BolivianExpress

Gratis

Magazine

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EDITORIAL

The fantastical and the real, Andean tales and Grimm's fairytales, the vastness of the world and the pluck and spirit of the children we spoke with for this issue were on the BX team's minds as we brainstormed cover options this month. Yesica, our brave and adventurous cover model, took to the idea with gusto, turning a rainy forest glade (just off the highway between La Paz and El Alto) into an otherwordly stage, and showing us a new, sassy take on Red Riding Hood.

In this issue we focus on the experiences of childhood by talking with young people about their daily lives, aspirations, and free time. From Yesica, who wants to be a dentist, to Rina, who is torn between plans to become a clown or go to university, our writers found that childhood dreams and amusements haven't changed much since their own primary school days.

We also take a look at President Evo Morales' tough upbringing on Western Bolivia's high plains, where he helped his family plant potatoes and tended sheep and llamas, and how leadership on the football field may have foreshadowed the future president's ability to unite and motivate people.

Of course the idea of childhood is inextricably tied up with family, and to a great extent all our childhoods are formed by the people who raise us, and what they think is right or wrong, good for us or bad for us. In this issue we feature the beautifully told story of a young man who was abandoned as a baby on the street, adopted from a Bolivian orphanage, and raised by a loving Belgian family. Today he has returned to Bolivia and is searching, with only meager records and recollections to guide his way, for his birth mother.

We also hear from a few mothers on their experience raising children in La Paz and El Alto. Nadia, an Australian and new mom living on the outskirts of El Alto with her husband and his family, talks us through the delicate cultural negotiations of raising a child far away from where, and how, she herself was brought up. We also explore the difficulty of obtaining affordable daycare (something that will resonate with many mothers far beyond Bolivia), and the great lengths that many parents go to when it comes time to enroll their children in school.

Here in the Southern Hemisphere the new school year has just begun, and as the streets once again fill with packs of uniformed young people we salute their energy and imagination—and perhaps envy them those gifts just a little bit.×

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

By Sara Shahriari

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INTRODUCING:

YESICA

TEXT AND PHOTOS: LAURA WOTTON

Yesica is eight years old, wears a bright pink top and a contagious smile. Sitting together in the early morning sunlight we talk boyfriends, animals and what she wants to be when she grows up.

What's your favourite food?
I love rice pudding, but that's only for breakfast. For dinner my favourite thing is Plato Paceño. I'm also a big fan of fruit and vegetables, carrots, onions, papaya, mango, strawberries, you name it. I don't like api con pastel, though.

Talk me through your average school day.
Well, school hasn't started yet so I'm allowed to get up later and relax. During term time, I have to get up really early. I put on my uniform, which is a waistcoat and my heeled trainers and then make my bed as usual. When we are all ready, we head to school. I have around five classes before break and five afterwards, ten in total!

What's your favourite subject at school?
I love maths but if I had to choose another, it would have to be languages.

What do you want to be when you grow up?
I want to be a dentist when I'm older because I'd like to look after people's teeth.

If you could make one wish, what would it be?
To have a doll of my own.

Do you have brothers or sisters?
Yes, I have a little sister who I get on with quite well.

Where is your favourite place in La Paz?
Parque Kusillo is my favourite because it's really pretty and there are lots of games and activities there. I also really like the green Teleferico line because it's really very long! I like La Paz but I wish I'd been born in the United States. I haven't actually been there, but I think it would be really nice.

What do you like doing with your friends?
I don't have any friends, only classmates who I learn with. I do have three boyfriends (she says, counting methodically on her fingers), but, (she whispers) I'm going to keep this a big secret.

If you could be one animal, which one would you be and why?
A monkey, I think, because they are really nice.

Who is the funniest person you know?
Virginia, a friend of my mother's.

The Upbringing of Evo

The Travails of Young Morales

TEXT: ALI MACLEOD
ILLUSTRATION: OSCAR ZALLES

On 21 January, Evo Morales was inaugurated as president of Bolivia for the third time at the ancient site of Tiwanaku, near Lake Titicaca, in a ceremony that mirrored Incan tradition. Morales emerged from amongst the pre-Columbian ruins decorated in gold and white cloth. He exhibited a medal on his chest, silver and copper on his traditional **unku**, a robe made of specially woven vicuña wool. The metals, drawing upon cosmic energy, are said to encourage one to think first before talking. Upon Morales's head sat the traditional **ch'uku**, a hat with four corners to represent the four cardinal points. It was a significant moment in history, as the ceremony declared Morales the spiritual and political figurehead of all the indigenous peoples of Bolivia. Such a setting was a far cry away from the isolated village of Isallawi, in the Orinoca district, where the Bolivian president was born.

Juan Evo Morales Ayma was born in 1959 into a traditional adobe house constructed of sand, clay and water. Upon the high plains of rural Bolivia, in a poor and bleak area, Morales's settlement was underprivileged. Few had access to sanitary provisions such as clean toilets and showering facilities, and electricity was nonexistent. As part of a farming family, the young Morales often assisted with planting and harvesting crops—mostly potatoes—and watching over his family's llamas and sheep. Jimmy Iturri, editor of the Morales biography Mi vida de Orinoca al Palacio Quemado, says that 'Living in the country affected [Morales] in many ways. There is a different world view, different teachings. The past is ahead and the future is behind.'

