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Editorial #104: Adaptations

By: Caroline Risacher

I wrote last month's editorial the day before Jeanine Añez announced that Bolivia was closing borders and enforcing a total lockdown on the country. The stream of new information coming from governments, media, scientific experts is relentless and dizzying, we have to deal with a new reality where anything and everything is possible. At the moment in Bolivia, people can only leave their home once a week according to the last digit on their **carnet**. Measures are being constantly updated; La Paz Mayor, Luis Revilla, announced that face masks are mandatory in public, additional restrictions were imposed on street vendors and the five-star hotel Real Plaza in La Paz started receiving quarantine patients (who can afford it).

And it is clear that the economic toll of the lockdown and social distancing is already hurting the society's less privileged. The government will distribute **bonos** worth about us\$70 - 80 for each child and to people without income or children to alleviate their situation. Efforts like these are necessary but their application will be complicated by the fact that some people live in isolated areas and transport is being strictly controlled. The crisis will only increase the gap between classes and hurt the most vulnerable populations harder.

The crisis will be able to reveal the weaknesses of the national public health system (p. 11). Doctors are still worried about the lack of protection and information and are threatening to quit or to go on strike. Indigenous communities who live in remote areas are not prepared in case of infection. No protocols are in place and the nearest hospitals can be a day away. Hopefully, events such as these will only help improve a system that has much to learn and help the country be

prepared for the future.

Bolivia also has a lot to improve when it comes to virtual meetings and internet access. Lawmakers are trying to figure out the best way to meet online and use video conferencing tools. Digital technologies will certainly benefit from this experience and the use of online platforms for administrative procedures and banking transactions will only become more common in a country that still relies heavily on in-person **tramites**. Entertainment will also be taken online, even if only temporarily. A selection of Bolivian movies are now available to stream online (p.16) and artists will have to adapt to showcase their work.

How Bolivia will adapt in the coming months and years is very much unknown: How and when will the presidential elections take place? What will happen to festivals and events such as **Gran Poder**, which has just been cancelled for the first time in its history? And what about tourism? The tourism industry is one of the most affected sectors and will have to find new ways. If the absence of humans in national parks is helping nature breathe and recover from the 2019 fires, the lack of income from tourism will hurt those who are protecting these same national parks and who are doing an essential job stopping poachers and traffickers.

The question is not: 'When are things returning to normal?', but 'How will the new normal look like?' and what changes will we have to adopt to go outside and resume some sort of social and professional life? These questions are certainly not specific to Bolivia; the COVID-19 will impact Bolivia's society and the world in ways that we can't all foresee. But some of them we can already guess.

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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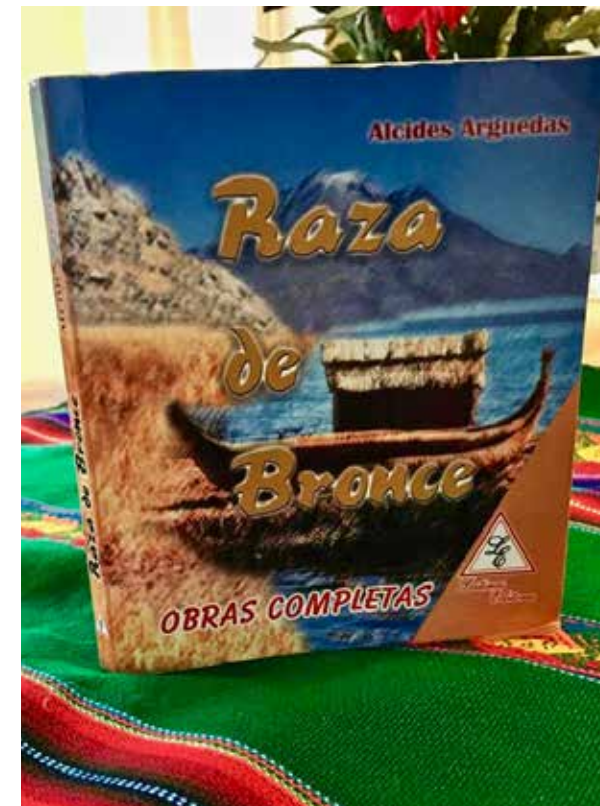
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RAZA DE BRONCE

WHY ALCIDES ARGUEDAS'S 1919 NOVEL IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF BOLIVIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

TEXT: ANNELI ALIAGA
PHOTO: ANNELI ALIAGA & LIBROSLETRAYLINEA (FLICKR)



In the Bolivian Ministry of Education's digital online library, Alcides Arguedas's 1919 novel *Raza de bronce* features in the collection '15 novelas fundamentales de la literatura boliviana' (15 fundamental novels in Bolivian literature). The novel has earned a place in the Bolivian state-school curriculum for over 50 years and continues to be widely read and studied by Bolivian students in both primary and secondary school education. The novel's readership is multi-generational, stemming from an array of different socioeconomic, ethnic backgrounds. Yet, *Raza de bronce* also has the power to unite readers by drawing on their experiences and knowledge of the politics that are tangential to the book's plot, and reflecting on a timeless Bolivian reality characterised by the social struggles of the rural **altiplano** populations in the novel.

