCK

'The average Bolivian doesn't read,' says Sebastian Antezana, author of La Toma Manuscrito, which won the "**Premio Nacional de Novela**" in 2008. There is frustration in his voice, but not a hint of surrender. 'The decision to write is not easy in a country like Bolivia,' he adds, referring to the relative lack of bookstores in the country and his claimed underappreciation of books in local markets.

In Bolivia, at times the lines between **librerías**, **papelerías** and **centros de fotocopias** can be blurred. Sometimes the books you are looking for can only be found in pirate book stalls.

Ernesto Martínez, who manages the bookstore Martinez Acchini on Avenida Arce in La Paz, is one of the few trying to survive in the book industry. He is driven not by the small profit he earns from the business, but by the wish to sustain and maintain a culture of reading in the country.

'If you enter a typical Bolivian living room, you will find a painting, a sculpture, a statue, but you will not see books,' he says, with a desperate expression on his face, as if he cannot believe the absence of the objects.

According to him, the average Bolivian is not enthusiastic about literature or the preservation of the book, which he considers an 'expression of the knowledge and cultural advancement of society'. He thinks, 'The people's perception has always been that the book is a luxury product – something reserved only for intellectuals and those with money.'

'You could blame poverty, the lack of education, or the fact that Bolivia was until recently an illiterate country,' he explains. 'But these are not the real reasons. The real reason is that in Bolivia books have never been considered cultural wealth.'
Martínez and Antezana agree that Bolivia's current education system does not encourage or raise literature lovers. 'The majority of us have grown up with the idea that it is a punishment to read, that it is boring,' Martínez says. 'In school, when students misbehave, they are sent to the library as punishment.'

Perhaps a better education will result in a greater appreciation for books, which could enrich artistic and cultural movements. 'An educational revolution is necessary,' Antezana claims. 'It will bring about better citizens.'

The answer to the problem seems to lie in future generations. Matínez's bookstore has sustained itself in part by taking advantage of the recent boom in children's literature. 'This is what gives me most hope,' Martínez says.

Although he may not agree with their choice in literature, he accepts and encourages the youth's frequent trends and hypes about series such as Harry Potter and The Hunger Games. He aims to foster a culture of reading in younger generations to sustain the cultural and intellectual growth of Bolivian society. 'For me as a bookstore owner, children's trilogies are great because the customers always come back for the next book. For me as someone worried about literature, it is also great because young boys and girls are reading – not just 100 pages, but 500, 600 pages in one go!'

Martínez's hope is that once adolescents start to read they will become adults who appreciate and sustain literature in Bolivia. In this sense, he says, 'Harry Potter has defeated the demons that do not read.'

Indeed, Harry Potter's magical abilities seem to go beyond "Expelliarmus". It may well be the best chance to get young Bolivians into the habit of picking up a book once in awhile. Who knows? They might even read it.

WHAT SUSTAINS YOU?

SUSTENANCE EXISTS IN MANY FORMS: FOOD, DRINK, MONEY, REGGAETON.

REGGAETON?

TEXT: MADELEINE POLLARD
PHOTOS: GABRIELLE MCGUINNESS AND MADELEINE POLLARD

We asked **ciudadanos** on the meandering streets of La Paz 'What sustains you?,' probing the motivational forces in their lives.

Olga and Judith 4

Ages: 32, 9
Profession: Hand puppet designers/sellers
Olga: My children – my son died as a baby in 2003, so I designed these hand puppets to pay him tribute and to make money for our family. My daughter Judith helps me sell them along El Prado. She loves to dance, dance is what keeps her going.
Judith: Yes, especially reggaeton! And mathematics – that's my favourite subject at school. I love to multiply and to divide.
Olga: And health, you must not forget your health – looking after yourself is the most important thing.

Heidi 3

Age: 23
Profession: Student
I have had two very traumatising experiences in my life. To keep me going I tried to find other people, a place to run to, but then I realised that you can't find peace in others or somewhere external, you have to find it inside yourself first. I realised that I am my own source of happiness. I like visiting isolated places and sitting in silence – nowadays not many people can stand silence, they are always on their phone, but self-reflection is peace for me. I found that charity work is another source of motivation, giving and not asking for anything in return, making a positive impact in someone else's life even when yours is difficult.

Racinto 2

Age: 70
Profession: Orange juice vendor
Plata – I was a construction worker until I grew too old, now I sell oranges all year round, but as there is no work for me in the countryside I must come to the city. The need to work and the joy my grandchildren bring me are the most important things in my life.

Mauro 1

Age: 17
Profession: Student
My parents, friends, strategy computer games, football and the pursuit of adventure. When life gets difficult I like to be alone with my music.

Eulogia 6

Age: 51
Profession: construction worker
Necessity – I have six children whom I must provide for and there is no one else to help me. This need is what keeps me going, the need to care for my children as well as to make them happy

Oscar 5

Age: 55
Profession: Advertising
My family, my Bolivia and faith in **ser supremo** – my god. He sustains me every day, and every year I return from Buenos Aires for **el día de la paz** to see my family, a tradition motivated by my identity as a Bolivian and one that has lasted 35 years.

