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EDITORIAL

What does the Bolivian Police Force have in common with a group of Argentinean street jugglers? Not much, it would seem. Yet imagine an alien race descending onto our planet and picture what they would see through their liquid green eyes. Like Columbus once did, they might return to their planet with not just plundered riches, but field notes, describing what they saw and who they encountered. They might talk of various distinct groups of people, sharing a common language, dress, rituals and values. They might refer to these communities using some word in their language, whose closest English-language approximation is the word 'tribe'. All of a sudden cops and hippies aren't all that different.

To talk of tribes still conjures grainy images of proto-aborigines in the Amazon, untouched by civilization. These are archetypal, emblematic tribes, of scantily clad foragers with face paints and large piercings. Traditionally, such groups have been the province of anthropologists, seeking exotic remote populations, possibly to understand what makes us civilized and them not so.

But in the last decades of the 20th Century, pioneers in this field turned their attention to groups not previously understood as legitimate subjects of anthropological investigation: urban societies, private-members clubs, and even anthropologists themselves. Something radical was afoot, something was breaking, namely the assumption that there was nothing to understand about these overfamiliar social specimens.

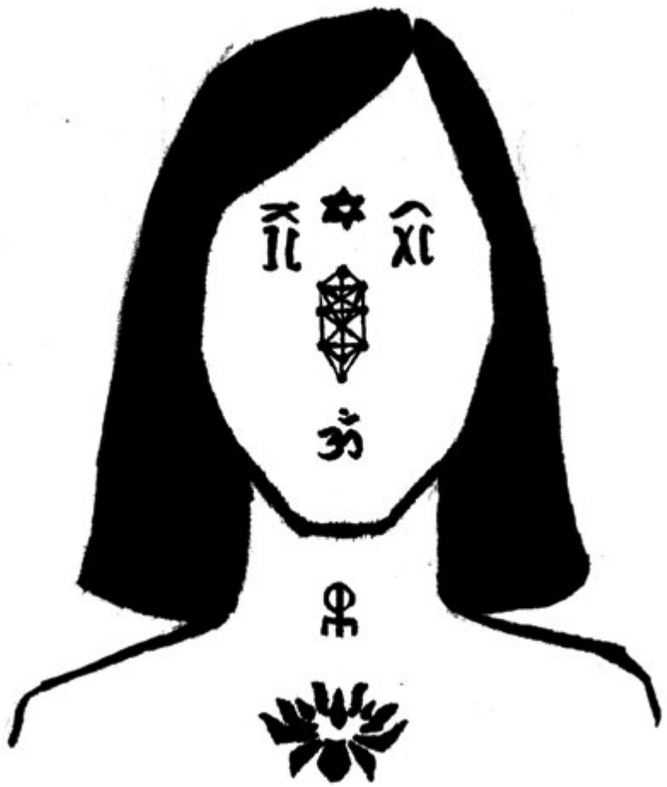
As a favourite example, in 1979, Steve Woolgar and Bruno Latour entered a laboratory in France to study a group of scientists. The language and faux naivete of the volume could make us believe they were talking about animals in the wild. They noted, for example, how subject A moved to table X to put liquid Y in a recipient, proceeding to write something in a notebook, asking themselves how this tribe went from a prescribed and regulated set of actions (or rituals), to the eventual construction of scientific facts.

Facetiously, but in the same spirit, I sometimes describe Bolivian Express not as a magazine, but as a sect. A group of people with shared beliefs (ie, that journalism is interesting and worthwhile), rituals (e.g. pulling hat-themed all-nighters before the magazine deadline), and a territory (the BX house). Even a shared language (**colla** spanglish).

In this issue, we have sought to look at groups of Bolivians, and have tried to understand them as tribes, often facing their resistance to be seen as such. We have found that it is possible that the only social behaviour which unites the world's people is an innate tendency to associate with other individuals and form discrete social units. Such a task is made possible through an iconography, shared enemies, codes, and rules, which define who belongs and who doesn't. Being part of a tribe is something almost impossible to see from the inside. To see Bolivia in this way (not just 36 nations, but composed of thousands of tribes, even within a single city), can be deeply unsettling, destabilising our most sacred beliefs and trivialising our most solemn ceremonies. Yet we believe it is necessary to do so, in order to understand the fragility of our associations, as well as the tolerance we owe one another. ×

N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue
Their meanings can be found in our glossary

By Amaru Villanueva Rance



NOMAD

IT IS A WELL-KNOWN FACT AMONG SHAROLL FERNANDEZ'S FRIENDS, THAT THROUGHOUT HER LIFE SHE HAS BEEN PART OF EVERY INTEREST GROUP IMAGINABLE. FROM ADVENTIST CHURCH TO SOCIAL VOLUNTEERING, PASSING THROUGH HINDU TEMPLES, SHAMANIC RITUALS AND ZEN MEDITATION GROUPS. IN THE LATEST INSTALLMENT OF HER PERSONAL SAGA, SHE HAS BEEN CHALLENGED TO EXPLAIN TO OUR READERS WHAT IT MEANS TO SEARCH, TO FIND, AND SOMETIMES TO LOSE, IN THIS SPIRITUAL QUEST TOWARDS FINDING ONE'S TRIBE.

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS : SHAROLL FERNANDEZ

I refuse to write. The experience could be worse than taking Ayahuasca, a Quechua expression which translates as the 'rope of death'. This beverage, product of the boiling and filtering of various plants, is used in healing and cleansing spiritual rituals. It is believed that it lets the spirit leave the body without the latter dying.

How can I allow words to caress, or even attempt to fathom, experiences so sacred and intimate? Writing can indeed be seen as a ritual, of a different nature than those practiced by tribes in the Amazon. And I understand it is necessary, in some way, to surrender to this rite, as symbol of my being a part of a certain kind of contemporary tribe, that of those who seek to communicate. The tribe of those who have the dual burden and blessing of having a range of spiritual paths to choose from.

I'm a seven year old girl. Saturdays start on Friday nights, when instead of sleeping in my bedroom I move to my grandparents' room to begin the Seventh Day alongside them. Early in the morning, before dawn has set in and the cold is felt more intensely, I am awoken by my grandfather. The ritual begins. We sing, someone reads a Bible passage, my father's father comments upon it, we pray (which is not the same as saying our prayers), we have breakfast and we leave the house.

It's barely seven in the morning and there are already people in the temple. They wait for the sermon and they give worship through song. These songs don't bother me, but I don't feel they bring me closer to the Creator, as my grandmother says they do to her. Even so, I have my favourite, number 500 in the hymn book. Because of my age I cannot stay and listen to the pastor. I have to go to the children's class where I am greeted by the young teacher in a long skirt. Her face is clean and her voice is sweet and soft, disturbingly sweet and exaggeratedly soft. Being an adventist meant to praise the Lord in word and through our actions. It meant not skipping Sabbath school, learning verses off by heart, doing charity, dressing and behaving appropriately, visiting the sick, knowing why it was necessary to keep Sabbath instead doing so on Sunday. Among other things, it also meant being prepared to be seen as different, and even rejected. None of this, apart from the dogma, seemed negative. After all, showing consideration and using one's memory were good things, I thought.

