Underworlds

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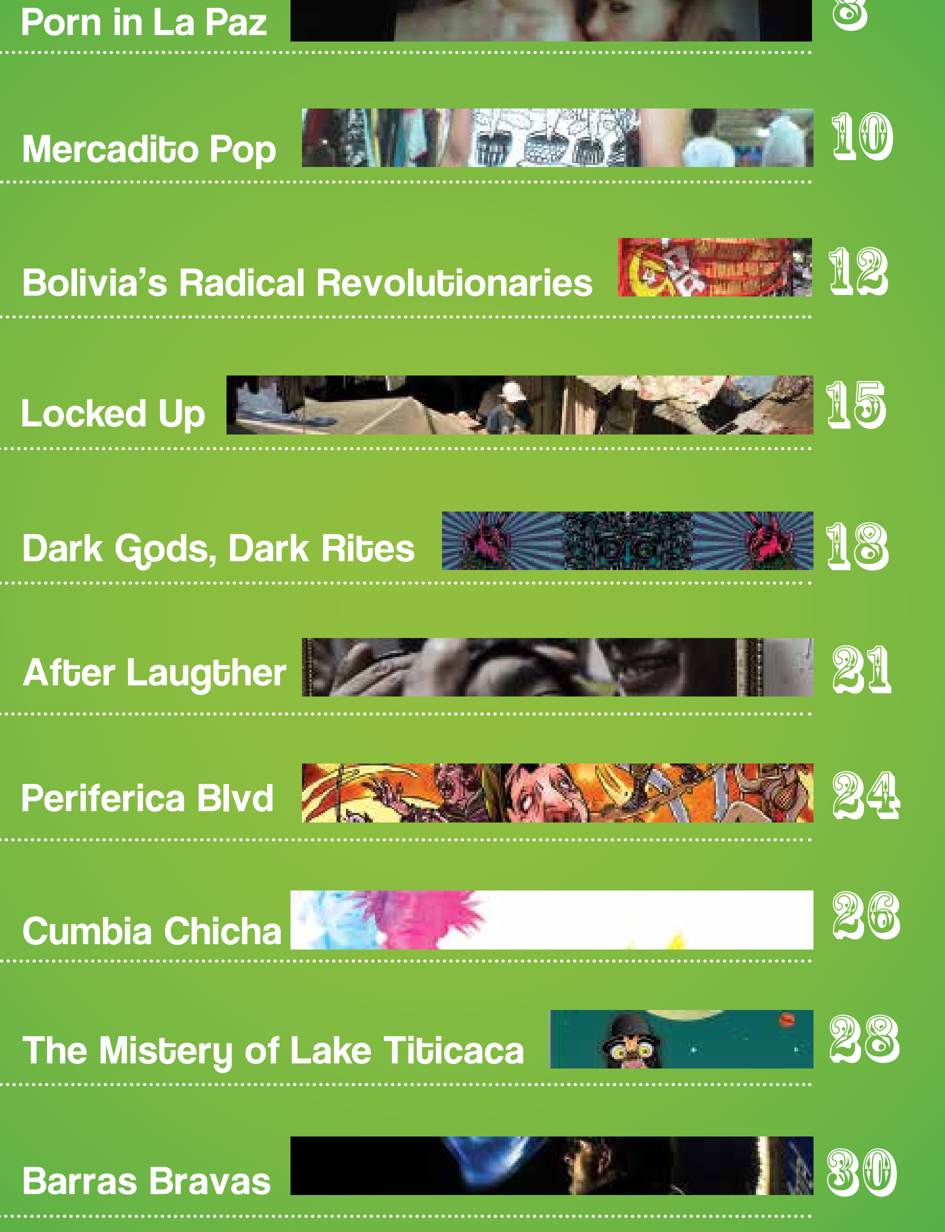

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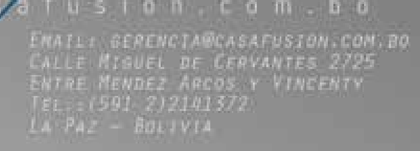

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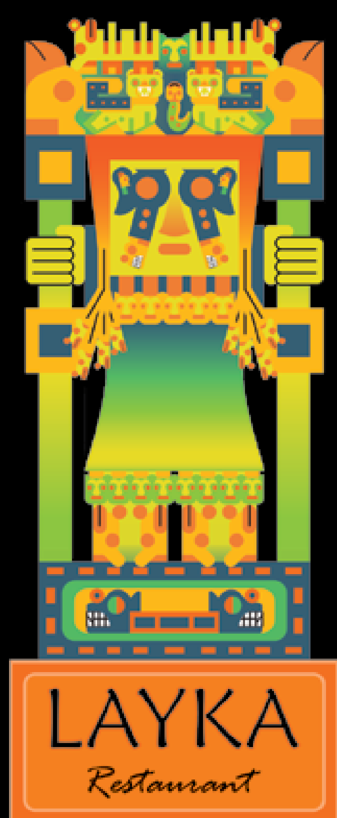

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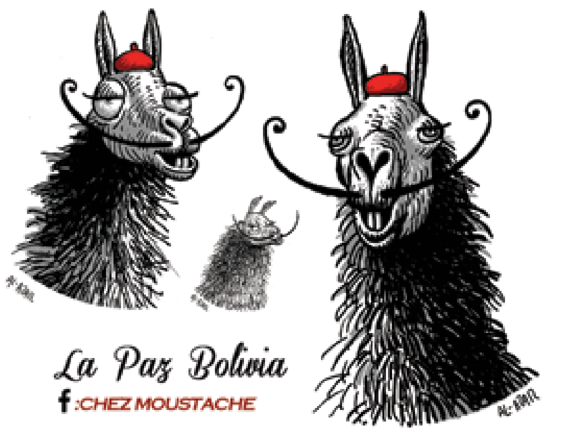

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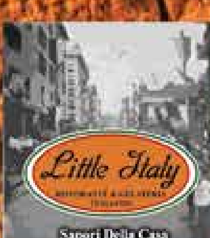

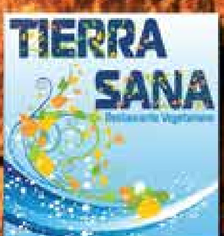

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I first met Ian Pons Jewell at a club night. According to Facebook, it was some time in April 2013. The British-Spanish filmmaker of *La La La*-fame hadn't been in the country for more than a couple of months but was already able to sum up some of his initial impressions by pointing out that 'there's a strong sense of satanism of some sort here'. 'Um, what do you mean?' I asked, not so much surprised as just curious. 'I heard that **cogoteros** bury their victims face down to make sure their souls remain trapped'. The reasoning behind this, he explained, was that if these tormented souls were face down, they would not to be able to rise up into the afterlife and come after their assassins. 'So the thieves don't just fuck you in this life but also in the next'. It seemed to be a place where resting in peace was not exactly guaranteed, even for the innocent.

Some of what he said chimed with my own experiences here. I told him about the time in October 2012 when I was doing research for an article on the *ñatitas* up in a clandestine cemetery in El Alto. On this occasion I ended up being led to an inconspicuous metal door in Villa Adela where I was told a woman held a daily mass where people could go and pay worship to these forensic skulls.

I was greeted by an old woman with a chilling smile full of decaying teeth —in shades of dark green and black, a likely alchemy of coca leaves and Astoria cigarettes— who led me to her shrine. Covered in a black shawl, her yellowing liquid eyes and piercing gaze made it clear I was not standing before an ordinary pseudo-sorceress. I didn't even need to suspend my disbelief to feel I was speaking to a real-life witch.

I was allowed to enter without, precisely, being *welcomed in*. Half a dozen people were gathered around the shrine. Some laughed, others wept. Others cackled. A cholita with a mouth full of gold teeth called Yolanda explained that the ñatita to whom she paid worship had been good to her. 'Now I have money. All my enemies are gone, they no longer cause me trouble. I am grateful to the *ñatitas* because everything I asked from them became true.' Why, then, was she here? 'Because I am now in their debt. I come here twice a week to bring them gifts, to thank them. They took care of me so now I must take care of them. Right? Otherwise they can take away twice of what they have given me.'

I learned that, of all days, I was lucky enough to be there on a Thursday. 'Black masses are held on Tuesdays and Fridays', explained a man. I was not exactly familiar with the idea of a black mass. 'On Mondays and Thursdays people come here to ask the *ñatitas* for things like health, education, money. But if you want something bad to happen to somebody, for example, you need to come on a Friday', he explained.

I left shortly after. Not entirely taken in by the ritual, it was hard to remain impervious to the dark energy of that place, dense like the cloud of smoke that rises from a pile of burning tires, except hanging in mid air.

A young woman working at a corner shop a few metres down the road warned me I should be careful with that place. 'I don't believe in ñatitas, those things. But sometimes very bad people come here. Thieves, ***cogoteros***. I don't know what these people do but they come here. They are very faithful. They believe the *ñatitas* protect them, you know, so they don't get caught or so the souls they have harmed don't come after them.'

Telling Ian about this story got me thinking that these realms can't really be seen as underworlds in the strict sense of the word. After all, these practices are pervasive and exist within the mainstream of people's spiritual beliefs. The *ñatitas* even have their own day enshrined in the calendar: every year on the 8th of November, people across the country pay tribute to these tiny-deities in their thousands. Large parties are organised in their name and the skulls are even taken into to Catholic churches to receive the priest's blessings.

This bizarre degree of syncretism between pagan and religious rituals offers up important clues to understanding underworlds and their place among local beliefs. In what amounts to a form of spiritual pragmatism, people here seem to understand that no single deity reigns supreme over every realm. When a miner goes down into the mine he understands he is entering an underworld in which the Tío needs to be appeased, lest anything bad happens to the miner or any of his colleagues.

The Christian faith believes God built man in his own image. Yet humans are fickle, vengeful and unpredictable whereas the Christian God remains morally perfect. Gods that were worshiped across this vast land long before the conquest are closer to those in the Greek tradition or even the God of the Old Testament. Like the imperfect humans who live in the world (which these deities control from up above and down below), these gods are erratic, mischievous and even hungry. First they giveth then they take it away. They can't be seen to belong in subterranean and occult realms for they are just like us; they cohabit with us everywhere. But, unlike humans, gods and spirits are powerful and so must be continuously appeased, however unreasonable their demands may be. x

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

PORN IN LA PAZ:

IT'S A COMMUNAL THING

TEXT: OLLIE VARGAS

Nothing quite defines the seedy underworld of La Paz quite like its many 'adult cinemas' or cines privados, as they are called. Watching a bunch of old men sitting together calmly watching what most would consider hardcore porn beamed from a cheap overhead projector is surreal, alongside watching them 'go to the toilet' every five minutes, leaving promptly afterwards. As if the dark, smoky room isn't bad enough, the films themselves will also leave one questioning whether the final triumph of barbarism has already arrived. With an entry fee of just 10 bolivianos, o ne can watch three hours of feature-length adult films with their comical 'storylines' (or rather lack of). One is reminded of the That Mitchell and Webb Look sketch in which David Mitchell plays a porn scriptwriter and explains the complexities of the job: 'It's really easy, basically, I get a piece of paper with "they have sex" written on it eight times, and I just have to fill in the blanks, simple.'