An agricultural upbringing meant that throughout his childhood Morales would often make a journey by foot to the Arani province, in Cochabamba, along with his father and his llamas, travelling two weeks in order to exchange salt and potatoes for maize and cocoa. Later, Morales spent six months in northern Argentina, sacrificing an education for two years of work in the sugar cane fields.

Morales's childhood, like those of many people who inhabit Bolivia's arid landscapes, was often arduous. Yet amongst his hard work a passion that Morales still pursues to this day was born: football. A homemade ball was never too far from his feet. At the age of fifteen, Morales organised a football team within the community and made himself captain. It was his first experience in leadership. Then after two years he was nominated as the training coach for the entire region. 'Football was very important to him. It became a fundamental piece of his life. He started being a leader as a football player', Iturri says.

Morales emerged as a natural leader, but as a teenager he struggled academically. As the future president entered his adolescence, he was expected to work towards academic achievement. Morales moved to Oruro in order to attend high school. A series of manual labour jobs paid for his classes and a place to live; however, although he graduated in 1977, he did poorly academically. Despite this setback, Morales's ambitious nature later saw him triumph by assuming the mantle of general secretary of the **cocalero** trade union, a group that campaigned against the imperialist oppression of the United States and stressed the significance of coca as a symbol of cultural identity. All of these experiences helped ready Morales for the position of influence he holds today, regularly addressing thousands of people throughout the country.

the ceremony declared Morales the spiritual and political figurehead of all the indigenous peoples of Bolivia.

'Evo is unique but, at the same time, he summarises who the people of Bolivia are, with all their virtues and all their defects', Iturri says. 'Evo is, in a sense, the formation of the Bolivian people, but without the Bolivian people Evo would not be who he is.'

LIFE LESSONS FOR THE BOYS OF BOLIVIA

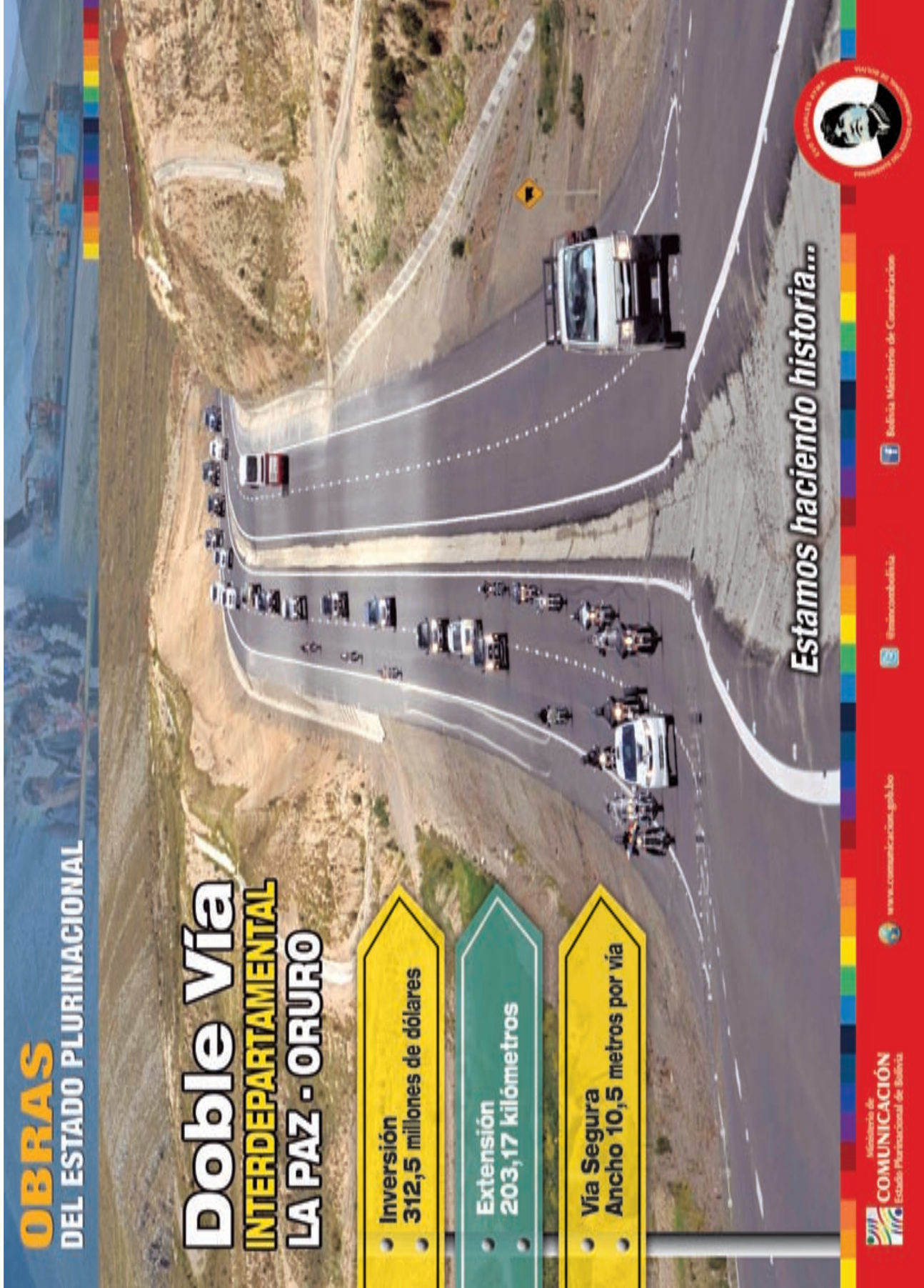
RETHINKING HOW TO BE A MAN

TEXT: LAURA WOTTON
PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MELEAN A.