A CLOSE KNIT ALPACA COMPANY

LOOKING ABROAD TO PRESERVE A TRADITION

TEXT AND PHOTO: MARIA MAYBÖCK

As soon as Simon Huanca sits down at a knitting machine, it is clear just how familiar he is with what has been his livelihood for decades. His hands move with intimate certainty over the machine. They investigate and count the rows of a pattern sheet. They pick up the pieces of a sweater and show how they can be united to form a finished garment. His clothes, though plain; his body language, though subtle; and his inconspicuous car indicate he is the manager, the man in charge. When it comes to knitting garments, however, it is apparent he was once a craftsman like the forty artisans who work for him today.

Art Sol is a company of genuine alpaca clothing that primarily targets lucrative European markets. Huanca started the business after working for one of La Paz's big alpaca clothing companies and learning from a German designer. 'They trained us in design and how to relate to the clients,' he explains. 'We then started producing and exporting.'

Stepping off the buzzing street of Linares, Huanca's store is a refuge from the exuberance on Calle Sagarnaga. Garments are elegantly laid out, the colours are more natural, and the designs and patterns are visibly harmonized to the international fashion market.

No llamas adorn the sweaters here. Instead, simple, timeless designs and patterns prevail. European customers prefer 'simple designs, whatever is in fashion at the moment,' Huanca says. He laughs at the thought of selling sweaters with little alpacas and llamas on them. 'No, that? Abroad? No,' he says with a grin on his face.

His Bolivian and international customers look for quality and design, something that is lacking in the selection of synthetic sweaters and other garments advertised and sold as 'authentic alpaca' all over Bolivia. *Sol* Art's designs are inspired by the latest styles crossing the runways of world fashion capitals. 'I live for this,' exclaims Huanca. 'I see, I think.'

ART SOL COMBINES THE OLD WITH THE NEW, WHILE MAINTAINING AN ANCIENT KNITTING TRADITION

'There will always be alpaca,' he says, and its price will fluctuate with the demand of alpaca products. His is an environmentally friendly and sustainable business, as it works with live, domesticated animals that are shorn without being killed. Breeding alpacas for their wool is an ancient tradition in Andean countries like Bolivia and Peru, where the high altitude gives the wool its characteristic softness.

Huanca's business not only supports local alpaca cultivation, but it also provides opportunities for small artisans. 'We only have enough workers to meet the demand,' he says, but he goes out of his way to provide them with skills that can earn them a living. All of his craftsmen have small workshops in their homes. *Art Sol* provides the necessary equipment to those who do not own a proper knitting machine, which the workers pay back in interest-free instalments.

Ediberto Acero, who is a longtime employee and dear friend of Huanca's, owns a workshop facing the runway fields of the airport in El Alto. It is a simple room adjacent to his house with three knitting machines; balls of colourful yarn; boxes of sleeves, collars and chest parts; and a pile of finished sweaters ready to be showcased in stores or in European catalogues.

With trained and confident movements, Ediberto slides the carriage across the machine with one hand and feeds the yarn with the other. The carriage clicks rhythmically as a myriad of fast-moving needles knit a new row and the yarn winds off the reel, turning into a garment. Within five minutes, Ediberto holds an incomplete part of a sweater. A simple and beautiful pattern, one of Huanca's latest creations, adorns the collar.

'He is one of our fastest workers,' Huanca says, while Ediberto looks up proudly with a shy smile on his face. As the finished product lies on a table, one could easily imagine it in a Zara collection.

Huanca's company combines the old with the new in his modern designs, while maintaining the ancient tradition of alpaca knitting. With his products, he makes Bolivia known beyond its borders, while supporting the masters of this traditional craft.

AFTER THE SILVER LINING

THE TENSION BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY AND MINING IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: ELLEN WEAVER
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

Gutted to the point of near collapse, the once silver-lined entrails of Cerro Rico, emblematic of prosperity in the New World, now pump deadly dust through an untraceable network of tunnels and sinkholes. Succumbing to the reality of colonial decay, the vision of the 'Rich Hill' is one of a sickly, dying mountain; yet it is one that will continue to consume the lives of those who enter, until it is brought to its knees.

With the city of Potosí listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Danger in 2014, the uncontrolled mining operations that are still carried out there, despite serious environmental warnings, make the question of sustainability highly relevant to Bolivian mining. There are plans to fill the collapsing parts of Cerro Rico with concrete and suggestions of directing the mining industry towards tourism. But these ideas are often met with hostility and reservations on the part of miners and unsurprisingly so.

For many miners in Bolivia, mining is what they know and all they have known for generations, dating back to pre-colonial times. However, if mining is to continue providing subsistence for a significant portion of Bolivia's population, measures have to be taken to ensure the longevity and sustainability of the sector.

