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Editorial Team: William Wroblewski, Matthew Grace,Juan Victor Fajardo. **Web and Legal:** Jack Kinsella.
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Journalists: William Wroblewski, Kinjo Kiema, Laura Chitty, Rodrigo Barrenechea, Valeria Wilde, Katherine Browning
Our Cover: Mattia Polisena / 7200.LineaRecta **Marketing:** Rodrigo Barrenechea
Advertise With Us: rodrigo@bolivianexpress.org. **Address:** Calle Prolongación Armaza # 2957, Sopocachi, La Paz.
Phone: 78862061- 79658778 - 70672031 **Contact:** info@bolivianexpress.org

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EDITORIAL

June 21 marks the Aymara New Year in Bolivia. Coinciding with the Winter Solstice in the Southern Hemisphere, it is an important celebration for many of the indigenous groups in the region, a time in which agriculturalists carry out rituals to appease two gods, **Pachamama** and **Inti**, in hopes of a successful harvest. A large celebration is carried out at Tiwanaku, a pre-Incan ceremonial site on Lake Titicaca, as well as in communities across the country.

Official government recognition of this day first came in 2009, following a supreme decree by President Evo Morales recognising this day as a national holiday. This was an important event in Bolivian history, serving as a milestone on the road to indigenous recognition and helping to bring ancient traditions back to the centre of life here.

The reemergence of pre-conquest traditions has changed the face of Bolivia in seemingly countless ways. Perhaps most importantly, it has helped bolster a sense of indigenous pride, as young people are finding ways to reconnect with their ancestors. Bolivians today are at a crossroads, where currently prevailing Catholic belief systems and practices intersect with past notions of the sacred. That exchange can be both exciting and challenging to experience.

Bolivia has always been a place of sacred spaces. From Tiwanaku and Lake Titicaca to the many churches and cathedrals in the cities, towns and **pueblos** throughout the country, myriad traditions complement and inform each other. Perhaps it is this mix of beliefs and practices that brings so many travelers here to explore their spirituality in their own unique ways.

Every individual provides her or his own piece to the kaleidoscope of spiritual life. As we celebrate a new Aymara year, we invite you to take in the shapes and colors of this wondrous mix blending together in Bolivia. Join us as we navigate the ways in which beliefs and traditions guide social and political life here, and uncover many transcendent wonders that inhabit this amazing place. ×

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

GLOSSARY

ALTIPLANO	Mountainous in region of southeastern Peru and western Bolivia where many Aymara people live
AMIGO	Friend
APACHETA	Spiritual female hills
APUS	Spiritual male mountains, such as Illimani
COSMOVISION	A way of viewing the world; The Incan/ Andean cosmovision is different than the Western one, and involves worshiping nature.
CURVA DEL DIABLO	Sacred corner on the motorway between La Paz and El Alto where spiritual offerings take place
EL SEÑOR DEL GRAN PODER	Jesus Christ, the Lord of Great Power
DIABLADA	The Dance of the Devil, often seen during the Gran Poder festival
HINCHAS	Sports fans; football hooligans
INTI	The sun god
KILLA	The moon goddess
LA K'OA	Ceremony involving the burning of sacred items, such as coca leaves and ethanol, as gifts to the Pachamama in return for her help and guidance
LIMPIAS	Ceremonies involving a healer praying over a client, using the elements of nature—herbs, flowers, candles, incense, water, along with songs, drums and rattles—to cleanse the person of unwanted or imbalanced energies or emotions
MERCADO DE LAS BRUJAS	The Witches Market
MESA	Sacred table used for offerings to gods
MORENADA	Dance of the Black Slave, often seen during the Gran Poder festival
ÑATITAS	Decorated sacred skulls
PACHAMAMA	Goddess of Nature to the Aymara and Quechua people
PUEBLO	Town
SUMO PONTÍFICE	Supreme Pontiff, the Pope
SUPAY	'The devil' in Spanish, but 'the dead' in Aymara
TIERRA,TECHO, TRABAJO	Land, Housing, Work; slogan of the Pope's World Meeting of Popular Movements
YATIRI	Medical practitioners and community healers among the Aymara of Bolivia

CONSTELLATING THE UNCONSCIOUS

TEXT: VALERIA WILDE
PHOTO: MATHIA POULSEN / Zoo Linear.org – Courtesy of fundacion Jorge Macchi de Vizcaya

You walk into a room and see a group of people in a circle watching a young lady in the middle moving her right foot back and forth, crying desperately. Next to her is an elderly woman dancing with a big smile, surrounding the lady with wide open arms. Also in the circle is a young man trying to reach the crying woman, but he seems invisible to her. She is too consumed by her tears and begins to shout that she cannot stop dancing ballet as yet another woman tries to comfort her without success.

What would you make of this scene? The common assumption may be that you are watching a cast of actors rehearsing a play. For some conservative observers, however, it would be easy to believe that an evil force has somehow possessed these individuals. The truth is that this is a session of an unorthodox therapy called Family Constellations.

Bert Hellinger is the founder of this therapy, which is heavily influenced by systemic psychotherapy, psycho-genealogy, and transgenerational psychotherapy. Usually the practice takes place in a room with a large group of people who are standing in a circle. The subject selects individuals from the group to represent members of his or her family system.

In what follows, the spontaneous actions of those selected reveal the inner conflicts that the subject of the therapy is attempting to solve. As the session advances, these actions change and evolve, shedding light on a way to resolve the inner conflicts at hand. Organically, a natural order is eventually reestablished in the family portrayed at the heart of the circle.

"There is a force that overtakes me and does all the work through me. That's why a phrase or a movement comes to me," says Rosa Scardino, a Family Constellations therapist currently working in La Paz. This force, which is known as the collective consciousness, is what prompts the actions and behaviour of the people participating in the therapy.

English biologist Ruper Sheldrake has developed a similar idea in his morphic fields theory. According to Sheldrake, there is a collective memory that resonates in all kind of things, from crystals and animals to human beings.

Traditional psychology doesn't recognice the value of Family Constellations therapy because it doesn't have scientific bases. Nevertheless, the number of psychologists who unlearn traditional practices and theory to become Family Constellations therapists is growing rapidly.

I've witnessed shocking scenes during these sessions in which people characterise someone else's life, including my own. My family, my feelings, my pain, my emotions, my present and my past. It is unexplainable but amazingly true how these people can embody, if for a moment, your whole life as it is.

The growing popularity of Family Constellations is explained by the fact that one session can sometimes be enough to heal deep and unconscious issues that might take a year or more to resolve in traditional therapies. Furthermore, when one person 'constellates,' or is the subject of the therapy, it helps to heal his or her family members as well, bringing order to the larger family system across generations.

As Scardino explains, the sessions reveal what can at times be an invisible reality. It brings conflicts that are in the unconscious to the conscious level, so that the subject can see them, understand them and solve them.