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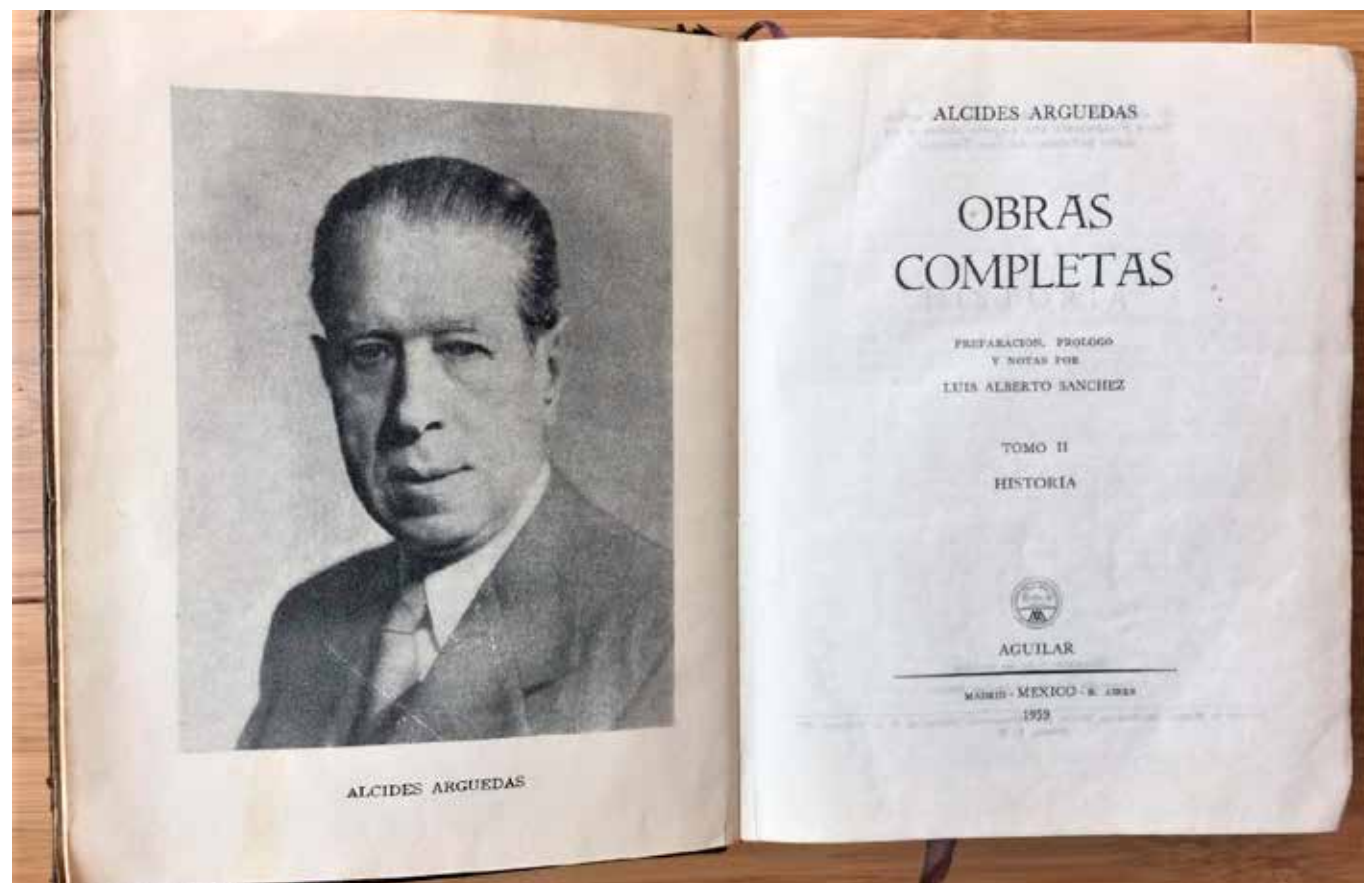
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ORGULLOSAMENTE BOLIVIANA

Raza de Bronce was written at a time of extreme political turbulence and ambivalence: liberalism in Bolivia. Conservative parties and the mining elite were at war with a new wave of liberals who teamed up with revolutionary indigenous powers. Liberals promised to cooperate with the popular sectors, favour them and return their land only to go back on their word when they assumed power. The sociopolitical turn of events feed into Arguedas's novel, perhaps because of his professional background as a politician and a sociologist, or perhaps because of the political inclinations behind the cultural movement that was beginning to take shape. *Raza de Bronce* is a pillar in Latin American literature as it is considered to be the first text in the **indigenista** movement in Bolivia. In *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, the novel is cited as 'the most important work of early twentieth century **indigenismo**'. The *indigenista* movement was a cultural and political wave that consisted of non-indigenous voices supporting and speaking for the indigenous populations of Latin America.

Raza de bronce was originally written and published under the name *Wata Wara* (after the eponymous Aymara heroine) in 1904. The second edition is structured into two parts: the first half 'El Valle' ('The Valley') narrates the engagement of an Aymara couple (Wata Wara and Agiali) who are working as farmers in a remote community near Lake Titicaca, and Agiali's subsequent journey through the *altiplano* to sell his produce and buy seeds for their abusive superior. The second half of the novel, titled 'La Yerma' ('The Barren Land'), describes the surrounding landscapes, and how colonisation affected the indigenous communities in the area. Upon Agiali's return from the valley, a series of racially motivated crimes towards these populations culminate and lead to the novel's climax.



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Racism and class discrimination are the overarching themes in *Raza de bronce*. For Iván Apaza-Calle, published author and **indianista** academic, the novel's significance lends itself to the way in which it 'presents the condition of the indigenous populations in Bolivia' and how it 'denounces their oppression, the authoritarianism of mestizos, and White decadence.' Arguedas provides an interesting commentary on racialised social mobility in Bolivia: 'the indigenous figure can change his/her life, improve it and even get rich; but they will never be able to leave their social and racial class.' In other words, Bolivians are bound by rigid social and racial constructs that inherently work in favour of the ruling White elite, and permanently marginalise and repress the poorer, more indigenous sectors of society, making upwards social mobility close to impossible for them.