Daniel Lafuente, a manager at Cumbre del Sajama, a local NGO that supports responsible mining, believes collaboration is necessary to take full advantage of the resources in this land. 'The State should open options for foreign investment and develop a socially responsible mining that generates significant income for the country,' he says. Lafuente envisions an industry that allows for independent cooperatives, private companies, foreign investors and the State to work together in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.

In line with this vision, Lafuente believes that the future of mining in Bolivia is highly dependent on the participation of cooperatives. Although cooperatives make up a large portion of the Bolivian mining industry, there are many weaknesses in their structure and organisation. Cumbre del Sajama aims to lend support and management to these groups and collaborate with cooperatives that show a willingness to improve their exploitation of resources in a responsible manner.

'The idea is to generate a change in mentality – in terms of environmental and social issues, work safety and appropriate economic management,' Lafuente says. If the cooperative demonstrates a desire to change how it works, then Cumbre del Sajama will invest resources.

Both parties have to invest, however, for change to be achieved, and for many small-scale, artisanal or cooperative mining groups the costs involved prove too much. Currently, Cumbre del Sajama is working with three Bolivian cooperatives and only two of them have demonstrated successful and significant changes. The failures that Cumbre del Sajama has experienced reveal several factors that inhibit the success of their work: the inability of cooperatives to invest in the changes, an attitude of **dejadez** from the miners and preoccupations with productivity.

While Cerro Rico and the work of Cumbre del Sajama suggest that the situation of Bolivian mining is desperate, mining activity elsewhere proves otherwise. The Andean foothills are home to approximately 1400 gold mining cooperatives affiliated with the Regional Federation of Gold Mining in the department of La Paz (FERRECO). FERRECO's president, Remberto Chávez, was keen to expand on the measures they have in place to ensure responsible mining in the associated cooperatives. 'We work legally,' Chávez said, 'complying with the requirements imposed through decrees from the Bolivian government and governmental institutions. For sustainable mining, there are many requirements, but the environment and **el cuidado de la Madre Tierra** are the most important.'

> WHAT YOU PRODUCE IS WHAT SUSTAINS YOU.'
>
> - REMBERTO CHÁVEZ, FERRECO

In practice, what FERRECO calls "responsible mining" refers to processes such as filling out-of-use **pozos** with stone, sand and vegetation; maintaining a specific space for fuel stores; and loading and unloading machines in controlled areas to avoid contaminating the surrounding land. The base camp, where toilets, showers, kitchens, waste and recycling are located is also run under environmental regulations and is kept separate from the filtering of the machines. Everything is done specifically to comply with environmental standards and nothing is released into the river. There are also strict regulations controlling deforestation that require a cooperative to survey a tree before cutting it down. If the tree is mature, local authorities grant the cooperative permission to extract its wood. If it is an endangered species, then the tree is left alone.

Although FERRECO cooperatives work within these environmental parameters, what constitutes sustainability for them remains in the balance between respecting la **Madre Tierra** and the primary objective of their mining pursuits: sustaining their families. 'What you produce is what sustains you,' said Chávez. If not enough gold is produced to cover the costs of the mine, members of the cooperative have to pay the difference. If the miners can't earn their daily sustenance after an eight-hour shift, they search for work elsewhere. 'It is hard work,' Chávez says. There are risks involved, but this is how they survive: **arriesgando la vida**. Risking their lives to provide for their family.

On a certain level, there appears an incompatibility between Cumbre del Sajama's ideology and the reality of the mining federation. While the NGO pursues environmental responsibility that extends beyond legal requirements, it seems that economic necessity is what underlines the work of FERRECO's cooperatives. The federation is proud to comply with mining law, but the economic hardship and the instability of their work make further environmental concerns a luxury that cannot be afforded. Lafuente professes a future of collaboration in mining, but what Chávez speaks most proudly about is internal unity, describing each cooperative as **una familia**.

The tension between the NGO's vision and the way of veteran gold miners exposes but one part of the complexity that is mining in Bolivia. These tensions are a prime example of what happens when issues of environmental preservation have to contend with a population's livelihood and age-old traditions. External attempts to influence change are bound to face resistance. While Cerro Rico's drooping peak shadows a wealth of alternative mining activity, it remains both a warning and a symbol of the state of mining in the country. The question of its sustainability is as complicated as the hidden labyrinth of veins that instil lifeblood into so many Bolivian communities.

TREADING CAREFULLY ACROSS BOLIVIA

AN ETHICAL ALTERNATIVE FOR THE MINDFUL TRAVELLER

TEXT AND PHOTO: GABRIELLE MCGUINNESS

There is a certain guilt that comes with being that gringo wandering the streets of Bolivia, wrapped up in an alpaca sweater, scarf and hat. The one who scoured the depths of the Witches' Market for what were certainly hidden, unique gems. The gringo keenly snapping photos of every cholita artfully poised on the pavement, or shamelessly ogling the esoteric merchandise at the local market stall while communicating through broken Spanish and enthusiastic hand gestures.