I feel fortunate to have found this therapy for myself. I am grateful for having been at rock-bottom, where you lose your defense mechanisms and start looking for help. I share these words so that they may reach someone who needs the therapy, but I am aware of the limits of written language. To fully grasp the value of this practice, one has to partake in a constellation.

Healing is our duty in this lifetime. This is a great way to begin.

ZOMBIE POLITICS

NUCLEAR POWER AND THE PACHAMAMA

TEXT AND PHOTO: LAURA CHITTY

The Bolivian government turned heads around the world in 2010 when it introduced a controversial and ground-breaking regulation called the 'Law of Mother Earth'. It was a revolutionary step forward in world environmental thinking. The law gives nature seven rights: the right to life, to diversity of life, to water, to clean air, to equilibrium, to restoration, and to pollution-free living. However, in January of 2014, President Evo Morales announced plans to build a nuclear power plant in the La Paz region of Bolivia, as part of his economic liberalisation plan for the country. A strange turn of events, considering that Bolivia hosted an international conference on climate change in 2010, during which the Law of Mother Earth was drafted.

The environment is a major part of life for many Bolivians, both spiritually and economically. The country possesses abundant natural resources, including natural gas and lithium, and its mountainous **altiplano** region has great potential for hydroelectric power. But the environment isn't only about industry, employment and energy—it is also worshipped by a large proportion of the population. The **Pachamama**, the goddess of nature, is one of the most sacred gods for the indigenous Aymara and Quechua peoples. For them, she has many powers, including the abilities to provide good harvests, protect families, and grant academic and business success. Given the spiritual importance of the environment, President Morales, who is of Aymara origin, seems to be going against his indigenous roots by investing US $2 billion in a nuclear plant.

In a speech last year, Morales said, "We can never feel like a small country again now that we have liberated ourselves economically. With this type of investment toward atomic energy we are going to guarantee that."

But critics question the need for such a power plant. Cecilia Requena, an environmental activist, said, "There is not one good reason to build this plant. It makes no sense financially, environmentally or politically." She also disputed how much it will end up costing: "[The price tag] doesn't include other expenditures such as security, dismantling expenses and the disposal of nuclear waste."

The government aims to complete the plant by 2025, and it is expected to provide between 700 and 800 megawatts of energy each year. But Requena would like to see more environmentally friendly options. "Bolivia is a paradise for renewables," she said. "We would need $400 million to invest in renewables like wind, solar, and small hydroelectric plants to make the same amount of energy—a small price compared to the $2 billion which is going to be invested in the nuclear plant."

But financial concerns pale next to the potential for a nuclear catastrophe, and Requena is emphatic with her unease. "Environmentally it would be a disaster," she said. "Why are they placing a nuclear plant next to the largest city in the country, a protected rainforest, and Lake Titicaca?" And she emphasized another environmental concern, one that grows more acute every year with global warming: "You also need a lot of water to cool the nuclear waste, and here in the **altiplano** we have a water shortage." In fact, retreating glaciers currently threaten the water supply of both La Paz and El Alto.

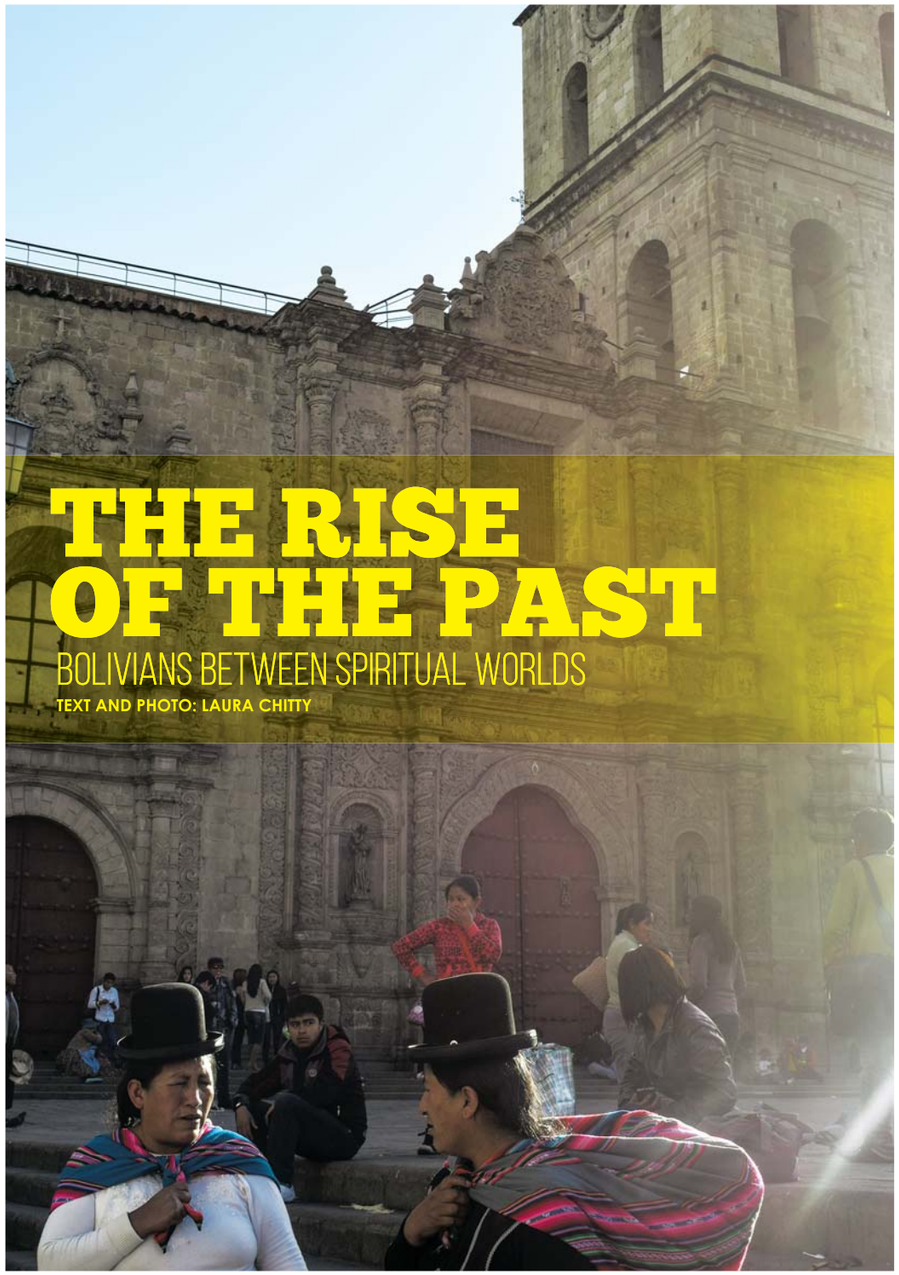
Daniel Bellot, a member of 'NO! A la planta de energía nuclear en Bolivia', an anti-nuclear group, said that the Law of Mother Earth is a smokescreen. "Oh yeah, [the Morales administration] sure doesn't care about nature, nor the natives of the lowlands," he said. "The only thing it cares about is staying in power, and it will modify laws to get what it wants." Requena agreed, saying, "It is an open contradiction. The government is not coherent with their vision—only a few days ago they passed a supreme decree allowing businesses to explore protected areas for fuel."