However, a childhood of light versions of biblical stories, and weekends of worship didn't show sign of showing me the answers I was looking for. Something was missing.

This is when the journey begins. I'm going through adolescence, when what we look for is to belong. I discovered that going to the Temple on Saturdays wasn't a given, it was a choice. And making use of my free will, confirmed by the teachings of Sabbath school, I decided to stay at home. Doing so gave me time which I spent, with increasing devotion, in front of the television. It later turned into time I used to find another nest. And this search continued to mutate. At first Saturdays were for leisure. Then I spent them wandering the streets. Later it was tango, and movies after that. Then I went on walks and started volunteering. One day I turn up at the Hindu centre, the Radha Krishna temple.

I'm fourteen and I have so many questions. I have looked for the address for over half an hour and, as is often the case, I find it just before giving up. The centre smells of **Nag Champa** and is inundated with images of gods that I cannot name but which I recognise as deities. The light is slightly lighter than normal. Someone comes up to me and asks me to take off my shoes. They whisper where, as a woman, I am to sit. They sing and dance at the same time. Simple movements, a simple toing and froing, but it is disconcerting and for seconds I feel ridiculous. Even so, I decide to come together, and try to follow the choreography, leaving a foreign conviction to take over me.

After the chanting I am given a *japa mala*, a set of 108 wooden beads which I am explained, are to be used to recite Krishna's name. They accept me without me having sought admission, and I commit without them having asked me to.

After some years I have not only wandered in and out of different congregations, I have even returned a couple of time to Sabbath school. I had become a vegetarian for three months when I was 10, and for three years and eleven months later in my adolescence. I had learnt to meditate in the mornings, reciting mantras in Sanskrit just before sunrise, and doing breathing exercises before bed. I had learnt the seven chakras of the human body, and knew of the various cleansing ceremonies for the body, mind, and soul. I had read about Zen Buddhism, the Sufi masters and Commander Ashtar, who I later discovered is the deity of a prominent UFO religion.

I had learnt how to read runes, the meaning of colours, and about the existence of salamanders, beings which inhabit fire. Like the fairies in the air and the gnomes of the earth, they taught me the secret of cinnamon rolls and how to best lay the table when you're holding a tea party. I discovered that knitting with my grandmother was a price I gladly paid to hear her memories, and I learned that food tastes better when it is cooked for several people.

These spiritual groups, religions, and beliefs differed to an astonishing and catastrophic degree, but perhaps shared the notions that attachment to people or things can imperil your existence, and that we must fight against the fickle traps of our own ego, as well as the conviction that those who hold the deepest truths also have a duty to share them.

I had, effectively, or I felt I had gained acceptance into different tribes, each with its own rituals, language and demands for legitimate membership. I became an expert in watching behaviours, in understanding, or at least thinking I understood, what these people thought and believed. But most importantly, I was able to accept them with decreasing levels of scepticism in every new place I visited. Sometimes for seconds, or even months, this scepticism reached a vanishing point, allowing me to fully become part of worlds alien yet deeply familiar.

My journey through these different tribes, sometimes as a member, sometimes as an observer, has often felt like a primordial return. Meaning is found in people, and tribes are people at their core. Belonging to a tribe, however fleetingly, laces our existence with meaning and makes our lives worth living. A journey of this nature is an odyssey. As such, it presents us with a risk, in this case that of isolation, of never being able to return back to the mythic Ithaca and its people. In this journey, one can become lost, not in the world, but in oneself, given in to the intoxicating siren songs in the high seas. To elude them is to return home, to your friends, to your family, to yourself.

Eadem mutata resurgo, although changed, I arise the same. I return after the journey, not just home, but to my everyday life, the jokes, and the afternoon watching films. Throughout my life these various tribes have served as a refuge. They were mirrors where I could see my own image more easily, possibly because this mirror was more understanding towards my needs, as it suffered from the same ones.

I HAD LEARNT HOW TO READ RUNES, THE MEANING OF COLOURS, AND THE ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF SALAMANDERS, BEINGS WHICH INHABIT FIRE.

But they were a refuge because from them I was able to return to the world, to that place I didn't feel was special enough to belong to. I was returned to this world to appreciate it, accept it and love it, because the world was there appreciating, accepting, and loving me.

At 27, I look back and understand why I was driven to go to the countryside to spend countless hours mantralising, and understand that this is the same reason I spent entire days in the kitchen with my grandmother deboning fish, or afternoons in my friend's living room studying for an art history exam. I wanted to share and through doing so, belong.

Yet if I don't find differences between these pastimes, and if my sensation of belonging and fulfilment are practically indistinguishable, what does it mean for me to be immersed in one community instead of another? How important is it, all things considered, to have meditated or to have cooked food for those I love? Everything can be sacralised, as my grandmother did with every meal she cooked, just as the most solemn of rituals can be trivialised when seen through the wrong set of eyes. I find the same mysticism in the overwhelming presence of the Sajama, as I do in an afternoon drinking tea and eating cake, or in Bhagavad Gita's verses.

TED IDEAS WORTH SHARING, FROM BOLIVIA TO THE WORLD

WHAT DOES STEVE JOBS, THE FOUNDER OF THE WORLD'S MOST VALUABLE COMPANY, HAVE IN COMMON WITH WALTER MELENDREZ, A BOLIVIAN ARTISAN WHO EXPORTS MINIATURE CLAY FIGURINES? CHRISTIAN ROJAS, ORGANISER OF BOLIVIA'S LATEST AND LARGEST TEDX EVENT TO DATE, EXPLAINS WHAT IT TAKES TO CONNECT PEOPLE THROUGH IDEAS.

TEXT : CHRISTIAN ROJAS ALVES
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

It is 2 a.m., the temperature is 1° C but the thermal sensation is, I believe, -5° C. I am located in the Coliseum of the *Universidad Católica Boliviana,* which feels like it's a freezer. The effects of fatigue have long since set in; I started working at 9 a.m. and have been concentrating on every detail of the next-day's event. By that time I realized it was already Wednesday, July 31st, a very important day for us, the organizers, the university, and the city of La Paz. We were hours away from Bolivia's latest and largest TEDx event.

A year and a half ago, I was feeling the same chills I did that night at the coliseum. Back then, I was walking around the University of Chicago in the middle of winter. A friend of mine, Güimar Vaca (who gave a talk at the latest TEDx UCB event, not that either of us imagined this back then), was showing me around the campus where he lived and studied for four years. He told me how he was organizing a TEDx event at the university. At the time, I was kind of a 'fan' of the TED Talks, and I didn't know that a regular person could organize such an event. When I came back from that trip, I set myself the task of holding a TEDx event in La Paz, something which had never been done before.

TED is a non-profit organization devoted to 'Ideas Worth Spreading'. It started out as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: technology, entertainment and design. The success was such that later it gave a platform to such a variety of people and themes that it became an ideas-producing machine.