Despite my best efforts to remain the incognito gringo, I have guiltily fallen into these tourist traps because the average traveller is naturally inclined to do so.

Nearly everyone can agree that supporting local economies as a tourist and engaging with other cultures has its advantages. But backpackers the world over often take other paths during their travels. Many prioritise partying, which in excess can neglect cultural engagement. When it comes to exploring Bolivia, though, travellers can support and enjoy this country if they pay close attention to their footsteps.

According to a World Bank report, the number of tourists who visit Bolivia increased from 711,000 in 2011 to 870,000 in 2014. This total is roughly one-third of the number of people who travel to Chile or Peru annually. For some, the embryonic nature of Bolivia's tourism industry is a cause of concern. For others, it offers an opportunity to establish a model of sustainable tourism that benefits both the country and the traveller.

La Paz on Foot is a local tour agency that takes an ethical approach at presenting Bolivia as a backpacking hotspot. Its model of 'sustainable tourism' allows visitors to experience the intricacies of Bolivian life. Profits from the company are reinvested into Bolivia, through nature conservation projects or by directly supporting the areas they visit. They cooperate with communities like Santiago de Okola on Lake Titicaca and the Tarapari Biodiversity Garden in the Yungas. Many regions of Bolivia face danger from deforestation, water mismanagement and labour abuses. Sustainable tourism raises funds to tackle these issues and promotes a culture of responsibility.

La Paz on Foot, founded by Stephen Taranto in 2004, operates locally in the most coveted Bolivian destinations. In 2009, Taranto partnered with Tomas Sivila, the founder of Sendas Altas, a global travel company that 'bridges Bolivia with the outside world'. They came together with one goal in mind: to show tourists the real Bolivia, as Bolivians see it.

'I despise the "be careful" message that is conveyed to tourists,' Sivila confesses. 'It scares them away from truly exploring Bolivia.'

Their brand of tourism is meant to be a tool for progress. Where some agencies suffer from being scattered and localised, they are a cross-cultural network unified by a strong moral code. Sivila reports they are close to receiving the TOURCERT accreditation, bestowed to agencies that have sustainable practices such as recycling in their office, paying their workers fairly and designing tours that empower local communities.

I am sent on the 'Urban Trek' to experience the company's ethos, a dazzling three-and-a-half-hour exploration of the city through the eyes of a paceña. Naira, my tour guide, leads me to the yellow teléferico that ascends to El Alto, bundled alongside local commuters. My ears pop as we advance and I catch myself staring across the valley at the proud Illimani. Upon arriving, Naira sprinkles my awestruck daze with factual knowledge, explaining that the social hierarchy of La Paz inversely correlates with the altitude of each neighborhood.

As we descend the stairs to the city centre, I conceal my breathless panting with attempts at breath-taking photos of the view. Naira knows and loves her city. She tells me about the crops, the sewage system, the architecture and which houses have been recently fitted with gas pipes.

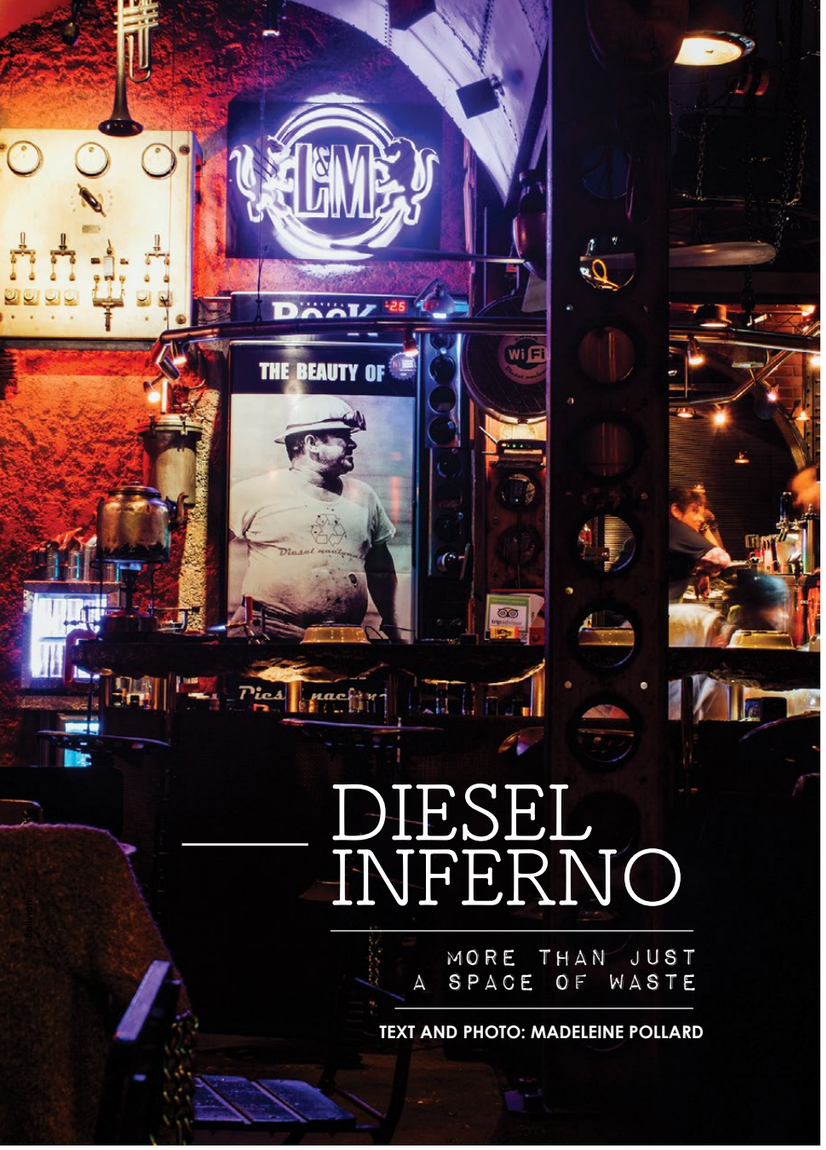
SOMEHOW, AFTER THIS ADVENTURE, I SCARCELY FEEL GRINGO.

