BolivianExpress

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Magazine

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Die Lösung gegen die Höhenkrankheit

A solução contra a doença de altura

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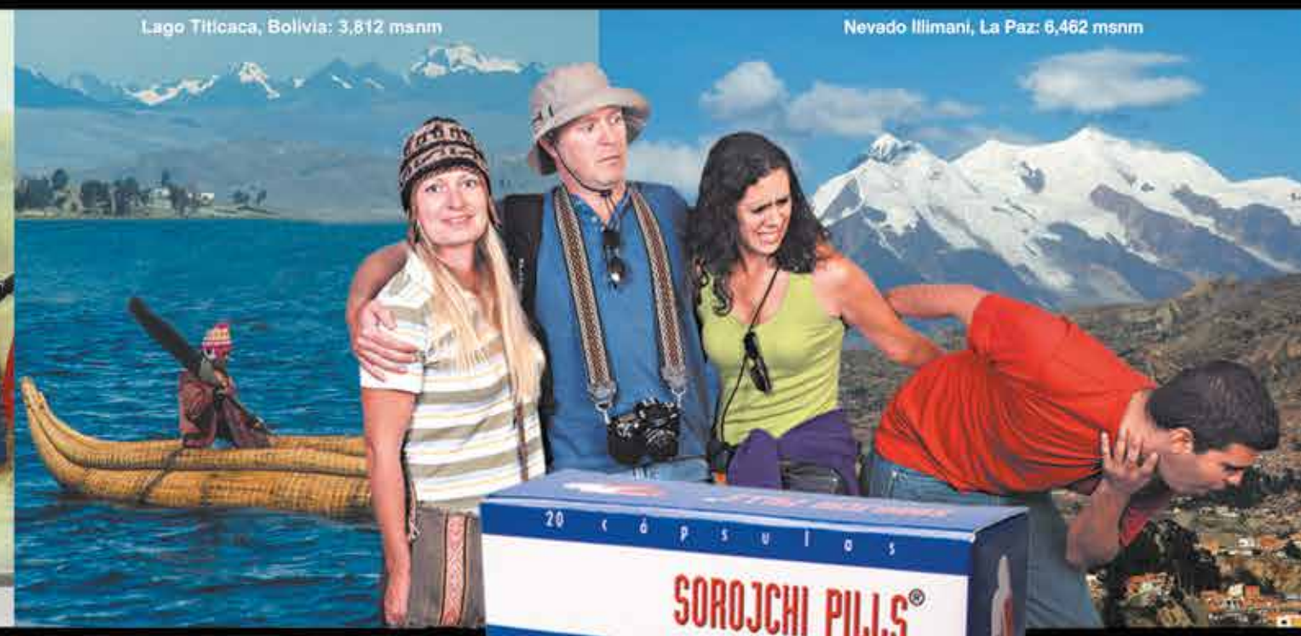

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Editorial #80:

Cause / Chaos

By: Caroline Risacher

If you've ever wondered what chaos looks and sounds like, head out on a Sunday at around 5pm to **Avenida** Buenos Aires near **Calle** Eloy Salmon, a few blocks from the general cemetery, and proceed to jump in a bus heading down to the **Prado**. Sunday is market day, which itself isn't the quietest environment, but add to that the pushy cars, minibuses and micros attempting to move forward amidst the throngs of people. You'll will find complete disorder and confusion – or at least the illusion of it. I may or may not have decided to jump in a micro at this precise time and place and dearly regretted it about eight seconds later. The fact that the vehicle was empty and motionless should have tipped me off. **Paceños** know better.

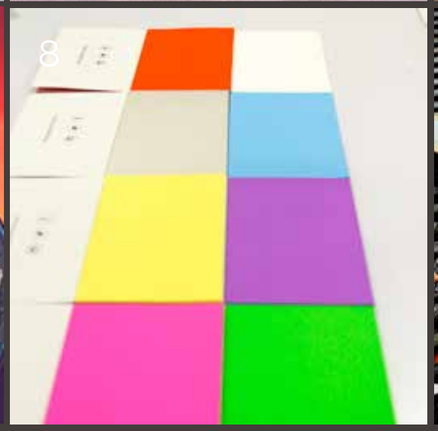
It's extraordinary how bus drivers manage to navigate this sea of people, how those same people seem to pay no attention to a five-ton blue machine honking directly into their ears, and how everybody still manages to extricate themselves unscathed. It is a perfectly choreographed waltz in which everyone knows exactly what's happening around them, where the buses cruise amongst the shoppers and market stalls as if they each had their own predefined routes and risked no danger in brushing against one another. Even more impressive, though, is the moment when the bus suddenly fills up minutes before the traffic starts flowing again. Clearly, I have much to learn because, again, *paceños* do know better.

This year, 2018, started with protests and strikes erupting from one side of the country to the other, and torrential rains flooding entire towns in the eastern part of the country. The political and social climate is equally overwrought after a recent penal-code debacle and a Constitutional Court decision to allow President Evo Morales to run for president indefinitely despite the popular vote of 21 February 2016 prohibiting exactly that, prompting a new wave of protests in anticipation of the second anniversary of the referendum.

To shed some light on these issues, for the 80th issue of *Bolivian Express* we want to delve into the chaos that surrounds us, a chaos that is controlled, nurtured and sustained by us – *paceños*, expats and travellers alike – whether we realise it or not. We'd like to try to grasp the hidden significance that lies behind this tangly mess – like the **caseritas** stands around Bolivia's cities, where items are piled in unlikely ways and fitted in the most improbable nooks with a variety of merchandise that will answer to each and every need: a 50-**centavo** bag of water, a much-needed roll of toilet paper, cat stickers and much more. Even the *caserita*'s outfit has been meticulously thought out: Each pocket has a specific function, bills go here and coins go there. Because even within the most chaotic mess, order and precision rule.

