

WINTER 2015

ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA

GARBAGE





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FIRST TAKE

Waste by *Marty Chen*

2

TRANSFORMATIONS

Trash as Treasure by *William L. Fash and E. Wyllys Andrews*

8

Recycle the Classics by *Doris Sommer*

11

A Recycling (of) Tradition: A Photoessay by *Andrew Lantz*

14

Trash into Treasure by *Tina Montalvo and Charles Martin*

16

RECYCLING LIVES

Living off Trash in Latin America by *Martin Medina*

20

Recycling Livelihoods by *Lucía Fernández and Martha Chen*

25

Ciudad Saludable by *Albina Ruiz Ríos*

29

The Sound of Garbage by *Rocío López Íñigo*

32

A Long Way from the Dump by *Evelyn Mansilla*

34

THE ART OF TRASH

Trash Moves by *Maite Zubiaurre*

38

Beautiful Trash by *Paola Ibarra*

41

Daniel Lind-Ramos by *Lowell Fiet*

44

A Present from the Sea by *Sonia Cabanillas*

46

Burning Messages by *Michael Wellen*

48

Haiti in the Time of Trash by *Linda Khachadurian*

50

Thinking on Film and Trash by *Ernesto Livon-Grosman*

53

CONFRONTING WASTE

Privatizing Latin American Garbage? It's Complicated... by *Sarah Hill*

56

Trash in the Water by *James Howe and Libby McDonald*

60

Zero Waste in Punta Cana by *Jake Kheel*

63

Recycling in Guatemala: A Photoessay by *Kellie Cason O'Connor*

66

Buenos Aires by *Jessica Sequeira*

70

Transforming Values by *Julia Leitner*

73

IN EVERY ISSUE

BOOK TALK

Breeding Gangs

77

A Review by Marcela Valdes

Art as Civic Acupuncture

79

A Review by Pedro Reina-Pérez

Bringing the War to Mexico

80

A Review by Andrea Oñate

Tracing Back Marijuana Stigma

82

A Review by Viridiana Ríos

BUILDING BRIDGES

We Make Things Happen

84

by Marcela Rentería

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ON THE COVER

"Descarga Cero" by Jake Kheel, environmental director of Punta Cana Resort & Club in the Dominican Republic, shows waste before being processed in its ambitious Zero Waste Program.



A Recycling (of) Tradition

A PHOTOESSAY BY ANDREW LANTZ

AT FIRST GLANCE, THE INDIGENOUS WOMEN—known as *cholitas*—looked like all the others who dance in the festive parades that regularly weave through the sharply angled streets of La Paz. Yet, at second glance, one would see that instead of being adorned with bright feathers or sequined corsets, these women danced with black plastic bags and newspaper hats. Their attire was composed entirely of recycled materials.

This was the 10th annual folkloric dance festival held by the La Paz Asociación de Centros de Mujeres (ACM), which supports some 20 organizations within the city and its surrounding areas. In many ways, a public exhibition to raise environmental awareness

is entirely in keeping with recent Bolivian socio-political discourse. Since Evo Morales assumed the presidency in 2006, the rhetoric of the ruling MAS party has been infused with references to establishing and protecting an equal relationship with the earth deity known as the Pachamama, an approach reflecting a need to promote the Andean spiritual worldview of the country's majority indigenous population, Morales' constituent base.

In 2011, Bolivia joined its Ecuadorian neighbors in amending its constitution to grant nature equal rights to humans. Despite this legal recognition, however, the administration has struggled to rid itself of the extractivist logic of its neo-

liberal predecessors, and many critics have noted a rather large gap between policy and practice, most evidenced by the continuing backlash surrounding the administration's plans to build a highway through the protected Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure, or TIPNIS.

On a more micro level, one can see that the message of environmental protection is not yet particularly resonant with the Bolivian populace just by hopping onto an intercity bus; passing through town after town, it is impossible not to notice the piles of trash lining the streets or the fellow passengers contributing to them by nonchalantly tossing unwanted items out the bus win-



From left: Sewing a costume; women wearing recycled carnival costumes dance in the streets; detail from a hat made of recycled material.

dows. On the first day of my recent stay in Sopocachi, an upper-middle class La Paz neighborhood, I watched as two fat pigs happily paraded from street corner to street corner, gorging themselves on tasty heaps of garbage. More unsettling than the act itself was that I seemed to be the only one that gave it a second glance; apparently many of Bolivia's urban residents have gotten used to the sight of these impromptu buffets.

Especially in the country's metropolitan areas of Cochabamba, La Paz, El Alto and Santa Cruz, thousands of pounds of waste are produced daily, and estimates suggest that upwards of 80 percent could be recycled if infrastructure existed to support it. Until the Morales adminis-

tration takes a more concerted initiative, however, events like that held by the ACM will only likely play a greater part in raising awareness and molding public discourse on this issue and others.

While the ACM carnival highlighted the importance of recycling in an entertaining fashion, it was the repurposing of traditional dance that distinguished it from other displays and allowed it to bring to bear two other matters: the leading role of women in Bolivian sociopolitical practice and the conceptualization of new forms—urban and cosmopolitan—of indigeneity. When I spoke with one group leader, she said that the idea to hold a recycling-themed dance evolved from the fact that women are

the ones directly involved with taking care of family. So while the event may have been based on a rather conservative premise that has itself been recycled for many years, the notion of women leading the way on issues of social and political import speaks to a more progressive stance, a type of green feminism rooted in indigenous practice, an idea truly worth recycling.

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