We walk down **Calle Los Andes**, drinking **batidos** like locals, to marvel at the market's glorious array of parade costumes and regional fruit.

Somehow, after this adventure, I scarcely feel gringo.

'We let tourists move to the pulse of Bolivia,' Naira tells me and I cannot help but believe her. Their tours aspire to eradicate segregation between tourist and native. One wonders, however, whether sustainable tourism can really help Bolivia reduce the distance between the watcher and the watched, the Bolivian and the gringo.

Can tourism empower people through economic advancement or is it forever haunted by the whiff of colonialism? A part of me suspects that gringo guilt will still be draped across shoulders.



DIESEL INFERNO

MORE THAN JUST A SPACE OF WASTE

TEXT AND PHOTO: MADELEINE POLLARD

Upon approaching the late-night bar Diesel Nacional, located in the centre of La Paz's Sopocachi neighbourhood, you would be forgiven for thinking you'd mistaken a popular twilight retreat for the entrance to a dystopian abandoned factory. The sharp spikes of the gate thrust imposingly into the barbed night air, whilst disused machinery parts lie strewn across the gravel, either side of the ruptured train tracks that pave the way towards revolving boxcar doors. Once inside, customers are ensconced in a windowless metallic semi-cylinder, illuminated by amber coals burning invitingly in the cauldron-turned-woodburner.

RODRIGO QUIROGA RESERVICES THE TERM 'INDUSTRIAL CHIC', SIMULTANEOUSLY CREATING A POPULAR SOCIAL SPACE, A WORK OF ART AND AN EMBLEM OF SUSTAINABLE INTERIOR DESIGN.

Through his use of predominantly recycled materials, owner and designer Rodrigo Quiroga reservices the term 'industrial chic', simultaneously creating a popular social space, a work of art and an emblem of sustainable interior design. Diesel's inky steel walls give the illusion of having descended from Avenida 20 de Octubre into the kernel of an industrial bunker, an impression augmented by the internal combustion engine of a 1948 Curtiss aeroplane hanging as a sculpture near the entrance, accompanied by a rusty canister of glue and 19th-century ice-cutting machine.

Utility meets a harsh beauty in Diesel's aesthetic, offering a dining and drinking experience like none other in La Paz. Take a seat at the bar and you'll find yourself perched on what were once the seats of tractors, with engine cogs composing the stool's root. Glance up and you'll see fragmented chains, trenchant meat hooks and idle trumpets dangling from the ceiling.

The incandescent buzz generated by the murmur of fellow drinkers and a synthesis of American soul, Latin American gems and mellow rock music provide a prime environment to taste Diesel's excellent pub food and dare to try its explosive cocktail menu and notable wine list. The bar is not only host to innovative architecture but also to the best mojito in town (democratically elected by the Bolivian Express team, after extensive field research), whilst the menu dubiously includes a cocktail with a description represented by the English-language phrase, 'Bolivian politician Son of a Bitch's typical corrupt dirty business': a fusion of whisky, bitters and cloves (cost: 40 bolivianos) – it's smoother than it sounds.

The food menu at Diesel is surprisingly diverse and piquant considering that the establishment's allure sparks from its drinks and design. Here, food prices range from 25 bolivianos for gently cooked **papas** to 50-70 bolivianos for seafood dishes, and an Argentine-style barbecue platter for 100 bolivianos.

Although Diesel approaches the pricier corners of La Paz's nighttime haunts, it's certainly worth a little extra to spend an evening immersed in its intriguing metallic charm. Amongst the solid steel columns there flows an atmosphere not of decay and discomfort but of progression and motion. The ruptured train track outside the front entrance continues along the ceiling of the back rooms whilst stainless steel from commercial aeroplanes adorns the toilets. These abandoned vehicle parts are recycled and repurposed, symbolising a forward movement in interior design.