Bolivia is (in)famous for its culture of protest, the regular strikes and roadblocks crippling the lives of commuters and roadblocks causing hours of delay, but even these follow an inescapable logic. Like matches being lit up, when they feel they have been wronged or an injustice has been committed, Bolivians' voices are instantly heard loud and clear in the streets. Governments have fallen as a consequence of this popular unrest, laws have been enacted or annulled as a consequence of the people's indignation. And behind this controlled chaos one can find a very precise, polished mechanism of syndicates, neighbourhood associations and unions that, at their best, safeguard democracy and push the country forward to a more inclusive future.

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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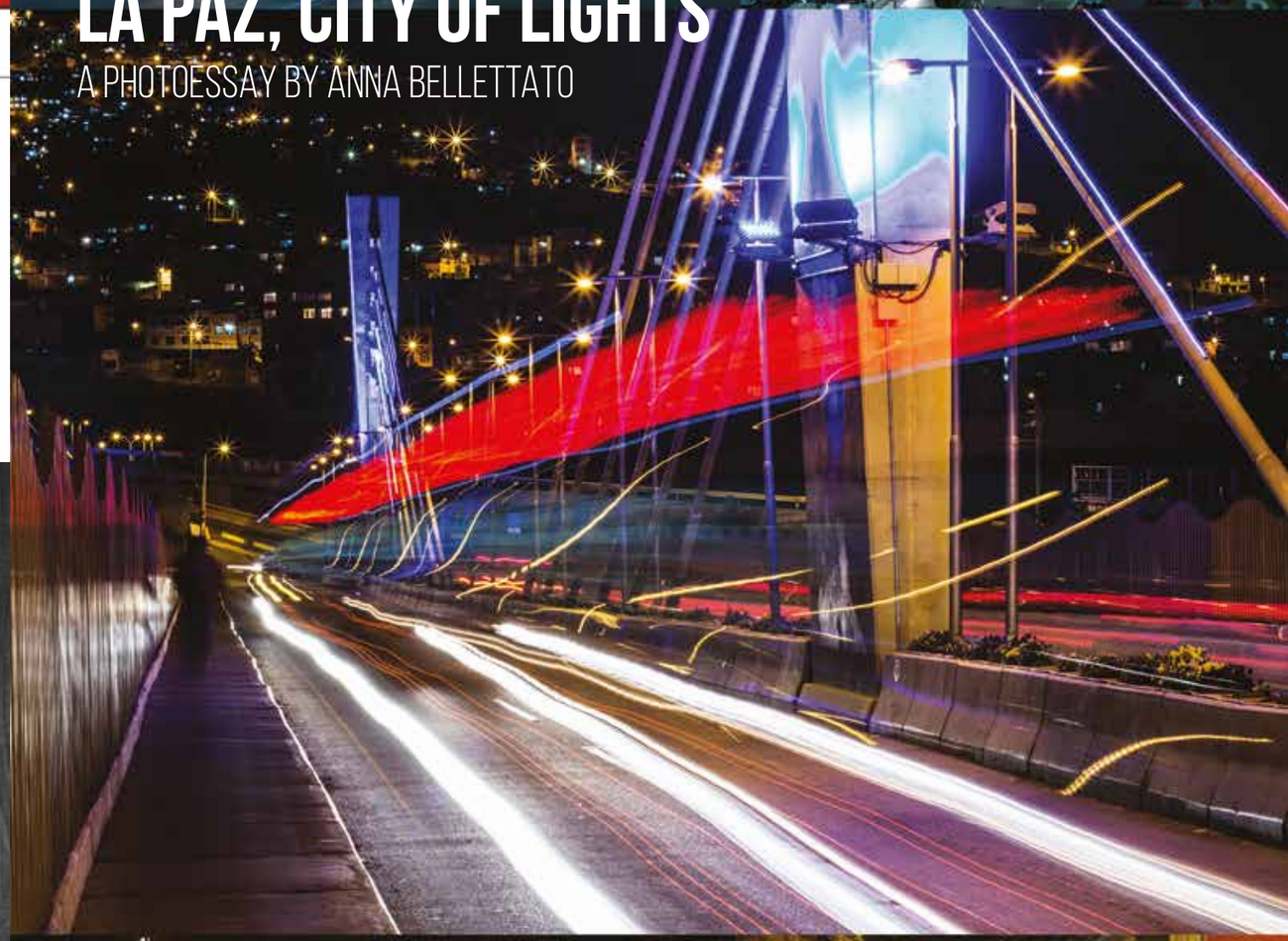
LA PAZ, CITY OF LIGHTS

A PHOTOESSAY BY ANNA BELLETTATO



CLIMATE CHANGE REFUGEES

THE PLIGHT OF THE URUS ON THE DRYING LAKE POOPÓ

TEXT: GEORGINA BOLAM

Lake Poopó, once the second largest fishing paradise in Bolivia, has become nothing but an expanse of dry and salty land. The water waned, 30 million fish died and rose to the surface belly up. For weeks the stench stagnated the air. But it is not just the fish that suffered. A large part of the indigenous Urus of Lake Poopó, who lived by the lake for centuries, were forced to leave, joining the world-wide evacuation of refugees who are not fleeing war or a natural disaster, but the devastating consequences of climate change. Facing a desolating situation, they have consequently become 'the climate change refugees.'

