

Where it Should Always Be

Carlos Andres Olivera Caballero

Bookcubers, Bolivia

col62804@gmail.com

Abstract

“Where It Should Always Be,” is a powerful poem written by Carlos Andres Olivera Caballero. The poem delved into the complex interplay between urban spaces and social movements. It illustrates how public spaces, often overlooked, became crucial arenas for the expression of communal identity, resistance, and aspirations for a just society. Set against the backdrop of a city undergoing turmoil, the poem is narrated through the experiences of a young individual witnessing the transformation of everyday urban landscapes into sites of collective action and contestation. It captures the essence of public space as a platform for civic engagement, where the community’s fight for equality, dignity, and freedom is articulated and enacted. Through vivid imagery and emotive storytelling, the poem reflects on the role of public spaces in shaping social dynamics, highlighting their potential to foster solidarity, empower marginalized voices, and challenge structures of power. It emphasizes the solidarity of resonates the reader’s interest in urban movements underlining the poem’s message of community empowerment.

Keywords: Bolivia, indigenous rights, cultural division, urban resistance, postcolonial society

To cite this article:

Olivera Caballero, C.A. (2024) “Where It Should Always Be”, *The Journal of Public Space*, 9(2), pp. 281–286. doi: 10.32891/jps.v9i2.1819.

This article has been peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution - Non Commercial 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

A Subjective Interpretation and Introduction

My poem, inspired by the heart-wrenching narrative of Sacaba, Bolivia, in 2019, serves as a testament to the indomitable spirit of a community that stood at the crossroads of violence and hope. This piece weaves together the threads of resilience, mourning, and an unwavering demand for justice, encapsulating a moment in history where the public square became both a battleground and a sacred space for collective memory and resistance. In November 2019, Sacaba became the epicentre of a profound human rights crisis, marked by the violent repression of peaceful protests. The demonstrators, who were primarily indigenous people, sought to voice their dissent against the interim government's policies and actions. This tragic confrontation resulted in numerous fatalities and injuries, a somber reminder of the cost of political upheaval.

The government's response to the protests, characterized by an excessive use of force, has been widely criticized by international human rights organizations. Reports indicate that the violence was not just a clash but a calculated act of repression, with evidence pointing towards the use of military-grade weaponry against unarmed civilians. This stark discrepancy between the official narrative and eyewitness accounts underlines the deep-seated issues of accountability and transparency within the state apparatus.

Moreover, the aftermath of the Sacaba incident has been a journey towards seeking justice and recognition for the victims and their families. Despite various challenges, including attempts to silence dissent and obfuscate the truth, the resilience of the affected communities shines through. Their refusal to accept silence in exchange for compensation and their continued advocacy for a comprehensive investigation into the events speak volumes about their commitment to justice and the principles of democracy.

The poem reflects on the transformative power of public spaces. It underscores how public squares and streets can simultaneously embody the potential for peace and the peril of violence, serving as platforms for both oppression and liberation.

The narrative woven through the poem resonates with a universal theme: the struggle for the right to public space is inherently tied to broader contests over dignity, rights, and democracy. By capturing the essence of Sacaba's ordeal, the poem contributes to a deeper understanding of how public spaces can be catalysts for change, embodying the hopes, fears, and aspirations of a community yearning for a more just and equitable society.

Where it should always be

The day breaks with ominous sounds, and an atmosphere of foreboding fills the air. My dad talks about the earth sweating—an indication that the sun has deserted it. The suffocating atmosphere adds weight to his words as if it were preparing itself for what is about to happen. My dreams were haunted by a woman dressed in red, wearing a green blindfold and pursued by a fox. Her picture remains in my mind, an emblem of the fight we are going to have. Wake up my mother tells me; there is movement everywhere in town. I see a sign like “chilijchi” from my window, feeling like a chick sheltered but aware of dangers out there. The sky appears dangerous and birds are restless, signs that they will lose their freedom soon. Seeing Sacaba uplifts me; it is indeed hope amidst tension. I swear today I would fight for freedom, something that my family will always stand for regardless of what the day presents us with.

My family is sad; my mother combs my sister’s hair while my father says there won’t be any food today. The chuño is scarce, and his pockets are empty. The sheep are gone, and the children’s hunger is loud. The town suffers from shortages as trucks are blocked, so supplies can’t reach us. My father gives me a staff to carry, which symbolises our burdens. We will stand all day, waiting for the scorched earth beneath our feet to burn in testament to our resilience.