FROM THE SHORES OF TITICACA TO SYDNEY

BOLIVIANS AND AN AMERICAN ADVENTURER TEAM UP TO SAIL ACROSS THE PACIFIC USING ANCIENT TECHNOLOGY

TEXT AND PHOTO: MELODY CHAN

Floating on the shimmering surface of Lake Titicaca, an imposing boat made of yellow **totoras** matches silhouettes seen on ancient pottery by Incas and Egyptians, drawing a striking contrast to the motorized cars and hints of 21st-century life that abound nearby. The boat docks near a white barn, home of Fermín Esteban's museum dedicated to his family's role in crafting boats used by modern explorers in their expeditions across oceans.

Balsa building, or hand-crafting reed boats, has been a trade passed down through generations since pre-Incan times. Once popular vessels in South America, small ships called **yampos** ferried occupants between coastal towns long before roads connected them. Fermín makes these two-person boats out of reeds harvested from Lake Titicaca, the largest lake in South America, straddling the borders of Peru and Bolivia. Each boat has a certain lifespan – the longer they remain in the water the more water they absorb, eventually sinking due to the weight. The reeds are harvested and hand-woven with minimal tools and tied with rope to form cylinders that surround one another. When placed in water, the reeds expand and the string tightens, sealing the hull.

Huatajata, Fermín's home, is a small coastal town on a busy road halfway between Copacabana and La Paz. Since 1969, it's been known for its expert boat builders. Back then, an Italian, Carlo Mauri, arrived looking for men to fly to Morocco to construct a 12-metre-long reed boat that would sail across the Atlantic to Barbados. Before Mauri, the largest boat created on Lake Titicaca was only eight metres long. Mauri and his partner, Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl, wanted to recreate the large *balsas* of ancient civilizations to test their ability to travel long distances. Fermín's father, Paulino, placed first in the competition that Mauri held to test the skill of the town's boat builders, leading to his role in building seven different boats for Heyerdahl and other explorers.

Fermín grins as he relates a well-remembered story about his family's relationship with the renowned explorer. When Heyerdahl was building the Ra II, a boat that used Iraqi papyrus, Paulino's boat-building team tried to cut him out of the project, as he was getting paid more. When Mauri and Heyerdahl called for the same team that had built the original boat, the Ra I, Paulino's partners sent word saying Paulino was ill. Heyerdahl's response was simply, 'When he gets healthy, send him.'

In his museum, Fermín regales visitors with tales of journeys alongside his father to build these impressive vessels. He learned how to build *balsas* from his father, and has already passed the tradition to his 27-year-old son. But Fermín rarely makes vessels for adventures anymore; barely anybody does. Motorized and wooden boats have long replaced the less durable *balsa*. Fermín mainly sticks to weaving reed boat sofas, used for decoration in hotels and restaurants, as well as miniature reed boats and llama figurines to sell in his museum.

However, there are those who keep the tradition alive. Near Plaza Velasco in La Paz, the smell of reeds permeates the air and bundles of long yellow cattails mark the building where American Phil Buck is building his dream. In 2003, Buck and seven volunteers launched a reed boat, the Viracocha II, from the shores of Viña del Mar, Chile, hoping to sail to Sydney, Australia. Their plan was cut short by steep waves and unfavourable winds that damaged the ship, and the expedition ended on Easter Island 76 days later. But today in La Paz, Buck is working with shipbuilders from Huatajata to build the Viracocha III, for a journey from Arica, Chile, to Sydney. As his team builds the new craft, Buck hopes to draw as many curious visitors as possible to his workshop, part of his deal with the city of La Paz and the official channel of Bolivia, BoliviaTV, which has the Bolivian rights to screen a program about the adventure. 'We want to inspire, especially younger people, to go out and accomplish their own goals,' Buck says.

THERE IS A HINT OF SOMETHING CRAZY, A LITTLE DANGEROUS AND QUIXOTIC IN BUCK'S EYES.

Come September, the ship will be transported to Chile and assembled. An international team will man the ship, but the boat's hull will be created solely by Bolivians. One of them, Erik Catari, will join Buck's crew on the six-month journey.

Buck, 52, styles himself as a 'professional adventurer.' He has lived in La Paz since October 2015, when he began this project. In the corner of Plaza Velasco, Buck and his Chilean partner, Valentina Muñoz, describe their vision for the journey they hope to take in January of next year. The ship will be 18 metres in length and seven metres wide, requiring 2.5 million reeds for the hull alone. Their 10-member crew will bring people from at least seven different countries together at sea for half a year. Expert knot makers, fishermen, doctors and seamen will all work to bring the sail-powered ship 10,000 nautical miles across the sea, the farthest an ancient-style reed vessel has ever travelled in documented history.

Their goals for this endeavour are simple. First, this is a scientific expedition. Buck hopes to add to the theories that South Americans may have gone further in *balsas* than ever imagined. While his route specifically is not one that may have been taken in the past, the possibility that ancient boats could travel this distance will open up theories of cross-continental contact that may have been previously dismissed.