The character of Pablo Pantoja embodies everything Arguedas disliked about racial and social prejudice in Bolivia. The character is a **mestizo** landowner of a **hacienda** (a colonial plantation or ranch which relied on indigenous workforces), who incessantly abuses and looks down on his workers – who are Aymara farmers. In *Raza de bronce*, the author writes that 'for [Pantoja], the indigenous man was worthless, and only served to plough fields, sow, harvest, transport the produce, sell it and receive payment.' His attitude towards his workers confirms the hierarchical nature of social, racial strattas and how these two aspects intertwine. Pantoja goes from being the perpetrator of racism in the context of the novel, to being the possible victim of racism at the hands of someone who is richer and/or whiter. His characterisation echoes what contemporary *indianista* philosopher Ramiro Reynaga describes as Andean racism which has a somewhat unique and 'strange' dynamic. 'The indigenous Andean man can go from being the perpetrator of racism in the morning, to then being the victim of racism in the afternoon,' he says. These racial, social pyramids continue to haunt Bolivia today, showing us that little has changed – in this respect – since Arguedas wrote the book.

The Aymara farmers have to endure racism, discrimination and inhumane conditions due to impoverishment throughout their journey to the valley. Arguedas writes that 'they had to bear all kinds of insults' from passersby. In the second half of the novel, the racial abuse eventually escalates to the point that the Aymara characters revolt in protest of their suffering at the hands of the corrupt *mestizo*-creole characters. Although the author writes the novel in third person, therefore creating a certain level of objectiveness and emotional detachment from the characters, the attention to detail in his writing style makes the experience of these Aymara protagonists seem raw and real. Darien Illanes, a university student at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, recalls reading the book at school when he was 10 years old.

'I remember feeling horrified,' he says, 'what I found most terrifying was knowing that all of the suffering that these characters have to endure throughout the plot represents an indigenous Andean reality.' As a non-indigenous spokesperson, Arguedas was never able to fully simulate the indigenous experience to its full capacity. But, for many readers, *Raza de bronce* provides them with an insight into the injustice and ostracisation that was felt by thousands of other Bolivians.

Raza de bronce's inclusion in the Bolivian school curriculum may seem odd due to the complexity of the politics, history and racial dynamics that are extensively explored by Arguedas. Apaza-Calle explains how 'most students will be obliged to read this book at school because of the model of our education system, which centres on decolonisation.' The novel's analysis and exploration of themes are an important introduction to generating debates on what Apaza-Calle refers to as the 'the colonial side of today's society', from a young age. After all, learning about Bolivia's colonial past should be no different to having a history lesson on the Tiwanaku era or the Inca dynasty. As well as being a key player in a student's grasp on decolonial thought, *Raza de bronce* also brings cultural diversity, alternative worldviews, and ruralism to urban school settings.

RAZA DE BRONCE IS A PILLAR IN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE AS IT IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE FIRST TEXT IN THE INDIGENISTA MOVEMENT IN BOLIVIA. IN THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF LATIN AMERICA, THE NOVEL IS CITED AS 'THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIGENISMO.'

Arguedas's novel has not only earned a place in the school curriculum, but also in Bolivian popular culture. In 1976, Theatre company La Máscara debuted their adaptation of the novel at the Teatro Municipal de La Paz. It was a hit, winning the National Theatre Festival prize. It remains as one of the most popular theatre productions in Bolivia to this day. Two years later, the novel inspired folkloric band Savia Andina's song *Raza de bronce*. The book also forms a part of La Paz's Biblioteca de Bicentenario, a library comprising of 200 national texts which all contribute to the 'understanding of Bolivia's past and present.' Arguedas's book procured an international status after UNESCO decided to create a published edition of the book to display in their digital library.

Raza de bronce should only be considered a historical novel due to the fact that it was written over 100 years ago. In more ways than not, the deep-rooted social injustices that are presented in the novel have never been more relevant in Bolivia than they are in this day and age. *Raza de bronce* is not just an obligatory text that students read and study at school, it is a canonical Bolivian book that should be picked up more than once in your life. The indigenista movement has its limitations and its flaws. Speaking on behalf of marginalised and repressed social and ethnic groups, paternalism, and assuming and representing their experiences is problematic. However, it was a necessary stepping stone in Bolivia that has, to some extent, opened up a safe space for intercultural exchanges and vision.



HEALTH MATTERS

A VIEW INTO THE INNER WORKINGS OF BOLIVIA'S PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

TEXT: ANNELI ALIAGA AND GEORGE FEARNLEY
PHOTOS: CRISTINA ALIAGA & CAROLINA QUIROGA

Never before have matters of health been so widely spoken about, broadcast, and prioritised on such a global scale as they have been during the COVID-19 pandemic. The public healthcare system and the Ministry of Health in Bolivia have played leading roles in the battle against the coronavirus contagion in the country. Needless to say, the Ministry and medical staff's efforts have been widely extolled. Bolivian politicians, public figures and the general public have taken to social media and national television to show their appreciation. In a similar vein, *La Razón* reported how over 25 million bolivianos (US\$3.8 million) and hundreds of medical supplies had been donated to Bolivia by various private international entities, such as the American company HS Medical Inc to reinforce health institutions and hospitals during these pressing times. While this support has boosted Bolivia's medical inventory and morale, the health crisis has also dragged pre-existing flaws in the public health system into the spotlight. Many of these issues have been under fire by medical staff for several years who strongly believe that (a lack of) government funding is the root of public healthcare problems in Bolivia.