The Urus of Lake Poopó have lived through centuries of displacement due to the forced migration of the Aymaras after the conquest of the Incas, and now the transformation of not only their livelihoods but of their homes. For generations they adapted, but it seems that they will not be able to adjust to the upheaval caused by the drought. Ruth Vilches, officer of Centro de Ecología y Pueblos Andinos (CEPA) tells us: 'Their way of living has been eroded, they are discriminated against. They used to have their own language but now they only remember some words.' This, in turn, has endangered their way of living and brings to question whether they will be able to overcome something as consequential and unavoidable as this to remain near the lake.

THE URUS ARE NOT FLEEING WAR OR A NATURAL DISASTER, BUT THE DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

There was a migration of Uru men to urban areas to work as carpenters and drivers. Some Urus went to the lake Uru-Uru, not as fishermen but as employees of the Aymara fishermen. Many went to work in the mines near Oruro and a lot have also gone to work in the salt mines near Uyuni. Out of the 1,200 Urus living near the lake, around half remain.

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‘WE WERE FISHERMEN AND THAT WILL ALWAYS BE A PART OF US.’
DON FELIX, URU ELDER

CEPA, however, is committed to helping them. CEPA, which is the Center for Ecology and Andean Communities, works in defense of indigenous rights, territory and resources. ‘The Uru are in a very special situation, there is no income,’ Vilches says. ‘ They used to live from fishing. They don’t have land. They don’t have another activity other than fishing. So CEPA is accompanying the three communities (Llapallapani, Villa Ñeque and Puñaka Tinta María) helping them replace the loss of their income with other productive activities. Now we are helping the women who want to make artisanal crafts from **chillawa**, a type of hay [...] but this, in reality, doesn’t provide much income.’ On account of Uru displacement, CEPA has ensured that authorities carry out small projects such as building solar panels and water tanks.

In the region, the Urus were known as ‘the people of the lake’ and without it, they are drastically adapting their way of life. The fishing season began on the shore of the lake with a ritual known as ‘remembrance.’ Around 40 Uru men spent a whole night chewing coca leaves and drinking liquor. Together they recited the names of the main fishing spots of Lake Poopó. In the morning, they made their way among the underground springs and threw sweets in the lake as a religious offering and that’s when fishing season began. Rituals such as this have, unfortunately, become a thing of the past.

Fishing has always been the Uru’s principal activity and dates back generations upon generations. Vilches, who approaches the communities directly and personally, understands that their experiences and beliefs are what makes this indigenous community so special. ‘When we talk to the elders,’ she recalls, ‘they tell us how they lived on their boats. One elder, Don Felix told us: “We basically lived on the lake – I’d bring my little boat – here was the kitchen, here is where we slept... Everything was on the boat.” And I admire them. Don Felix can name 34-different bird species. [...] They were very close to the lake, physically and emotionally.’

According to the elders, ‘the lake always dried up’ but what should have taken 1,000 years took 4 and the difference now is that conditions have changed, it’s not like 40 years ago. This situation may have been easily preventable. Lake Poopó collected a lot of sediment such as dirt, rocks and rubbish from Rio Desaguadero, and as Lake Poopó has no exit, this built up over time – stopping the fish from reproducing. On top of this, chemicals from the heavy metal mines were emptied into Lake Poopó and there has been a severe lack of rain in the area due to climate change, which has caused the lake to dry up. With all these forewarning signs, it’s disturbing that something wasn’t done sooner.

Vilches explains that ‘it was already always anticipated... I imagine the previous and current leaders should have taken actions to prevent the drought. They could have drained and cleaned the lake. They should have foreseen this.’ Recent efforts from the government involved bringing food and materials to the Uru people after the disappearance of the lake. Due the 2013 march for better living conditions, the Uru received one ambulance, schools and homes, but ‘there was still no structural care from the governments,’ Vilches notes. ‘We always knew the lake was going to dry.’

The issues, however, go further than just the lake. ‘Their culture and their social relations and political structures have been disintegrating. There is conflict within the families, between the three communities and with the public authorities,’ says Vilches.

Unlike the Aymara communities of the lake, who all belong to the same municipality, the three Uru communities were separated in 1984 by law, which has prevented them from being unified. The drying up of the lake has only exacerbated underlying tensions between the Urus, having unintended effects such as migration and the disintegration of social and political structures.

Even with these frequent adaptations, Vilches agrees that the Urus are far from losing their identity. ‘This is what surprises me,’ she says. Perhaps there is a silver lining in this situation in that, according to CEPA, even though the Uru have lost their most vital source of income, they have found ways to revive their identity. ‘They are still saying that they are Urus. It’s still present in their way of dressing, speaking and in their attitude.’

Furthermore, with the 2009 Constitution the Urus have more of a public presence, which allows them to strengthen their cultural identity. Vilches adds: ‘I think they have done so already because they have returned to the past. “This is how it was,” they say. “We were like this, our clothes were like this, our relationship to the lake was like this.” Their past is not set in stone, their past is ahead. In a way, their displacement has allowed them to retain their identity.’

Despite current situations, there is still hope for the Urus to remain near the lake. ‘I have the impression that the current rains will improve the water level in the lake and allow the fish to reproduce and the families to stay. I hope.’ The recent rains and the new schools have encouraged them to stay and remain connected to their past: ‘The Urus as a people, as a culture will stay. Their recent hardships have allowed them to reconnect with their past and say: “this is who we were, we were fishermen and that will always be a part of us.”’