Of course the first question one is left with is why would men go to such a public place to watch this type of film. In the UK, such cinemas aren't a common sight, and with DVDs and the Internet there isn't any reason to go to such a communal place. But the demographic at these cines privados is clearly older married men, whose wives might not approve of these films. After all, anyone single would rather enjoy these films in the privacy and comfort of his own home. (In fact, at various points in the cine, men would receive calls and quickly reject them—no doubt their long-suffering wives.) Secondly, the reach of the Internet is different in Bolivia than it is in the West. In Europe, almost everyone has access to it in their own homes, and most have multiple connected devices. However, in Bolivia, with home Internet costing the same as in the UK, many ordinary Bolivians are priced out. Only around 30 percent of Bolivians have home access, compared with 83 percent in the UK. Bolivians typically rely on cheap public Internet cafes—not the best place to access such explicit material.

When stepping into this cheap and seedy underworld, you cannot help but notice what a colossal industry this is. This kind of commodification of sex is thought to be worth around $57 billion annually worldwide. You get a sense of the money involved even at the seediest cine privado in La Paz. Like most media, too, the 'actresses' in these films are white, even though Bolivia has an indigenous majority and whites are a tiny, privileged, and often foreign elite. The contradictory world of cheap overhead projectors and white Western actresses makes it a bizarre but thoroughly depressing affair, certainly not a recommendation for those sightseeing in the city. ×

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POPPING UP SOON—AT AN UNSPECIFIED LOCATION NEAR YOU

TEXT: LEO NELSON - JONES
With exclusive material from Gabriela Durán

Mercadito POP was originally created in June 2012 as an underground and economically collaborative Pop-Up crafts fair in La Paz. The organizers saw the need to address the huge socio-economic limitations and needs that were present in the creative and artistic community in Bolivia. The way they did this was to try and create an event that would call into question —and hopefully help answer— perhaps the most important problem that the artists, designers and creators faced: generating a fair income from their creative endeavours. Mercadito POP also provided a diverse range of artists (of which women make up around 80% of the participants) an opportunity to showcase their work and make a name for themselves.

Bolivia is home to a great deal of talented and ingenious young artists and creators working across various disciplines. The issue for most of them is that the large majority find themselves in a situation in which they are not able to make a living off of their creativity alone and thus are unable to dedicate as much time to their artistic work as they would like. They are forced into institutional, commercial and/or governmental jobs just to survive. All of this is because, until now, there has been a profound lack of understanding when it comes to the importance of the creative economy and its contributions to Bolivia's economy as a whole, forcing it to continue functioning as an underground and informal economic movement. The creative economy includes more than just art and its associated sales. It encompasses any kind of innovative or creative endeavour—a factor crucial to the evolution and development of any economy.

> The most important problem Bolivia's artists and creators face is generating a fair income from their creative endeavours

Mercadito POP has grown into an artistic and cultural platform that promotes these types of small-scale creative ventures and offers new and different experiences to the public. To do this, the concept of occupying physical spaces (often considered unconventional or unlikely candidates for such an initiative) is a very important feature. These locations are as varied as a colonial house behind the San Francisco Church in the historic center of La Paz, the front esplanade of a convent in Cochabamba, an underground parking lot in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, or an out-of-business cellar in the Zona Sur district of La Paz. Thanks to these unusual spaces and the more personal nature of the interactions that they encourage between artist and attendee, those who come often end up developing a relationship with the artist, something that would be almost unheard of in more conventional galleries. Apart from making the experience more pleasant for both parties, this also brings some benefits for the artist: these relationships can sometimes lead to repeated commission work which is typically what an artist needs to make a living.

Mercadito POP may have its right foot in the public sphere —as the project works alongside local authorities and enterprises in order to put on its events— but it keeps the other foot firmly placed in the underground. It does this through both cultivating and presenting alternative forms of consumption to the public, by appreciating local independent design and inventive crafts, environmentally friendly ventures, and responsible consumption. Perhaps, though, the most important function served by Mercadito POP is the way in which it has opened up the debate on the importance of mapping and empowering the creative economy sector in Bolivia. It has worked to bring into focus the tremendous lack of funding for the arts provided by the State. Bolivia, according to **Mercosur**, only dedicates 0.0012% of its national budget to culture, a tiny percentage when you compare it to other South American nations. For example, 0.27% of Brazil's budget goes towards the arts. However, there are now some signs of slow and slight change. The government is working on a new piece of legislation—la *Ley de Culturas*. Though not necessarily as broad as it could be, the new legislation is certainly a step forward in the relationship between the government and the creative sector and it is, at least partially, the result of initiatives put together by underground collectives—just like Mercadito POP. ×

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BOLIVIA'S RADICAL REVOLUTIONARIES

SURVIVING YET MARGINALISED

TUPAK KATARI, ONE OF BOLIVIA'S MOST FAMOUS REVOLUTIONARIES, FAMOUSLY PROCLAIMED ' I DIE BUT WILL RETURN TOMORROW AS A THOUSAND THOUSANDS' MINUTES BEFORE BEING QUARTERED BY HORSES. IN THIS ARTICLE, LEO NELSON -JONES LOOKS INTO WHETHER OR NOT THIS PROPHECY LIVES ON TODAY AMONGST POR, ONE OF BOLIVIA'S MOST HISTORICAL (AND SELF PROCLAIMED) REVOLUTIONARY PARTIES

Revolutionaries in Bolivia have a strong history, mostly due to the years of oppressive dictatorship and colonial powers that they have faced over the last four centuries. Though their influence has varied over time, they have never been an insignificant force in the Bolivian political landscape. However, since the transition to democracy, the nature and impact of these revolutionary parties has started to change.

Bolivia's most memorable and influential early revolutionary was the Aymara leader Tupac Katari, who stood up and rebelled against the Spanish empire in 1781. Though his attempted siege on La Paz failed after a hard-fought 184 days, his memory has lived on amongst Bolivia's revolutionaries ever since, most notably in the name of Felipe Quispe's revolutionary Aymara separatist army in the 1980s, the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army.

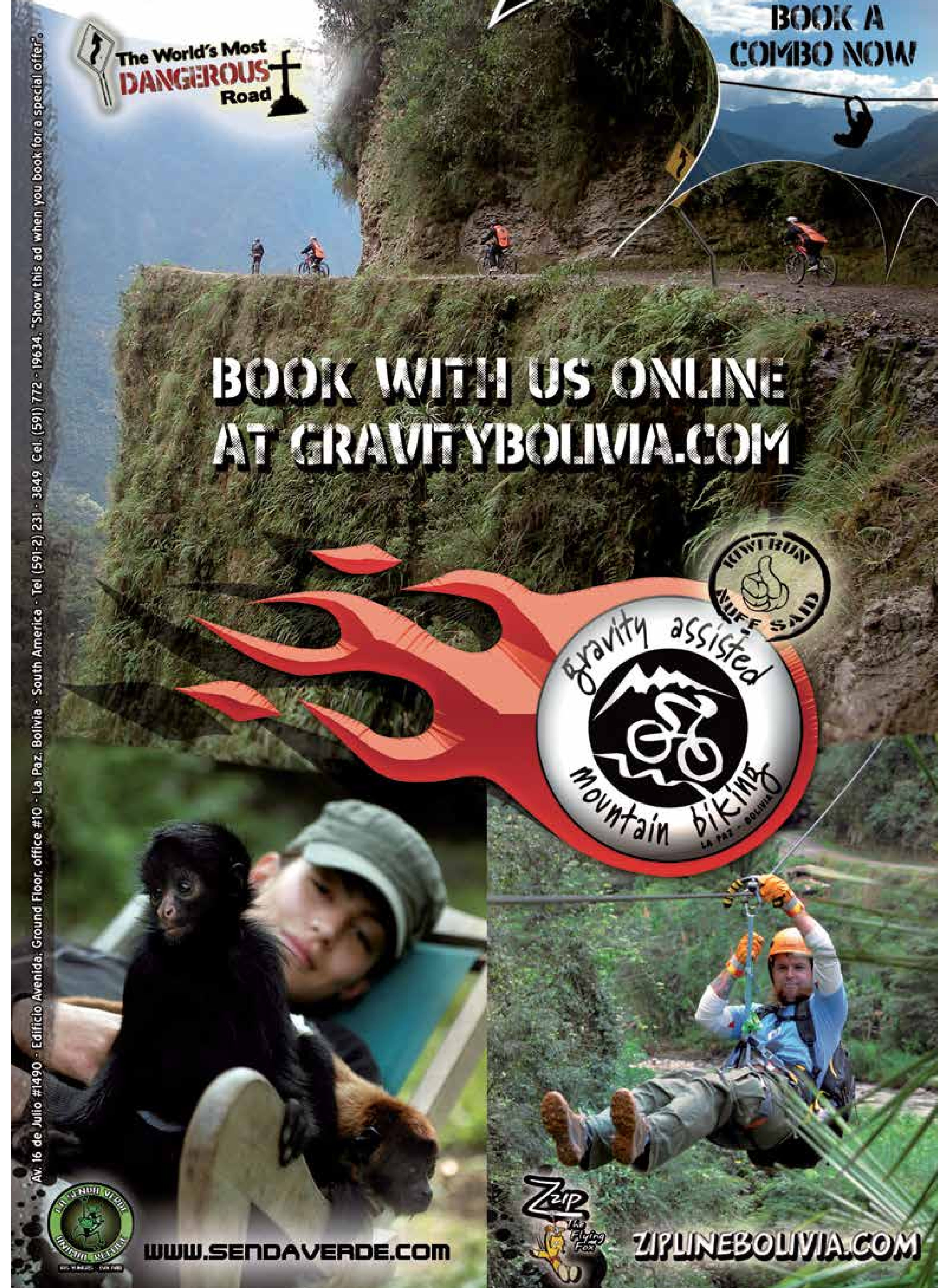
Revolutionary groups saw a rise in prominence during the 20th century as Bolivia fell under the intermittent control of nationalist dictators. People were faced with oppression, both mentally and physically, and so naturally they began to look towards revolution and rebellion for change. In the 1960s, Che Guevara arrived in Bolivia, bringing with him increasing clandestine action and guerrilla warfare.

> People were faced with oppression, both mentally and physically, and so naturally they began to look towards revolution and rebellion for change

Perhaps the most interesting and, in some ways, influential of these groups was the Workers' Revolutionary Party (POR). POR was, and still is, a Trotskyist revolutionary group looking to overthrow the government in order to install a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Its history is rich. In the 1930s and '40s, POR attracted a huge amount of support from the miners and this lead to the historic creation of **La Tesis de Pulacayo**, in 1946, which promulgates the classical Trotskyite conception of permanent revolution.

My first experience of POR was meeting with members of the Revolution Union of Socialist Students (URUS), the student faction of POR, at their stall at San Andres Higher University (UMSA) to try and find out how active POR still was. What I found was a small but dedicated group of students all ideologically bound by a desire for a worker's revolution.