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The level of healthcare inequity in Bolivia is notable. As a country, it has a relatively high number of deaths from preventable illnesses. For example, it has the third highest maternal mortality rate in Latin America and the Caribbean, after Haiti and Guyana, with 155 per 100,000 live births according to statistics from the World Bank. On a positive note, the government has gradually been increasing the amount it spends on healthcare, which has arguably led to an improvement in the population's overall well-being. In 2010, the health expenditure was 5.5 percent of the country's GDP. In 2017, this number had risen to 6.4 percent and, accompanied by a growing economy, has meant an increase in health expenditure per capita has gone from US\$103 in 2010, to US\$220 in 2017. This change is possibly marked by the steep rise in life expectancy in Bolivia over the past decade, even if it is still comparatively low for Latin America.

What does public healthcare mean to Bolivian medical staff? When asked to define public healthcare, Álvaro Cabezas Sánchez, Director of the Hospital Los Pinos, chooses to describe it as 'the branch of medicine which encompasses all activities relating to health and illness, and the only one that is capable of providing solutions for a population's general wellbeing.' The Bolivian Healthcare system, like most, is composed of a public and a private sector. Nationally, the public sector is headed by the Ministry of Health but, locally, the municipalities are largely autonomous and have the final say on how funds are allocated. The public sector can be further separated into two sub sectors. There is a short-term social security sub sector that grants short-term insurance packages to individuals, and the public sub sector that looks to provide some level of health care to those who do not have insurance of any kind. In 2018, four million of Bolivia's 11 million people had short term insurance policies and less than one percent belonged to the private sector. This meant northwards of 60 percent of the population had no coverage at all. On the 1st of March 2019, the Sistema Único de Salud (Unified Health System), or SUS, was introduced in Bolivia. In essence, this programme came about as an amplification of a previous law that guaranteed free health care to certain groups, such as children under the age of five and pregnant women. With the arrival of SUS, the population that had no form of health insurance received, and continues receiving, free access to health care.

Victor Vaca, a doctor and the director of the Hospital General de los Yungas, explains how all public health establishments are ranked on a universal scale of one to four. 'If you have a level one health establishment, it will be very basic and consist of one general practitioner and one nurse who are able to treat basic infections and carry out general check-ups,' he says. 'Next, we have level two hospitals, like the one I work at in Coroico,' Victor continues, 'they offer treatment in the five essential specialist fields in medicine: pediatrics, gynecology, surgery, internal medicine and anesthesiology, which is all you need to cover most health complications.' Level three hospitals provide specialist treatment for more complex and critical illnesses such as cancer. In fact, as mentioned in a recent report carried out by *La Razón* (31 March 2020), there are only 33 level three hospitals across the nation. Level four hospitals are the most scientifically advanced health establishments. They have laboratories installed for medical research, and are reserved for highly specialised and sophisticated treatments. Bolivia does not yet have a level four hospital. According to Carlos Lopez's 2019 article on level one health centres, which featured in the *Los Tiempos* newspaper, of the 3,253 hospitals and clinics which exist in Bolivia, approximately 70 - 80 percent of them were ranked level one.

The public healthcare system in Bolivia does also deserve some praise. The SUS programme has given every Bolivian citizen the possibility to access healthcare. In a speech to the World Health Assembly in May 2019, the Bolivian Minister of health at the time, Gabriela Montaña, celebrated the fact that 'in just less than two months, more than one million health checks have been carried out.' *Telesur* reported that Fernando Leanes, the representative of the Pan American Health Organisation and the World Health Organisation, described Bolivia's health-related policies as 'a model for Latin America.' Likewise the Programa Ampliado de Inmunización (Expanded Immunisation Programme), more commonly known as PAI, has given children free access to vaccinations, thus precipitated '10 years of a yellow fever-free Bolivia,' says Sánchez. In addition to these positive measures, health professionals in Bolivia have an admirably high level of training. 'Foreign students come to the country to study careers in medicine and return to their countries to practice the profession,' explains Cristina Aliaga, the head of finance administration in the Municipal Hospital Los Pinos, La Paz.



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However, for Boris Corini Bustamante, a surgeon at the Hospital Obrero in La Paz, public health in Bolivia is 'the Achilles heel of the nation's overall healthcare system.' 'Sadly, there are more deficits than virtues when it comes to public health,' he says, 'there is a lack of infrastructure.' This sentiment seemed to be shared by other medical staff who, similarly to Bustamante, criticise the SUS's bad planning and its poor funding. With little investment being pumped into the health sector in Bolivia, public hospitals and clinics have found themselves too under-equipped and understaffed to handle the dramatic increase in patient numbers brought on since the introduction of SUS. The underinvestment of the SUS initiative 'resulted in hospitals running out of supplies just two months into the programme, generating more complaints from the general public about the service they receive,' describes Aliaga. And although prospective doctors receive a high level of training in Bolivia, once they have graduated many of them look for jobs in countries with better opportunities and more governmental support. This, in turn, fuels the problem of understaffing that is rife in Bolivia.

When talking about the state of medical equipment in hospitals in La Paz, Sánchez jokes about how many medical tools and pieces of equipment 'should be in a museum, not a functioning hospital that still uses them.' In agreement, Vaca also describes the medical equipment to be 'ancient' in the public healthcare system, and makes a point out of comparing it to the 'latest models of medical equipment' that are used in private clinics across the capital. The inadequacy and the lack

of equipment could complicate things in Bolivia if the number of COVID-19 cases were to rise, given that patients with severe symptoms will need to be placed on respirators.

According to Francis Álvarez, a junior doctor at the Hospital Municipal Boliviano Holandés in El Alto, rural populations suffer the most from a lack of investment in health care. Outside of urban spaces, 'there are no level one health centres that meet the minimum requirements to attend patients properly,' states Álvarez. Although everyone has some form of access to healthcare in Bolivia, there is a noticeably large difference between the waiting list and the quality of the medical treatment received of those who attend private health centres, and those who go to public health establishments. Aliaga admits that there is an obvious discriminatory social dimension when it comes to healthcare in Bolivia. 'The more money a person has, the easier it is for them to access the highest quality of medical care,' she laments.