An hour or so southwest of La Paz lies the town of Viacha, bustling but comfortably so, its maze of brown-faced buildings baking in the midday heat. Corner shops spill onto the pavement; a solitary cow hesitates, then hobbles across the road; a lorry driver abandons his vehicle in search of a cold soda. Yet underlying this flurry of Friday activity, greater, more pressing changes are taking place, specifically across masculine ideologies.

As violence against women continues to be a priority problem across Bolivia, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has seen its two-year campaign against gender discrimination take off, governed by its guiding principle that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. A catalogue of statistics underlines the necessity for a rigorous revaluation of these **derechos humanos** across Bolivia: Seven out of ten women have suffered a type of violence; out of every ten people physically assaulted, nine are women; and twelve cases of sexual violence are recorded every day, according to information distributed by the UNFPA. Whilst casting this issue as a comparative game of numbers, these statistics go a long way toward assessing the severity of Bolivia's crisis amongst other South American countries and the necessity for radical change.

Angarita Noguera is director of the Fondo de Población in Bolivia. Running a workshop series aimed at boys, Noguera and her team have encouraged a widespread understanding of violence against women and of the roles we can all play in its prevention. The Programme has targeted twelve municipalities, each with varying degrees of success. 'It is a long process that has been different across all municipalities, but we have seen advances in all of them', says Noguera. Working with central municipal governments is key to this initiative, she explains: 'Workshops have been tailored to specific communities, and the UNFPA have worked hard to institutionalise the agenda in each as to make a wider impact'. And whilst the 'adults' financially run the show, the boys involved play the actors. 'It is the young people themselves who are in charge', says Noguera. 'They are in the position to re-evaluate ideas of gender and inspire local governments to make financial compro-



mises to maintain the scheme'. Word of mouth, in it loosest sense, will secure a future for this programme, with or without UNFPA support.

Recent acknowledgement of the scope of this problem on the part of the government and international organizations is clear in the municipality of Viacha. Shelters now support victims of violence, and comprehensive legal services have expanded to offer survivor counselling and psychological services here, as well as in many remote municipalities. But the UNFPA's wider approach is to prevent violence before its onset. avigating through Viacha's centre, I reach the municipal office of government official Shirley Davalos, who speaks of the success of her six-month workshop series in Viacha and the educational methods used; 'It is interactive, but mainly it has a youth-to-youth transmission policy'. Once schoolboys themselves, twenty-five young men now make up the Youth and Adolescence Municipal Council in Viacha, a committee that runs workshops focused on exchanging ideas and rethinking identity and, in doing so, creating a dynamic learning experience for the 3,000 young attendees.

Davalos insists that whilst the scheme's focus is the prevention of violence, the programme approaches the issue through the lense of universal human rights. 'We do not believe in focusing on violence directly; rather, it is better from the other side, in the rescue and reevaluation of our rights'. In striving towards prevention rather than enforcement, rights over rule, Davalos and her extensive team work to a much wider audience willing to understand their own rights as men and those of the women around them. As Davalos herself believes, 'When you know your rights, you can prevent violence'.

Whilst success in this instance is hard to gage, Davalos has confidence in the scheme's transformative effects on the local community. Schools, especially those in rural Viacha, have seen both a greater enrollment of young girls and considerably fewer dropouts, and male attendance at the workshops has been impressive. There is a buoyancy amongst the young here, Davalos explains—the girls take pride in their education and the boys facilitate this new confidence. Noguera too has been impressed by the workshops' uptake in Viacha. 'You talk to those participating in the programme and they tell you about changes in behaviour', Noguera says, 'the importance of having an informed idea about violence against women'. If, as The mayor of Camargo, Marco Antonio Barco, suggests that municipalities must 'invest to protect'. In this case the boys of Bolivia, their ambitions and social understanding, are seen as a key part of preventing violence against women.

Yet whilst attendance of the boy's Programme has been strong, gaining funds for a similar series for girls has put a halt on proceedings. 'Securing new initiatives for girls is certainly a priority, but we don't as yet know what the plan is going to be' says Noguera. Waning financial support from the Fondo de Población alongside a tight municipal budget have rattled plans for a new anti-violence scheme for girls that was to have been launched this year. Davalos, however, is undeterred. A new strategy will train 600 parents of former participants to lead workshops themselves and subsequently keep this valuable programme alive, even on a limited budget. 'It's a much more sustainable method,' Davalos explains, describing ambitious plans to reach beyond schools to universities and youth groups. Sustainability of the scheme throughout these municipalities is precisely what the UNFPA hope to achieve.'By 2016', says Noguera, 'the local governments will have been able to implement these workshops on a permanent basis, supported by participants, parents, schools and communities alike'.

RECONSTRUCTING MY PAST

A quest to find my Bolivian birth mother

TEXT: CHRISTOF BEX
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS

Every day I spend wandering through the streets of La Paz, I see scenes that are foreign to the world I grew up in. **Cholitas** pass by, bearing children on their back. Busses come to a full stop in mid-street to rescue straggling passengers. Some children work to ensure their family's income. Regardless of age, everyone seems to be working in this Andean city: mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, and somehow I blend into these scenes. People think I am one of them. They speak to me in their language and look confused when I can't fully understand them. I've been here before, but I was too young to remember.