TED has become somewhat of a global tribe, where people are connected not physically or in creed, but through a shared ethos based on sharing ideas. Rather than marking its members apart from other people, it has brought them together by making the world aware of our commonalities, as well as what happens elsewhere on this planet. In the spirit of its mission of ideas worth spreading, TED created a program that gives communities, organizations and individuals the opportunity to stimulate dialogue in TED-like experiences at local levels, creating smaller tribes, so more people can get involved in this global movement. Today, one story or idea can flow from a community in the middle of Africa, and be known by the whole global community in the matter of hours. This initiative was given the name of TEDx, where the x signifies that the TED event was independently organised.

big and making this dream a reality. One of them was Rodrigo Barrenechea, who was part of this initiative from beginning to end. Some months later the university got involved and offered to help with various aspects, from funding to logistics. The theme was later chosen: 'Entrepreneurs: New Ideas for a New World', and we set out to find 7 speakers whose ideas and life experiences embodied the spirit we were looking for.

something you don't see everyday here in La Paz'. Another person remarked: 'this was an event of an international level, not a Bolivian level'. I'm proud to say we created an impact on that day. We inspired the audience, we left our mark in the university and the city, and we created a new local TEDx tribe, from where hundreds of bolivians are now entitled to feel part of this global movement. The best part is that through organising this event we shared

TED HAS BECOME SOMEWHAT OF A GLOBAL TRIBE, WHERE PEOPLE ARE CONNECTED NOT PHYSICALLY OR IN CREED, BUT THROUGH A SHARED ETHOS BASED ON SHARING IDEAS.

I was determined to organise this event in my hometown of La Paz, in order to bring this movement to the place closest to me. More importantly, I wanted to share with the world ideas from Bolivia worth spreading.

Once I obtained the license, after a two-month process, the first step was to gather a group of TED lovers capable of thinking

By 7:32 p.m. on the day of the event, I realized that something big has just happened. TEDxUCB has just taken place. We received a warm and thunderous applause from the audience, and everyone who stepped out of the coliseum seemed inspired and energised by the experience. As Ivanna Moreira, an attendee at the event, pointed out, 'people left inspired by the high quality of the event, which is

with the world so many ideas from Bolivia, many of which may find an audience, resonate, and inspire elsewhere. These are definitely ideas worth spreading.×

** Amaru Villanueva Rance, Founder and Editor in Chief at Bolivian Express was invited to give a talk at this event. The talk, titled 'The Accidental Entrepreneur' will be available online in coming weeks.*

BOLIVIAN FIGHT CLUB

FROM THE HIGHLANDS OF MACHA TO THE VALLEYS OF TOROTORO, FIGHTERS FROM THE REGION COME TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE THE CEREMONY KNOWN AS THE 'TINKU', WHICH IN QUECHUA MEANS 'ENCOUNTER'. IN THIS ANTHOLOGY OF PHOTOGRAPHS ACROSS TIME AND TERRITORY, BOLIVIAN EXPRESS DOCUMENTS THE CHANGING FACE OF THESE LEGENDARY BATTLES.

HISTORY

Source: Ayer Los Andes, Alain Mesili (forthcoming, 2013)

Over the past 40 years, Tinku has taken place across Northern Potosí, Southern Oruro, and on bordering communities between the departments of Sucre and Potosí. San Pablo de Macha (or simply 'Macha') holds claim to being the 'ground zero' of Tinku, though other prominent locations are Pocoata, Torotoro, Aymaya, Acasio and San Pedro de Buena Vista.

French-born photographer Alain Mesili visited Pocoata in Northern Potosí in 1971, where the Fiesta de la Cruz was to be held on the 3rd of May. To mark this pagan-religious festival, a confluence of indigenous peoples from the surrounding communities meet in the central plaza to fight.

Before the ceremony, the leader of the Tinku carries a large cross on his shoulder into the church. An aguayo can be seen draped over the Christ on the cross, a powerful symbol of the syncretism between ancestral and religious iconography which has become the essence of this tradition. Warriors parade into the plaza, congregating amidst the sounds of hula-hula and charango.

Men and women take part in this ritual offering of blood to the Pachamama. 'The young and old take to centre stage, spitting out teeth in every direction. Bloodstains leave their mark on the arena, and are left there, like trophies'. A mixture of alcohol, sweat, adrenaline, and testosterone, make for a cocktail of frenzied unconsciousness which culminates with bodies scattered across the **pueblo** at the end of this 3 day fiesta. "After the three days the fiesta takes place, 14 people have died". As Alain points out, "Caiman-brand 90 proof alcohol is the true winner of the ring where the most fierce fights take place [...] from midday onwards, those who don't fall in combat, are taken down by the **chicha**"

© CARLOS SANCHEZ NAVAS

MACHA: CULTURA VIVA

TEXT : CARLOS SANCHEZ NAVAS
TRANSLATION: ALEXANDRA MELEÁN

The present work documents the celebration of "Tinku" (encounter) held in the village of Macha, a community located in the north of Potosi, where every 3rd or 4th of May various **Ayllus** of different parts of Quechua communities prepare for the greatest party in this region of the country.

This village party, like many in other parts of the country, is characterized by its own sincretism. From one perspective, the "Lord of the Cross" is present, which every Ayllu exhibits through personal faith and devotion, representing the catholic world; and from the other perspective, the indigenous world has representation through the participation of all citizens who pertain to these lands. The tribute consists of facing blows and punches between Ayllus who shed blood and cause deaths and this year was no exception. For them, this practice is a form of tribute to Pachamama, expecting an optimal and successful harvest.

© CARLOS SANCHEZ NAVAS

In an encounter I had with a macheño, he commented and assured me that even though plenty of migration occurs in neighboring countries, especially in the newer generations, the fidelity this macheño has to his culture does not change and will pertain in the spirit of every devotee of this great party.

LAIMES Y PAMPAS

TEXT : CATERINA STAHL AND ALEXANDRA MELEÁN

Two men face each other in a makeshift boxing ring. The crowd presses inward, squeezing tighter. A man cracks a whip at the spectators to maintain space in the ring. Mesmerized spectators casually eat ice cream amidst the violent display. Children enter the ring. Elders test their strength. Over the next few hours, fights are arranged according to relative height, age, and weight: welcome to the Bolivian Fight Club.

The fighting is part of a tradition called the 'Tinku' which means 'encounter' in Quechua. Native to Northern Potosi, the Tinku is a tradition of dancing, drinking and fighting. The Tinku photos in this series take place in Torotoro on the corner of Charcas Street, near the Plaza Central. Annually, on July 25, Quechua groups of Laimes and Pampas congregate here, coinciding with the festival of Apostle Santiago.

© ALEXANDRA MELEÁN

© CATERINA STAHL

© MILA ARAOZ

RUNA TINKU TOROTORO

TEXT : AMARU VILLANUEVAND MILA ARAOZ

At the end of the Tata Santiago four day epic fiesta, Torotoro is scattered with bodies. In what at first appears like population on the verge between life and death, these bodies are rather in a limbo between drunkenness and unconsciousness. If any of them are half-dead, it has nothing to do with fighting. Some have vomit dripping down their shirts whilst others lie on steps and pavements in contorted sleeping positions, as if they had been tortured during their sleep, perhaps whilst dreaming. The streets and houses retain the faint but pungent smell of **Chicha**.

Earlier that day, walking in the midday heat, young children run past and head towards a crowd which gets progressively larger and more dense. Running to join this mass of people, my ice cream falls onto the dusty dirt road, but it doesn't matter. We're barely minutes away from the first fight.