Despite Bolivia's public healthcare limitations, there is no denying the sense of commitment, and professionalism that is demonstrated by the medical staff who were interviewed by the *Bolivian Express*. When asked about their favourite aspect of their job, doctors Vaca and Álvarez both agree that nothing compares to the gratitude they receive from patients. 'The best thing about my job is seeing how well my patients are doing and the sincere gratitude they express towards me,' Álvarez says. Surgeon Bustamante believes that his work with kidney transplantation offers patients a better quality of life. He loves his involvement in giving them a chance to 'reinsert themselves back into their family life.' For hospital administrator Aliaga, she believes that her role as a civil servant for the Municipality of La Paz 'exceeds merely doing your office job.' 'We are working towards generating the "greater good" for our population,' she adds. Her comments resonate with what the director of Los Pinos hospital, Sánchez, has to say: 'By working in the public sector for the municipality, I feel we are making a real difference to the healthcare system in general. We have changed the restrictions to make healthcare more accessible, built new hospitals, and created job opportunities for municipal health staff.'

Doctors, nurses, administrative hospital staff, and Ministry of Health staff in Bolivia have all proven that not all heroes wear capes. Their indispensability and bravery during the pandemic has hopefully demonstrated that their demands and suggestions on how to build a more prosperous public healthcare system should not fall on deaf ears. While the pandemic continues to force us to question our societal and moral ideals, it is a necessary time to reevaluate what and who we value in society.



ALTHOUGH EVERYONE HAS SOME FORM OF ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE IN BOLIVIA, THERE IS A NOTICEABLY LARGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WAITING LIST AND THE QUALITY OF THE MEDICAL TREATMENT RECEIVED OF THOSE WHO ATTEND PRIVATE HEALTH CENTRES, AND THOSE WHO GO TO PUBLIC HEALTH ESTABLISHMENTS.





As Bolivia approaches the end of its quarantine, cases of COVID-19 in the country and the world are still growing. Government officials will be reassessing the situation to decide if the strict measures in place are to be extended. At the moment, Bolivians are confined at home and can leave once a week (depending on the last digit on their personal ID). The use of cars is not allowed (except to transport food or with special authorisation) and the use of face masks outside is mandatory in La Paz. As the crisis continues and evolves, Bolivians are adapting to a difficult situation and to rules which are constantly changing.

BOLIVIA UNDER LOCKDOWN

PHOTOS: PATRICIO CROOKER
TEXT: BX TEAM





Photo: Patricio Crocker

'TU CINE, TU IDENTIDAD'

HOW TO CELEBRATE BOLIVIAN CINEMA WHEN YOU ARE STUCK AT HOME IN QUARANTINE

TEXT: ANNELI ALIAGA
PHOTOS: ALVARO OLMOS

On 20 January 2020, months before national lockdown and worldwide quarantine hit the country, Bolivia Cine was inaugurated. It is an online cinema portal which journalist Wilford Alvino from PuntoBo describes as 'la primera plataforma de streaming nacional' ('the first platform for national streaming') in Bolivia. Co-founders, and film directors in their own rights, Álvaro Olmos (*Wiñay, San Antonio, Matrimonio Aymara*) and Ariel Soto (*Wagayñan, En Tierra de Nadie, Quinuera*) had the idea of creating a catalogue of audiovisual content that was exclusively Made in Bolivia by Bolivian directors for Bolivian citizens under the motto 'Tu cine, tu identidad' ('Your cinema, your identity').

One of Bolivia Cine's predominant features, and one of the primary motives behind its creation, is its accessibility. The platform claims that on their cinema portal 'viewers will find

the films they have been searching for for a long time in an easy and secure manner'. Bolivia Cine advertises itself on Facebook under the slogan *Donde quieras, cuando quieras* ('Wherever you want, whenever you want'). You create a Bolivia Cine account by verifying your email account, and are then free to stream any of the 25 films that are currently available, on any device. The portal's minimalist layout is divided into different film categories: feature length fiction films, short films, documentaries, latest releases and a 'Coming Soon' section. Co-founder Álvaro Olmos explains that although the Bolivian films can only be accessed and streamed for free by national citizens at this moment in time, the Bolivia Cine team are working on expanding their horizons: 'We hope to make our portal available to other Latin American countries, USA and certain European countries,' he says. However, due to Bolivia Cine's philosophy, which prioritises Bolivian viewers, the cost of renting or buying the films

YOU CREATE A BOLIVIA CINE ACCOUNT BY VERIFYING YOUR EMAIL ACCOUNT, AND ARE THEN FREE TO STREAM ANY OF THE 25 FILMS THAT ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE, ON ANY DEVICE.

on their platform will range between 15-45 bolivianos for foreign viewers. It is a small price to pay considering the quality of the audiovisual content Bolivia Cine has to offer.

The films available on Bolivia Cine are amongst some of Bolivia's most critically-acclaimed and internationally-recognised works. The catalogue consists of an impressive portfolio of classic Bolivian films such as *American Visa*, *Zona Sur*, *Jonás y la ballena rosada* (Juan Carlos Valdivia), *Mi Socio* (Paolo Agazzi) and *¿Quién mató a la llamita blanca?* (Rodrigo Bellot). The latest cinematic release on Bolivia Cine, which is definitely

worth mentioning, includes Nina Wara Carrasco's documentary *En el Murmullo del Viento*, based on tinku culture and music from the north of Potosí. The feature-length documentary was part of the official selection of films shown at the Festival Internacional de Cine Arica Nativa, and was also pre-selected, under the category of 'Best Feature Length Documentary', for the Platino cinema awards. In an interview for *Opinión*, the female director describes how her childhood, spent in a rural community in Potosí, inspired her to shoot this semi autobiographical documentary. Carrasco's exploration of her cultural and personal roots parallels Bolivia Cine's mission to reconnect the Bolivian population with their cultural identity through film.