To understand a more spiritual side of the environmental, I took part in an Aymara ceremony to give offerings to the *Pachamama*. These oblations can be anything from animal foetuses, such as llamas, to **limpias** and **la k'oa**. I opted for a *la k'oa* ceremony, which involved burning sacred items on a **mesa**, a traditional table. My **yatiri**, Alicia, explained that "we do not just pray to the *Pachamama*, we give her an offering of food and then ask her to help us in return. If she agrees, then she will help and protect you."

Alicia told me that her parents were involved in ceremonies and producing herbal medicines, but she wasn't interested until the *Pachamama* told her in a dream to become a *Yatiri*. When I asked her about the Law of Mother Earth, she said, "People were against the law initially, but now the *Pachamama* is respected. The law has stopped evil deeds against her." As for the nuclear plant? "It is wrong," she instantly said. "It goes against the *Pachamama*. The thought scares her and gives us bad feelings."

Although President Morales describes the nuclear plant as 'economic liberalisation', Requena argued that the administration is, in fact, investing in 'zombie techology'. "Why invest in last century's technology?" she asked. "We have the potential to make Tesla batteries, which make energy from solar panels available all year round. Now that's technology!" She then referenced Albert Einstein's description of a nuclear plant as "the most dangerous way of boiling water".

Bolivia has taken a unique approach to the environment. It is a central part of life for many Bolivians, both spiritually and economically, making the proposed nuclear plant a sensitive issue for the people. Although the planning is still in the early stages, and the government is facing strong opposition, Evo Morales and his administration seem determined to make Bolivia a South American nuclear powerhouse.



THE RISE OF THE PAST

BOLIVIANS BETWEEN SPIRITUAL WORLDS

TEXT AND PHOTO: LAURA CHITTY

The largest indigenous groups in Bolivia are the Aymaras and Quechuas. The former are mostly found in the vast plains of the **altiplano** region on the west of Bolivia, while the latter are found in the east towards Santa Cruz. In both societies, religious beliefs revolve around the power of spirits that live in mountains and the sky, and natural forces such as lightning. Both indigenous groups often give offerings to the **Pachamama**, the goddess of nature, who has the power to make the soil fertile and ensure a good harvest, and her children, *Inti,* the sun god, and **Killa**, the moon goddess.

To learn more about Aymara traditions, I paid a visit to the Witches Market, the place to go if you want to buy materials for offerings to the gods. It is hidden behind the San Francisco church in central La Paz. There one can find shops full of colourful objects, talismans, coca leaves, and even llama fetuses and unto—animal fat statues.

Ada, a-14-year-old girl running her mother's shop, said, "For me, this is just business. I have never done an offering to the **Pachamama**, but my parents and grandparents lived in the countryside and healed people with medicinal herbs. We sell everything here: **mesas**, crafts, herbs, medicine, llamas—everything." When asked about her spiritual beliefs, she replied, "My family are Catholic, but they believe in the *Pachamama* and **Inti** as well as God. I believe more in God than the *Pachamama*, but I don't go to church."

Ada is an example of a growing population of Bolivians combining their Catholic beliefs with traditional practises and ceremonies. This trend is often attributed to the government and President Evo Morales, who is of Aymara origin. One big example of the government's influence on spiritual culture came in 2009 with the declaration of the 21st of June, the Aymara New Year, as a national holiday. Although it was a controversial decision, many people praise Evo Morales for empowering indigenous groups and ensuring that they are more accepted throughout the country. But as more people become involved in Aymaran traditions, the role of the Catholic Church, the most prominent religion in Bolivia, is changing.

Catholicism was introduced during the colonial period and was adopted by 80 percent of the population. Today, though, only 70 percent of Bolivians are baptised, and only 35 percent of these actively practise their religion. Although the Catholic

Church has always worked with Andean traditions, there are beliefs within Andean folklore which go directly against Catholic doctrine. I spoke to Giovani Arana, who works in the pastoral care section of the Bolivian Catholic Church, about the connections, and the conflicts, between these Andean traditions and the Catholic Church in Bolivia.

'The government has moved against everything colonial, and that includes the church. The state is not secular, it is anti-Catholic.'

"I often go to the **altiplano** areas to promote Catholicism, but I find introducing celibacy very difficult and it isn't accepted," said Arana. "In their culture, a man cannot be in a position of power unless they are married; therefore Catholicism contradicts Andean belief."

"It used to be the families and schools who educated people about the church," Giovani continues. "But now the schools only teach ethics, and families let their children make their own choices. The government has moved against everything colonial, and that includes the church. The state is not secular, it is anti-Catholic."

Giovani described the church's work in promoting Catholic beliefs in more traditional societies as "cultivating the Catholic tree. They assume the positive aspects and purify the negative ones." For example, Catholics have a respect for all life, including animals and humans; therefore the church can't accept animal sacrifice. However, the sacrificing of animals is very important in Andean tradition, especially in August, the month of *Pachamama*. At the **Curva del Diablo**, which is located along the motorway connecting La Paz and El Alto, animal sacrifices such as llamas, cats and dogs are made to the **Supay**, the god of death and the underworld. Until 2009, there was a sacred stone at this location but the Catholic Church removed it to discourage the animal sacrifices.

But the content of many religious festivals now shows evidence of traditional beliefs, including the Gran Poder festival.

'I believe more in God than the Pachamama, but I don't go to church.'

This traditional Andean festival involves folkloric dances and singing, such as the **Diablada** (Devil's Dance) and the **Morenada** (Dance of the Black Slave), but the participants also pay homage to **El Señor del Gran Poder**, Jesus Christ. When it began in the 1930s, Gran Poder was a simple candlelit procession performed by Aymaran migrants living in the market district, but it has now evolved into a major international street festival, famed for its exuberant parties, elaborate costumes and enormous crowds. The growth of this festival is an example of the growing influence of the Aymara people and the improved attitude towards these traditions by the non-indigenous population of La Paz.

Back in the Witches Market with Ada, I asked her about young people becoming involved in Andean traditions. "Oh yes," she replied. "We learn about the culture, language and traditions in school. I'm learning about how they traded with goods instead of money at the moment."

Some say that these changes in education—brought on by government policy initiated by President Evo Morales—are the driving force behind the developing relationship between the Catholic Church and indigenous traditions. They say there is more freedom to make your own choices about what you want to believe, who you want to worship, and how you want to show it, opening the door for those wanting to practice the spirituality of their ancestors alongside Catholic beliefs.