On October 1992, two police officers, who (I think) were on a night round, found me on the corner of a certain street in this city that remains unknown to me. They took me to the hospital because I had just been born and still had my umbilical cord attached to my belly. I was a Bolivian newborn facing a Bolivian world signed by economic, social, and ethnic inequalities. At the time, I couldn't have known where my life was headed, but I bet no one would have guessed that it would take place in Europe.

I feel powerless. So many decisions have been made over my head. Now, as a young adult, I am able to take action.

I am now back in La Paz -- twenty two years later -- with the goal of finding my birth mother. The only

bond I ever had with her were the nine months I spent quietly in her womb. Nine months that associate me with a person whose name I don't know, whose face I am unable to recognize, and whose love I will probably never experience. I've often thought she made a brave decision by sacrificing what could have been our life together in exchange for my future.

I spent my childhood in Diepenbeek, Belgium, in a typical Flemish house three streets away from the city centre, where a loving Belgian family raised me. I remember cycling with my sister, playing outside in the garden, spending a lot of time on the swing and slide, and visiting mazes on family day trips. While I was growing up, my parents gave me the chance to dream and pursue my ambitions. I went to university and this month I obtained my Master's degree in Sociology, which will allow me to apply for future doctoral studies. Everything seems to be moving in the right direction. But the direction I have chosen now leads me to a missing piece in my past, which is what I'm after here in Bolivia.

La Paz is my starting point. I'm sure my birth mother has been to some of the places I've visited in this city. She has probably walked past the San Francisco Church, for example, on countless occasions. So many questions come to mind when I observe this city. Whose child could I have been? Do I have relatives? What about siblings? If so, who might they be? The guy shouting in the minibus, could he be my brother? The girl dancing for loose change on the street, might she be my niece or maybe my sister? The guy casually selling salteñas on the corner, could he be my father? I don't have a clue. I simply don't know if my birth mother is still in the city. Maybe she moved away, or even passed away. This city is all I have. My only clue to begin completing the puzzle.

As a detective, my instinct was to begin my quest at my former orphanage, Hogar Carlos de Villegas. I spent the first 6 months of my life inside that building. The day I visited, I was hoping to gather bits of information about my background, maybe even decipher which street I was found on as a baby. I asked the social worker if I could see my records and, minutes later, her colleague entered the room with a red book and placed it on the table.

Once it was open, I became excited to see what had been written about me. Some of the children in the book had two pages of text that supposedly told their story. I had not even one. I took my camera out of my bag and asked if I could take a picture of my page in the book. But the social worker forbid me to do so, citing institutional privacy reasons. I could not understand. Perhaps for her, the piece of paper was a mere administrative detail, but for me it is a piece of my identity.

I've met several people who have been adopted and I know I am not alone in trying to reconstruct my personal past. I also know I am not the only one who has returned to their place of birth looking for answers and been disappointed. Sometimes the details about the past are just not there, about who I am, or should I say, who I 'was'. The orphanage staff baptised me as Cristóbal Díaz, but Cristóbal is no more. He died in Bolivia when I was adopted and Christof Bex was born. I feel powerless. So many decisions have been made over my head. Now, as a young adult, I am able to take action.

Let me be clear, I'm not entirely sure I will succeed in finding my birth mother, but my search is only beginning. I have yet to request permission to view my records at the police station. I have yet to visit the hospital. There are so many ways I could go about this. Every adoption case is so different, but, I've learned, there are certain similarities in what motivates mothers to relinquish a child.

According to Lizeth Villanueva, the social worker from my former orphanage, a relinquished child represents some of the larger problems in society. Rosmery Cordón, the principal of another orphanage, Hogar de Niñas Obrajes, told me that children usually end up in an orphanage due to a family's lack of economic resources, which tends to go hand in hand with more serious issues such as alcoholism, neglect, abuse and so on. All of this might seem obvious, but it was comforting to confirm what I've read in the literature.

I suspect that gathering information about other birth mothers might lead me closer to my own. Who knows? It's worth a shot. Over the next several months, I will do whatever is within my reach to exhaust every possibility. If I ever find her, if that day ever comes, then I can thank her with all my heart for the life she once gave me.

Dearest Bolivian mom and dad, I would like to know you. Hopefully we can meet soon. In the meantime, though, I will do everything I can to get closer to you. ×

'Some parents have slept here since the first of January', says Fidelia, who is queueing toward the end of a long line to enroll her youngest child, who is four and a half years old.

The schoolyard is crowded and hums like a beehive. Hundreds of voices rise over one another, making it impossible to single one out of the chaos. This is the kind of bedlam we are used to at a school, but today is different. It's not children who are filling up the yard, stairs, hallways and rooms, but parents. Once a year on enrollment day, it's their turn to populate this space—waiting in endless lines, and sometimes even camping out overnight—to assure their child a spot in the best school, or the school closest to their home.

'The school is close by, the teaching is good, the teachers are gentle and engage themselves with our children', Fidelia says.

Each school has its own system to enroll students, either one grade at a time or alphabetically by last name to limit chaos just the tiniest bit. Either way, tremendous lines are to be expected. All parents have one day, depending on the grade or name, when they can secure a place for their child. It is not hard to see why some may dread this day. Waiting hours in a crushed mass, packed like sardines on a staircase, not knowing how much longer it might take is hardly anybody's perfect way to spend a day. Add warm temperatures to that unpleasant mix, with a little food and drink stand in some corner as the only defence against boredom and discomfort, and it's a recipe for an awful experience. But it is necessary, and certainly a sacrifice parents are willing to make for their children's future—even if it means waiting after sundown. Knowing that you're securing a good future for your child is perhaps the only motivation needed to get through those days.