Think twice next time you go to put on a Blockbuster movie. There is a collection of outstanding Bolivia films which you can watch, for free, and only a click away.

[<https://boliviacine.com/>]



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BOLIVIA'S POWERFUL CHOLITAS

TEXT & PHOTOS: CATALINA UGALDE



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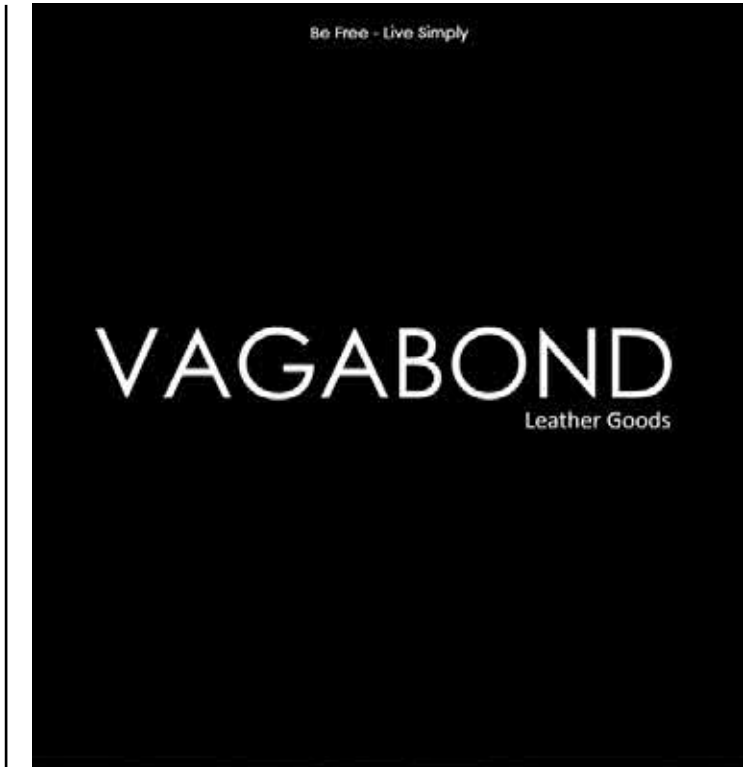
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Cholitas are indigenous Quechua-Aymara women who are identifiable because of the traditional Bolivian **pollera** skirts they wear. These women are the face of resilience. In many cases, unsupported, uncared for, yet undeterred. They are always stepping up in order to not only support themselves, but also their local communities. They are known to be hardworking, strong, and enterprising women by nature. Because so many of these women rely on informal trade as their livelihoods, they have had to adapt their jobs according to demand during this health crisis. Angela, who has set up her commerce a few blocks from my house, now sells eucalyptus leaves – a medicinal tree used to fight respiratory infections. She is not alone. Many salespeople have been forced to become flexible in what they sell. Commerce is vital for our subsistence and for our daily needs. *Cholitas* sell their goods in neighbourhood stores, markets, on street corners, in the countryside, as farmers, and in many other key sectors of society.



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WE NEED NATURE MORE THAN NATURE NEEDS US

TEXT: ANNELI ALIAGA AND VALERIA DORADO
PHOTOS: VALERIA DORADO

When quarantine is no longer obligatory and we are free to roam, we will remember how much we missed exploring Bolivia's magnificent natural landscapes. But until then, it is important to reflect on how one-sided our relationship with nature is. Sadly, our feelings towards nature are not reciprocated, as we have proven that mankind has done more harm than good when it comes to respecting the environment. The pandemic has allowed nature to take a breather and it has given us the time to understand that our future relationship with nature needs to be based on respect, kindness, protection and eco-consciousness.

The tables have turned. It is up to mankind to take on a maternal and nurturing role as protector of Mother Nature. All of the conservation projects that already exist in Bolivia are a good place to start. At least 16 percent of national territory is considered to be protected land, but this does not mean it is exempt from facing environmental threats due to pollution, deforestation, global warming and animal trafficking.

This photostory expresses the mixed feelings Bolivians feel towards their natural surroundings: a sense of nostalgia, awe, pride, and fear. The photographs of the Cordillera Real, the Ancohuma and the Illimani mountain manifest a sense of nostalgia and awe for Bolivians who, cooped up inside, miss the postcard-perfect skyline of La Paz. The photographs of protected Bolivian lands such as Madidi, Sajama, the Eduardo Avaroa reserve and Tucabaca inspire sentiments of national pride. Yet, fear for the future of conservation in Bolivia exists due to our awareness of mankind's carelessness and selfishness when it comes to the environment. Photography is a medium through which some of the world's most overwhelmingly beautiful sights can reach us and soothe us during these difficult and stagnant times. Mother Nature is doing just fine without us, and we will hopefully never forget that.





'LA BASURA MATA'

WASTE MANAGEMENT IN LA PAZ

TEXT: LIEKE VERLÉ
PHOTO: HONOR SCOTT



If you have walked around La Paz you may have noticed graffiti that reads 'La basura mata, prohibido echar basura.' The message is clear: 'Waste kills, it is forbidden to litter'; you can be fined up to 1,000 bolivianos (US\$145). How does this message reflect waste management in La Paz? Are people aware that mismanaged garbage has a negative impact on the environment?

