

che, piba



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Projektname: Che, piba
Visuelle Kommunikation/ Fotografie
Master Abschlussarbeit
Präsentation: 19. April 2018
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Che Piba (Hey Girl) is a photographic essay about adolescents in Mendoza, Argentina. This is where I was born and where I lived most of my life until I moved to Germany to study 9 years ago.

The difficult political situation Argentina has been going through for the past two years reminds me of the crisis in 2001. I have been asking myself what it is like to go through a complex phase like adolescence in times of political and social instability. I have searched for answers while spending time with Argentinian teenagers, and looked at them from both the perspective of a foreign observer, and a local who has spent her own childhood and adolescence there.

I observed the challenges of young people who grow up with their own desires, while at the same time carrying fears related to social and economic instability. I encountered shy boys telling me what they think I wanted to hear, and other, more confident ones, who denounced social inequalities or machismo. I met combative girls who would go to the streets to demonstrate for an institutionalised sexual education and the legalization of abortion and other ones talking enthusiastically about their birthday trip to Disneyland. Some teenagers gave very mature and precise answers, while others seemed to inhabit a childhood dream world.

I like to consider the photographs as speaking for themselves. But in case you would like to get a broader idea of the project's background, I have included the following text.

Fotoauswahl











Ausstellungsansicht

Kunsthalle am Hamburger Platz





Ausstellungsbroschüre

Seitenauswahl

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Mendoza middle class

I was born and raised in Mendoza in a middle class family. In my case this means that we had all our basic needs: our own house, mostly one holiday a year somewhere in Argentina (but not always), a very old car, and a very good education. While I went to a public school, my parents also sent me to English lessons, and did an effort to bring me in contact with art, literature and music.

In comparison to European and North-American countries, the Argentinian middle class is very particular. It is one of the most established among South-American countries, yet it seems to be under constant threat. Being middle class in Argentina means continuously being confronted with the possibility of social mobility. At times, things go up, but since the mid-1970s it has often gone down.

Moving away

Both sides of my family have European roots. The most recent immigration was on my mother's side though, and the bond we have with Germany is still very strong. My great grandfather emigrated from Germany to Argentina in the 1920s to return to Europe some years later. The subsequent generations have repeated this: my grandfather moved to Argentina after the Second World War when he was 14 years old, while my mother moved to Germany for two years at the same age. Last but not least, my family decided to migrate to Germany once more when I was 13, but returned a few months after. This continuous process of moving to and from Argentina among my family members and relatives means that I have grown up with a double perspective on Argentina, both close and distant.

The night of the millenium my parents decided that we should make some changes in our lives. My mother gave up her job and my father took a break from his. We sold some home appliances and furniture, sublet our house and shortly after we took a pile of suitcases to Europe to start a new life there. We reversed the decision of pa-



rents and grandparents to leave the old continent and try their luck in some remote corner of South America. We went back to Europe.

After a short stay in Berlin, we ended up in a quiet town in Bavaria where some relatives lived. My parents got jobs and I went to school for a month. I didn't speak the language and often felt out of place. My dad had a hard time at work and also didn't feel at home. One day my parents told me we were going back. Relieved, I cried. It never crossed my mind that this was an option. I had imagined we were there to stay forever.

Before we left, my German aunt bought me a very simple analog camera. I came back to Argentina with my brand new toy and started documenting parties at school and doing my first staged photographs. This was my first attempt at looking at adolescence through a magnifying glass.

Back in Argentina

In many ways, spending my adolescence in Argentina in the early 2000s was great, but I also noticed how my parents were struggling with the economic instability during and after the Argentine Great Depression (1998-2002). Recalling the experience of my stay in Germany a few years earlier, I knew that although in Argentina Europe is often romanticized in a somewhat naive way, life in Germany in many ways really is more stable and the education system in many ways works better.

When I was 22, I decided to emigrate to Germany once again. Because of their timing, at 13 and 22, both my moves from Argentina to Germany have marked my experience of the transition into adolescence and to adulthood.

Recurring crisis

I have been living in Germany for nine years now, but I try not to lose contact with the everyday of my first home. I follow the news from Argentina and it seems that things are going back to where they were during the collapse of 2001. People are collecting trash in the streets to sell, travel all the way to Chile to buy cheaper school materials and clothes, and alternative printed money with no real value is circulating once more. Street protests are now again taking place on a daily basis.

In Argentina, the usual middle class fears – social and economic descent – are heightened and often turn to reality. Losing your home, the means to take part in cultural life, or even to provide in your necessities of life as a result of sudden economic downturn are a continuous threat.

After a decade of growing social equality since the mid-2000s, the current government has shifted the political direction. Far-going market liberalization and the dismantling of public and social services lead to ever-increasing inequality and a growing instability. I see this when watch and read the news, and I feel it when I'm there.

My adolescence in Mendoza took place against the backdrop of social and economic instability of the Great Argentine Depression. In my work, I revisit a question that is closely related to my personal history, and at the same time concerns the broader, seemingly recurring theme of severe economic crises in Argentina:

What is it like to go through the turbulent personal transitions of adolescence as part of a middle class culture that is itself characterized by a continuous sense of crisis?