By 11:55am the street is bursting with expectant onlookers. Every balcony and shop window is packed with people, most of them on tiptoes. Some kids have climbed up to a window ledge and grip onto rusty metal fences to get a view of the action. A moustachioed man in the center of this circle uses a belt to whip the spectators in the inner circle to make more space for the fight. Being in the front row suddenly doesn't seem too attractive.

Up on a friend's shoulders I get the perfect view into this small vortex at the centre of the crowd, where two men prepare for the first fight. For several seconds nothing happens, as the two men in the centre stumble around in inebriation. The eye of the storm is calm and silent. Without warning, the fight begins.

Swinging fists, sweat, screams and tangled bodies. Punches land without aim or grace, it's all very hard to make out. The fight is broken up after some 20 seconds without a clear victor. Indeed, none is proclaimed. Instead, they greet each other after the fight with a tough embrace. The frenzied men rejoin the crowd with swollen lips and foreheads, blood on their ripped clothes. If they are supposed to be representing their feuding communities, it's not apparent by their side of the crowd or their clothing. Rather, it seems like a group of young men keen to prove their valour against any worthy opponent. Later they celebrate with a red plastic bucket of chicha. Those who end up unconscious fall to the ground under the influence of alcohol, a mightier opponent to any encountered during the day.

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DWINDLING DIASPORA

THE NUMBER OF JEWS SETTLED IN BOLIVIA IS DECLINING, YET THOUSANDS OF YOUNG ISRAELIS CONTINUE TO VISIT THE COUNTRY EVERY YEAR.

TEXT : MAY WOODS
ILLUSTRATION: SHAROLL FERNANDEZ

JEWISH FACTS

- THE LOCAL JEWISH POPULATION PEAKED IN THE LATE 1940'S, WHEN 10,000 WERE ESTIMATED TO HAVE SETTLED IN BOLIVIA
- AT 12,000 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL, THE CIRCULO ISRAELITA IN LA PAZ IS SAID TO BE THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD
- THE CÍRCULO ISRAELITA MAINTAINS TWO SYNAGOGUES, A HOME FOR THE AGED, AND A CEMETERY.
- THE COLEGIO BOLIVIANO ISRAELITA IS A LOCAL SCHOOL WITH STARTED ACCEPTING NON-JEWISH STUDENTS IN THE 1960S. NOW OVER 95% OF THEM ARE NON-JEWISH.
- BOLIVIA CUT DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH ISRAEL IN 2009
- BOLIVIA'S ONLY MIKVAH, OR JEWISH RITUAL BATH (PICTURED), IS LOCATED IN DOWNTOWN LA PAZ

In a tribal sense, I have always felt rather anonymous. I don't belong to any particular clubs, my family aren't religious, nor do we have any distinguishing traditions or customs. And yet, upon the passing of my grandfather in March this year, I realised that my previous perception of our lack of identity was a rather ignorant assumption. When my grandfather's funeral was held in a Jewish cemetery, I had my first contact with a rabbi and I came to realise that, despite the fact that we are not practicing Jews, we are connected to something.

At first glance, it seemed that here in Bolivia the tribal element of the Jewish community is rather absent, partially because the Jewish population is so minute, so modest. With only an estimated 350-700 Jews in the country, it is unsurprising that many Bolivians continue to hold misconceived perceptions about the Jewish people's lack of integration here. 'It is a mistake', states Ricardo Udler, the president of Círculo Israelita, the main Jewish organization in Bolivia. Udler is eager to explain that his community is not so esoteric as perhaps it is envisioned to be. 'I am a Bolivian man', he says. 'I am also a Jew. The stereotype is that Jews only make money. That Jews live in ghettos only for Jews. This is what society thinks, but this is not true. Many Jews living here are in the professions, not only in commerce. We have doctors, lawyers, engineers. I myself am a gynaecologist. We work for the country, not for ourselves.' Of course, Bolivian Jews hold close relations with one another as well: every Friday evening, many families congregate together for Shabbat, lighting candles and reciting blessing. Udler also believes that the size and dwindling nature of the Jewish population has made his community more religious, intent on holding together their tradition and beliefs. 'Most Jewish families used to only go to the synagogue on a Friday night and a Saturday morning', he says with pride. 'Now, it is every Monday and Tuesday night as well.'

MOST JEWISH FAMILIES USED TO ONLY GO TO THE SYNAGOGUE ON A FRIDAY NIGHT AND A SATURDAY MORNING', HE SAYS WITH PRIDE. 'NOW, IT IS EVERY MONDAY AND TUESDAY NIGHT AS WELL

Although various explanations can each partially account for why the Bolivian Jewish population is depleting, many seem to centre on political grievances. Of particular concern have been President Evo Morales's relations with former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, who has made intemperate comments regarding Jews and Israel; rumors that Iran has provided funds for the new regional defence school of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas; even some speculation that trainers from Iran's greatly feared Revolutionary Guard are consulting with the Bolivian government. Further, in recent years Iran and Bolivia have strengthened trade agreements and formed a partnership to exploit Bolivia's vast lithium fields. These increasingly close ties as well as Ahmedinejad's anti-Israel rhetoric—not to mention his infamous questioning of both the existence and scope of the Holocaust—have deeply troubled Jews in Bolivia. (The new Iranian president, Hasan Rowhani, is more moderate, although some news sources claim that he was involved in the planning of the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires that killed eighty-five people.)

Despite this, Udler has a balanced view on the situation. 'I respect relations between two countries', he says. 'There is no harm in Bolivia and Iran making deals for economical benefits, for example in transport and television channels. But Iranian penetration in Bolivia and in all of Latin America is a very, very dangerous thing. It is so sudden. Why now?' Udler claims that Bolivian Catholics are being recruited for conversion to Islam, and that Islamic terrorism could make inroads into Bolivia, through Hezbollah. Despite these fears, Udler says that 'politically, I have no Plan B. I was born in Bolivia, and I will die in Bolivia. My religion is Jewish, but I am a Bolivian citizen.'

Such political tensions are also yet to deter approximately 8,000 young Israeli men and women a year from making Bolivia their travelling destination of choice following their two years of compulsory military service—and unsurprisingly so, as they are well catered to. A synagogue located by the Witches' Market, near Plaza San Francisco, in La Paz provides kosher food for travellers, while the nearby Hotel El Lobo has Post-it Notes on the walls that welcome visitors in Hebrew, although my monolingual ignorance meant that I could understand very little.

Sharon Malka, a young Israeli woman, describes her trip to Bolivia to me as a 'right of passage'. Malka's plans were to stay in La Paz before heading out to the ultimate Israeli tourist destination—Rurrenabaque, a tropical Amazon town that is the gateway for those wishing to visit Bolivia's jungle region. Rurrenabaque was catapulted to Israeli fame in the '90s following the publication of Yossi Ghinsberg's book Back From Tuichi. The book tells a dramatic tale in which two of Ghinsberg's friends lost their lives in the jungle and, undefended, he encountered perils in the form of anacondas and jaguars. As a result, Ghinsberg is now a cult-like figure to young Israelis who come to Rurrenabaque specifically to follow his tracks.