Most of my hour or so at the stall was spent in conversation with a woman who called herself Natalia, though two other members, Toco and Ishkra, did occasionally chime in. These weren't their real names. They felt that it was necessary for them to protect their identities, a throwback to the days of dictatorship when persecution was a real threat. Natalia claimed that pseudonyms were still necessary under Morales's government though nothing suggested to me that the members of POR



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were under any genuine threat from the authorities. Personally, these fake names reminded me of when I used to read superhero comics as a kid, where one's secret identity was one's most important asset, the only difference being that the superheroes actually needed theirs. Natalia claimed that POR's members need the safeguard due to the extreme nature of their aims and actions, but from what I saw this just wasn't the case. Quite frankly, they didn't seem to be extreme enough to merit an oppressive response from Morales and his administration.

Natalia and I mostly discussed how POR was trying to effect change. She made it sound as though they were both very active and really quite extreme, with a focus on direct action and even, if necessary, the taking up of arms. But I had my doubts. We also discussed the reasons behind POR's large drop in support over the last 20 years. POR still has support amongst government workers, due to the reduction in power of the unions, and, in fact, it has control of the teachers' union. But amongst other sectors, POR's numbers aren't what they used to be. Toco and Ishkra, Natalia's comrades, became involved in the conversation, and the general consensus was that since conditions for **campesinos** had been improving, they no longer felt any real need to take up arms and bring about a worker's revolution. Essentially, they were saying that due to Morales's great popularity, people no longer wanted any significant change.

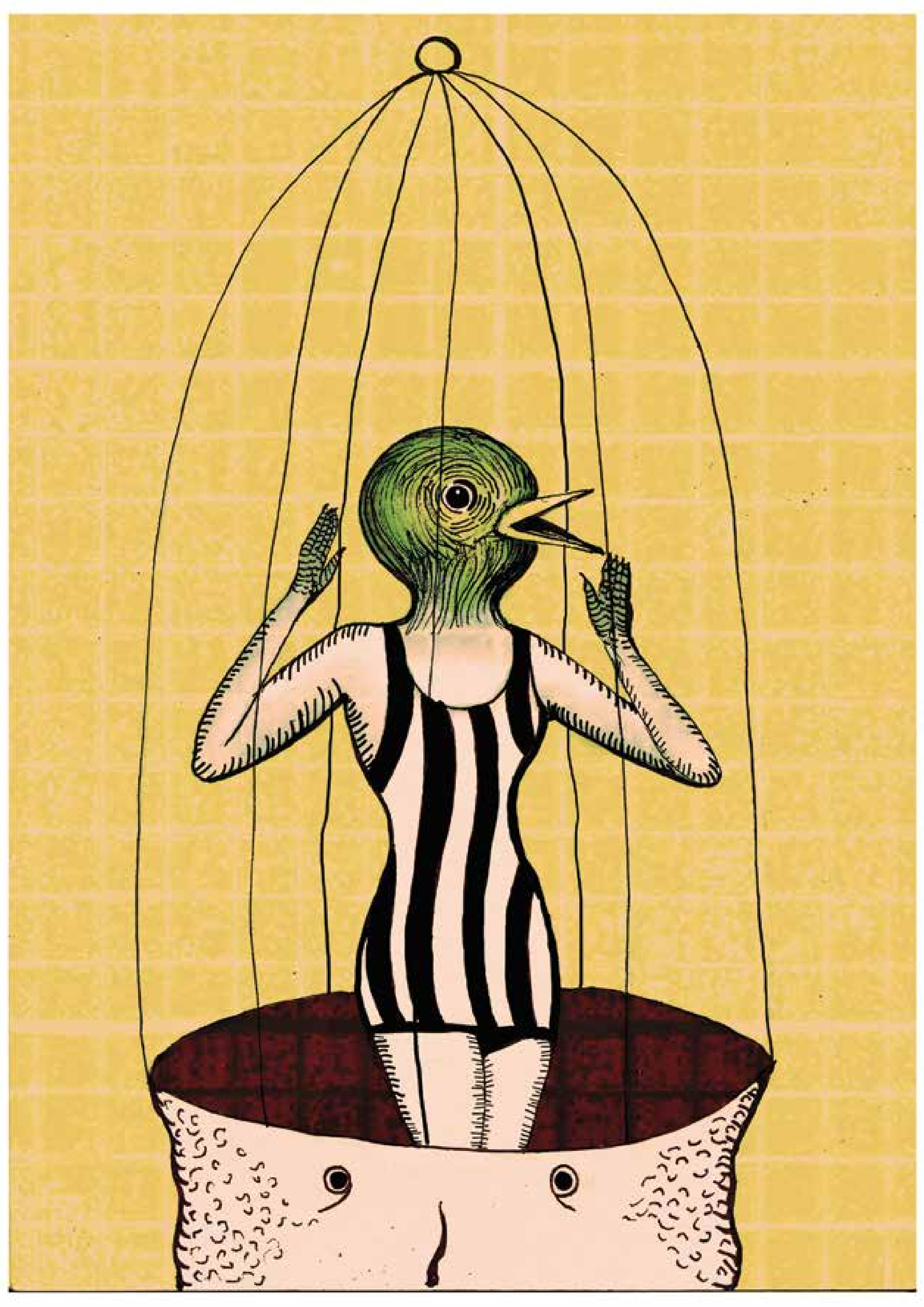
The group also told me about their efforts to try and get people involved with POR and rebuild support. Their main tactics were organising marches, speeches or other events.

Later, I attended one of these events, which turned out to be not quite what I expected. I met Natalia outside the UMSA psychology department building at 9am on a Thursday to to observe her and her comrades address a class. Their normal practice was to get in and out before the teacher would arrived; however, on this occasion, things didn't go quite to plan. URUS had posted some fliers that some considered slanderous, allegedly defaming a psychology professor by claiming she had been oppressing the students. The professor wasn't pleased with this, and so decided to turn up early to her class and intervene. What transpired was a long argument-slash-debate about URUS's methods. The students seemed, on the whole, to just want to get on with their class, but URUS stuck to their guns. In the end, they parted moderately amicably, mainly thanks to the cool head and restrained stance of Toco. After we left, an argument broke out amongst the members of URUS. They felt that Toco had been too moderate in turning the argument into a debate, even though he had just tried to direct the conversation onto political issues.

The next and final step in my journey with POR and URUS was the one I had been most excited about—the May Day march. I had been warned in advance that there would be a large turnout and that there was a good chance things might get hairy. But this did not end up happening. Once again, it was a case of POR talking a big game but not backing it up. As it turned out, only about 100 to 150 people from all parts of society turned up. They chanted with vigour, though not necessarily in unison, but were unwilling to push the boundaries. The most exciting thing that went down was everyone running round the admittedly-quite-intimidating police presence to get to the other side of the Prado. The police, however, simply followed suit and that was that.

Some speeches were given, but nothing more happened. None of the members seemed willing to test the police any further; hardly the actions of a hard-core revolutionary group. After about 20 minutes of just standing around feeling somewhat let down—not for the first time during my experiences with the party—I left.

Overall, my time with POR and URUS was surprising. I came into it expecting to find a group of hard-core revolutionaries, but ended up with the impression that, though their aims have remained as radical as ever, they lack the support to achieve them which, in turn, has lead to them losing much of their old vigour and revolutionary zeal. This also reflects the wider trend amongst Bolivian revolutionary groups: with the switch to democracy and especially the election of the very popular Morales, the clandestine and extreme nature of their methods has all but disappeared, leaving the state of the revolutionary, on the whole, weakened and ineffective. ×



LOCKED UP

Life Continues Inside the Women's Prison of Obrajes

TEXT: SHANTI DAS
ILLUSTRATION: CLAUDIA VARGAS
PHOTOS: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Nestled between high-rise apartments and post-apocalyptic rock formations sits a settlement inhabited solely by women. This is '*la cárcel* de mujeres', a low-security prison for Bolivia's female offenders, located in the relatively affluent Obrajes barrio of La Paz.

On first impression, it feels more like a village than a jail, save for a watchtower and burnt-orange walls that surround the courtyard. But *la cárcel* houses 360 women serving up to 30-year sentences for crimes including murder. Petty thieves and drug addicts mingle with violent criminals. Amongst them roam 62 children.

The prison is essentially a functioning community, albeit an atypical one. Inmates here have jobs from cleaning toilets to packing snack boxes with sandwiches for Bolivia's state-owned airline. There's a lavendería where garments drip over women kneading soapy piles with bare hands, and a chapel, a kindergarten and several **tiendas**.

A view from the bleak room we're ushered into to conduct interviews reveals a ramshackle *mélange* of metal roofs brightened by sodden clothing in every colour drying in the late-morning sun. One woman dyes the tresses of another a disconcerting lilac hue, wringing excess slosh into a washing-up bowl. Sandals and lopsided toys lie discarded on the walkways separating **toldos,** which are the metre-square 'rooms' where time is passed when the women aren't working or studying. This isn't the type of establishment where inmates are enclosed within four walls every day. Instead, hours are filled in a variety of ways.

'We have four roll calls per day', explains grandmother of 10 Patricia Arduz, who has been incarcerated for 13 years for a crime she'd prefer not to tell us about. The 59-year-old has a petite frame and a warm personality, with smile-wrinkled eyes and crucifix jewellery in abundance.

'I arrived at Obrajes last year, and it's far better than where I've been before', she explains. 'Besides the roll call, we choose what to do. You can watch TV, play sports, work or take classes.'

The women in *la cárcel* have the opportunity to study courses, from English and social etiquette to therapeutic dance and reusing aluminium. 'I don't work here, but I make clothes which sell well on the outside', Patricia says. 'One item goes for up to 250 bolivianos.' She smiles proudly as she holds up knitted mittens for us to admire.

Another prisoner, 24-year-old Esperanza Chambi, says that she'll spend her afternoon partaking in a hairdressing class. 'I've learnt a lot here: sewing, knitting, making clothes. I'm also vice president of the [inmate] population. I look after the other women and they respect me', she says, with little tangible enthusiasm. Esperanza is six years into a 30-year sentence for murder—the maximum allowed under Bolivian law. Her name in English means 'hope'—ironic and perhaps understandable, then, that her eyes betray her as lacking in her namesake.

'It was accidental murder', Esperanza says, hesitating before describing her crime. 'I worked in a Chinese restaurant and started fighting with another employee. I pushed her, shouting, "Go away!" But she fell and hit her head. I ran away, but the police found me.' Esperanza has reluctantly become accustomed to life in jail. 'I've changed since being here', she admits. 'I've changed the way I think. Maybe outside will be worse. Maybe there is a good reason I'm here now.' She speaks chillingly, tone hollow and eyes expressionless.

She's not the only one who is unsure of what life in **el mundo exterior** might hold.

'I'm leaving the jail in a couple of weeks', explains Patricia, fear permeating her voice. 'It's not going to be easy after 13 years—there's everything you need here. I'm afraid because I don't know what people's reaction will be. They might hate me. I'm afraid. I've been here for a long time.'