In 2018, the World Bank warned us that global annual waste generation could increase to 70 percent by 2050 if no proper action was taken. In 2016, 2.01 billion tonnes of waste were generated worldwide, which could become 3.4 billion tonnes 30 years from now. In its report 'What a Waste 2.0: A global snapshot of solid waste management to 2050', the World Bank gives a summary of the total waste generated in different countries. The global average is 0.74kg of daily waste produced per person. If we have a look at Latin America, Bolivia generates 0.55kg of daily waste per head, which is relatively low if you compare it to

Peru (0.75kg) and Ecuador (0.89kg). Although waste generation in Bolivia is lower, the collection of this waste is not managed as well as neighbouring countries. The report shows that La Paz only collects 90 percent of its waste, while in Quito, Ecuador they are able to collect 96 percent.

In La Paz, waste containers seem to be frequently used and the city's streets are fairly clean, but there isn't a proactive attitude towards recycling or separating your plastic, glass and metal, and at supermarkets, they always wrap up your groceries in plastic bags. Nevertheless, the local government is making an effort. In 2015, they introduced the 'Plan Integral La Paz 2040' (Integral Plan for La Paz 2040). One of the objectives is to implement sustainable and eco-efficient changes in the city. They plan to introduce separation recycling methods, separate waste collection and the recycling of solid waste; the prevention, mitigation and control of contaminated water, air and soil; and environmental campaigns designed to sensitise and educate **paceños**.

The plan had a good start and in 2014 they introduced **Puntos Verdes** (Green Points) in different areas in La Paz. These are points where you can donate your separated, recyclable trash. In the same year, they launched the **Plastimadera** initiative, which turns recycled plastic into school furniture. Although the **Puntos Verdes** campaign was operating on a daily basis, over the years their activeness has decreased. Ruby July Peñaranda Espinoza, a postgraduate student who currently studies at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences in Mexico, wrote her thesis on waste management in La Paz between 2012 and 2017. She observed how the new Plan Integral of 2040 was introduced and how it functions next to the existing waste separation system. For years, **segregadores** (waste separators) have been working on waste separation and collection in La Paz. They voluntarily collect, for example, cartons on the streets and sell them in bigger quantities to **centros de acopio** (collection centres), who then collect certain types of waste and resell them to recycling companies. In fact,

anyone is free to sell their household waste – such as paper, plastic and metal – to these collection centres for a price. So, there is a very low incentive to donate your waste for free.

The reason why recycling initiatives exist is because there is a market for it. 'The economic factor is still more important than the ecological one,' explains Peñaranda. On the other hand, the **Puntos Verdes** were not as successful as they thought they would be due to a lack of capacity. According to Peñaranda, there were not enough employees and space. In addition, they only recovered a small percentage of the recyclable waste and could not compete with the **segregadores**.

But, environmental awareness is growing. Verónica López, general coordinator of the Municipal Secretary of Environmental Management, emphasises that La Paz is one of the most advanced cities in Bolivia and it plays an exemplary role in terms of waste management. López explains that they share their model of integrated

CONTINUES ON PAGE 28 ▶

waste management and eco-efficiency with other Bolivian cities. Additionally, the municipality plans to include the *segregadores* into the integrated government system.

According to Peñaranda, the landslide in the sanitary landfill of Alpacoma was a turning point. In 2019, there was a landslide in one of the disposal cells of the landfill and it caused, not only a great danger for the environment and people that lived nearby, but also some serious logistical problems in La Paz. Workers and inhabitants of neighbouring communities blocked the entrance to the landfill to avoid more waste from coming into the landfill. With no other place to go, the waste accumulated in the streets of the city. 'Normally people would get rid of their garbage without even thinking about it and they would never see it again, but *paceños* were faced with having to manage their own trash. After this incident, the focus on recycling, separation of waste and waste reduction increased a lot,' tells Peñaranda. People also experienced economic consequences: because of the accumulating trash in the streets, rats and contamination were becoming a problem for vendors, which led to fewer buyers and a decreased number of sales.

In 2018, the municipality launched a new project, **Islas Verdes** (Green Islands), another system introduced for waste separation in La Paz. Alongside the organisation Voluntariado Ambiental Municipal, they have been educating La Paz on environmental matters. At global events, like Earth Hour and World Water Day, they engage with

citizens and inform them about climate change and tell them how to take care of the environment. According to the Municipal News Agency, they collected more than 250 tonnes of solid waste over the past two years, which was recycled into new products. In an article for *Página Siete*, journalist Luis Escobar writes about how this quantity makes a huge difference to the 36.1 tonnes of waste that was recycled in 2014. The municipality started by putting the recycling containers in the neighbourhoods of Miraflores and Achumani. According to another article by *Página Siete* published in June 2019, the municipality announced that they would expand to using 560 more waste containers: 40 new *Islas Verdes*, 120 coloured containers to separate by type of waste and 400 smaller bins in schools. On top of that, in December 2019, they installed 25 paper containers with WiFi networks powered by solar energy.

Attitude towards recycling in La Paz seems to have really changed in the past three years. López explains that it is hard work, but people are learning and the system in La Paz has improved a lot. The municipality goes from door to door, informing the public and instructing them on how to do waste separation from home. With its thriving integrated waste management system, La Paz has become exemplary to other Bolivian cities.

ANYONE IS FREE TO SELL THEIR HOUSEHOLD WASTE – SUCH AS PAPER, PLASTIC AND METAL – TO THESE COLLECTION CENTRES FOR A PRICE. SO, THERE IS A VERY LOW INCENTIVE TO DONATE YOUR WASTE FOR FREE.

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BX-104 RECOMMENDATIONS

DESTINATION

SORATA

DESCRIPTION: Sorata is a town in the department of La Paz located at the foot of the Illampu mountain, with warm weather and beautiful landscapes. Its main attractions are the San Pedro cave, the San Cristóbal river, the Chilata lagoon and other scenic viewpoints in the area.