There is a slow, inexorable diminishment of the number of Jews in Bolivia: Jews leaving for political reasons; Jews leaving for better opportunities in more developed countries; Jews leaving for a more secure religious base and a greater availability of families to marry into. This grim reality can be summarised by the words of an American Jew, Jonas Jacobs, who said that 'there are more Jews in the cemetery here than in the streets.' But with an uncertain future for the permanent Jewish occupancy in Bolivia, it is somewhat comforting that some Jewish presence and tradition will continue to live on in Bolivia in the form of these fresh and excited young Israeli travellers, eager to experience all that this fascinating and stunningly beautiful country has to offer.

In the Cult of Comics

TEXT AND PHOTO : GEORGINA PHILLIPS

VIÑETAS CON ALTURA (VIGNETTES WITH HEIGHT), LA PAZ'S ANSWER TO COMIC-CON, IS A KEY EVENT IN THE BOLIVIAN COMIC YEAR AND HAS BEEN RUN FOR ELEVEN YEARS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF EL CENTRO, CELEBRATING DOMESTIC COMIC BOOK ARTIST AS WELL AS THE GENRE IN GENERAL. AS WELL AS DISPLAYING LOCAL ARTWORK, BOLIVIAN AND EUROPEAN ARTISTS ALSO RUN WORKSHOPS.

LA LUCHA GRAFICA (THE GRAPHIC FIGHT), BASED AT CAZA DUENDE CAFÉ ARTE, IS AN EVENT THAT HAS TAKEN OFF OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS WHERE ASPIRING AND PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS COME TOGETHER TO DRAW FOR FUN AND AGAINST EACH OTHER.

> The struggle for recognition as 'true art' and 'true literature' for comic books is global.

As a fourteen-year-old girl, my contact with comics was restricted to the hours I spent in comic book stores, waiting for my friends to finish dithering over whether or not to buy the latest issue of X-Men. Comics appeared to be the province of teenage boys, and seemingly beyond the realm of my understanding. The characters on the pages were familiar to me from TV cartoons, but comics themselves were an enigma. However, over the years I have gradually been integrated into the comic tribe, with its occasionally secretive and peculiar quirks and traditions unfamiliar to those outside of it.

The city of La Paz exudes an artistic spirit. Unlike many cities where art appears constrained to galleries and museums, in La Paz it spills out, smothering the streets, walls and buildings. How much of this art is formal or informal is unclear to the traveller's eye, as graffiti merge into murals. To an extent it doesn't really matter—here, art can be anywhere. And it was whilst I was admiring the streets of La Paz that I found C+C Centro del Cómic, just up from Plaza Avaroa. My interest was piqued—how strong is the comic book culture here in La Paz?

Initially I assumed the Centre was simply a comic book shop, but to my surprise it was in fact a comic book library. I had never encountered a library dedicated to comic books before; the closest back home in the UK are institutional historical archives. This unusual set-up intrigued me—not only the puzzle of a comic book library existing in itself, but also why here in La Paz?

One of the main reasons for its existence is the Fundación Simon I. Patiño, an institution named after the 'Andean Rockefeller' who, at the time of his death in 1947, was one of the richest men in the world. The comic book library is part of the foundation's cultural programme and occupies the ground floor of Espacio Simon I. Patiño—the foundation's base in La Paz.

The Centro has been providing a free space where people can come and enjoy comics for the past 11 years. As a library, it helps circulate limited material around the maximum amount of people, instead of selling them for a profit. Readers I spoke to identified the centre as pretty much the only place they could get good comics—shops either had limited stock or the prices were too high. In times of economic uncertainty, it is also an important cultural refuge for those who would otherwise be unable to afford to enjoy comics. Friday afternoons are the centre's busiest hour as people—young and old, male and female - visit on the way back from school and work. For an annual subscription fee of only Bs. 100 (around $15) you can borrow two comics for two weeks. And there's a lot to choose from.

C+C has around 4000 comics on offer, with **historietas** from four main **escuelas**:

- The more well-known comics of North America
- Black and white Asian Manga series
- European titles
- A section dedicated to home-grown South American talent, particularly Argentinean and, of course, Bolivian comics.

As well as the traditional fan bases for superheroes and manga, there is a strong interest in domestic talent with many fans favouring Bolivian comics. One reader said they preferred these comics as they were 'more to do with them'—ideas of a shared culture, shared geography and shared experience building a shared identity perhaps. Or maybe they just prefer their drawings.

The centre does not only attract readers but also artists – aspiring, published and professional alike. Two schoolgirls had visited the centre to practise their skills using drawing books and magazines at the centre, with aspirations to maybe draw their own comics one day.

I spoke to Francisco Leñero, responsible for the running of C+C, about the success of the centre and what he felt about the comic culture of La Paz. He admits the Bolivian comic market is small, but explains there remains a sufficient, stable community to sustain it. It also provides an interesting situation for artists –the reduced market may mean it is hard for artists to make a living from their work but it also allows a greater level of experimentation. However, a lack of market pressure, he believes, can reduce the pressure to create higher quality work.

The struggle for recognition as 'true art' and 'true literature' for comic books is global. Francisco believes that there is increasing respect for comics as an art form here in Bolivia—libraries in wider La Paz are now housing comics within their collections and no longer just in the children's sections—the likes of Marjane Satrapi and Joe Sacco, for example, have gained recognition as important writers in themselves both for their art and the difficult issues they confront.

Another increasingly popular way people are interacting with comics is through the Internet. A quick Google search reveals fan sites and pages, Facebook groups and Blogspots for Bolivian fans of comics. The rise of the online comic and illegal downloading may be changing the scene, but it is Francisco's belief that the internet does not pose a threat to the centre with the majority of people who visit also reading comics online. It appears that printed comics, and a physical space where people can read them, is still important.

There is certainly a thriving comic book culture in La Paz, even if it is only a modest one. Many different groups and places sustain it, from stores to the library; from **fanáticos** to aficionados and artists. This multi-layered community is interdependent, and the lines between reader, writer and artist can be easily transcended.

The community itself is nicely summed up by Mauricio Salazar Jemio, an aspiring artist, who had this to say about La Paz's artistic tribal community:

'There is gonna be always somebody that supports you and can see what you do and help you with the publication of your work or the commercialization of it. The tribes are small and the comic book artist is nowadays everywhere, and they are part of the cultural community of La Paz where you meet and share ideas with all kinds of artists from musicians to graphic designers, [together] forming part of what is the comic culture in Bolivia.'

TRAVELLING TRIBE:

A Visitor's Lament

BOLIVIA OFFERS UP A LOT CULTURALLY, BUT TRAVELLERS CAN FIND THEMSELVES IN THEIR OWN CLOSED CIRCLE OF FRIENDS, RARELY VENTURING FROM IT AND REMAINING APART FROM THE NATIVE POPULATION.

TEXT AND PHOTO: AMY PROVAN

Striped cotton trousers, a llama-print sweater and messy, unwashed hair. Most likely hungover and/or still drunk from last night. We see a traveller in her natural habitat—a party hostel in central La Paz. Grouped around her are many like herself. They chat about fuzzy memories of Route 36 (an underground cocaine bar in La Paz) and last weekend's jungle trip. That traveller is me.