Twenty-six-year-old Helen Pereyra, who has two Bolivian parents but a misleadingly fair complexion, served one and a half years in la cárcel. 'Settling into Obrajes was difficult. The women were unkind, calling me "la **leche**"', she remembers. 'I tried to keep a low profile—they threatened to cut my face like they did another fair-skinned woman. In the first week I cried because I was scared and missed my daughter. Then I took sleeping pills that I got from a guard to try and forget.'

Readapting to the real world even after a relatively short sentence was just as challenging, Helen says. 'It was strange being in the city again—working, traffic, mobile phones. It was like being reborn.' Since leaving la cárcel, Helen has returned to living with her daughter. She was four when her mother was imprisoned for falsifying government documents with her father, who is now serving three years at San Pedro. 'I didn't want my daughter to live with me', Helen tells us. 'I decided to be strong for myself, but in prison children learn bad things.'

Sgt. Nancy Villegas, a guard of seven years, agrees, and her concerns are confirmed by the general director of the Obrajes jail. We sit in a high-ceilinged office with an ornate light fixture and a wooden desk. The two women face us, attired in khaki-coloured uniforms and polished boots.

'My good experiences here are mostly with the children', Villegas says. 'I'm always there to protect them. But children suffer. They don't belong here.' She is straight faced as she elaborates. 'Mothers are under pressure, and they take it out on their children. It's not [physical] violence but psychological; they lose their patience.'

Bolivian law allows infants to live with their parents until the age of six. *La cárcel* is home to 51 children that fit the criteria, but 11 others, the oldest aged 12, live here too. Sometimes three share a single bed with their mother in a dormitory sleeping up to 40 inmates. 'We have a team whose obligation it is to provide health care, social work and work in conjunction with other institutions', prison director Luz Alaja Arequipa explains. 'But children shouldn't be here. They have nowhere to play, and when they're old enough to attend school they face bullying and discrimination.'

Walking around la cárcel, however, I can see that the children here are happy. Rosy-cheeked toddlers sip juice and run around the courtyard. One young girl sits cross-legged on the concrete, feeding spoonfuls of pasta shells to a baby sibling in a cardboard box cot. She giggles and says 'buenas tardes'. Another plays hide and seek, weaving between *toldos* draped in flowery sheets and women shielding their faces from the sun with Tupperware lids.

Some argue that the children are better off living with their mothers, no matter how unnatural the environment, given the alternative of being cared for by potentially untrustworthy or distant family members. Esperanza is perhaps proof of this. For the first two years of her time in la cárcel, Esperanza's daughter, now six, lived with her.

'When my daughter was here she went to the kindergarten', Esperanza says. Now, however, she and her eight-year-old brother live with their father in the countryside 12 hours away. 'They don't visit often anymore, just once a year in December. I'm here for 30 years, but the worst punishment is that I can't see my children growing up', she says, letting her steely-eyed defence down as she sobs, speaking at an increasingly inaudible volume. It's moving, a true indicator that the women here are more than the criminals that they're labelled as.

Her name in English means 'hope'—ironic and perhaps understandable, then, that her eyes betray her as lacking in her namesake.

'When I left Obrajes, employers couldn't see past my criminal record and old friends didn't want to know me', former prisoner Helen tells me over a coffee. 'People can't see past the fact that I've been in prison. It makes me so angry. But the experience formed a part of my life and that won't ever change.'

It's hard to leave Obrajes with an attitude void of positivity. Before the visit comes to an end, grandmother Patricia, who is set to leave within the next few weeks, shows us around her *toldo.* It's small, cosy and brightened by slightly wilting yellow flowers in a coffee jar vase. It's wallpapered with a collage of faces of beautiful women, cut from glossy magazines. Why? 'I chose this because I like to see the happy, open smiles of women', Patricia says, beaming and becoming one of them. And that's the thing that surprises most about la cárcel: whilst there are faults in the system and gaps are fallen through all too often, at the same time, there are happy people here.

'Sometimes the women are playing and chatting and forget that they're in prison', says guard Nancy. 'That's the most rewarding thing about my job. I feel more human working here.' ×

DARK GODS, DARK RITES

WHEN UKRAINIAN MODEL AND BARBIE DOPPELGÄNGER VALERIA LUKYANOVA PROCLAIMED HERSELF TO BE A REINCARNATION OF THE TIWANAKAN GOD WIRACOCHA, LITTLE DID SHE KNOW THAT SHE WAS ADDING TO BOLIVIA'S LONG, DARK AND MYSTERIOUS RELIGIOUS HISTORY. IN THIS ARTICLE, ALEX WALKER PRESENTS THREE SNAPSHOTS OF THE DARK SIDE OF BOLIVIAN FAITH, FROM THE RITUAL SACRIFICES OF THE TIWANAKU TO THE DEVIL-WORSHIPPING DECADENCE AT THE HAUNTED CURVA DEL DIABLO.

TEXT: ALEX WALKER
ILLUSTRATION: MARCO TÓXICO

Tiwanaku

Although the Tiwanacotas—the great civilization of the **altiplano** around 1,000 years ago—had a number of figures they worshipped, Wiracocha was arguably the most significant. A supreme god and destroyer who 'in the beginning created the dark', he presents an ironic contrast to the Christian creation story in which God struck light out of darkness. Wiracocha visits the earth disguised as a beggar to check up on humanity. The resultant fear of upsetting or disappointing the gods is a thread that can be traced throughout Bolivian religious history. There is also something of the Romantic hero, reminiscent of Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost, about Wiracocha. Indeed, the veneration of a sublime, omnipotent deity in Bolivia is no less strong today with the upcoming *Fiesta del Gran Poder*.

Similarly, it is not unheard of during the **Alasitas** fair for Catholic priests to be seen blessing another Tiwanakan figure: Ekeko, the god of abundance and prosperity. These kind of contradictions seem to be inherent in Bolivian faith—for example, in the **paceña** church La Merced, people hang ribbons on the arm of San Francisco de Paula who is now covered with scrawled curses against their enemies. These contradictions are a byproduct, perhaps, of merging pre-conquest beliefs with the Catholicism imported by Spanish conquistadors. Marcos Loayza, film-director of the 2008 Bolivian classic '*Cuestión de fe*', tells me that 'our whole continent is marked by a particular syncretism', an amalgamation of different religions. This conflation of religions is nowhere more striking than in the modern-day town of Tiahuanaco where, standing guard at the entrance to the Christian church, the statues of St. Peter and St. Paul are, in fact, looted effigies from the Tiwanaku ruins.

The dependence that the Tiwanacota people had on a good harvest and obliging weather spawned a desperation to please their environmental gods. Anthropologist Carlos Candora explains that 'the harsher the conditions, the more intense the rituals.' Indeed, archaeologists have discovered evidence that ritual human sacrifices—including disembowelment—formed an integral part of religious practice in Tiwanaku. Even more shocking, though, was the discovery of headless mummies, indicating that decapitation also became part of their rituals. To this day, the Aymara, descendents of the Tiwanaku and current inhabitants of the **altiplano**, hold ritual llama sacrifices at the end of each winter, offering their blood up to the stones in order to 'reinvigorate the soil and give it back its agricultural potential', according to Candora. After the tribe's extinction, the great city of Tiwanaku was looted and torn apart by Christian conquistadors, leaving the bare, desolate ruins of today. Ironically, then, perhaps the 'darkest' thing to happen to this ancient society was inflicted by the insensitivity of another, invading faith.

When studying Tiwanaku religion, it is essential, according to archaeologist Dr. Jago Cooper of the British Museum, to try and detach ourselves from our own cultural lense, explaining that 'any discussion of ritual or sacrifice has to be seen within a cultural context.' It would be easy—perhaps even natural—to dismiss these Tiwanaku customs as barbaric due to our instinctive way of looking at the past through the cultural paradigm of the present day. However, a number of today's topics—take capital punishment, bullfighting and alcohol consumption, for example—may well be viewed with this same contempt by the year 2050. To make the mistake of immediately denouncing Tiwanaku customs, then, would render us as guilty of cultural insensitivity as the Spanish conquistadors destroying the heart of this great, ancient civilization.

El Tío

If we fast-forward 1,000 years, we find perhaps the darkest figure of worship in Bolivia today: El Tío. Miners believe that when the devil fell from heaven, he entered the earth at Potosí. It must be noted that where the Western devil is synonymous solely with evil, vice and sin, El Tío represents both a malignant and a benign figure. Loayza explains that 'our devil is not the rest of the world's devil; he doesn't represent evil as such. . . . He is the male figure to Mother Earth.' In fact, many miners lead an innocently literal double life, worshipping the Catholic God above ground and El Tío down below.

It is considered essential for miners to ask El Tío for safety and prosperity in their work, as they believe that their average life expectancy—47 years—is a result of El Tío's wrath rather than their dreadful working conditions. Juan Bacilio Apaza, 33, who has worked in the mines at Potosí since he was 10 years old, explains this dependence: 'One must always look after El Tío—give him coca, alcohol and tobacco. This is so that he keeps us safe . . . . it is he who looks after us.' This is strikingly portrayed in the documentary The Devil's Miner, directed by Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani, when Basilio—a 14-year-old working in the mine at La Cumbre—says the following words: 'Never stop believing in El Tío. He eats the miner. He kills him then eats his soul. Only if he is generous, the devil will give us a good vein of silver and let us leave the mine alive.' Father Sebastian Obermaier, once a miner himself, considers this fear as 'a rejection of God . . . a failure of faith: the devil does not give life, only God can do this.' Worship of El Tío, he believes, represents 'a moral choice.' The Catholic Church, of which Obermaier is a representative, is certainly not blameless for the rise of El Tío. Indeed, as The Devil's Miner argues, the conquistadors may well have inculcated a fear of the devil to keep their horrifically exploited and mutinous workers in line.

The fear that 'if El Tío is not fed, he will punish the miners' is such that sacrificial offerings have become an integral part of mining culture; most notably, the ritual slaughter of llamas. More disturbing, though, is the idea that human foetuses have come to play a part in the sacrificial rituals. This, alarmingly, is not a ritual limited

to the mines. Indeed, it seems it is not uncommon for human foetuses to be buried under new buildings to ensure safety and prosperity. For important and grand buildings, though, a human foetus is often considered insufficient and—in a horror story reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe—witch doctors and construction workers will prey upon alcoholics and lowlifes, taking them in and plying them with excessive amounts of food and drink until they pass out, at which point the unsuspecting street wanderer is entombed—alive but unconscious—beneath the concrete foundations.

La Curva del Diablo

As we make the journey down the side of the highway from our makeshift stopping point, I am decidedly sceptical. We passed the shrine on our way up, a flash of colour from the melted wax candles offered to El Tío in exchange for good fortune. It didn't seem like a great altar for the congregation that converge here each Tuesday and Friday night. Today is Saturday, 9am: the morning after. Standing here is like sitting in an empty cinema, surrounded by torn-up tickets and empty popcorn bags, staring at a blank screen. There is evidence of life, of activity, but now there's just a silence broken only by the rushing wind of passing vehicles. It is an eerie, haunting setting. I am also acutely aware of the nine road accidents that took place here in the first half of last year—ironic, given that people pray here to Lucifer for safety, then, that this has become something of a hotspot for traffic collisions.