A LITTLE LUCK GOES A LONG WAY

EKEKO LENDS A HAND

TEXT & PHOTOS: GEORGINA BOLAM

EACH YEAR ON 24 JANUARY, THE PEOPLE OF LA PAZ HEAD TO THE PARQUE URBANO AND ITS SURROUNDING PLAZAS AND FILL THEIR BAGS WITH MINIATURE CARS, HOUSES, COMPUTERS, ROOSTERS (WE WILL COME BACK TO THIS ONE), AIRLINE TICKETS AND EVEN MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES. TAKING PLACE JUST BEFORE CARNIVAL, THE ALASITAS FESTIVAL IS A MONTH-LONG AFFAIR, WHEN LOCALS PURCHASE MINIATURE ITEMS TO GIVE TO EKEKO, THE AYMARA GOD OF ABUNDANCE, IN THE HOPE THAT HE WILL BRING FORTUNE AND HAPPINESS TO THEIR LIVES. BUT WHAT ARE THE STORIES BEHIND THE FESTIVAL, AND WHAT DO THESE THESE MINIATURE ITEMS REPRESENT TO THE PEOPLE OF BOLIVIA?

EKEKO: This is the god of abundance and prosperity in the mythology and folklore of the Aymara people of the altiplano. But even though Ekeko is the traditional god of luck, he must continually be given gifts throughout the year to keep his good fortune alive. To do this, he must be given (lit) cigarettes and alcohol every week, and lots of miniature bits and bobs. According to vendors we spoke to, purchases of Ekeko figurines have decreased in recent years – perhaps because people do not want to be burdened with the effort of replenishing him so frequently, or maybe they just don't like the smell of tobacco in their house.

BABIES: Feeling broody? They have a variety of babies at the Alasitas. Buy the life-size cot, pram and formula and a real human will come in time.

EKEKO MUST BE GIVEN **(LIT) CIGARETTES AND ALCOHOL EVERY WEEK.**

STACKS OF MONEY: Yes, you read that right. The lottery can be very hit and miss, so here is the next best thing. Just buy some stacks of money at the miniature central bank of Bolivia. This woman will kindly lead you to your correct currency – euros? Dollars? Bolivianos? She has it.

THE FROG: Unlike the Ekeko, the frog doesn't need alcohol or nicotine to stabilise its fortune – it accumulates it all on its own (clever, right?). Keep a frog in your house and be blessed with good luck for all of your mortal life.

THE GALLO: Well, well, well... Still haven't found your husband or wife to be? Are you still meandering the streets hoping to find your princess or prince charming? Perhaps you are wondering the supermarkets in the hope that your hands will touch over the last tin of soup and it will be love at first sight? Well, look no further... Buy a hen or rooster figurine (depending on preference) and you are sure to find your true love this year. If you are picky by nature, perhaps you want one with a specific job title – a psychologist? A chef? Or, if you are feeling dangerous, maybe even a soldier? Don't worry, you don't need to thank me.

MINIATURE TOOLS: Ever needed a mini hammer, shovel or pliers? The mini pliers came in particularly handy when fixing a necklace of mine. They can be very easy to lose, though, so look after them wisely.

CAFÉ ESPACIO CULTURAL SANGRE Y MADERA

BREWING COFFEE AND CULTURE IN SOPOCACHI'S CORNER

TEXT: GEORGINA BOLAM
PHOTOS: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Sopocachi: an extraordinary enchanted, bustling neighbourhood, with avenues and pathways that weave between the main roads; flooded with ornamental trees, sociable parks where you can have a breath of fresh air within the intimacy of the shaded spaces. In this truly inimitable neighbourhood, and off the Medinacelli passageway, you will find the Café Espacio Cultural Sangre y Madera, a café that triples as a laboratory and cultural space. Víctor Hugo Belmonte, the civil engineer and barista, has made Sangre y Madera his own scientific laboratory. In this café, which has only been open for three months, Hugo puts into practice what he learnt in an international course in Barcelona from Kim Ossenblok, a well-known Belgian barista and coffee taster.

Although the food is important in this new café, the engineer sees himself, above all, as a lover of coffee. When tasting their coffee I was particularly amazed by the cold brew. Delivered to me in a rotund glass with a circular block of ice in the centre, its delicate sweetness, presentation and delightful coffee flavour was remarkable. This particular coffee is infused for more than 24 hours at 4°C, which allows Hugo to extract the coffee in the most delicate way possible. Others included coffees flavoured with liquors, hot coffees, espressos with milk and their own Sangre y Madera **sucumbé** with a touch of syrup and toasted marshmallows.

'Because our coffee grows in **Los Yungas** [at 400 to 3,500 metres above sea level],' Hugo explains, 'it takes longer to mature than other coffees. This simply means it absorbs more sweetness and oils, which makes it one of the best beans available... Preparing a specialty coffee is another world. It is something that cannot be obtained in the supermarket, because there are many variables, such as the handling of the beans, drying and preservation.' With these elements, Hugo has everything necessary to get the flavour he desires; from an apparatus that measures the consistency of the grain, to a computer application that gives the exact measurement of water and quantity of the specialty beans.

With the introduction of distinctive places such as this, the Sopocachi neighbourhood is creating a new image for itself; an image of experimental businesses, risk-taking processes and diverse cultural spaces for Bolivian and foreign palates.

With his wife Kruzcaya Calancha, who graduated in gastronomy, the couple decided to turn their residence into a cultural space. Calancha, also an ex-dance teacher, wanted to maintain the venue as not only a place to eat, drink and relax but also as a cultural environment where workshops of all sorts can take place, such as salsa dancing and children's theatre workshops. When speaking with the couple, a workshop for women in business was taking place in the main patio area. The environment was inviting and I acquired a sense of a real community that is starting to take shape there. The waiters happily talk to you about the workshops available around the time you are visiting and consistently take pride in the food and drinks they present to you. After my first visit, I have returned a couple of times to simply soak in the atmosphere and try the variety of coffees and appetisers they have on offer.

As mentioned in the menu, it is a house built in the 1920s, once owned by past diplomat and minister, Hugo Ernst. The republican-style house opens with folding doors that lead to the patio of the café. Its windows that almost reach the floor and its cherry-coloured walls come together to create a wholesome experience for the visitor.