Second, Buck imagines his efforts will embolden and educate young Bolivians and South Americans, proving to them that something so improbable is possible. Buck will film and edit all the BoliviaTV footage himself before he sends it to the channel via satellite, and Bolivians will be able to watch his journey as it happens.

Lastly, Buck's adventure is about preserving and sustaining a tradition that has died down in the past decades. He hopes that his team will be able to exercise their knowledge of building *balsas* once again, in the process educating the younger members of the team in this traditional craft.

'South America is losing its tradition, and Bolivia somehow keeps hold of it,' Buck says. 'It's amazing that Bolivian still retains its culture.'

On the the business card for Buck Expeditions, Buck's company, is an image of the Viracocha II floating peacefully on blue waters. No hints of technology to be seen, the hand-woven sail billows in the wind and the totora hull floats on the water. It is an unimaginable sight for the 21st century. There is a hint of something crazy, a little dangerous and quixotic in Buck's eyes as he watches his team work with the same type of reeds their great-grandfathers used centuries ago.

THRIFT SHOPPING IN LA PAZ

THE CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR OF MILLENNIALS

TEXT AND PHOTO: VALERIA WILDE
TRANSLATION: BRIAN WEISBECKER

US singer-rapper Macklemore gave us a hint in 2012 – the youth of his generation have an incredible affinity for the consumption of used clothes. In his song 'Thrift Shop', he speaks of his passion for buying clothes secondhand: how cheap they are, how awesome they make you look, the incredible articles of clothing you can find, and how ridiculous it is to pay big-brand prices.

As a frequent consumer of used clothes and a designer of an upcycled clothing brand, I dedicated my marketing master's thesis to the study of used clothing. The majority of previous studies about secondhand clothing focus on its negative aspects: the threat it represents for Bolivia, the deficiencies in the country's own industry and the risks that its consumption produces. My intention, however, was to give another perspective that would reveal the reasons behind the demand for used clothing and the consumption patterns of the Millennial generation. In this way, I examined the other side of the issue and tried to focus on the consumption of secondhand clothes in a way similar to how it is viewed in many other parts of the world. That is to say, to see thrift shopping as an eco-friendly alternative that goes against consumerism, the industry of fast fashion and the deterioration of the environment.

When one speaks of secondhand clothing in La Paz, the Feria 16 de Julio in El Alto immediately comes to mind as the biggest market for used clothing in Latin America. However, my intention was to not only study these special markets and traditional stores, but also the entrepreneurs and small businesses that work within the secondhand-clothing sector, and the activities used to promote its sale (e.g., car boot sales). According to my research, Millennials (those between the ages of 16 and 34) have several defining characteristics: they are more likely to purchase used clothing; they have a major interest in conscious consumption; they are concerned about the degradation of the environment; they enjoy spending their money on trips, gadgets and experiences more than personal objects; they have little interest in brands; and they prefer to invent their own style and distinguish themselves from others. Although the study found that the majority of Millennials in La Paz generally buy new clothes in traditional stores, malls and venues (such as those along Calle Uyustus, near the Cementerio General, which offer cheap clothes from China), 30 percent of respondents considered themselves to be conscious consumers: consumers that support local start-ups, buy used clothes for eco-friendly reasons and are in favour of recycling.

Currently, there is greater acceptance of the consumption of used clothing, which is no longer viewed as strictly for people with a low income. Indeed, Millennials often take pride in their secondhand sartorial choices, echoing global attitudes toward climate change, scarcity of natural resources, intrusive marketing and eco-friendly consumption.

MILLENNIALS HAVE AN INCREDIBLE AFFINITY FOR THE CONSUMPTION OF USED CLOTHES.

THIS GENERATION TAKES PRIDE IN ITS SECONDHAND SARTORIAL CHOICES, ECHOING GLOBAL ATTITUDES TOWARD CLIMATE CHANGE, SCARCITY OF NATURAL RESOURCES, INTRUSIVE MARKETING AND ECO-FRIENDLY CONSUMPTION.

Companies are now challenged by these new considerations, and they must think about new models of business.

Nonetheless, new, quality clothing is on sale throughout La Paz. In 2012 the Bolivian government raised tariffs on new clothing imports by 45 percent in order to strengthen national industry. However, Chinese-made clothing is so inexpensive – even with added tariffs – that clothes from that country continue to dominate the market. And import duties have slowed the sales of more expensive, higher-quality foreign brands. Economist Gonzalo Vidaurre explains: 'International brands are also hesitant to open stores here, not only because of the tariffs, but also because Bolivia is a smaller market whose inhabitants have less disposable income.'

As a result, Millennials are searching for new alternatives in order to find articles of clothing to their liking. While half of those surveyed generally buy clothing from traditional stores, the other half prefer to find their clothing at secondhand stores, local boutiques, online or abroad.