With each step, we pass other strange objects: black bin bags we don't dare disturb; solid drips of candle wax suspended on the rock face; lines of burnt-out cigarettes arranged as a decadent offering. But to whom? Legend has it that, around 20 years ago, a snake appeared from the rock face, causing a truck to crash. Then the devil's face appeared on the rocks. But there is no face here now. When we talk to three ABC Highways Agency workers posted next to La Curva del Diablo for the last three months, they explain that the police, who usually turn a blind eye to illegalities here, tore down the devil's face after a young man was found at the curve with his throat slit. It was believed to be an act of human sacrifice.

A local emerges from a building on the site they are repairing. He tells us that murderers and drug dealers worship at the curve; that a friend of his went drinking there and appeared the next day with an inexplicable broken nose; that the decadence begins at 8pm and only draws to a close at 5 in the morning; that chickens are the most common sacrifice—white representing benign requests and black symbolising a conveniently ambiguous 'change of fortune'. The only chicken we could find, though, was incinerated, a mass of charcoal and ash. This, however, seems a merciful death given that live animals are often trapped and left to starve in this hellish place. As we descend towards La Curva del Diablo for a final inspection, we spy a group of morbid-looking worshippers round the corner, dissolving into the mountain. The final cholita—a vision in black—brushes past us out of nowhere, hurriedly pursuing the rest of her flock, the shredded ends of her black dress struggling to keep pace, the faceless devil awaiting open-armed.×

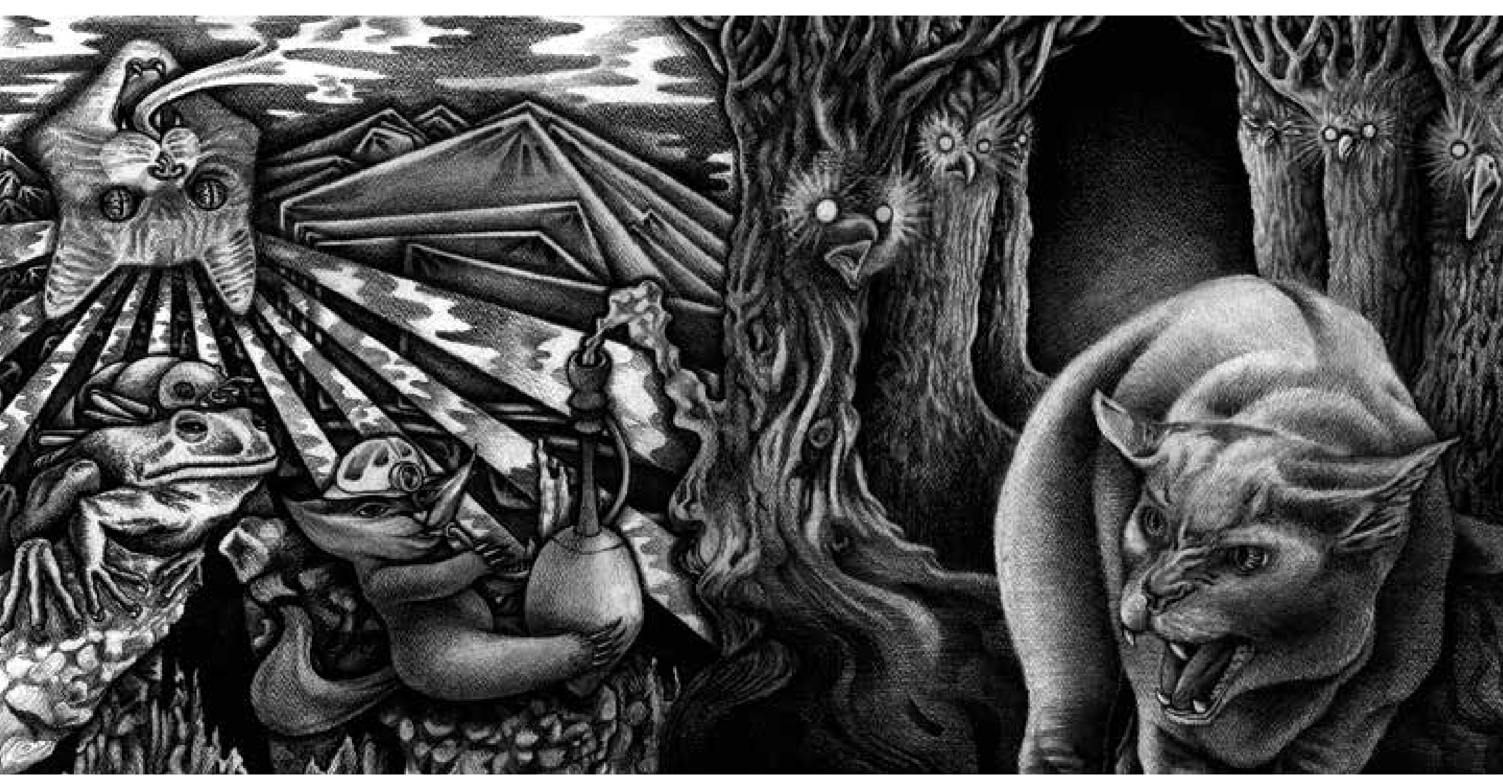


ILLUSTRATION: XAVIER PINO

AFTER LAUGHTER

FOR THE CLOWN ASSOCIATION OF LA PAZ, THE SHOW GOES ON IN THE UNLIKELIEST OF PLACES

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MILA ARAOZ

With additional research by Luis Velasco Schmiedl

The bar *El Acuario* is hidden deep amongst the busy, traffic-filled streets in the commercial district of Max Paredes. The dizzying blue and red plastic covers of the street stalls make the journey to the boliche intense and stressful. Behind three women selling chicharrón lie some steep steps leading down to the 'El Sotano', a popular nickname for the bar. The playground-like coloured rocks on the wall guide visitors down the stairs towards a small lamp hanging above a wooden door. There is no other sign to indicate that this is a popular bar for clowns.

The owner, Don Chelo, opens the door. Luis and I sit on some wooden chairs at a table laminated over with a Coca Cola advert. The peeling walls and sticky smell of beer and cigarettes could mistakenly make you believe you are entering a typical boliche. At the front, where various liquors are on display, two signs catch my eye; 'if you *drink* to forget, pay before you forget', and the second one, written in blue biro on a piece of lined paper, says 'we sell soft toys'. Behind the second sign is a pile of dusty-looking teddy bears.

When Luis first told me about *El Acuario*, the image that popped into my head was the cartoonish hybrid between a friendly clown and a depressingly drunk man. I have always found the clown, perhaps due to iconic horror stories and films —such as Stephen King's 'IT'— a depressing and eerie character, so the idea of a bar full of drunken ones sent cold shivers down my spine.

However, the juxtaposition of a half-empty bottle of **singani** next to a toy rabbit is, to my surprise, the only thing to live up to my nightmarish vision. It appears that clowns don't exactly drink. In the time we spend at the bar, the face-painted patrons order 2 bottles of Coca-Cola.

Tibilín, one of the more lively and chatty clowns we manage to speak to, smiles as he continuously pushes his prosthetic red nose back into place. Instead of walking, he skips, and when he sits down he constantly fidgets—as a child might. 'We don't drink when we are dressed as clowns', he begins, 'the AMI association [Artistas del Mundo Infantil] says we can't be drunken clowns. Its also the rule here in the bar. We can't drink or smoke -- what would happen if a child saw us? We would break the fantasy'. He continues to wipe off the thick layer of face-paint with a baby wipe.

As difficult as it is to carry out a full interview with all the distractions and hysteria, I am slightly disappointed to not find a single clown drinking a **Paceña**.

The manager tells us that he received an invitation for the misa of a clown who died a year ago. We ask Tibilín how it feels to a fellow clown: 'It is sad when a friend dies. They don't even let us into the funeral when we arrive dressed as clowns, they say it is a serious occasion, but we are completely serious, paying our respects. There are also close friends who are not clowns who have died. For instance, there was a woman we called Espica, she served us food, looked after us when we had a problem', he giggles, 'she also used to pull our ears if we were cheeky...all the clowns knew her. What was most hurtful was when she died there was not a single family member there for her. So, all the clowns had a meeting and we took care of everything'.

A few more clowns arrive around 10 p.m. Tamborcito comes to our table. His half-asleep son sits on his lap. 'My dad was lucky enough to be one of the first clowns in Bolivia. He started off his career by working in a circus in the *Cancha Zapata*. He loved the atmosphere and making people laugh. On the television, they were looking for comedians, artists who could entertain the whole family. One of the presenters called Margarita was looking for people to create a children's show; so he threw himself at the opportunity and started to work on the show'.

Two clowns sitting on the table next to us reach over with a bottle of Coca Cola; 'this one's on the **payasos**', they laugh.

Tamborcito started training as a clown when he was 13; 'at first it was embarrassing, wearing those big shoes and trousers, people in the street would stare, but bit by bit I got used to it...not only is it the artistic talent that is difficult to achieve, but it is also how you present yourself and make yourself understood by the crowd. I have worked with Aymara and Quechua people who didn't speak Spanish and had to mime the whole act to make them laugh without speaking! You have to be prepared for everything, you have to learn to get a smile from everyone, ignoring the situation, especially a child'.

We meet Chirolín and Yuyito, a pair of clowns getting ready to perform at a birthday party. Like the other clowns we meet at the bar, the pair are members of the AMI Association. Ignoring the improbable number of mirrors hanging from the walls, Yuyito uses his small pocket-sized mirror to apply face-paint .

> It is sad when a friend dies. They don't even let us into the funeral when we arrive dressed as clowns, they say it is a serious occasion, but we are completely serious, paying our respects

Chirolín has four children but explains he has never been a clown at any of their birthdays. He always hires another clown because he understands that his friends also need to 'feed their families'. He pauses and laughs; 'there are always plenty of clowns, as the friend I hire will tell his friends and it will be more like a clown festival than a birthday party!' Yuyito is shy, quiet and playful -- whilst Chirolín is distracted, he steals a handful of his balloons and grins showing off his missing teeth. He continues applying fluorescent orange paint around his eyes.

For me, one of the most enchanting aspects of a clown lies in the transformation they go through. The Swiss clown Grock, also known as 'The king of clowns', once said that 'the genius of clowning is transforming the little, everyday annoyances, not only overcoming, but actually transforming them into something strong and terrific'.

Chirolin explains that it is in the nature of clowns to be actors—even when they are dealing with personal problems they must overcome them in order to entertain people: 'we can be dying on the inside but smiling on the outside'.

Once their faces are painted white, cheeks red, and noses on, Chirolín and Yuyito undergo the final step in their transformation, suddenly breaking into an incredibly high-pitched voice. As we finish the interview, it is hard to take these two squeaky-voiced strangers seriously. They get up in a hurry —with their oversized shoes and undersized stripey shirts— head to the door and depart with a '**chausito**'.