Open from noon to 10pm on weekdays and noon to 6pm on Saturdays, anyone can visit to take in the amicable and sociable atmosphere whilst they enjoy some of their favourite items from La Paz cuisine. 'We have a lot of food and drink that is typical of La Paz – things you would find in the food markets but adjusted for our guests. For this time of year during the Alasitas festival we even have **piqueos** (appetisers), which we call "Alasita **paceña**"', named after the festival where locals purchase miniature items to give to Ekeko, the Aymara god of abundance, in hope he will bring fortune and happiness to their lives. You can get a **sandwich de chola** or **salteñas** miniature style to share or to have on your own. I was introduced to the **sandwich de palta** (avocado), which was rich with flavours and tingled my taste buds, particularly with its caramelised tomatoes, soft, fresh bread and basil flavouring.

PROTEST CULTURE

SOCIAL CHANGE IS NOISY AND INCONVENIENT – BUT THE PEOPLE WILL BE HEARD

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER
PHOTOS: CARLOS SÁNCHEZ NAVAS

Back in 1981, a New York Times headline declared that 'For Bolivia, Chaos Rules.' This referred to the fact that despite constant regime changes, coups and other uprisings in Bolivia, poverty remained constant. But however accurate that was in 1981, Bolivia has changed dramatically since then and the opposite has now become true: The current government has been the most stable since the country's creation, and Bolivia has Latin America's fastest-growing economy. However, for those living here today, this 37-year-old headline – taken out of context – still rings true.

Roadblocks, protests and strikes are, to commuters' frustration, fairly common occurrences, alongside marches on the **Prado** with fireworks exploding in the background. The end of past neoliberal regimes hasn't brought the end to this chaos. For instance, on 8 January 2018, Bolivian doctors finally ended a 47-day strike that affected the whole body of medical professionals. Except for emergency situations, medical care was greatly reduced in hospitals and pharmacies. The strike came with continued demonstrations, some of which escalated to hunger strikes. Doctors and medical professionals were protesting Article 205 of Bolivia's new penal code, which imposed heavy sanctions on doctors found guilty of causing physical harm to their patients.

The last few months have been particularly tense, especially since Bolivia's Constitutional Court overruled on 28 November 2017 the 2016 referendum prohibiting President Evo Morales from running for a fourth term in 2019. Now he's free to run again, next year and for the rest of his life. And, with the second anniversary of the annulled referendum approaching on 21 February, tensions and demonstrations are multiplying. Morales's opponents – as well as his supporters – are planning marches across the nation. Teodoro Mamani, secretary general of Bolivia's farmers' union (CSUTCB), is expecting 'around 3 million farmers to get mobilised in support of the president.

Nowhere else in Latin America have social movements been as influential as they are in Bolivia, where they've been – and continue to be – the impetus of social and political change. In 2003, the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was overthrown due to massive waves of protests, first during 2000's Water War in Cochabamba and then during 2003's Gas War in El Alto,

NOWHERE ELSE IN LATIN AMERICA HAVE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS BEEN AS INFLUENTIAL AS THEY ARE IN BOLIVIA.

both of which brought the masses to the streets, contributing to Evo Morales's eventual ascension to power. More recently, demonstrations in 2012 against the development of a highway in the **TIPNIS** region effectively stopped the project.

Protests have become the primary means of political communication between the Bolivian citizenry and the government. Past colonisation and the pillaging of natural resources, followed by neoliberal regimes that only widened the inequality gap, brewed discontent, and the Bolivian people began to rebel and fight for a more representative democracy. When rising prices ignited the Gas War, people reacted against the implicit racism, discrimination and a lack of opportunities that the neoliberal economic system laid bare – just as today people are also reacting to the government's long and punitive regulatory overreach. Nothing is taken for granted, and what has been achieved so far is only the first step towards a long process of change.

To understand this culture of protest, one can look at Bolivia's past; marching and protesting are the primary way of political expression against the legacy of neoliberal policy. But this expression assumes many different manifestations. And to really grasp what protest means for the Bolivian people, one should look at the everyday protests; what role the syndicates, unions, neighbourhood associations play; and how they are organised.

In Bolivia, it's natural for any group of people interacting together for any period of time to join a union or form a syndicate. Because an important portion of jobs in

Bolivia belong to the informal sector – juice vendors, **caseritas**, fortune-tellers, shoe-makers, etc. – workers need to unite to be able to defend themselves and have any legitimacy. A lone vendor would have no chance of survival were he not to join the local association. Wherever you live, you are a part of a **junta de vecindario**. Each structure is then absorbed by a larger structure with its rules and hierarchy that form an invisible framework supporting the life of the city.

La Paz's Fejuve *(Federación de Junta de Vecinos)* is precisely that. It comprises 600 neighbourhood associations and acts as a unified voice for its members. Fernando Zegarra, secretary of Fejuve La Paz, says, 'We are constantly mobilised.... When something is not working right, the community organises itself.' Fejuve's role is to improve living conditions, to fill a social need for neighbours to meet and discuss issues, and to organise marches and protests. 'A lot of the people living in the **laderas** are from the countryside and have brought their traditions with them. One of them is the **apthapi**, and, each time they hold a meeting or organise a march, everybody contributes by bringing food and drinks,' Zegarra says. 'That's why organising marches and protests is sustainable.'

These can be localised actions, such as a handful of people asking for a sewer system in their street, or thousands of people mobilising to protest against a decision from the municipality that will affect them all. Fejuve is a complex but well-oiled all-volunteer administrative machine in which elections take place every two years. Meetings are held weekly, and because of a very efficient chain of command in place, marches can be organised in hours.