The dust-filled morning of that day. It feels like the atmosphere weighs down on us with the anticipation we have collectively built up in our hearts. Men with jaguar voices join us as families march behind them, together with others whose voices resemble those of ‘peccaries’ and ‘jucumaris’. Their presence both reassures and intimidates me as it reminds me of our collective strength. In this air hangs a fierce unity – that shared determination which keeps us bound together in one purpose: moving forward. Millions were mentioned by an old man but I see thousands of reasons to go ahead because every face in the crowd tells a story, represents some kind of struggle or embodies hope for a better future.

We are heading towards Huayllani bridge and its name grows louder inside me showing how important this journey really is. That is when I notice a baby's face peeking out from an aguayo, understanding for the first time that this fight is about everybody's family not just mine.

As we approach our destination, the streets are becoming wider. On Huayllani Bridge, a symbolic and literal place of crossing where we will congregate in our fight. Sacaba families and others from nearby communities wait for us. At the bridge, people begin to move slower before finally stopping there as a line of men blocks it off. These people stand in our way, making it impossible to enter into the town as stipulated by law. They stay silent while deafening their shields against begging. Our leaders hoped for a peaceful entrance that comes only with rumble of steel beasts.

The pressure builds up, and the crowd's noise gets louder. The foundation of this wall is laid by someone above who says we cannot pass through here. I hear whispers about "dangerous", and there can be seen guns that can take away our breaths. Tear gas rains down like seeds thrown from poison tree, causing disorder everywhere. The choking smell envelops the air with coughing voices filling it too; it is filled with acrid fumes that make people cough and scream in pain I catch sight of my father and mother among those present; my father's head is bleeding I pick him up and carry him towards safety just as an ambulance arrives at the scene. Sounds of sirens mixes with the noise around reminding us how dangerous this life has become.

My mother is relieved inside the ambulance, but it is an exhausting journey. She has tired and relieved signs on her face as she wars within herself about her emotions. My sister is scared but safe. Her wide eyes reflected the chaos and fear all around us, and I took refuge in a nearby building. The windows showed us what was happening outside. Hell is breaking loose out there. People are running, stumbling over the fallen. Stones and burning tyres fill the air. Crowd members counter white tear gas with black smoke. The scene outside depicts utter chaos that resembles a battlefield where hope clashed with despair.

I see my father's bloody skull amid all this noise and my mother crying helplessly, usually so strong, now with desperation in her voice. I raise my father up, telling mum that we will take him to hospital. The van takes him away while I stay and assist other people. There is so much smoke, violence but in the Whipala, our unity and hope lies. A new chant of courage fills the air as if reminding us how fearless we should be.

I go around offering assistance to anyone I can within the large crowd. To see such an evil: many were exhausted and fell or had their upper body wounded. Every face is narrating the story of a sufferer that speaks volumes of the barbarity of the day. I chance upon individuals jogging with despair and panic in their eyes. The green-uniformed men approach and rush further, contributing to the confusion and panic. Their presence is a constant and vivid threat that keeps reminding us of the power we are dealing with. Last night, I was able to follow the rest and seek comfort within a structure which is also home to the others. Cruelty and seeing people being beaten up and shot is shocking. In this role, I see police forces violently dealing with people who have no weapons in their hands. The sight evokes rather complex feelings of anger and helplessness within me.

Hernán, a man living with courage that I have met, suffers an injury. He looks like he is in turmoil, but the gleam in his eyes leave the door to hope wide open. I pick him up and go to the bushes, and his blood is all over my hands. It is as if the dress transforms into something warm and sticky, eliciting the brute force that was used in the day's work. He expresses himself with the use of 'whipala' and the significance of its symbolism.

These words are bitter-sweet to remind us the purpose of our being, or so the mashed potato man. The medical practitioners try their best to bring him back to life, as we move to the hospital, and I hope that he wakes up from that final disaster.

The hospital finally depicts a number of weak and agonising persons. The feelings that permeate the script are those of sadness and fury, sensations that seem to become an almost organic attachment to the characters.

My father is bandaged, and my mother shows care to him. The way she remains concerned for his welfare and cook for him when she is already weak, provokes feelings of compassion and motivation. A sense of sad and bitter emotion hovers in the air. After sunset, the pains and hardships we went through as we compete in our fight start to be felt. Tensions between the authorities and the population have escalated, people across the country are killed and injured. This is also evidenced by the presence of the Whipala, as we continue to struggle for our rights. The colors bring out the light against the dull gray of the day, reminding us that there is always hope and strength amid the struggle.