When I asked asked Ada if she thought more people were becoming involved in Aymaran culture, her answer turned to the changes that have occurred around her. "I'm not sure," she said. "But thanks to Evo Morales, more people accept these kinds of things."

She gestured around her shop. "He introduced Aymaran beliefs. Before him, we were prohibited to sell llama foetuses."

PLOTTING SPIRITUALITY IN LA PAZ

TEXT: LAURA CHITTY
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

Spirituality comes in many shapes and forms, and that is certainly the case in La Paz. To show off the variety of religious systems found here, we have created a map showing seven of the most intriguing sacred places in the city. To help us with the map, we sought help from Milton Eyzaguirre Morales, director of outreach at Bolivia's National Museum of Ethnography and Folklore, who explained some of the history and traditions of each location.

FESTIVAL OF SKULLS

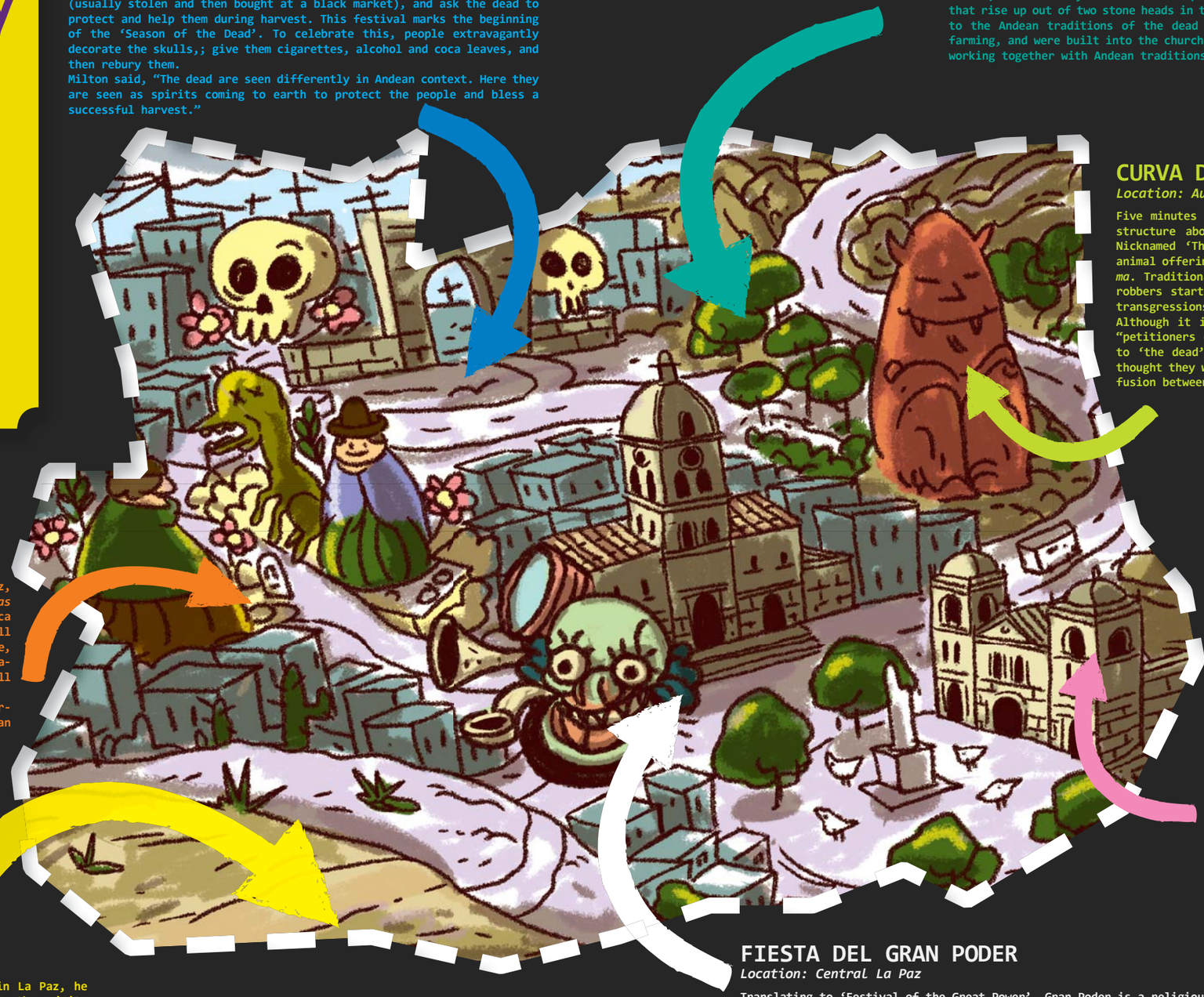
Location: General Cemetery

Every year on the 8th of November, people flock to the graves of their ancestors at the General Cemetery with hundreds of skulls, known as *ñatitas* (usually stolen and then bought at a black market), and ask the dead to protect and help them during harvest. This festival marks the beginning of the 'Season of the Dead'. To celebrate this, people extravagantly decorate the skulls,; give them cigarettes, alcohol and coca leaves, and then rebury them.
Milton said, "The dead are seen differently in Andean context. Here they are seen as spirits coming to earth to protect the people and bless a successful harvest."

SAN FRANCISCO CHURCH

Location: Calle Sagarnaga

Most tourists into La Paz take a trip to the beautiful San Francisco church, but most may not notice the pillars at the front of the church that rise up out of two stone heads in the ground. These heads are linked to the Andean traditions of the dead helping the harvest, growth and farming, and were built into the church to represent the Catholic Church working together with Andean traditions.



CURVA DEL DIABLO

Location: Autopista La Paz–El Alto

Five minutes by car up the freeway to El Alto, there's a rock structure about 15 metres in diameter and four metres high. Nicknamed 'The Devil's Corner', this is a site for spiritual animal offerings, such as dogs, cats and llamas, to the *Pachamama*. Traditional offerings at this curve began when thieves and robbers started to come here to ask for forgiveness for their transgressions.
Although it is called 'The Devil's Corner', Milton explained, "petitioners originally gave offerings to the *supay*—translated to 'the dead' in Aymara. But when the Spanish heard them they thought they were making offerings to the devil." There was confusion between devil and death!

WITCHES' MARKET

Location: Calles Santa Cruz and Linares

Uphill from Sagarnaga, the central tourist market in La Paz, lies a slightly more unusual bazaar. At the *Mercado de Las Brujas*, or Witches' Market, you can find anything from coca leaves to llama foetuses, even trinkets and talismans, all meant to appease the gods of the sun, moon and earth. Here, women tend the products they sell, as they have done for generations. The market began when women from Oruro travelled to sell plants and animals, starting a system of informal commerce.
Milton said, "It should actually be called the women's market—again, there was a confusion between Spanish and Andean terms."