The reasons for protests or roadblocks are as varied as the people organising them. I once encountered a roadblock on the main highway between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz because the man leading it wanted justice for his murdered father. He claimed that a corrupt judge let his father's killer go free. On my way back from Santa Cruz, another roadblock was organised by tenant farmers whose land was being sold by the land's owners. The question that comes to mind, especially if you are the one inconvenienced by a roadblock, is: Are they ever successful?

Oftentimes, they are. That men who lost his father may not have managed to send the corrupt judge to jail, but by blocking a main highway for hours, attention was raised, his and the judge's names were reported on local television, and his father's memory was honoured. This is the goal. In La Paz, on **avenida** Perez behind **Mercado Lanza**, are a handful of *caseritas* stands. Because of the insecurity in the area, 10 to 15 of these women recently marched in the centre of La Paz to ask for an increased police presence. The next day, they tell us, the police responded, providing more security in the neighbourhood and converting a once-forlorn and crime-ridden area into a secure and bustling commercial center. For these small associations of people, this is the only way to be heard: block a street, paint some banners, ignite some fireworks.

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE NEW PENAL CODE?

The new penal code was meant to replace the 1972 penal code enacted by the government of dictator Hugo Banzer. It took two years to write and brought some much needed changes to outdated laws. We wrote in BX issue No. 78 about Article 157 of the new code that was going to give access to safe and legal abortions to more women. However, groups protested against a certain number of articles (including the one regarding abortion) and, ultimately, the new penal code was annulled a few days after being enacted. Now the process starts anew and a whole new penal code needs to be agreed on.

23 November 2017: Medical professionals start a 47-day long strike in protest of Article 205 (which imposes heavy sanctions on doctors found guilty of causing physical harm to their patients).
15 December 2017: Alvaro García Linera, vice president of Bolivia, enacts the new penal code after it was approved by the Senate a few days earlier.
9 January 2018: President Morales announces the elimination of Article 205.
21 January 2018: President Morales requests the elimination of the entire penal code so that 'the right wing will stop conspiring and have no arguments to destabilise the country.'

On the other hand, the extraordinary frequency of acts of protest and roadblocks can lead to officials to not take demands seriously, which pushes protesters to escalate their actions until they are heard. On 25 January and then on 7 February 2018, minibus and micro drivers blocked whole sections of La Paz. Enrique Aliaga, from the bus syndicate Eduardo Abaroa, is leading the second 24-hour roadblock. Protesting against the city's new, more modern buses, he's asking for more transparency and support from the municipality: 'We are being discriminated against, our roads are in terrible condition, the PumaKatari buses have better conditions than us,' Aliaga says. These drivers are intent on continuing their protest until something is done. 'If they don't hear us, next time it will be 48 hours, and then 72 hours, until it's an indefinite roadblock,' Aliaga says.

Ultimately, protesting fills many functions. It can be practical: asking for a specific need. It can be political: The residents of Calle 21 of Calacoto asking for their street's name to be changed to '21F No' in a show of support for the 2016 referendum and in protest of the Constitutional Court's decision (now residents in Cochabamba and El Alto are also asking for a similar change). But the protest is always social, creating a safe space for Bolivians to express themselves and uniting a group of people in a common fight. Bolivia's political future may be uncertain, the country may be divided and people might be tired of the constant delays and inconveniences caused by roadblocks and strikes, but these are the expression of a democracy. They serve a very specific purpose and fill a vital role that allows the nation to breathe and react.

A DOOR TO THE PACEÑO UNDERWORLD

MARCOS LOAYZA AND THE NEW VOICE OF BOLIVIAN CINEMA

TEXT: GEORGINA BOLAM
PHOTO: ALMA FILMS

The Bolivian film critic Pedro Susz wrote some years ago that filming in Bolivia is as difficult as building a Concorde airplane in a car garage. Despite the lack of demand for Bolivian cinema and the challenges met by the country's film industry, in the last year there has been a rebirth in Bolivian movies. From *Las Malcogidas*, an acid musical comedy that tells the story of a woman of 30-something searching for her first orgasm, to *Averno*, released at the start of this year to tell the escapades of a shoeshine boy weaving through hysterical encounters within the underworld of La Paz. These are two movies that, despite high risks, have managed to captivate the Bolivian public.

But, one should keep in mind that tickets for Bolivian cinema remain significantly lower than their foreign competitors, perhaps revealing the importance of adventurous films such as *Averno*. Marcos Loayza, director of the film, parodically recreates the spaces and characters of the La Paz underworld to capture the essence of a place that resonates with Bolivians. Audacious in its narration, the story begins with a dream between life and death that merges into a plummeting trip down from the towering city of El Alto to a door in La Paz that leads to that mythological place, *Averno*.

Much like the spectator, Tupah, an 18-year-old shoeshine boy, does not recognise the moment he has left the real world. Running for his life through the indistinct, obscure city of La Paz, he encounters living ghosts; souls in pain, neither undead nor trying to return to their bodies. *Averno* conveys similar stories the Bolivian grandmothers tell their grandchildren about the demons of deceased demonology, the Anchancho, a dreaded malignant spirit or the paths lead by Tata Santiago, a horse-riding truth guide. For the most part, it does not matter what these characters are called or in what scenarios or settings they appear. Loayza has gathered them all to immortalize them in the cinema; where funeral boleros coexist, where a saint who rides on a horse appears through a tunnel to save a life, and where drinkers in a bar walk on a floor flooded with beer in the name of Mother Nature.