Although the topic of used clothes in La Paz can be controversial due to the damage inflicted on the national textile industry, and while it is necessary to address this issue, there is a good reason for buying secondhand clothing. It's more than just the lower price – it's a movement of people who are searching for alternatives due to the limited offerings of traditional stores or for reasons relating to conscious consumption. And this type of clothing consumption is growing to a global level, one to which many of the biggest brands are adapting.

The consumption of secondhand clothing is a trend strongly connected to the Millennial cohort, which many parties within the clothing industry can take advantage of. From the biggest brands producing articles of clothing that evoke past decades or vintage styles, to the secondhand-clothing stores and small local start-ups that provide recycled offerings, they all provide alternative ways to dress sustainably, based on upcycling and eco-friendly fashion.

CONTEXT

- In 2006 the importation and commercialisation of secondhand clothing in Bolivia was made illegal. Regardless, today these activities have not ceased
- Secondhand clothing arrives in South America through the philanthropic activities of organizations like the Salvation Army and Goodwill, which receive donations from people that throw out articles of clothing and export them to countries in the Global South: South America, Asia and Africa.
- The textile industry sees itself as threatened by this, along with the availability of cheap clothing produced by China

Annually, Bolivia admits around **8,000** tons of secondhand clothing

DISCOVERIES

Of the **612** surveyees between the ages of 16 and 34 years in the city of La Paz:

- **87%** bought secondhand clothing at least once
- **56%** consider themselves a regular buyer of secondhand clothing
- **54%** bought between 1 to 6 articles of clothing in the past 6 months
- **74%** buy secondhand clothing occasionally when they see something that really gets their attention
- **61%** buy secondhand clothing because of the low price
- **52%** buy secondhand clothing because they want articles of clothing that are original, special or unique that they can't find in traditional stores
- **50%** buy secondhand clothing because the brands they like aren't sold in Bolivia
- **30%** of those surveyed demonstrate a high level of commitment to the environment, support slow fashion, local startups, upcycling and conscious consumption in general
- Over twice as many women than men have bought secondhand clothing

KEY TERMS

- **UPCYCLING:** to process used goods or waste material to produce something that is often better than the original
- **FAST FASHION:** refers to a phenomenon in the fashion industry whereby production processes are expedited in order to get new trends to the market as quickly and cheaply as possible regardless of the consequences
- **SLOW FASHION:** describes clothing often made from locally sourced or fair-trade material; emphasizes quality of products and life, traditional techniques and craftsmanship

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GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress

ALTIPLANO - A plateau region situated at high altitude in the Bolivian Andes

AGRÓNOMO - 'Agronomist'; an agricultural scientist

ARRIESGANDO LA VIDA - 'Risking their life'

AUTOSUSTENTABLE - 'Self-sustaining'

BALSA- Boats built by hand-woven reeds since Pre-Incan times, once extremely popular for trade and communication

BASURA - 'Rubbish'

BATIDOS - Bolivian blended beverage like a milkshake

BOTELLAS RETORNABLES - 'Returnable bottles'

CALLE LOS ANDES - Street in the commercial centre of La Paz

CEMENTERIO DE TRENES - 'Train cemetery'

CENTRO DE FOTOCOPIAS - 'Photocopy centre'

CERVEZA - 'Beer'

CIUDADANOS - 'Citizens'

CIUDAD MARAVILLOSA - A colloquial way of referring to La Paz ever since its nomination as one of the "New7Wonders Cities", an initiative undertaken by the New Seven Wonders Foundation

EL CUIDADO DE LA MADRE TIERRA - 'Caring for Mother Earth'

CURSO DE BARISMO - A set of training workshops for budding Baristas

DEJADEZ - 'Negligence'

EL DÍA DE LA PAZ - 'Day of La Paz'

UNA FAMILIA - A family

GARANTÍA - 'Guarantee'; a system used in some stores where a small amount of extra money kept as collateral until an empty beer bottle is returned

LA LUZ - Light

LETREROS - Signs

LIBRERÍA - 'Bookstore'

MADRE TIERRA - 'Mother Earth'

MICROS - Public buses

PACEÑOS - Citizens of La Paz

PACHAMAMA - Mother Earth in Quechua and Aymara

PAPAS - 'Potatoes'

PAPELERÍA - Stationery store

PÉRDIDA - Loss

PLATA - 'Silver'; money

POZOS - Wells

PREMIO NACIONAL DE NOVELA - A national literature prize of Bolivia

RIACHUELO- A small flowing body of water

SAL - Salt

SALAR - Salt flats

SER SUPREMO - 'Supreme being'

SÍ - 'Yes'

SOL - Sun

SOLAR - Coming from the sun

TIENDA - 'Store'

TOTORAS- Long spindly reeds that turn yellow when dried, found throughout South America, especially on Lake Titicaca they are the main material used to build balsas

TRANVÍAS - 'Trolleys'

TRATADO- Treaty; agreement

YAMPOS- Small two-person reed boats that were once the most common mode of transportation on Lake Titicaca; they are barely built anymore, except for tourist purposes

ZONA CAFETALERA - Coffee-producing region of Bolivia

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