'The truth is, I don't mind that much', says María as she waits to register her child for preschool. 'Because if it's for my child, then I have to make the sacrifice. I've told myself that the education of my children is more important than having to wait in a line, rain or shine.'

On the other side of town, far away from the chaotic center of Sopocachi, at a private school rather than one of the many public schools, however, there is no chaos and there are no endless queues to be seen anywhere between the luxurious houses. Here the parents don't have to get up before dawn just to be the first in line, let alone sleep in front of the school for many nights. Inside we find the same calmness. The clean hallways and rooms filled with trophies and pictures of graduated classes have only a few people in them. And the buzz of activity is limited to a couple of workers and parents having a chat with their coffee, talking about the approaching new school year. Those who can afford to send children to private school spend but a few hours, maybe even less, to register. Enter the building, choose from one of the empty seats, fill out the form, hand it over—and that's pretty much it. Maybe stick around for a relaxing little chat with some of the other parents with a drink if you have some time left. It's the luxury money can buy.

The new school year started on February 2nd and parents can now enjoy a well-deserved rest, knowing that it will be at least another year before the melee starts again. ×

PUTTING WOMEN FIRST:

THE MUJERES CREANDO DAYCARE OF DREAMS

TEXT: LAURA WOTTON
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS

It is 11AM on a Monday morning and twelve young children wielding plastic cars and picture books totter about in the brightly coloured basement of the Virgen de Los Deseos. An array of animal cushions line the back wall and an overflowing ballpit captivates the young audience. It is the new year inscription day at the daycare and several mothers wait in the passage to collect their children from the first of the morning sessions.

'I chose this daycare especially because it is run by professional psychologists who help the children develop', explains a waiting mother, who enrolled her daughter. 'They make them feel comfortable so the children don't want to escape and there are always educational projects and activities going on to keep them interested.' The proof lies behind the swinging doors. Bearing an enormous grin and still clutching a bright blue ball, her daughter bursts through into the passageway to greet her mother.

Yet walking down Avenue 20 de Octubre, it's difficult to imagine the gaudy red exterior of Virgen de Los Deseos as a daycare centre. Blackened window panes, a blood red pair of painted lips and a twisted mural of a crouching woman, give an air of seductive mystery to the place, until you cross its threshold into the quaint tea room within.

Both the tea room and the daycare are run by Mujeres Creando, an anarcha-feminist group that seeks to expose entrenched gender prejudices in Bolivia. They do this mainly through protests, street art and broadcast media, and their message is clear: women are entitled to equal opportunity, opinion and sexuality. Whilst exercising these basic rights can be difficult in a patriarchal society, the organisation has put forth a set of initiatives that are proving to be revolutionary.

> 'A safe place, a warm place, a place of education'

The pink house, though small, is vital to this operation. To some, it is a tearoom serving hot api and home-baked pastel; to others, a bed for the night when horrors at home become too much to bear. But the basement has even more to offer. A sign outside announces the return of the pink house's third initiative, Mi Mama Trabaja, a feminist daycare service that promises mothers the chance to 'reignite their dreams and desires in the everyday struggle for happiness'.

A key member of Mujeres Creando, Rosario Adrian has been running the daycare since 2007. Her aim was to swiftly launch a scheme designed to salvage the careers and ambitions of women otherwise occupied in a round the clock daycare of their own. According to Rosario, the generalized vision of women as experts only in childcare and comercio informal is only a patriarchal imagining of 'an overwhelmingly empty motherhood'. Since Rosario recognises that the generic 'family nucleus' is often just the mother, she designed a program that 'allows women not just to work, but to grow, to gain some autonomy, to do things including helping other women' she explains.

The daycare is a self-sufficient scheme, independent of government funding and with independent women at its core. Painted ceiling to floor in colourful murals, it is less a parking lot for children than a fully-equipped activity centre that promises educational, emotional and physical support for all those who enroll. 'It is a place where children can go to find respect and affection' says Rosario, 'sometimes they fight amongst themselves but they have to learn how to deal with these situations'.

Part of what makes Mi Mama Trabaja special is that the daycare operates as 'Un servicio social', where the mothers are seen as 'mujeres solidarias', who bring tea and cake to workshops, provide emotional support for each other and, at times, assist one another financially when ends don't meet. Alongside the center's daily activities, the staff encourages responsible parenthood by setting up workshops for mothers and fathers involved.

As the name of the organization suggests, Mujeres Creando injects creativity into all of its initiatives, including the daycare. The educational materials they use are clever and original. Here, racial, social and sexual prejudices are brought up daily only to be broken down, as children are educated about the realities of the adult world and other topics usually delayed until later in the school curriculum. Turning the pages of one the books used at the center, Barbara Cole's 'Mamá puso un huevo', I was struck by its frank illustration of sex, the playful illustrations of 'Mamá' and 'Papá' unphased by this social taboo. 'Sex and sexual relationships are important to an early understanding of our own bodies', says Rosario, 'protecting children from what is natural is only a detriment to their teenage years.'