Through integrating social realism with the fantastical, Loayza has pioneered a new platform of Bolivian cinema. His aim with *Averno*, is for people 'to have more knowledge of the workings of a Bolivian film and the traditions and typical characters that are part the country,' he says. Lucia Zalles, the marketing coordinator of the film admits 'it is a risk' to distribute the movie due to its exceptional and unusual nature. Shown in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, La Paz and Tarija, the film has had over 17,000 sales by the third week. Although this on its own is a success, the question remains: Is this the right direction for Bolivian cinema?

In the last two decades, Bolivian cinema has been marked by transformations by outside factors. A considerable number of young Bolivian filmmakers received formal training abroad. Loayza however, has chosen to produce a distinctly Bolivian film set within the very city he was born. He devoted a lot of time to the production of the film, dedicated himself to the audio-visual world often left in the background, prioritising aesthetics and technique above narrative. 'What I attempt to rescue is the dignity of having worked in the streets, having earned every penny honestly,' he explains. 'Choosing a shoeshine boy as the protagonist creates a very urban image ingrained in La Paz – they often hide their face and have a very definite, stand-out identity.'

'The film looks to the darkest side of us as human beings [...] The cinema is a mirror for everyone in some way or another. I wanted to show another type of mirror, a distorted mirror,' he says, pointing out that the film does not seek to judge but rather talks about reconciliation and forgiving oneself.

Averno has received predominantly positive reviews, with the majority of critics giving it five stars and agreeing that the photography, decors, costumes, makeup, visuals and screenography are extremely effective in creating Loayza's vision of the creepy underworld. However, some viewers lamented the lack of script. Facebook user Pablo Rossel says 'there is no continuity' and calls it a story 'without feet,' while Kevin, also on Facebook, suggests it's just 'a film made of poorly made metaphors.' Despite these few discerning comments, the reviews have mainly been positive with one English-speaking spectator even saying: '*Averno* is a movie that can take you to the underworld through a vivid journey to understand beliefs and locations intrinsically related to what life and death might be.' This suggests that *Averno* has been vastly celebrated because it's one of the few films to be typically 'Bolivian', revealing an unmet demand for quintessentially Bolivian movies for nationals and foreigners alike.

Much like making a film in Bolivia, entering *Averno* is not easy, but it is not difficult either, because you do not choose to go there. *Averno* is a limbo, a place where everything is possible and at the same time, nothing is. It takes us to the courtyards of memories and prompts the discovery of a magical story in the cinematographic voice of Loayza, which will perhaps be eternalised as a vital part of Bolivian cinema.

BOLIVIAN FESTIVAL APPAREL

INNOVATION KEEPS LOCAL CULTURE, CUSTOMS AND COSTUMES ALIVE

TEXT: ADRIANA MURILLO / TRANSLATION: SOPHIA VAHDATI / PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Vibrant colours, masks, sequins and feathers adorn the streets of La Paz during carnival and other traditional celebrations. La Paz, **la ciudad maravilla**, one of the New 7 Wonders Cities, brings together the work of hundreds of local people to make the carnival processions an unforgettable experience. The design and tailoring of Bolivian folkloric dress is the responsibility of artisan dressmakers, whose creativity and designs have the power to change people's perceptions.

The English architect William John Thoms defined folklore as the traditions, poems, songs, catchphrases, tales, myths, music, beliefs, superstitions and other elements that characterise a culture. He coined this word from 'folk' (meaning people) and 'lore' (meaning wisdom and ability). Within this idea, he recognised folklore to be one of the purest forms of identity expression, with its ability to preserve and innovate a culture's traditions.

The artisan costume makers of La Paz each have their own specialty; there are seamstresses, hatters, mask makers, tinsmiths and jewellers. They work in conjunction with one another to design and create hundreds of costumes for the country's different folkloric dances. Carlos Morales Mamani, who has spent most of his life as an artisan dressmaker, works the entire year leading up to carnival designing new costumes and meeting the demands of the dancers. He is now the manager of a costume-design business that was founded by his parents, he being the only one of his siblings who chose to carry on the family business of artisan dressmaking. Morales creates his own designs and costumes based on the knowledge passed in to him by his parents.

In terms of style, the current range of costumes made by artisan **paceños** is more influenced by colonial fashion than by rural, indigenous style. Varina Oroz, an anthropologist and a curator at the National Museum of Ethnography and Folklore (MUSEF) in La Paz, says that many of the 'local artisans' sewing techniques are based on the embroidery of chasubles worn by saints and priests of the Catholic Church, and now they're used to make folkloric costumes.' But modernity is slowly creeping in, and the tradition of donning full traditional carnival apparel, including the use of batons, is no longer practised due to the large number of participants in the processions. Oroz says that fabric from France and Japan and Swarovski crystals were once used to fabricate carnival outfits. Today, though, clothiers use predesigned fabrics and strips of sequins in order to save time. Designs, too, have changed through the years, with baroque styles becoming more common and new shapes and symbols being incorporated, such as the dragons that appear on **diablada** masks (this was inspired, amazingly, by that creature's figure on boxes of Hornimans tea!). Indeed, modernity informs new costume designs with the appearance of new characters, such as el Yapuri Galán in the **kullawada** dance, who is a representative of the LGBT community.

Carnival masks were originally made of plaster, making them very heavy, which was later replaced by tin. From the 1990s onward, tinsmiths and mask makers sourced their own raw material from discarded cans, which were then crafted with specialised tools. They were then nickel-plated to highlight a silver colour. Now, most carnival masks are made from glass fibre, a lightweight material that allows mask makers to fabricate even more extravagant pieces; some masks used in the *diablada* dance can even emit fire from the mouthpiece.

Photos and videos fail to capture the magnificence of these events; they cannot capture the excitement and energy of the exceptionally dressed dancers and the feel of music felt in spectators' bones. But carnival occurs every year, and the municipal tourism agency La Paz Maravillosa invites you to experience this and other traditional Bolivian festivals in person, and perhaps in a costume of your own!