LA CATEDRAL

Location: Plaza Murillo

A few blocks off the Prado lies Plaza Murillo, the city's main square and the location of the National Congress and the Presidential Palace. It is also home to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Nuestra Señora de La Paz. This area was once a sacred site, where offerings were made to the *Pachamama*. After the Spanish arrived, churches, plazas and government buildings were built over sacred Andean locations. In 2005, when excavators were working in the area in preparation for the new national folklore museum, they found human bones in the ground, leading archaeologists to believe the site was once a sacred cemetery.

'APUS' AND 'APACHETAS'

Location: Calles Buenos Aires and North Yungas

When we first asked Milton about famous spiritual areas in La Paz, he responded with *apus*, the spirits of mountains, and *apachetas*, the spirits of smaller hills. In the past, *apus* and *apachetas* were worshipped by the Aymara. During August, the month of the *Pachamama*—Mother Nature—the hills are activated, and people give offerings of llama foetuses to bring economic luck, success in studying or business, and a healthy family.
Milton said, "These spiritual places are being forgotten, but you will still notice a stash of wine, bread, and fruit in some buses, which drivers use to make blessings to the ancestors when they drive over the hills."

FIESTA DEL GRAN PODER

Location: Central La Paz

Translating to 'Festival of the Great Power', Gran Poder is a religious celebration paying homage to Jesus Christ. This dramatic celebration features thousands of folkloric dancers parading down the sprawling streets, flaunting their colourful, extravagant costumes. Although Gran Poder has developed and changed over the decades, many Aymaran traditions remain, making it a one-of-a-kind event. Every year, more than 30,000 dancers take to the streets and dance along a six-kilometre route, beginning at Parque Ben Hur and ending at Avenida Simon Bolívar.

Taking a Trip

AYAHUASCA AND SPIRITUAL TOURISM FLOURISH IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: KINJO KIEMA
PHOTO: MATTIA POLISENA / 7200.LineaRecta

Trip Advisor ranks an Ayahuasca ceremony as one of the top ten things to do in La Paz, so it's not surprising to learn that many people come to Bolivia seeking this spiritual life changing experience, which is probably hard to come by in their home country. Joining a shaman at ancient Incan ruins to participate in traditional ceremonies has become a rite of passage for some seeking spiritual enlightenment.

The brew that is Ayahuasca is made of a plant that contains a psychedelic compound called Dimethyltryptamine, or DMT. And this drink is serious business. After swallowing the pungent and bitter beverage, a process of 'purging' begins. The amount of vomiting that occurs is evidently a central part of the whole experience, as it symbolizes getting negative emotions and life experiences out of your body.

> Some describe the opportunity as life changing, some as miserable, and others report not feeling much of anything during their first ceremony. Many feel that the process helps them understand their purpose in life or to gain insight into the workings of the world around them.

Various users claim that this 'spirit vine' has helped them overcome mental illness, handle previous trauma, move past alcoholism, and even treat cancer. However, people with severe mental illness are warned to take caution when using the drug. This is especially true for people who take prescription pills for mental health, as the combination of the drug and anti-depressants can have unintended negative consequences.

Given the popularity of Ayahuasca among Western travelers, and my lack of a desire to spend hours vomiting during a ceremony in the jungle, I decided to consult an expert about the topic.

Yumi Tapia Higa is a woman who performs Ayahuasca ceremonies and also works with other traditional medicines. Although she isn't officially considered a shaman, she performs individual ceremonies for people in and around La Paz.

Her first experience with Ayahuasca gave her "motivation to contemplate" various aspects of her life. Coupled with experiencing illness in members of her immediate family, she decided to devote her time to traditional medicine and healing.

The life-changing experiences of self-discovery many people have with Ayahuasca may not be surprising. As Higa states, it "isn't an external world, it's an internal world." She explains the path of spiritual medicine and Ayahuasca as "a path of oneself."

Higa defined the process of administering and taking Ayahuasca as "a real commitment." The intensity of sessions with the hallucinogenic is seen by many as extremely cathartic, and a great way to expend one's spiritual horizons.

Although Higa offers ceremonies to Bolivians and foreigners alike, she prefers not to administer Ayahuasca to the tourists just looking for a trip. She doesn't judge any people who seek the ceremony, but offering the treatment to random tourists isn't a part of her repertoire. The most valuable ceremonies, in her opinion, are the ones where the individual is committed to serious self exploration.

VARIOUS USERS CLAIM THAT THIS 'SPIRIT VINE' HAS HELPED THEM OVERCOME MENTAL ILLNESS, HANDLE PREVIOUS TRAUMA, MOVE PAST ALCOHOLISM, AND EVEN TREAT CANCER.

She also describes her work with plants and traditional healing practices as a task that requires "a lot of care and a lot of attention." She says selecting and working with the plants is a serious but delicate process, describing her work as "like surgery", not of the body, but of the mind.

She explained that finding someone to correctly administer Ayahuasca is not something to be taken lightly, advising people to find out "Who are they? Where are you going with them and from where? Is it a place that is sincere?"

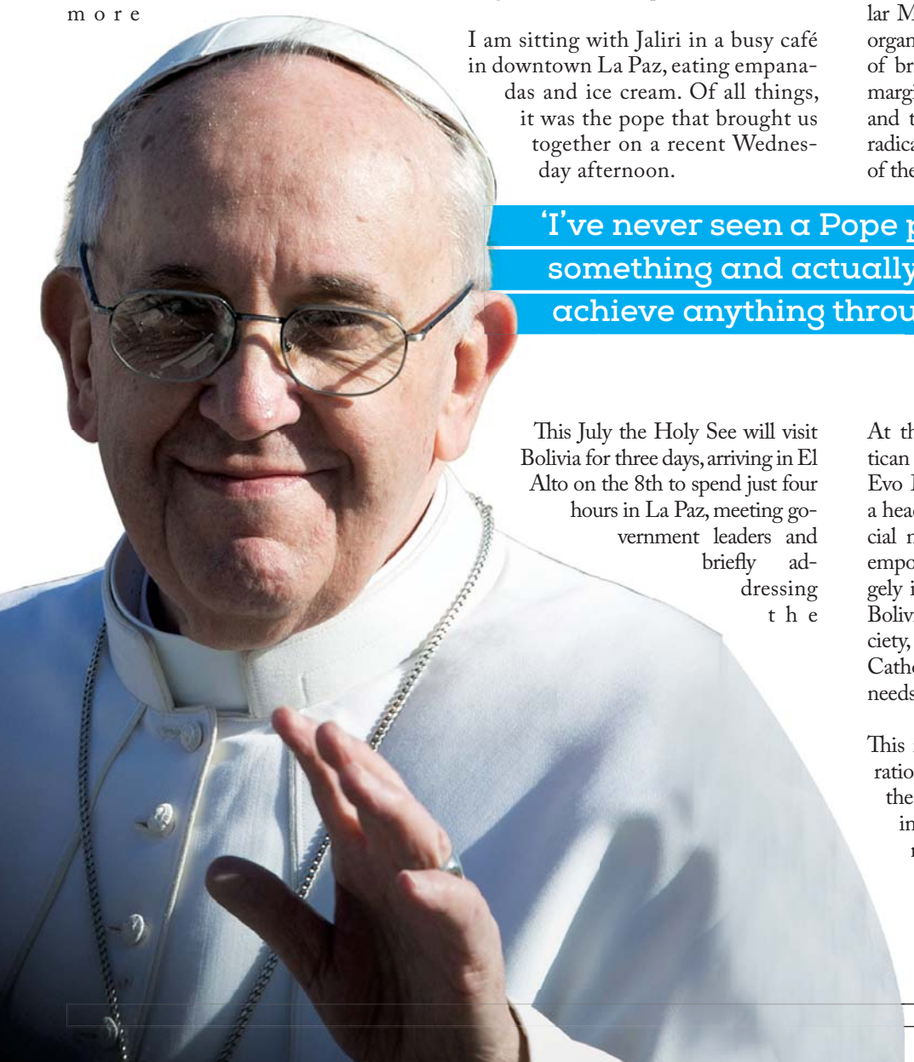
A trained shaman administers the hallucinogenic and leads the ceremony. However, claims of negligence and unwanted sexual advances from shamens during the ceremony are not unheard of. So it is generally recommended to people who want the experience to pick a reputable shaman.