The place is created to put us at ease. An English-language menu advertises Western food. Fellow English-speaking travellers tend the bar. Each person gets their own comfy bed with two pillows! Davie Browne, who backpacked round Bolivia in 2005 and now owns the the Dubliner Irish pub in La Paz's Zona Sur district, remarks that travelling here has become much 'comfier' than it was in his day. As the evening draws out into night, the hostel fills with approachable faces. Maria and Juliette are two of them. Both French travellers in their early twenties, they found advice on where to go once the hostel bar closes, and which tour companies to use. An otherwise foreign environment becomes an easy meeting place.

'It's so cheap here!' May, my companion, exclaims. 'Two cocktails for 18 bolivianos [$2.60]?!' Prices are one of the best things about Bolivia for tribes of backpackers—you can survive on a tenth of what it takes to live in Europe. Most visitors stay only a couple of days, travelling through as part of a larger South American trip. Nevertheless, creating a tourist tribe is still big business. Bolivia is currently trying to triple its tourist income to $1 billion a year by focusing on high-end cultural and ecological visitors, whilst avoiding becoming a 'mass tourism' destination. That trade benefits both sides. Travellers have money to spend, and hostels have found a formula that works. Jamie McManus, the Scottish partner of Loki—a major hostel in La Paz, boasts of a sixth branch opening in Argentina. Their business model has been copied all over the continent, improving the quality of hostels and giving entrepreneurial Bolivians an effective strategy to increase profits.

Real fun. But stepping out into the harsh sunshine of the street I realise I had forgotten I was in Bolivia. Hotel licensing laws mean Jamie's crew can only serve guests, which excludes any Bolivian customers. Seeing alligators, dolphins and piranhas was incredible, but not once on my jungle tour was I forced to speak any Spanish. Nightclubs with 20 boliviano ($3) cover charges, in a country where many live below the minimum wage of $170 a month, are hardly welcoming to anyone but expats and a small clique of Bolivian elites.

This is not really what I wanted when I came to Bolivia. I'm here to understand more of a new place, but how much insight does the small travelling community here get of Bolivian life? Since being here, I have interacted mostly with travellers who can afford to make the journey halfway across the world—making them well off even in their home countries.

Perhaps our problem is rooted in our position as 'travellers'. As a newcomer to Bolivia, this ready-made tribe is too accessible, and too attractive, to distance myself from. It is also in many peoples' interests for travellers not to leave the tourist trail, because our money is trapped there as well. But more than this, being a traveller gives me no context in which to understand Bolivia. Why should local people show a stranger how they live? Explaining my curiosity will not get far in justifying pure voyeurism.

So I went to visit Plan International, an international development agency that helps impoverished children, to get a view of this society from the bottom up, rather than the top down. I was given a stack of literature on the position of children in the country—eight in every 100 children between the ages of 7 and 13 work, despite the fact that it's against the law, and chronic malnutrition affects nearly 22 percent of children under 5. Half of all indigenous Bolivians live in extreme poverty. Of course, Bolivia's poverty is well known, but I nevertheless found found these statistics disheartening after leaving the comfortable bubble in which I had been existing.

Travellers in every country are bound to only scratch the surface of a place. Why should Bolivia be any different? The country's extreme social inequalities mean that disparate social groups are less likely to mix, and travellers in turn are cushioned from the reality of poverty in Bolivia, and this makes it more difficult for us to comprehend the country. With time and persistence, some can break through social barriers. But according to Edgar Dávila Navarro, Plan International's communications coordinator, it is also possible, with a privileged lifestyle, to never come into contact with, or completely ignore the poverty that exists here.

IT SEEMS MY QUEST TO EXPERIENCE BOLIVIA EXPOSED, ABOVE ALL, MY OWN NAÏVETÉ. I BELIEVED THAT THERE WAS AN ACCESSIBLE CULTURE TO UNDERSTAND.

So I never got quite what I wanted. It seems my quest to experience Bolivia exposed, above all, my own naïveté. I believed that there was an accessible culture to understand. This issue of Bolivian Express shows the stratification and complexity of the many Bolivian 'tribes'. I wanted to 'get' this country in a month, but that's not how it works—here or at home. As a middle-class South Londoner attending a private school, I am also far from understanding British society in many of the ways I seek to comprehend Bolivia. I know only what it's like to live a certain lifestyle—to belong to my own certain tribe.

Thus my status as a member of the traveller tribe is prescribed from the moment I can afford the flight here, and can be identified by my blonde hair and sometimes rather ridiculous choice of dress. It's fun, but not the way to gain understanding of an alien and fundamentally very complex place. Bolivia is definitely not 'done'.

CARPE DIEM

JUGGLING WITH REALITY

TEXT : SOPHIA AITKEN & KELLY KEOUGH
PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN CACERES

There's no time for mistakes. Emanuel has only 45 seconds to wow his audience with his juggling until the light turns green and the cars speed away. A generous patron rolls down her window and quickly hands him one **peso**. He smiles broadly, thanks her as he skips to the safety of the sidewalk. He has noticed us watching his routine and approaches us with a warm 'Buenas tardes!' He is eager to speak with us about his occupation, especially after we explain that we are doing a piece on *artistas* ***callejeros*** - street artists.

Street performers are a controversial topic here in La Paz: some will tell you that they are degenerates looking for a quick buck to support illicit habits, others consider them lazy pests infiltrating the city. After speaking with a number of these callejeros, malabaristas or street performers of many kinds, we came to the conclusion that there are several myths about them that need debunking.

Myth #1 Bolivia's drug mecca attracts young travelers

Malabaristas are not using their money earned on the streets to buy drugs like they have been stereotyped to be doing. Malabarista Emanuel from Argentina said, 'I am not against drug consumption but I am against drug abuse because any type of abuse is an excess which is a bad thing.' This attitude is common among malabaristas.

Bolivia is not their destination. Malabarista Vanessa from Argentina said, 'Bolivia is on the way to wherever we want to go, we have to cross here not matter what.' Malabaristas are travelers. They do not stay in one city for more than three weeks. After they have explored and earned enough money to leave, they are back on the road. Bolivia suits them well because it offers cheap living and transportation. In other countries they have to hitchhike because bus travel is too expensive.

Myth #2 Street performers are aimless

'*En el futuro, no me veo*,' said Emanuel after we asked him where he saw himself in the future. Similarly, **malabaristas** Vanessa, Gabriela and Virna balked at our future-oriented question. For them it seemed we were asking the wrong question. Virna from Colombia said, 'We don't think about the future, maybe we say that in a couple years we want to be doing this or that but right now it is only about the present'. This is not to say that they have given up on having any life ambitions or dreams. The men and women we spoke to all seemed to be resolved to a certain extent about their destinations and goals. For now, the girls are headed to Paraguay for a circus festival in September, an event that will attract many **callejeros** from all over South America.

Their notions of goal setting seem to be very particular, yet they are coherent. Emanuel explained that he is not 'future-oriented' rather, he prefers to think in terms of 'projections', more general goals focused on a certain day to day quality of life than specific financial or material ends. 'I do what I do for a long-term objective and a short-term objective. In the short-term, to make money to pass the day. In the long-term to arrive in Venezuela', he said.