The cost of the service is marginally higher than that of state-sponsored daycares, but cheaper than private alternatives. The only difference, Rosario says, is that what they have to offer is priceless. Working morning, day and night, each staff member is professionally trained, well-equipped with pedagogical tools, and many are accredited psychologists. Their aim is to instill in children a basic understanding of social issues "by dismissing violence, and deconstructing the cultural prejudices that exist on the television and in society in general'. Since children at the daycare are aged between two and five and at an impressionable stage of their development, this early education is intended to help change their attitudes as adults in the future.

The team is small, but their ambition is great. Now in its ninth year, Mi Mama Trabaja remains true to its initial purpose: supporting vulnerable women, readdressing maternity and developing the educational potential of generations to come. It is, as Rosario concludes, 'A safe place, a warm place, a place of education'.

THE BLANKET POLICE

RAISING A BABY IN EL ALTO

TEXT: NADIA BUTLER
PHOTOS: ALEXANDRA MELEAN A.

Doña Basilia rushes out of the store where I stopped to buy eggs, wrestles my baby from me, and wraps him tightly in a blue fleece blanket featuring a pitchfork-wielding bear. She tells me I can keep the blanket if I promise never to bring my baby outside like that again.

We are in a community on the outskirts of El Alto, that sprawling city that looks down onto adjacent La Paz from high up on the windswept **altiplano**. Once just a makeshift satellite suburb of Bolivia's capital, El Alto has grown at a reckless pace since the 1950s, as migrants from rural areas arrived in search of a better life. Now a city in its own right, it has exceeded La Paz in population and is said to be the largest predominantly indigenous city in Latin America. This is where I live with my husband and his extended family, the newest member of which is our four-month-old son.

In El Alto, there is a strict set of rules governing the raising of babies. These include but are not limited to: always wrapping your baby as tightly and in as many blankets as possible (due in part to the icy *altiplano* weather, but also to avoid incorrect development of the hips or spine); making sure your baby always wears a hat, lest cold enter through the top of his skull; never carrying your baby in a vertical position, as this will cause her cheeks to sag; sleeping with your baby so that neither mother nor baby need get out of bed to breastfeed in the cold.

Those who choose to disregard these rules must be prepared to answer to the Blanket Police.

In effect, everyone is a member of the Blanket Police, since everybody subscribes to the rules and is aware of their duty to confront and discipline rule breakers. This is because, in El Alto, babies and children are collectively owned. Everyone has a stake in the upbringing of the child, from your mother-in-law and the woman at the corner store to a stranger on the bus.

> It is perhaps typical of a small community, which is what El Alto neighborhoods effectively are, that your business is everyone's business, and by extension, your baby is everyone's baby.

'No me lo vas a manejar así', instructs the woman at the vegetable stall. It is the 'me' that is indicative. 'Don't carry him like that for me'. ('I'm sorry, I didn't realize it was your baby I was carrying. If I had known, I would have asked you first how you wanted him carried', says my indignant inner self.)

It is perhaps typical of a small community, which is what El Alto neighborhoods effectively are, that your business is everyone's business, and by extension, your baby is everyone's baby. The advantages, of course, are that a collective eye is being kept on children, and any perceived abuse will be made public, while for new mothers who don't yet know a baby's head from his bottom, there is always someone there to tell them. The downside is that your capacity to choose how to raise your child is limited.

At the beginning of my pregnancy, I signed up to an online forum of Australian mothers-to-be, wanting to know how they did things 'back home'. There, the buzzword is 'choice'. You can disregard SIDS recommendations if they don't work for you, you can restrict in-law visitation hours, you can suspend all housework activities until your child turns three; it is your choice. In El Alto, your doctor tells you what to do, providing information only on a need-to-know basis. Your mother-in-law or Doña Basilia at the corner store issues you with commands that you, as the ingenuous new mother, must follow.

A large part of this has to do with information flows. New mothers in Australia overdose on a million conflicting sources of information found on the Internet; devour books on parenting; weigh up advice from mothers, friends and doctors; and then choose for themselves. In El Alto, information sources are limited to your doctor, your mother, your mother-in-law, and the Blanket Police, all saying essentially the same thing. The effect, in Australia, is an expectation that we can control and manipulate every aspect of raising a child to suit our personal belief system/lifestyle/timetable/horoscope. In El Alto, you just suck it up and get on with it.

I like to refer to the online forum mums as the 'Oh Hunners'. If you've had a tiring day, only managed to put one load of washing on, or are not receiving enough support from your partner, you simply post a rant, and within minutes you will receive several responses all beginning with, 'Oh hun, you're doing great, you're a great mum.' Mothers in El Alto have a different set of expectations. There is likely to be no washing machine for that one load, no dishwasher, blender, car, cot, Jolly Jumper, sense-stimulating toys, mothers' groups, postnatal depression support groups, and certainly no nappy-washing partners. No one gives up their place in a bus queue for a pregnant woman in El Alto. Women become mothers; it's just what they do.

I would like to carry my son in an **aguayo** like the **cholitas**, but unable to shake that thirst for information and control, I consulted a fancy traumatologist down in La Paz, who ruled that a carrier on the front was better for a baby's hips. And so, when we hit the streets, it's like the circus is in town. People stare and whisper, "Did you see that baby?!" ***Cholitas*** ask to borrow him, and they pass him around.

The Blanket Police are used to us now. They've become resigned to our deviations. But I always carry a blanket when I leave the house. Just in case.