Despite these warnings and the potentially unenjoyable aspects of the ceremonies, and the Ayhuasca ceremony's persistent popularity with Westerners visiting Bolivia, it seems unlikely that this piece of spiritual tourism is going away anytime soon.

THE POPE AND THE POPULAR MOVEMENT

TEXT: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI
PHOTO: JEFFREY BRUNO

"I am not very Catholic," says Simeón Jaliri, secretary general of the Bolivian Workers Central (COB by it's Spanish acronym), the largest labor federation in Bolivia. "We go to church, but it's more about the ancestral traditions. Those of us from rural areas, fisherfolk, farmers, we have a more ancestral essence. Aside from the church, we will pray to the **Pachamama**, in order for her to give us what we produce."



I am sitting with Jaliri in a busy café in downtown La Paz, eating empanadas and ice cream. Of all things, it was the pope that brought us together on a recent Wednesday afternoon.

> 'I've never seen a Pope pray for something and actually achieve anything through that prayer.'

This July the Holy See will visit Bolivia for three days, arriving in El Alto on the 8th to spend just four hours in La Paz, meeting government leaders and briefly addressing the public, before boarding a plane and flying to Santa Cruz for two days of events, meetings and public appearances. Perhaps the most important part of his visit will be his speech at the second meeting of the World Meeting of Popular Movements (WMPM), a gathering organized by the Vatican with the goal of bringing together representatives of marginalized sectors of global society and to, as the Vatican itself says, "seek radical proposals to resolve the problems of the poor."

At the first WMPM, held at the Vatican last October, Bolivian President Evo Morales was in attendance, less as a head of state and more as a former social movement leader who successfully empowered farmers, miners and a largely indigenous working class. It seems Bolivia's government, and its civil society, are taking an active interest in the Catholic Church's efforts to address the needs of the poor.

This is where Jaliri and his labor federation come in. With renewed focus at the Vatican on improving the lives of informal workers, peasants, indigenous groups and urban squatters, what effect can the pope have to improve the lives of marginalized people across Bolivia? As invitees to the WMPM, COB members must certainly have expectations for papal visit—after all, its members are engaging with this far-reaching global effort coming from the Vatican.

"We are invited [to the meeting with the pope]. We will participate. We will be involved," Jaliri says. "Many will want to go see the pope because of their religious convictions, as they are Catholic. Others may come just to see him. This will cause people to gather."

The distinctions between these motivations are important. While the Catholic Church has played an historically strong role in shaping political and social systems in much of Latin America, its influence on daily life, some say, is waning. While many Bolivians do go to church, more and more are also going back to old traditions of the past, to Andean beliefs and practices that were largely forgotten until very recently. The influence of the pope's visit here may be less a visit from a spiritual leader and more from a global celebrity.

Jaliri admits that the goals of the Vatican's WMPM align with some of the goals of the COB and the nearly 80 organizations that fall under it. Carrying the banner of the 'Three T's' in the pope's native Spanish, **Tierra, Techo, Trabajo** (or 'Land, Housing, Work'), the calls of the WMPM sound strikingly similar to even some of the more radical members of Bolivia's labor movement.

But Jaliri is careful to make distinctions between the approach of the church and that of social movements and of Bolivia's socialist-leaning government. He believes making changes to defend the rights of workers, indigenous peoples, women and the environment requires a model not based on spirituality and religious doctrine, but on concrete change. He states that achieving the goals of helping the poor and disenfranchised by way of religion and by programs of the government are in direct conflict. Bringing the church and socialism together, he believes, is problematic. "Catholicism is an imposition," Jaliri says. "But on the other hand, socialism is not. It is about consensus."

Jaliri adds by explaining the process Bolivian society has gone through to replace the one with the other: "Socialism has an ideology. Before, the ideology consisted of believing in the church. But not anymore. Now people are believing more again in **Pachamama**. So we have changed our beliefs."

Jaliri tells me he does not have any specific goals regarding COB's participation in the meeting in Santa Cruz; he will not be attending, he says. But at the same time, he understands why it may be important for members of his organization, and Bolivian social movements in general, to be there and hopefully engage the church in their struggles. Perhaps taking part in the pope's visit can provide an open door to bring their concerns to a larger, global stage. And perhaps their stories can encourage the church to take an active political role, and not serve solely as spiritual support on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised.

"I don't know if the pope is praying for us or not, or if he asks God to help us," Jaliri says as he scoops his last pink bite of ice cream. "But I've never seen a Pope pray for something and actually achieve anything through that prayer."

POTENTIAL FOR PROGRESS

BOLIVIAN POLITICS AND LGBTQ EQUALITY

TEXT AND PHOTO: KINJO KIEMA

Avenida Montes, a bustling, taxi-covered main road in the center of La Paz, is home to Privilegio, one of Bolivia's few gay bars. This prominent and flashy symbol of LGBTQ existence goes unhidden, standing in stark contrast to the imposing San Francisco cathedral just a few blocks down the street.

The owner of the bar mentioned that he finds discrimination to be the biggest challenge for members of the country's gay community. This may be because Catholicism is very influential in Bolivia. Almost 80% of the country's population identifies with the Church, and given that the Catechism deems homosexual acts a sin worthy of hellfire, this is a plausible reason for anti-gay attitudes. But, just because Bolivia is a Catholic country doesn't mean it won't soon have laws that bring LGBTQ people closer to equality.