'THE DAY I HAVE NO MORE CURIOSITY I WILL DIE', EMANUEL SAID.

These traveling young people and their extemporaneous existence seem to embody the old aphorism, *carpe diem*. 'The truth is that we're all here doing the same thing: trying to travel and live for the present', said Vanessa.

Gabriela from Argentina does have the eventual goal of settling down and making herself a 'home in the south, to live off the land with my animals and live calmly'. But for now, the present is enough. Emanuel and these women all seem very content living in the day to day of travel, talent, and whim.

Myth #3 Street performers don't make enough to support themselves

'Depending on the day and how many hours I work I can earn from Bs. 80 to Bs. 150', explains Emanuel. 'There is always that kind person who throws you 10 Bs.' Normally he will work four to six hours. This is enough to cover his hostel, food and travel expenses.

Virna explained that the amount you earn depends on how long you work for. 'I want to buy *un bombo y un platillo* and until I earn the money for that I don't leave, but if you just want to pay for food and hostel stay, then you won't work for more than three hours a day.'

Myth #4 Street performers live on the streets

The hostels in the centre of La Paz house the malabaristas. They live there like a small community, gathering in the San Francisco plaza after a day's work to practice their juggling and other circus tricks.

The malabaristas come from all over South America. 'Wherever you go there will be jugglers. We make friends along our travels and say goodbye to them but find ourselves with them again in a new place' Vanessa tells us.

Because they have this community, Gabriela calls their lives 'normal'. 'Just like you, we wake up to eat breakfast, go to work and then go meet up with our friends. We do the same.'

Myth #5 The life of a street performer is unrewarding

'The day I run out of curiosity I will die', Emanuel affirms. He has played guitar and bongos in bars and restaurants across a number of cities, toured art museums, taken art classes and learned to juggle, all in the last six months. He is constantly investigating, trying and learning new things, but he is especially pleased to have been able to do all this on his own time.

Virna also cites this independence as one of the most rewarding aspects of being a malabarista. 'We don't have a boss. We don't have schedules. We can work at whatever time we want for as long as it is convenient for us' she explains. Vanessa agrees, 'There is nobody to tell us when to stop or start working. Life is about enjoying the morning, afternoon and night. I worked for a while before I realized that closing myself in would not benefit me in the future. This is all about living in the present'.

These self-employed travelers live well and seem to love what they do. When asked why he started performing, as opposed to selling crafts or playing in bars, Emanuel laughs and responds that it was out of 'pride, definitely pride, the satisfaction of having a direct response from people in the moment in which you're performing. That's why I do it. It's also a matter of experiencing a distinct form of working, one that isn't dependent. It's working for yourself, for your own goal. It's not being confined by so many strict hours'.

Listening to them talk about their lives, we wondered, could it be possible that street performers have a better quality of life than the rest of us? At night they go out together to bars in the city with new friends they have made within the community of malabaristas and travelers staying in hostels in the city. They sleep late, eat well, and have fun working street corners with friends during the day.

But for Emanuel it is more than that. For him, performing has changed a number of his perspectives. 'You know it's amazing how much I appreciate every coin I get, 50 cents, 20 cents, it helps me, it helps me accomplish what I want every day and it gives me satisfaction too.' It has made him more thankful, more appreciative of his freedom. The lifestyle has made him less prejudiced and very open to people.

He believes his lifestyle got him out of a rut and has helped him figure out who he really is. 'In the moment when we ourselves change in earnest, looking at our realities and errors, we will be able to change and respect the world and appreciate every day.'

THE TRIBULATIONS OF BEING TRIBALISED

AN INSTITUTION THAT FORMS STEADFAST POLICEMEN AND STONE-COLD INDIVIDUALS, THE POLICE ARE A TRIBE WITH A RESOLUTE PURPOSE BUT A QUESTIONABLE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDENTITY. OVER THE PAST 60 YEARS OF TRANSFORMATION, THE TRIBE HAS BATTLED INDOCTRINATION FOR RIGHTS AND RECOGNITION.

TEXT : DANIELLE CARSON
PHOTOS: MICHAEL DUNN CACERES

There's something decidedly tribal about them. They are always armed, often with multiple weapons. They wear identically olive-green, seemingly bulletproof uniforms. They act instinctively. Like members of a cult, they stand by secrecy and hierarchy. They are united by a shared cause—to serve and protect. The tribe that is the Bolivian police is comprised of individuals with individual needs and desires, united for the nation and love of the law. Ironically, indoctrination by the law itself has stifled members of the institution, and in recent years they have been subject to under-appreciation from an overly-critical population. These challenges have brought about a renewed quest to reclaim their rights and discover an identity.

According to sociologist Juan Yhonny Mollericona, a great 'insecurity' has swept over Bolivia. Crime in La Paz rose dramatically from 1995 to 2001, increasing more than threefold, but through modernization efforts crime has decreased in recent years.

Today, the demand for further police modernization is apparent. After a failed attempt to institute a model of communitarian policing in 1999, this initiative has been given new life at the start of 2013. In cooperation with the British Ambassador Ross Denny, the police have been putting into practice this model, which has as one of its main components the requirement that policemen devote greater time to foot patrols, as a way of integrating them further with the local community.

HISTORICAL TENSIONS

On the surface, it's just an institution. But being part of the police force in Bolivia means more than this, bringing with it a history fraught with subjugation, both of its members, and of the police in relation to other, more powerful, institutions. The Bolivian Police has historically been separated, tribalized by its tensions with the government and the military, a struggle that has been salient since 1949, when the police began demanding social and institutional reforms.

During the National Revolution (1952-1954) the police distanced itself from the government, and the military took its place—forming a military-government alliance that for the next fifty years would manipulate the police as an instrument with which to further a set political agenda. Inevitably, this separation further weakened the already underdeveloped institution. In 1965, the Police was reduced to its lowest institutional level under the command of the military. The police's existence was trivialised, as policemen were only called upon when needed for assistance. Historically, the military has been the privileged group, receiving higher pay and benefits from the government. Today, on an institutional level, the relations between the police and military are cordial on the surface, though both institutions have been scarred by their problematic shared past. Latent resentments stew underneath the surface only to spill over at critical moments, such as those of February 2002, when far from helping to keep the peace, both forces used firearms against each other. Since then, both institutions are often called upon to work together in times of conflict or social unrest. Individual officers nevertheless express resentment towards the military, an institution they still consider more privileged.

During the first term of Hugo Banzer's dictatorship in the early 1970s, the Doctrine of National Security turned the eye to the security of both the state and society. Action was then taken to improve the Police Institution, bringing upon the era of Militant police that were charged with the responsibility to control society, fight against delinquency and social marginality.

The militaristic aspect is still more than residual. I asked an officer why he was poised so readily to shoot, his hand on the trigger, on a barely busy street corner. As if reading from a script, he replied, 'it's only for show, to keep the peace'. As he said this, his eyes were forward, his posture tall, forming sentences as if he were swearing by a book.

WE ARE OFTEN POORLY PERCEIVED BY THE PUBLIC, BUT WE ARE A NECESSARY EVIL.