DREAMS ACROSS GENERATIONS

One man's life and the dreams of his daughters

TEXT: ALI MACLEOD
PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

'I know it sounds funny, but I want to be a clown!' says Rina, laughing, wearing a half-guilty, half-thrilled grin. Then there is a pause. Rina considers another option: 'I would also like to stay in La Paz and go to university.' She is fourteen, she is ambitious, and she faces a common childhood dilemma. Should she pursue an instinctive passion or chase a more realistic and secure desire? Nearly every child is caught between the two--no matter where they are from. Whether you're from the small, countryside village of Stoke-Row in England (like myself) or from the urban sprawl that is La Paz, there is little difference in sentiment towards childhood experiences, dreams and ambitions.

Rina's father, Wilmer Machaca, has two other daughters: Maya,13,and Suyana,7,all of whom inherited Wilmer's engaging smile. He grew up in a town on the edge of La Paz called 'Vino Tinto' or 'Red Wine,' which ironically had no drinking water readily available. As a child, Wilmer had to fetch the water from the public well. His childhood recollections are of the 1980´s and 90´s, when he was living in a tight knit community without TV and where children were left to play on their own in the street and amuse themselves. 'You could say that my parents were irresponsible for leaving me out on the street,' he says, 'but also there was simply more trust in others back then.'

Things have certainly changed for Wilmer. He lived most his life in Vino Tinto, but now calls Plaza Murillo home. In the city, Wilmer only knows a handful of his neighbours and has noticed that, unlike in his hometown, people simply go about living their own lives. For his children there is less street play and more structure. All three enjoy going to school, learning English and spending time together at home. They are more familiar with technology than Wilmer was. Rina has Facebook, Maya enjoys watching TV and Suyana plays games on the computer. Despite these differences across generations, however, Wilmer's childhood dreams were not far from those of his daughters.

Today, Wilmer is a logistics coordinator and writer with Bolivian Express, but years ago his dreams used to take him far away from La Paz. 'As a result of the era I was born in,' he says, 'I think I wanted to be an astronaut--there was a lot of Star Wars at the time.' His daughters laugh when he says this, either at the thought of Wilmer in a spacesuit or at the image of him charging about with a lightsaber--or both. Even though his family didn't have much money, Wilmer still dreamt of journeys into space or of taking to the field as a Bolivian football star.

Since Wilmer grew up in an impoverished rural town, I assumed he would have been forced to take on grown-up responsibilities and face circumstances that would limit his childhood wishes. This, of course, was not true. In fact, the nature of Wilmer's childhood dreams differ very little from mine - dreams I had while living a comfortable life in rural England. I too had fantasious ideas, such as sailing the seas as an eye-patched pirate, win the world-wrestling championship with my very own signature move and perform a guitar solo in front of a live audience. All of which seem unlikely now.

> Wilmer's daughters also have ambitions of other sorts. They don't only want to be clowns, astronauts, pirates, or the like

Wilmer's daughters also have ambitions of other sorts. They don't only want to be clowns, astronauts, pirates, or the like. There is a more realistic edge to their intentions. ' I want to study architecture somewhere in the city,' Maya says, laying out her plans for the future. Like her older sister Rina, Maya wants to stay in La Paz and go to university. That sort of dream was not available to their father. As a child, Wilmer never thought of higher education, even though he has been studying sociology at university for six years now after he ' began to want to know more things, learn and explore.'

Both Maya and Rina see their father as an idol. They are grateful for his hard work and seem to acknowledge that they've had a better start in life that he did. Even the youngest daughter, Suyana, when asked who her idol is looks over to Wilmer. There is a strong bond within the family as all three daughters also cite their grandmother as an idol. ' Our grandmother is hardworking,' Maya explains, ' she taught us to cook and she raised us.' In an age of K-Pop celebrities and second-rate movie stars, Maya's answer was refreshing. For Wilmer, the silky feet of Diego Maradona and the superhuman strength of "He-Man" were the things he looked up to.

Wilmer is very clear about his daughters' dreams and ambitions. He recognises that his children have more opportunities than he did and that they should make the most of them. But Wilmer would still like his children to pursue the lives that they want and not feel pressured towards one particular direction. 'Many people in Bolivia are born into certains conditions, with their future already decided for them,' he says, ' but gradually this can be changed, even though the change will not be quick. It might take one or two generations, but the moment will arrive.'

THE TALE OF THE MISFORTUNATE FOX AND THE MOUNTAIN

Be true of heart, persevere, and all your dreams shall come true. Damsels in distress will eventually be saved by rich, attractive gentlemen. Mother-in-laws are evil by their very nature.

TEXT: SOPHIA VAHDATI

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN
ILLUSTRATIONS: ALEXANDRA MELEAN A.

These are some of the timeless morals that were drilled into my brain as a young child through the medium of disneyfied Brothers Grimm fairy tales. Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty. All of these tales deliver some of the same mantras. The only reason they've stuck with me is probably because of the countless cultural products that have emerged from them. Disney films have managed to transform originally dark and morbid tales into saccharine creations, catnip for kids. These stories are constantly being respun in the form of American TV series like Once Upon A Time, or BBC productions like Modern Day Fairy Tales. Why has the world become so obsessed with fairy tales written in Europe that stem from European culture?