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ISLA DEL SOL'S LA ESTANCIA

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER / PHOTOS: ALEJANDRO LOAYZA GRISI

ONE OF THE AREA'S FIRST ECOLODGES WAITS FOR THE ADVENTUROUS TRAVELLER

AROUND ME NOTHING BUT SOOTHING SERENITY – **AND THE OCCASIONAL BRAYING OF DONKEYS IN THE DISTANCE.**

I have been on the road for eight hours, having taken two buses and two boats and climbing 240 steps (at 3,800 metres above sea level), walking another hour and travelling about 165 kilometres since leaving La Paz. But none of this matters once I reach my final destination: the southern side of Isla del Sol on Lake Titicaca. I am now standing 200 metres above the largest lake in South America; the clouds are scattered on the horizon, allowing me a glimpse of the Cordillera Real to the east. Around me nothing but soothing serenity – and the occasional braying of donkeys in the distance. The view (and the altitude) takes my breath away. I have arrived at the ecolodge La Estancia.

Built in 1999 when tourism on Isla del Sol was taking shape, La Estancia today offers an inclusive experience that caters to each traveller. The concept behind La Estancia is one that is not only considerate of a traveller's needs but also of the surrounding communities and the island's fragile ecosystem. Behind this vision stands Rodrigo Grisi, director of the La Paz–based tourism agency Magri Turismo, a family enterprise spanning over three generations. Founded by Grisi's father 45 years ago, Magri Turismo provides high-quality experiences in Bolivia and throughout the world.

Seventeen years ago when the agency was new, Grisi recalls, tourists would simply camp on the island, and there was no electricity. Grisi and his wife saw an opportunity to provide a higher standard of tourism to Isla del Sol. By chance, they discovered the location where La Estancia is now. 'That was the only option for us,' Grisi says. A year later, La Estancia welcomed its first visitors. Since then, the lodge has come a long way. There are now 14 cabins and one family suite, each with the same spectacular view, all facing east towards the neighbouring Isla de la Luna, with a snowy cap of mountains in the distance lit every morning by the spectacular sunrise.

Standing apart from the other ecolodges on the island, La Estancia works in partnership with the Aymara communities from the nearby town of Yumani, on the southern end of the island. Indeed, on Isla del Sol one can find a multitude of 'ecolodges', most of them wearing the appellation as a way to attract tourists, but few of them can fit the fit bill like La Estancia does. For Grisi, the ecology is a priority, and La Estancia respects and abides by a high level of environmental care. Water is recycled through a water-treatment tank based on a filter system and heated through solar panels. The lodge also has an on-site a rainwater-collection and sewage-recycling system. The cabins are made of adobe and heated with solar energy. This shallow environmental footprint is something that Grisi has been building incrementally throughout the years: As he puts it, 'We have been learning, and we are still learning.'

In the last two years, particular attention has been placed on La Estancia's culinary offerings. Most of the lodge's ingredients are grown in its greenhouse – which can be visited – and gardens; the rest, if possible, are purchased from small local producers. The menu varies depending on the season and offers foods that reflect the richness of the Andes, adapted, of course, to travellers' dietary restrictions. The staff want their visitors to taste authentic and healthy homemade Bolivian food cooked by Doña Grego, the resident chef. 'It's like arriving home,' says Roxana Mendizabal, the hotel manager.

Working with the local communities is also an integral part of Grisi's vision. Since its founding, La Estancia has employed and trained people from the area. 'It wasn't easy in the beginning to find people,' says Grisi. 'We had to fight to establish ourselves.' Looking back, though, Grisi says that they 'haven't encountered major difficulties.' Now La Estancia is integrated with the surrounding communities. And despite the recent tensions dividing the island – for almost a year now, the communities of Challa and Challampapa have been blocking the northern part of the island to prevent the construction of more ecolodges – La Estancia hasn't suffered any negative consequences.

La Estancia's main challenge, according to Grisi, is 'competition from Peru' and 'establishing Isla del Sol as a must-see stop on the Inca Trail.' 'A lot of tourists don't know about it and only stop on the Peruvian side of the lake, but Isla del Sol has much to offer,' he says. Both Grisi and Mendizabal would like to see travellers spend more time on the island, as most tourists only spend a night. Isla del Sol is also completely car-free (donkeys haul heavy loads here, like travellers' backpacks), which contributes to a truly relaxing environment. And, as I unwind at the ecological site for unfortunately only one night, I wish I would stay longer.

GLOSSARY

APHTAPI	A tradition from the countryside where everybody shares food
AVENIDA	Avenue
CALLE	Street
CASERITA(O)	Female shopkeeper of a kiosk or market stall
CENTAVO	Cent
CHILLAWA	A type of hay found on the Andean altiplano
CIUDAD MARAVILLA	City full of wonders
DIABLADA	Typical dance from the region of Oruro in Bolivia. Characterised by the mask and devil suit worn by the performers.
GALLO	Rooster
JUNTA DE VECINDARIO	Neighbour's meeting
KULLAWADA	Aymara folklore dance
LADERAS	'Hillside', refers to the basic housing found on sloped areas
LAS YUNGAS	Province of La Paz
MERCADO LANZA	Popular market in the centre of La Paz near San Francisco church
MICROS	A public transport bus
PACEÑO(A)	From La Paz
PIQUEOS	Appetisers
PRADO	Main avenue in the centre of La Paz
SALTEÑAS	Typical pasties filled with stew
SANDWICH DE CHOLA	Traditional sandwich in La Paz with meat and escabeche
SANDWICH DE PALTA	Avocado sandwich
SUCUMBÉ	Traditional drink made with singani, milk, cinnamon, cloves
TIPNIS	Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory

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