HOW TO GET THERE: Take a minibus from the general cemetery, it takes about 4 hours to reach the place, the road is safe and fully asphalted.

PHOTO: Mark Goble via Wikimedia Commons



ACTIVITIES

URBAN RUSH

DESCRIPTION: If you want a dose of adrenaline this is for you! With seven years of experience, Urban Rush offers rappel of 50 metres and free falls of 20 metres in the heart of the city of La Paz. The activities comply with all the necessary safety standards. You can also try wearing superhero costumes, do you dare?

ADDRESS: Potosí street #920

OPENING HOURS: 12:00-17:00

PHOTO: Courtesy of Urban Rush



CULTURAL

MUSEF - MUSEO NACIONAL DE ETNOGRAFÍA Y FOLKLORE

DESCRIPTION: A collection of more than 30,000 cultural artefacts lays within an architectural structure built in 1730 with a typical colonial style. The 'National Museum of Ethnography and Folklore' is one of the most prestigious and popular museums in Bolivia, their mission is "to value local archaeological, historical and anthropological memories and heritages of different nations and peoples of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, fostering intercultural and intracultural encounter and dialogue". Vibrant colours, masks, craftsmanship, bolivian numismatist, feathers, pottery and other traditional vestments is something you can appreciate at the MUSEF.

ADDRESS: Ingavi street #916, La Paz

WEBSITE: www.musef.org.bo

OPENING HOURS: 9:00 to 12:30 and 15:00 to 19:00



COFFEE SHOPS

TYPICA

DESCRIPTION: A place with a vintage and relaxed atmosphere, cool music and great staff. They are present in four cities – La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz – offering high-quality Bolivian coffee with different distillation methods, and a variety of Bolivian inspired food, pastries and bakery. A new location just opened in La Paz near the Central Station.

LOCATIONS IN LA PAZ:

Av. 6 de Agosto #2584 (Sopocachi)

Calle Enrique Peñaranda L-35 (San Miguel)

Av. Peru, Central Station (Centre)

Opening hours: 7:30-22:00

Photo: Typica



RESTAURANTS

PROPIEDAD PÚBLICA

DESCRIPTION: 'Public Property' focuses on simple, delicious Italian dishes and fantastic cocktails. The rustic appearance of the restaurant, home-made details and eye-catching portraits of people enjoying their pasta, represents their values: all are equal, all are welcome. A place of all and for all, with food and drink that feels good to the body and soul.

ADDRESS: Enrique Peñaranda Street L 29

OPENING HOURS: 19:00 - 22:00

PHOTO: Propiedad Pública



WHERE TO DO SHOPPING

MISTURA

DESCRIPTION: One of Bolivia's first concept stores, it is a beautifully decorated boutique, dedicated to showcasing Bolivia's essence and original design that focuses on fashion, art, books, gourmet food and household items. All proudly made in Bolivia.

ADDRESS: Sagárnaga street #163

WEBSITE: www.misturabolivia.com

OPENING HOURS: 9:30 to 20:00

PHOTO: Mistura



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GLOSSARY BX104

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ALTIPLANO	High plateau
BONO	Bonus
CENTROS DE ACOPIO	Places where people can sell plastic, paper, metals to be recycled
CHOLITA	Bolivian woman of indigenous decent, also referred to as cholita
GRAN PODER	Religious celebration paying homage to El Señor del Gran Poder or Jesus Christ
INDIANISTA	A political ideology from the Andes that gives the indigenous populations a platform to fight against their systemic, colonial and hegemonic violence and oppression.
INDIGENISMO	Cultural and political wave that consisted of non-indigenous voices supporting and speaking for the indigenous populations of Latin America
INDIGENISTA	Someone who is part of the indigenismo movement
ISLAS VERDES	'Green Islands', large recycling bins in La Paz
MESTIZA/O	Person of mixed heritage
PACEÑA/O	From La Paz
POLLERA	Multilayered skirts worn by cholitas
PUNTOS VERDES	'Green Points', large recycling bins in La Paz
SEGREGADORES	People who separate the trash to sell what can be recycled
TINKU	Type of dance based on a form of ritualistic combat
TRAMITE	Procedure

CULTURAL DIGITAL AGENDA

APRIL - MAY 2020

Due to the current circumstances, there won't be a cultural agenda in this issue.

But here are a few online resources that can provide some entertainment during the lockdown:

WATCH BOLIVIAN MOVIES:
<https://www.boliviacine.com/>

ACCESS THE BOLIVIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S DIGITAL ONLINE LIBRARY:
<http://biblioteca.minedu.gob.bo/>

VISIT LA PAZ AND ITS MUSEUMS HERE:
<http://www.lapazdigital.net/>

READ BLOG POSTS FROM THE JICCHA COLLECTIVE AND DOWNLOAD FREE BOOKS:
<http://jichha.blogspot.com/>

ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT EXTENSIVE, THIS COLLECTION SHOWS THE WORK OF SOME OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL BOLIVIAN ARTISTS:
<http://www.bolivianet.com/>

ABC EMBODIES CULTURAL AND CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES. CURATED BY CHARLENE ECKELS, THE WORK IS CULTURAL, AND FOCUSES ON THE BOLIVIAN DIASPORA THROUGH FEMALE BOLIVIAN AMERICAN EYES. ABC PRESENTS A CHANCE FOR THE WORLD TO SEE THIS CONGLOMERATE OF BOLIVIAN AMERICAN CULTURE THROUGH OUR EYES.
<https://americanboliviancollective.com/>

YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT BOLIVIA'S HISTORY THROUGH ITS BILLS AND COINS IN THIS VIRTUAL VISIT OF THE BANK OF BOLIVIA:
<https://www.bcb.gob.bo/?q=museo-virtual>



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