All the clowns agree that *El Acuario* is a special place. Tamborcito explains that most other bars in the area will not allow clowns to eat, drink and get changed. 'Usually we meet Fridays or Saturdays to have lunch or supper. There was this other bar called *Bajo del Puente*, we would always go to eat there, have our meetings, until one day they changed owners. There are people who don't like this art- so they chucked us out. Here, the door is always open. We all meet here, we get changed, go to work, come back and take off our makeup. The owners take care of us.'

When speaking to Don Chelo, the owner, he speaks of the prejudice and closed-mindedness of many people: 'but the clowns are calm, they come in laughing, singing and always change the mood of the place - they are friendly and affectionate'. Tibilín says that although many bar owners are discriminatory, the majority of people in the streets admire clowns. 'For example', he says, 'once a taxi driver didn't want to charge us for the ride and told us that one day a clown made him laugh so much that he forgot about his problems. It taught him the lesson that no matter what problem you have, you have to keep going'. Chirolín admits that some children are 'the small stone in [his] shoe' but it doesn't matter because they can all laugh about it over a glass of Coke in *El Acuario*.

Its hard to leave the bar, even after having spent the past two hours here. In the corner of one of the tables is a large plastic cup filled with bottle caps and used razors. We leave this hectic little world just to enter another one. As we walk up the steps onto the street, the fresh air awakens us from the surrealist dream we've just left behind. We emerge into a labyrinth of multicoloured street stalls. The pervasive smell of fried food hanging in the air signalling our entry back into the strange and manic reality of La Paz above ground.

SHAMROCK
Irish pub

20 DE OCTUBRE AV. ACROSS AVAROA SQUARE. LOOK FOR THE SHAMROCK

PERIFÉRICA BOULEVARD

UNDERWORLDS IN BOLIVIAN LITERATURE

AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY, WRITING IN BOLIVIA ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TACKLED SURFACE ISSUES LIKE CAMPESINO LIFE AND LATER THE GLOBALISATION OF THE NATION. 'PERIFÉRICA BOULEVARD' BY ADOLFO CÁRDENAS, RUNNER-UP IN THE PREMIO NACIONAL DE NOVELAS (2005), REPUBLISHED LAST YEAR WITH ACCOMPANYING ILLUSTRATIONS –SEE TIMELINE ACROSS PAGE–, HAS HELPED TO TURN THE TIDES OF BOLIVIAN LITERATURE. ALEX WALKER MEETS CÁRDENAS TO DISCUSS 'PERIFÉRICA' AND THE RISE OF THE UNDERWORLD IN MAINSTREAM WRITING.

TEXT: ALEX WALKER **ILLUSTRATION: SUSANA VILLEGAS**

Reading *Periférica Boulevard* reminds me of watching Mathieu Kassovitz's film *La Haîne*, a story that follows the frustrated existence of three young misfits, living on the margins of society. Throughout the film, these characters struggle against the police corruption and violence that defines the vicious circle of their existence. The parallel that stands out between Periférica and La Haîne, though, is their use of language. Where '*La Haîne*' enacts the tension between Paris and its underworld by combining traditional French with Argot –slang developed and used in parisian ghettos– *Periférica Boulevard*. adopts a similarly innovative dialogue: a fusion of Spanish, slang and indigenous language.

Periférica Boulevard is a murder mystery set on the outskirts of La Paz. Two policemen arrive at the scene of the crime to discover that a person has been killed at a gigantic music hall. The victim is none other than EL REY, a rocker and self-proclaimed king of these underworlds. All the evidence points to an infamous subterranean character known as EL LOBO, known for his graffiti rivalry with EL REY. The two policemen embark on a chase across the city in pursuit of the single eye witness of the crime. The persecution ends in a shocking revelation (spoiler alert): the policeman (lieutenant Villalobos) is none other than El Lobo himself. But beyond being a murder mystery, *Periférica Boulevard* is a map of the cultural La Paz and its margins, as well as an insight into the (sometimes) incomprehensible jargon of these polyphonic urban tribes.

When I suggest to Adolfo Cárdenas, in a café overlooking Plaza Avaroa, that, to understand Periférica, it must be read out loud, he shakes his head: 'If you open your ears, you will hear this language everywhere'. Cárdenas, who describes himself as a '*relator-investigador*' (researching narrator), is as creative as he is perceptive. In fact, he claims that none of *Periférica Boulevard* comes from his own personal experience; that 70% is fiction and 30% is formed from the world he discovered in his investigation. When talking about this world, Cárdenas explains his surprise at the contradictions he found: abandoned wild dogs becoming 'pets of a community', the 'semi-clandestine double existence' of several bars and clubs, and how 'different worlds' would spring up from nowhere when the sun went down.

When discussing the effects of his work, however, Cárdenas expresses frustration at the laborious, slow development of Bolivian literature: 'almost nobody in Bolivia tries to innovate, they just follow the trends of the time'. The theme of graffiti in *Periférica* can be viewed as allegorical of Cárdenas' disillusion with the restrictions of literature. Indeed, he describes graffiti as 'one of the freest and most anarchic forms of communication; limitless because it is clandestine and anonymous'. True, these clandestine voices offer a more accurate reflection of a society than history books or tourist brochures because they do not come with a self-serving agenda: history is, after all, written by the winners and promoted by such brochures. Cárdenas, instead, writes to bring these underworlds, marginalised by society and literature into mainstream focus: it is both a piece of fiction and of journalism. Marcos Loayza, film director of the bolivian classic *Cuestión de Fé*, believes that *Periférica Boulevard* is Bolivia's 'finest book' of the last 30 years, explaining that 'somehow, the things that are on the margins, excluded by society, better illustrate its fears, prejudices and anxieties than those at its centre'.

Loayza, though, believes that the arts are 'slowly regressing', attributing this to a poor 'awareness of our cultural heritage' and citing the examples of people stealing from churches or dismantling metal sculptures to sell as scrap. For a country with such a well-documented revolutionary history, it is paradoxical, then, that the arts are not evolving. Cárdenas has an explanation for this, too. He claims that 'political protest is too connected: literature becomes purely criticism'. Whilst this may be somewhat true, I cannot help but feel that, more often than not, literature does flourish in the face of adversity – take Isabel Allende's 'La casa de los espiritús', for example. Written when exiled to Venezuela following the assassination of her uncle, President Salvador Allende, at the hands of the Pinochet military coup of 1973; she uses first person narrative interjections by Esteban Trueba, the novel's antagonist, to expose the political corruption, machismo and neglect of the **campesinos** that pervaded Chile at the time. Successful literature, then, is able to engage with the problems within its society.

Described by shvoong.com as 'disjointed, babelic, difficult and illegible, essential and easily one of the ten best bolivian novels of all time', *Periférica Boulevard* triumphs –according to Cárdenas– in 'unveiling the quotidian language of the peripheries'. This, though, is blatant over-modesty. While its language does play a role in bringing the voices of the underworld into mainstream focus, there is more to Periférica Boulevard than that. Cárdenas, small of stature with and with a glinting smile, takes a final sip from his **cafecito** and stands up to leave, he glances back and gives a wave as he steps out onto the Plaza. The silent revolutionary is swept up into the faceless throng until the sun descends and the underworld awakens once more. ×

EMERGENCE OF THE UNDERWORLD

JAIME SAENZ (1921-86)

Someone Cárdenas cites as a significant influence, Saenz introduced the idea of the other world. He suggests that decadence – particularly alcoholism – allows us to transcend our metronomic, monotonous quotidian to a new, intriguing existence.

RENÉ BASCOPÉ (1951-84)

Bascopé's most popular work, 'La Tumba Infecunda' offers snapshots of La Paz's underworlds through a 'conventillo': a huge public house where society's outcasts would rent rooms – reminiscent of Madame Vauquer's boarding house in Balzac's 'Père Goriot'.

VICTOR HUGO VISCARRA (1958-2006)

Viscarra's literature reflects his own life on the margins of society. Struggling with alcoholism, drugs and crime, he eschewed literary conventions creating a manner of expression moulded to describe the underworld that enveloped him.

JUAN PABLO PIÑEIRO (1979-)

Arguably Piñeiro's most important work, 'Cuando Sara Chura Despierte' is set during the *Fiesta del Gran Poder* and depicts a city in chaos, dealing with the uncomfortable merging of indigenous and modern cultures.

CUMBIA CHICHA

Wilmer machaca explains the social significance of one of the most popular (yet marginalised) musical styles in the country

PHOTO: AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE

Cumbia is very popular in Latin America. Originating in Colombia, virtually every country in the region has incorporated its sounds. In Bolivia, cumbia is enjoyed across society and can be heard everywhere from high-class weddings and nightclubs.

The same cannot be said of *cumbia chicha*, a sub-genre in the world of Bolivian cumbia, perhaps best characterised by synthetic sounds, sorrowful lyrics, and correspondingly moany vocals.
Chicha is not only popular within impoverished peripheral neighbourhoods, but more specifically among first-generation rural immigrants, linking the genre with a particular social and racial demographic. *Chicha* is an underworld, if you will, with another musical underworld.

"Do you really like that?" people often ask when one hints at a penchant for *chicha* music. "What is that?" others will say, pretending to be unaware of the sub-genre's existence. This is the type of music one would associate with bus drivers or with run-down canteens in the underworld of the urban periphery. Most despectively, some might think of it as **cholo** music, or music for **indios**.
Rejected, disliked, satanized and excluded from society's higher echelons due to its rural origins, *cumbia chicha* has now become a rhythm for the masses of a -now national- transcendence.
As a musical phenomenon, *cumbia chicha* emerges in Bolivia as a product of a rural migratory process to the urban peripheries associated with the growth and development of the country. Once these new geographical spaces became occupied they became strongholds in which impoverished migrants thrived. These spaces served as a melting pot for rich and varied sociocultural expressions. From 1950 to 2012 the country's urban population nearly tripled, from 26.2% to 67.3%.

Most of the rural migrants settled in areas that became peripheral cities, such as El Alto, Montero, and Quillacollo. Due to the humble background of the migrants, these areas became underworlds of exclusion and social hardship.

RONISH
TRAIGAN CERVEZA

IFRIENDS BRING ME BEER
I WANT TO DRINK TO FORGET
FRIENDS BRING ME BEER I WANT TO KILL
THIS PAIN

Cumbia chicha is born in this social context and it became a platform for the stories of its creators; stories of solitude, suffering, triumph and small victories. This is the origin of the sub-genre's main exponents such as, *Maroyu*, *Climax* and *Ronich* from Cochabamba; *Iberia* from Oruro, *Destellos* from Potosí, *Yoga* from Tarija and *Temblor* from Santa Cruz.
It is now peruvian bands -such as Lágrimas, Coralí, Sagrado, Delirios and Yarita Lizeth- that enjoy the greatest commercial success.
It was in this genre that the pain and suffering turned into song. The voices of a provincial Bolivia so often negated or made invisible struggled not only to make their way into the commercial mainstream, but even in securing record deals. Several doors closed before them until *Discos Condor*, a nascent label, decided to take them in. Today it has become a mainstay of andean music and especially *chicha*. Groups such as Maroyu, Ronish and Iberia have gone as far as opening their own radio stations and musical production companies, all of which jointly take care of the difussion of their music as well as the organisation of live events. It is thus *chicha* managed to break free from the musical establishment.