"MANY PEOPLE KEEP IT IN SECRECY...THE COUPLES THAT WANT A JOB, TO MAINTAIN THEIR ECONOMIC STATUS, OPT TO HIDE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS." - JULIA, MUJERES CREANDO

The idea of a very socially conservative country legalizing things like same-sex unions and creating anti-discrimination laws seems counterintuitive on the surface. But most of the countries that have legalized gay marriage show this isn't the case. A total of 20 countries worldwide have legalized same sex marriage, and eleven of those—Belgium, Canada, Spain, Argentina, Portugal, Brazil, France, Uruguay, Luxembourg and Ireland—have a majority Catholic population.

With the exception of Ireland, which was the first nation to legalise gay marriage through popular vote, the remainder have created these policies through their judicial systems. This demonstrates the differences between the legal and cultural sides of LGBTQ issues, and Bolivia is no different.

Capacitación y Derechos Ciudadanos (CDC; Training and Civil Rights) is one of several organizations that works on LGBTQ issues in Bolivia and is based in La Paz. The group manages legal issues relating to gender and sexual orientation, conducts research about the rights of gay individuals, and focuses on political and social advocacy as well.

Karissa Singh, a Program Officer at CDC, identifies cultural pushback as one of the biggest problems for Bolivia's LGBTQ community. "People don't really know what LGBTQ is, and there is discrimination and resistance," said Singh. According to a Pew Global Attitudes study from 2013, 49% of Bolivians think homosexuality should be rejected by society.

Attitudes towards LGBTQ people change from region to region in Bolivia, with gay individuals in the countryside facing much more hostility than their peers in the city. "I think it really depends where you are," said Singh. "If you're in Sopocacchi, you can walk around with your partner holding hands, but if you're in a **pueblo**, maybe someone's going to try to kill you in the night."

Bolivia's latest Constitution, which was ratified in 2009, prohibits any discrimination based on both gender identity and sexual orientation. Despite having constitutional protection, the reality for the LGBTQ community is still different.

"HERE IN BOLIVIA, WE'RE MORE ADVANCED IN THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL SIDE, WHEREAS THE CULTURAL SIDE IS WAY BEHIND." - KARISSA SINGH, CAPACITACIÓN Y DERECHOS CIUDADANOS

"People from the **pueblo**—where discrimination is the worst—think that homosexuality is not acceptable. The **cosmovision**... from that perspective it's not accepted," said Singh. A combination of cultural expectations, about specific roles for men and women, and religious beliefs, make life more challenging for those in more rural and traditional areas of the nation.

For lesbians, who face discrimination for both their gender and their sexual orientation, barriers in the workplace are common. A report by a UK-based development organization titled, "Unnatural, Unsuitable, Unemployed!" identifies this phenomenon in Latin America. Many of the women who detail their experiences in the study say they were fired immediately after their employers discovered their sexual orientation.

As a result, many people in the LGBTQ community remain in the closet for fear of losing their jobs. Julia, a member of Mujeres Creando, an anarcho-feminist collective in La Paz, argues this is one of the biggest challenges facing homosexual individuals and couples in Bolivia.

For same sex couples, one of the biggest obstacles is keeping their relationship hidden from the public view. "Many people keep it in secrecy. The couples that want a job, to maintain their economic status, opt to hide their relationships," said Julia.

Additionally, there is a lack of focus on the issue from the development organizations that work in Bolivia. "Globally, something like 1% of the available funding for development is spent on LGBTQ issues," said Singh. "It's really hard to get funding for LGBTQ projects." Despite the cultural challenges that gay Bolivians face—including hate crimes, job discrimination, and social condemnation—there is proof that legal progress may be on its way.

"We work with a lot of politicians, and they're on board to make changes," said Singh. "Here in Bolivia, we're more advanced in the legal and political side, whereas the cultural side is way behind." Bolivia's Family Code, for example, is written in gender neutral language, laying a potential framework for same sex unions and marriage to be legalized in the future.

"LGBTQ people are protected in the Constitution," Singh explains, "and in other laws that exist. It's not great, but compared to the cultural response to LGBTQ people, I think it's better."

FAITH AND FOOTBALL

YOUNG CATHOLICS IN BOLIVIA ENTER THE BIG GAME

TEXT: RODRIGO BARRENECHEA ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

Pope Francis, in his last youth conferences in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, presented a motivational and enlightening message for the thousands of devoted young Catholics who had the opportunity to hear him speak. The pope expressed to the assembled faithful that the Catholic Church is like a football team in a match, and the laity like *hinchas*, or fans at that game. When unconstructive criticism about the management of religion and about the church as an institution is made by those outside of the ecclesiastical authority, it is like *hincha* who shout outrageous insults at players who make bad passes or don't convert easy-goal opportunities.

With this metaphor, Pope Francis affirmed that the church has a notable absence of forwards, (especially taking into account that this writer is a young Catholic who still has significant doubts about the human—but not the divine—element of the Catholic Church), and that he passes this opportunity to us, putting himself back as the last line of defence so that we can play as strikers. Without a single doubt, and because of the passion felt for everything to do with football in the Latin American hemisphere, it was not difficult to imagine putting on the No. 9 shirt and entering a colossal stadium overrunning with spectators, ready to play a match that would truly present all of the challenges that one could hope to face. In this imaginary match, one would represent Bolivia, with the chance to enter the World Cup.

All of this means that it is important to stop idealising the church and accept it with all the imperfections that come with any institution that is managed by human beings. Undeniably, it will consist of more than just the ideology, beliefs and values it imparts. Before being critical, we have the opportunity to be protagonists and to turn the tables with regards to the mad perception of the church that has been established over the last few decades—because this does not have anything to do with faith.

In Bolivia, with the establishment of the Andean **cosmovision** that has been adapted by our leading politicians, it was thought that President Evo Morales would be a fervent player on the team opposing the Church. In fact, in 2009 he declared the church a symbol of European colonialism that must be wiped from the country. He also took action to abolish religious material in schools.

A few weeks ago, I was happily surprised to find out that the government had confirmed Pope Francis's visit to Bolivia, to the cities of La Paz and Santa Cruz, and that it had been working with the representatives of the church to coordinate the arrival of the **Sumo Pontífice**. It illustrated that Morales is aware of the country's large Catholic population, and of the importance it places on the unifying spirit and message that the pope represents. Indeed, it could be a stimulus to face up to our differences as a country, to once again recalculate ideological differences.

This type of visit also unites us in a single beat, from the planning, logistics and arrival, just as we were united by the Bolivian selection as they entered the North American pitches to play in the 1994 World Cup.

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PHOTO: MATTIA POLISENA / 7200LINEARECTA

BRAIN TRAINING

VIPASSANA MEDITATION IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: KATHERINE BROWNING
PHOTO: CREATIVE COMMONS, BUDHA, MHIGUERA

The first time I heard about Vipassana I was passing the night in the emergency waiting room of a hospital in Chile with a Californian, a Venezuelan and a French guy. The bus terminal was closed. We were cold, broke, and our only option was to seek refuge alongside the drunks, the crazies and the homeless of the dusty desert town of Calama.