Through the national shift to improve internal security, the Bolivian Police floated with the tides of the nation's needs, its own needs being disregarded; it represented a utility rather than an independent institution. The purpose and identity of the police was still unclear, and so were assimilated by the military and made to focus their attention on gathering military intelligence to battle drug trafficking.

In his book 'Policía y Democracia en Bolivia', former Minister of the Presidency Juan Ramon Quintana recounts how 'the police were converted into a docile instrument that supported not only the repressive structure of the government. Expanding upon its traditional functions, they took increasing part in corruption and delinquency in favour of the government's rule'.

PRESENT-DAY STRUGGLES

The issue is rooted to the fact that the police are a single national tribe rather than a clan with different bands and kin-groups. Because the police institution is structured in a similar way to the military, their respective duties have—and still do—overlap, resulting in police falling in the shadow of the military. This further makes them somewhat unapproachable by the general public, a middle state that translates to its lack of identity.

Coronel Rosa Lema, who currently works as the Commander of the Police Station of Cotahuma, likes to believe that police are an integral part of society. This occupational group has been forced to be a tribe but unlike the dwindling population of indigenous Amazonians, they desire to be integrated into and accepted by society, as an approachable entity as well as a protector. However, they are conceptually isolated both due to public perception and a privation of certain constitutional rights. Law 101, which outlines the Disciplinary Statutes for the Police, was passed on the 4th of April 2011. Although there are sections of this law which clearly state these cannot contradict constitutional provisions, it goes some way towards separating this group from the laws which bind the rest of the population. In a manifesto, they complain at being unfairly isolated from the rest of the Bolivian workforce. A mutiny held in 2012 had the purpose of demanding higher wages, as well as denouncing this law as unconstitutional; some members of the Police Force believed the law failed to uphold the principle of presuming the innocence of the accused in internal disciplinary proceedings.

THE TRIBES VALUES

Law 101 stipulates the police force is subject to the principles of honor, ethics, discipline, authority, loyalty, cooperation, responsibility, hierarchy, obedience and professional secrecy. Keen to see how these principles work in practice, I asked some members of the force who, despite resentment, seemed to have internalised the principles outlined in this section of the law.

HONOUR

Despite years of training leading to meagre wages, many policemen are steadfast and passionate about what they do. According to Lema, a total of 800 new recruits enter the institution each year. To Officer Abraham Felipe Felix, the police are paragons

of duty and honourability. Their philosophy, in his own words, is to abide by the law, save the weak, help the sick, and influence the youth. They say they respect the law, and like to believe that the law respects them.

ETHICS

Modernization of the institution has changed the requirements to enter the force; no longer is unquestioned political loyalty a criterion, but rather physical aptitude and willingness to serve and protect. Felix said that many are driven by their personal interests, and rather than superiors acting through political motive, they are driven by ethical disposition.

DISCIPLINE

'La vida es un poco dura', officer Jaime T. Murga said, explaining why some police are turned into violent creatures. On the inside, they are taught to be rock hard against drug-traffickers and terrorists. The punishment given during training is often drastic and militaristic, and the residuals are sometimes taken from the confines of the school to the household.

COOPERATION

Even outside of duty, a policeman constantly identifies with his tribe. 'They don't just go home and rest. Their lives are not separate', Murga said. Although there is an obvious hierarchical arrangement in the institution, Felix believes that all police are one in the same, bonded like kin by the purpose of public service.

OBEDIENCE HIERARCHY SECRECY

Professional secrecy will hold the obedient policeman's tongue when he is asked a hard question. Policemen have been indoctrinated to be faithful to their superiors, even if it means not denouncing corruption. Speaking with the individuals, they are all united by this ideal—if they say anything at all it is minimal and in a hushed voice. While this principle of secrecy helps them protect valuable and sensitive information, it can also have the unintended consequence of covering up internal corruption in the police force.

THE POLICE IN SOCIETY

They claim responsibility for the well-being of the community. In the past, the police has been used as a tool to instill fear and enforce discrimination amongst the people, but today the police is identifying with values not commonly associated with them. They now try to work

with the community instead of against it. The development of Bolivian Democracy was the enzyme for the current civil nature of the police. According to Bolivian philosopher H.C.F. Mansilla, the ideal of 'Communitarian Police' was conceived in the 1980s. For Lema, the police are in the process of building a communitarian culture, in which the police work directly with the citizens, occupy and fix dangerous areas in communities, and work with government authorities to resolve issues such as gang and domestic violence, as well as drug use. While this may seem like a natural role for the police force to adopt, this hasn't always been the stance.

'We are often poorly perceived by the public, but we are a necessary evil', Felix tells me, sporting a bulletproof vest, his gun nestled by his side.

> 'Violence is instinctual, to defend ourselves we can kill if we need to', Felix tells me, explaining that it's not uncommon for them to use violence before using a verbal approach.

Yet behind this hard facade, it is clear they want to be perceived as human beings. While the police may seem just as militant as their camouflaged counterparts, their purpose is quite the opposite, according to Lema, who explains that while the military is trained to attack, the police swear to defend, especially with this new ideal of communitarian police. Lema holds fast to the idea that policemen are as integral a part of society as anyone else, that police and citizen life are not two different identities.

Unfortunately, the police's public image is largely negative, and in urgent need of having trust with this institution reinstated. According to a report by the CSIS Americas Program, as of 2012 more than 60% of those interviewed believe the Bolivian Police are involved in criminal activities. If you ask the common passerby about their opinion on Bolivian Police, the first word that often escapes their lips is 'corrupt'.

It can be argued that while the corruption in the police force and Bolivian society are endemic, the current law governing the police doesn't help. Rather than discouraging corruption it can be seen to shield it. With their freedom to speak their mind being restricted, policemen are separated from the rest of society and denied an opportunity to be honest, opinionated and individual.

The future state of this tribe is unclear. The government, citizens and police know that a society needs, and cannot function without, a police force; former Minister Quintana goes as far as arguing the police serves as the 'only agent of cultural mediation' between the government and the people. It seems clear their quest for rights and an identity is not only the concern of this olive-green tribe, but of the country's citizens at large. To be a part of this tribe means to embrace both physical and psychological changes and challenges, to surrender oneself to the greater good of the nation despite a lack of appreciation. This identity has been and always will be in constant flux.

GLOSSARY

HISTORIETA	Comics
ESCUELA	School
FANÁTICOS	Fans
COLLA	Informal name given to someone from La Paz
SHABBAT	Jewish day of rest and seventh day of the week
HEZBOLLAH	Jewish political party and Shi'a Islamic Militant group
PESO	Informal name for the Boliviano, the Bolivian unit of currency
CALLEJEROS	Term used, sometimes pejoratively, for people who live or spend a lot of time on the streets.
MALABARISTAS	Jugglers
NAG CHAMPA	Indian fragrance containing frangipani and sandalwood
PUEBLO	Village
CHICHA	Alcoholic drink made from fermented corn, found in South American villages
AYLLUS	Traditional form of community in the Andes, comprising a social, political and economic unit.

ILLUSTRATION: SHAROLL FERNANDEZ

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN CACERES

PHOTO: CATERINA STAHL