For certain sections within Bolivian society it is hard not to identify with several of the themes developed through this music. Apart from an almost-obsessive fixation with beer, other recurring themes are heartbreak and passion. It is here the success of this genre resides. Watching these musicians perform and coordinate dance moves while playing the keytar might make one laugh, if sober. Yet after a few beers it is easy to find oneself dancing and weeping in tandem.

CHAPIS - AMBULANTE SOY

OHHH IT IS SO SAD TO LIVE
OOOHH IT IS SO SAD TO DREAM

I AM A PEDDLER I AM A PROLE
SELLING SHOES, SELLING FOOD, SELLING
T-SHIRTS
I BRING FOOD HOME

CHACALON:
SOY PROVINCIANO

I AM A BOY FROM THE PROVINCE, I WAKE UP
EARLY TO GO TO WORK
OHH I MUST WORK
I HAVE NO MOTHER
OR FATHER
OR DOG TO BARK AT ME
I ONLY HAVE HOPE

MAROYU -
VENENO PARA OLVIDAR

TO FORGET YOUR LOVE, GIRL
TO STOP LOVING YOU, MY LIFE
I WILL DRINK POISON TO FORGET
AND WHEN I DIE I DON'T WANT
YOUR EYES TO CRY FOR THIS LOVE
YOU NEVER KNEW HOW TO LOVE

I WILL DRINK POISON TO FORGET YOU

THE MYSTERY OF LAKE TITICACA AND THE TIWANAKU RUINS

SOLVING THE GREATEST ENIGMA OF THE ANDES

TEXT: LAURA VAN ANTWERP
ILLUSTRATION: EL GRAN PODER

Unlocking the mysteries of the world's most ancient archeological sites is a conundrum that has puzzled even the most knowledgeable scientists to date. Despite the advancement of information and technology, much remains to be understood about the nature and functioning of these locations. How do we go about explaining the unexplainable? How do we make sense of that which defies reason and logic?

I give to you Lake Titicaca, the world's highest navigable lake, the largest alpine lake on the planet, and a body of water considered sacred to the indigenous people of the Andes. The area around the lake is home to one the most unique archeological spaces on the planet—the ancient ruins of Tiwanaku .

Tiwanaku is considered one of the oldest and most advanced civilizations to have existed on the planet. The structures of its ancient city are so monumental that they continue to baffle scholars and researchers alike, despite the growing power of modern technology in helping to reveal their secrets.

The architecture of Tiwanaku, for instance, features stones that can weigh up to 100 tons each. How they were transported to their current location from quarries located 50 miles away before the introduction of domesticated horses is a mystery. In addition, these massive stones are perfectly shaped and stacked on each other like pieces in an elaborate puzzle. But the lack of chisel marks on their surface leaves us only to wonder how they may have been molded.

Adding to such mysteries at Lake Titicaca, is the recent discovery of what is believed to be 1,500-year-old ruins deep below the lake's surface. These underwater ruins feature a temple, a terrace for crops, a long road, and an 800-metre-long wall. For years, rumors circulated the region about the existence of an underwater city called Wanaku, but it wasn't until a decade ago that a scientific group called Akrakor Geographical Exploring discovered these structures.
Back on the mainland, other questions remain. What do we make, for example, of the unlikely site the people of Tiwanaku chose for their bustling city? Why did they choose to build it in an area of extreme isolation and altitude, where the atmospheric pressure and oxygen levels are extremely low compared to those at sea level? Were they crazy, misguided, or simply onto something?

> Why did they choose to build it in an area of extreme isolation and altitude, where the atmospheric pressure and oxygen levels are extremely low compared to those at sea level?

Could it be that these ancient civilizations were more technologically advanced than we are today?

According to Oliver Andes, an ancient energy theorist with the AT (Ancient Tomorrow) Exploration Team , there is a strong possibility that this is the case. "Our theory is that the ancient (pre-Incan) people built Tiwanaku and Puma Punku knowing the secrets of frequency and energy (water and sound) and that they built in alignment with the earth's energy grid."

According to Andes, scientists and archeologists have found evidence of electricity use at ancient sites around the world, from Egypt to South America. His team has taken a keen interest in Lake Titicaca because it lies on the most powerful electromagnetic vortex in the world and on what is known as the Second Chakra of the planet. This, in combination with its unique geography and the abundance of myth and legend that surrounds the lake, has made the site of significant importance to them.

If the site's strong levels of energy were a decisive factor for building Tiwanaku near Lake Titicaca, then what about lake itself? Surely having a large body of water nearby was significant to this ancient civilization. There is no doubt Lake Titicaca was of great importance to the Tiwanaku, but exactly what relationship they maintained remains a question. Despite the ruins being almost 4,000 metres above sea level, there is evidence that suggests the city was once part of a bustling seaport capable of accommodating hundreds of vessels. Some scientists believe the ruins may have once rested at sea level, connected to the ocean until a cataclysmic event caused the ruins to shift upward and created Lake Titicaca.

But if this is the case, what do we make of the underwater ruins? While no conclusive answers have been given as to who built the monuments before they were submerged, Italian scientist Lorenzo Epis has attributed them to the Tiwanaku civilization. Researchers have also speculated that the stone causeway leading out of the lake may have at one point led to the ocean.

So what do the locals of Lake Titicaca think of all this? After a visit to Copacabana, which is located on the southeast shore of the Lake, I found that many turn to myth and superstition to fill the void beyond the limits of logic and human reason.

"The mysteries of the ruins are impossible to explain!" Nelson, a local guide, told me with a glint in his eye as we strolled through the Isla del Sol, an island not far from the shores of Copacabana. He then pointed towards a space of water not far from the island and said, "Local fishermen refuse to travel near this area, for example. There are stories of people who have seen flying women and other strange sightings."

Nelson informs me that the Incas regarded the lake as the birthplace of their civilization; that, according to them, the Children of the Sun emerged from these mythic waters. Indeed, for every theory regarding the unique findings around the lake there is a legend to match, which makes sense for a place that is as much a mystery as it is sacred.

People like Oscar Andes are continuously conducting research to solve the mysteries of the lake and its surroundings. Every lead, every discovery, brings them closer to a better understanding of these ancient civilizations.

Andes hopes that by studying the electromagnetic density of the region he will have a better sense of how the Tiwanaku civilization may have used this energy to construct its architecture. Other scientists look underwater and keep on searching for answers in the submerged city. While the research advances, however, we'll have to make do with the legends and myths that have survived the passage of time like the ruins that inspired them. ×

BOLIVIA'S BARRAS BRAVAS

TEXT: ALEX WALKER
PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MELEAN ANZOLEAGA

Violence constitutes an inherent and quotidian part of club football worldwide. In South America, ***barras bravas*** – supporters' groups cut from the same cloth as European ***Ultras*** – are the culprits held responsible for this rise in bellicose hooliganism. Alex Walker speaks to former and current members of Club Bolívar's ***La Vieja Escuela*** to discover what the future holds for Bolivia's ***barras bravas***.

You come to a stop after a thirty hour bus ride. Roadblocks set up by opposition fans outside the city meant that your journey was delayed by several hours. The bus is sweltering, a heady fug of paceño sweat clogging up your olfactory senses. It is 1pm: match day. You scrawl provocative messages in black marker pen on white banners. You spend an hour tearing up last weeks' copies of **El Diario** for that split-second when the team emerges to a shower of printed letters. Then, you drink. The match begins, you can barely hear your voice through the relentless barrage of racism coming from across the stadium.

The opposition score. The place erupts. You try to sneak away ten minutes from time but when you step out onto the side street, your escape route is blocked. 15 opposition fans spread ominously across the road. There are no police in sight. Their leader, his gold tooth momentarily blinding you as it catches the disappearing sunlight, pulls up his sleeve, revealing the single word '**Blooming**' tattooed across his bulging bicep. He rips off your shirt, sets it alight with his zippo, throws it to your feet, spits on its navy badge, turns away, zones in on his next victim.

It hasn't always been like this. As one Bolívar fan recalls, 'in the '80s and early '90s everything was friendly' and opposing *barras* would amiably share the general stand; quite a contrast to the mandatory separation into the *Curva Norte* and the *Curva Sur* at **Estadio Hernando Siles** today. Bolívar's barra, *La Vieja Escuela*, formerly *Furia Celeste*, was formed in 1995 by a group of youths, primarily university students, following in Argentina's footsteps 40 years earlier. Ominously, Argentinian football had become increasingly bloody with the emergence of such barras; a situation that culminated in 2002 with a season that claimed the lives of five supporters and left numerous others with bullet or stab wounds.

Bolivia has clearly not quite reached these levels of aggression. For instance, since the inception of the *Furia Celeste*, almost 20 years ago, there has been just one reported death as a result of its action —a 'The Strongest' fan tragically beaten to death in '98.
I stumbled across a cartoon that aptly captures the nature of violence in Bolivian football today: it depicts two Argentinian fans scuffling, two English fans exchanging blows and a Bolivian fan sitting behind a computer battling his opponents through the medium of Facebook. The real underworld of Bolivia's *barras bravas*, then, can be found in the attitudes —though not as much in the actions— of their members: verbal aggression and taunting are commonplace but violent incidents are relatively rare. That is not to say that physical aggression between *barras bravas* is a dying phenomenon—quite the opposite.

In Santa Cruz, according to Javier, a former member of *La Vieja Escuela*, 'win or lose, the fans clash'. He explains that while 'all violence in La Paz is spontaneous', elsewhere it has become increasingly organised. Football, crucially, has also become 'a platform for a political agenda'. In fact, in **Estadio Ramón Tahuichi Aguilera**, Santa Cruz, banners demanding 'autonomía' have become a staple of match day protests.

Esmeralda, aka Cholita Fox, an icon of *La Vieja Escuela* –the only cholita to belong to a Bolivian barra of this nature– explains that *barras* are a reflection of their city: 'your club identity and your regional identity are linked'. She adds that today there are more female than members in *La Vieja Escuela*. Santa Cruz, for example, has a notably regionalist identity and the barra, consequently, is notorious for its racist chanting.

While the violence that accompanies the rise of such organisations is certainly a cause for concern, there may well be a more pressing one. In the 1950s, the *barras* of Argentina started out, much like those of Bolivia, as groups of dedicated fans who received free shirts and tickets by officials who needed votes by season-ticket holders so as to get elected onto club boards. Once these fans had their foot in the door, however, they began to turn the screw and increase their demands, resorting to extreme –often violent– measures to tighten their grip on the club's hierarchy. The *barras* of Argentina, allegedly, take hundreds of thousands per annum though controlling ticket sales, club merchandise and refreshments within the stadiums, much like a mafia organisation would. More alarmingly, though, is the claim from Gustavo Grabia –an Argentine journalist and corruption investigator– that larger *barras* also receive up to 30% of outgoing transfer fees and 20% of certain players' payslips.