As we awaited our 6:00 am bus to Bolivia, we discussed travel plans. My Venezuelan **amigo** told me he was heading to Cochabamba to volunteer in a 'life-changing' meditation retreat. The course, he assured me, would be no walk in the park. "There are rules," he explained, "You have to abide by five precepts: No killing, no stealing, no sex, no intoxicants, and no lies. This last rule is the hardest, which is why you're not allowed to speak for ten whole days."

Admittedly, I had spent the previous month in a rather debaucherous share-house-turned-drug-den somewhere in San Pedro de Atacama. Rather, the month had mysteriously passed me by in a haze of hedonistic housemates and hangovers, and a lengthy spiritual retreat seemed like the perfect balm to soothe my weary body, my weary mind and my weary soul.

For many, Vipassana retreats appear to be some kind of bizarre concentration camp, but I actually welcomed the idea of spending ten days of peace and quiet amidst the mountains of Cochabamba. The courses come with ten days of complimentary accommodation, delicious vegetarian food and, not to mention, HOT showers. Compared with a night in an emergency room-cum-homeless shelter in one of the

dodgiest **pueblos** in Chile, it seemed like a paradise. Oh yeah, and surely a bit of introspection couldn't do any harm.

That was almost two years ago. I've since participated in five courses, in three different countries, and to say that Vipassana has completely transformed my life for the better would be an understatement.

Vipassana is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation, rediscovered by Gotama Buddha more than 2500 years ago and passed down ever since as way to cultivate a harmonious mind and to lead a peaceful, happy life. The technique, however, is completely non-sectarian and encourages self-transformation through self-observation.

The official Vipassana website describes the practice as 'mental training'. "Just as we use physical exercises to improve our bodily health," it says, "Vipassana can be used to develop a healthy mind."

Although the technique is thousands of years old, it wasn't until the 1970s that the ten-day course gained worldwide popularity, under the direction of Vipassana teacher S.N. Goenka. Goenka began offering courses in India in 1969, and has since taught tens of thousands of people in many parts of the world. In 1982, he began to appoint assistant teachers to help him meet the growing demand for the courses. The instructions in every course remain exactly the same throughout the world, as Goenka's voice is played via audio recording, followed by a translation in the local language.

In a talk given by Goenka in Berne, Switzerland, he said, "[Vipassana] can be practiced by one and all. Everyone faces the problem of suffering. It is a universal malady which requires a universal remedy, not a sectarian one. When one suffers from anger, it's not Buddhist anger, Hindu anger or Christian anger. Anger is anger. When one becomes agitated as a result of this anger, this agitation is not Christian, or Jewish, or Muslim. The malady is universal. The remedy must also be universal."

'Anger is anger. When one becomes agitated as a result of this anger, this agitation is not Christian, or Jewish, or Muslim.' • S.N. Goenka

Unlike many other meditation techniques, Vipassana is not taught commercially, but is instead offered free of charge. This is essential to maintaining the practice in its original, authentic form. This universal remedy is for everyone, not just for those can pay. No one involved with the organisation of the course receives material remuneration of any kind, not even to cover the cost of food and accommodation. All expenses are met by donations from students who, having completed a course and experienced its benefits, wish to give others the same opportunity.

Vipassana courses have been offered in Bolivia for more than twenty years. Roger Chavez is one of eight members on the Bolivian Vipassana committee and helps to organise the biannual ten-day courses along with other Vipassana initiatives, such as short courses for children and weekly group sittings for established meditators. He says that participation in courses has greatly increased here in Bolivia, particularly in the past three years.

"Generally the course fills up by 50% in the first week of inscriptions being open," he says. "And we continue to see a lot more interest from foreigners, rather than nationals. In a typical course it is usually 50% foreigners and 50% Bolivians."

Almost two years ago, I was a part of that 50% of foreigners. Perhaps like many others, I was just seeking a hot shower and a novel 'spiritual experience' to add to my list of travel tales. Instead, what I found was 4:00 am wake-up calls and ten hours of daily meditation; it was profoundly confronting and, yes, I'm going to go there... life-changing. Now I'm one of those spiritual weirdos who shares their stories about 'life-changing' mediation courses with anyone who'll give them the time of day. And what can I say? I've never been happier.

For those who dare to learn this 'art of living', the next ten-day course will be held in Cochabamba from 9 – 20 September. Online inscriptions open June 13, via the official website www.dhamma.org.

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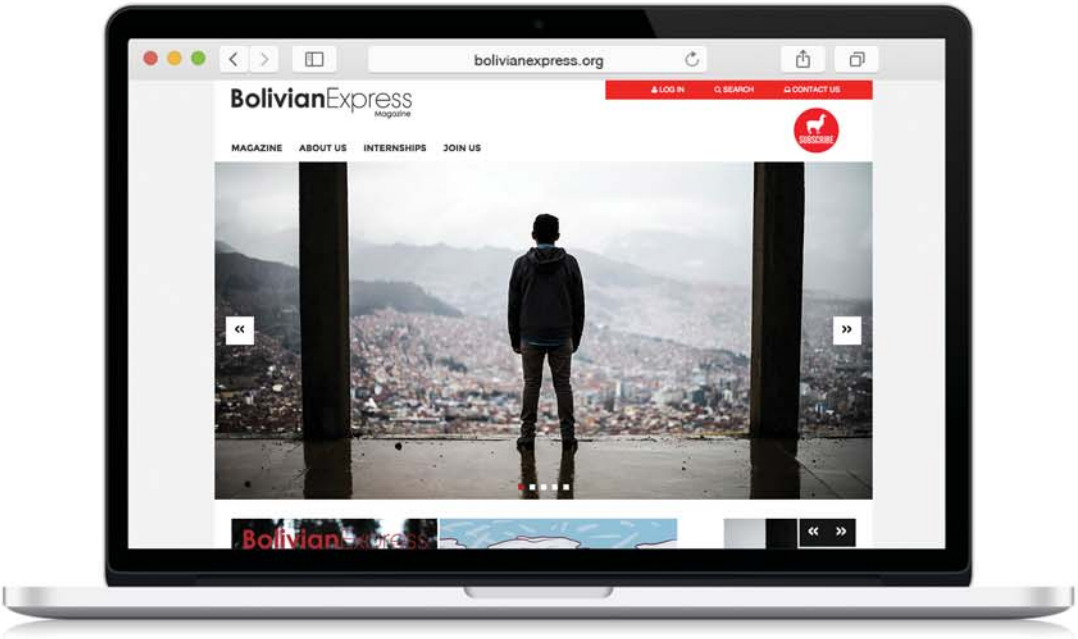

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