This is an ominous warning sign for Bolivia where the culture of *barras bravas* is still in its initial stages. Although it can clearly learn from Argentina's mistakes, Bolivian football may well have already condemned itself a silent slave to its burgeoning *barras bravas*.

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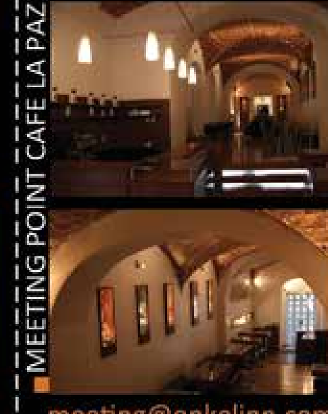

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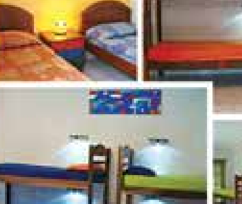

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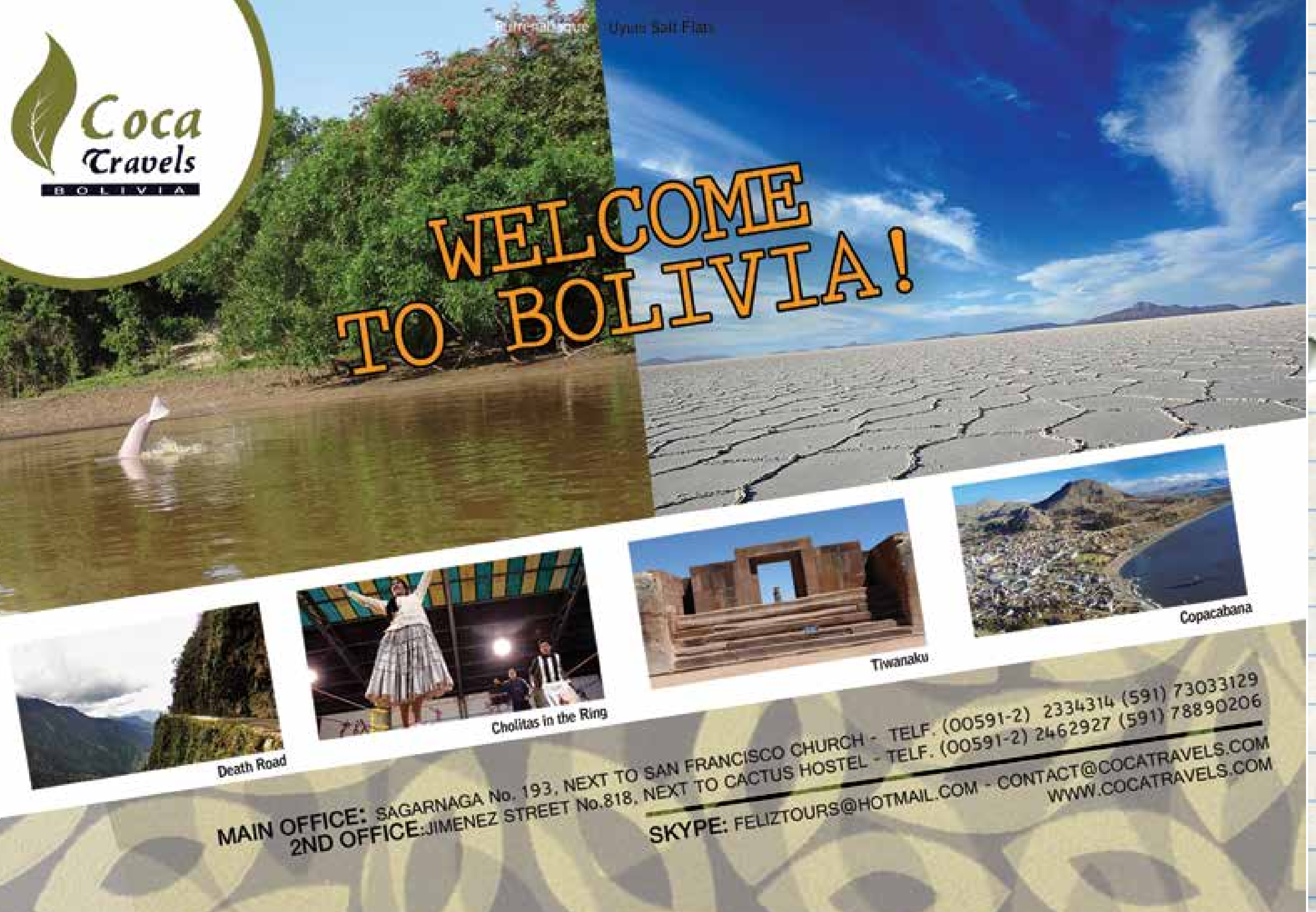
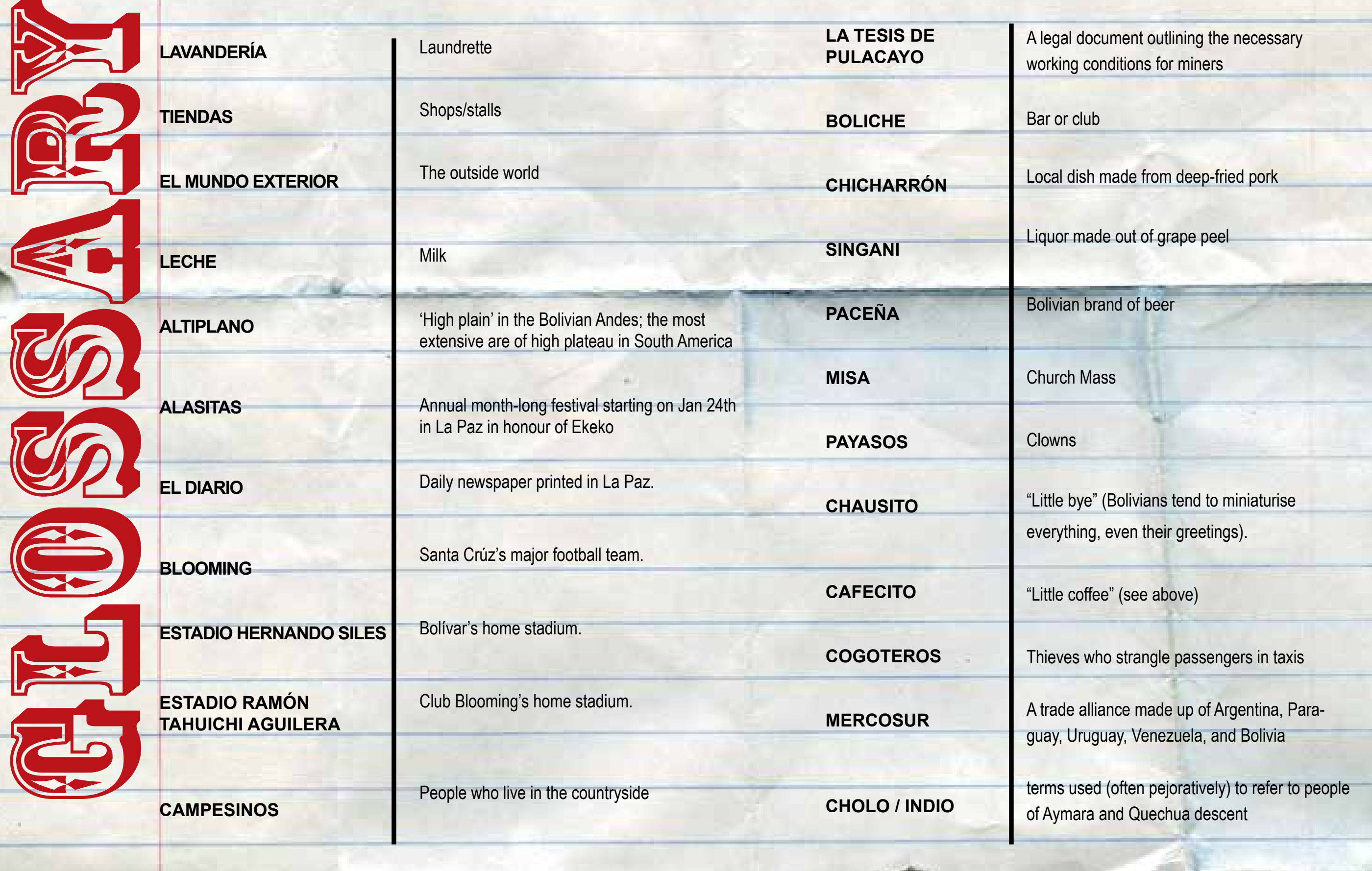
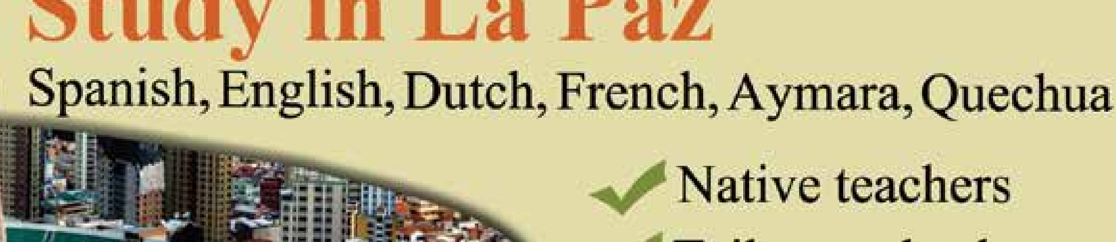




GLOSARY

LAVANDERÍA	Laundrette
TIENDAS	Shops/stalls
EL MUNDO EXTERIOR	The outside world
LECHE	Milk
ALTIPLANO	'High plain' in the Bolivian Andes; the most extensive are of high plateau in South America
ALASITAS	Annual month-long festival starting on Jan 24th in La Paz in honour of Ekeko
EL DIARIO	Daily newspaper printed in La Paz.
BLOOMING	Santa Crúz's major football team.
ESTADIO HERNANDO SILES	Bolivar's home stadium.
ESTADIO RAMÓN TAHUICHI AGUILERA	Club Blooming's home stadium.
CAMPESINOS	People who live in the countryside
LA TESIS DE PULACAYO	A legal document outlining the necessary working conditions for miners
BOLICHE	Bar or club
CHICHARRÓN	Local dish made from deep-fried pork
SINGANI	Liquor made out of grape peel
PACEÑA	Bolivian brand of beer
MISA	Church Mass
PAYASOS	Clowns
CHAUSITO	"Little bye" (Bolivians tend to miniaturise everything, even their greetings).
CAFECITO	"Little coffee" (see above)
COGOTEROS	Thieves who strangle passengers in taxis
MERCOSUR	A trade alliance made up of Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Bolivia
CHOLO / INDIO	terms used (often pejoratively) to refer to people of Aymara and Quechua descent



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