Bolivia has its own set of folkloric tales that have been passed down to younger generations through the oral tradition of the quechua and aymara indigenous people. A separate collection of morals and fantasies inhabit these stories, influencing and enchanting children from a young age. Despite the fact that the vast majority of Bolivian children today do not know many traditional tales in detail, they are well versed in the globalised Disney versions of **Cenicienta** and **Blanca Nieves**. This is not to say, however, that folkloric tales have simply disappeared, they still exist in the collective imagination. When the TV turns off, these tales are the root of popular superstition, they watch over children as they go to sleep, at times invading their nightmares or taking shape as irrational fears.

Some writers in Bolivia have attempted to harness these stories and put them on the page, if only to reignite the magic of Bolivian tales. According to Víctor Montoya, a specialist in Latin American literature for children, Antonio Paredes is a key example of a Bolivian writer who has tried 'to rescue the themes and characters of the oral tradition from the void of the forgotten.' I found some of Paredes´ work and chose two of the tales he has published. Perhaps together, these traditional Bolivian stories could make a good script for an American or British box office hit. Or maybe not. Who knows? You can be the judge of that.

I've merged 'el Zorro Bailarín' and 'el Zorro y el Cóndor' for this fairy tale experiment, mainly just to see what would happen. The first part of the plot is in the voice of Paredes. Then it becomes my version of a Disney film, and then I put on the eerie hat of British movie director Tim Burton, who redid Alice in Wonderland.

What follows is my westernised Bolivian folklore tale concoction:

The Tale of the Misfortunate Fox and the Mountain

(Antonio Paredes)

Once upon a time, there was a Fox who loved to dance. He could only indulge his passion, however, when sheltered by the shadows of the night. It was then he could dress up as a man and go unnoticed at the parties of the local town, wooing the wenches and spinning circles around the knaves.

One night, the Fox in disguise found himself particularly entranced by a pretty young lass who spun him around and around in circles until he lost track of time and reason. Caught up in the enchantment of the charming girl in the blue dress, he followed her and her friends to a late night party, but before long, the sun was rising.

In the light of dawn, his true fur became evident. His tail sprung out from the disguise and the girls recoiled in horror.

The Fox ran from the party, humiliated, his tail between his legs.

(Disney Production)

To the sound of epic music, the Fox bursts into a melancholic but wistful song as he runs away from the party. The melody dips and rises as the lyrics narrate his frustration. He is an animal, not a man; he is devastated because he's lost sight of the pretty girl.

"I have often dreamed of a far off place,
where the girls have tails, and they´re waiting for me…"

He skulks and runs past other human towns, seeing backs of heads and swirling skirts that remind him of his lost love. As the Fox rushes further and further from civilisation, the song peaks until he slumps at the foot of **Illimani** and looks out at the world he can never be a part of.

(Tim Burton's Gothic Animation)

A Condor appears, announced by hum of eerie panpipes, and sees the Fox down below at the foot of the mountain. Gracefully, he descends to the ground and asks him:

'What's wrong comrade, my great, agile Fox?'

'The woman I love will never accept me,' the Fox says. 'She is human and looks down upon me as a savage and untrustworthy animal.'

Condor: Why, we must prove her wrong, I know just the way. You see the peak of the great ***Illimani*** in the heavens? Let us embark upon a journey to the summit of the mountain. That way no living being, man or beast, will doubt your power or dignity.'

The Fox looks up at the dark steep slope: black ice, unwelcoming rocks and a creeping cloud of mist. He remembers dancing with his woman. The memory pops up in a cloud and the two appear like ballerina-figures found in a jewellery set, trapped and turning mechanically to shrill, shaking music. It is only then that the Fox and the Condor begin the ascent.

The Condor hovers over the mountain as the Fox climbs rock and ice, seeking to prove his worth through the struggle. The ice bites down and the mountain seems to cackle as the Fox realizes he can no longer feel, touch or see the tail he had cursed at the party.

'We will reunite at the summit!´, the Condor shouts down to his comrade, but the Fox's body is slowly conquered by ice. His loneliness, his temperature, his life source dwindles.

When the bird lands on the peak of ***Illimani***, he looks down to see his friend and finds only a faint dot on the ice with a Fox-like flicker. One hundred metres or so from the summit, lies the icicle that once was the Misfortunate Fox.

The Condor swoops down. He gets a hold on his friend with his talons and tries to whisk him up to the top, but the grip loosens. The Ice-Fox falls, smashing into 1000 pieces.

The end.

Morals of the story:
Do not stay out dancing till sunrise.
Do not try and be something you are not.
Do not attempt challenges you were not built for.

Make what you want of this oddball adaptation, and feel free to learn a thing or two from the morals it outlines... There are thousands of Bolivian folkloric tales waiting to be reworked or experimented with: lively characters, twisted endings, bawdy plot lines and Andean magic. What are you waiting for?

PHOTO: ALI MACLEOD

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GLOSSARY

ALTIPLANO	The high plains of the bolivian andes
AGUAYO	The ubiquitous bolivian blanket, multicoloured and used for a variety of tasks, from carrying infants to carrying large loads of produce
CHOLITA	The tradition indigenous Bolivian woman, sometimes wearing a derby hat and usually wearing apron and skirt
CH'UKU	Indigenous hat with four points representing the cardinal points
COCALERO	A coca farmer
DERECHOS HUMANOS	Human rights
ILLIMANI	The famous and largest snow-covered mountain visible from La Paz
CENICIENTA	Cinderella
BLANCA NIEVES	Snow white
UNKU	Ceremonial robe

LEARN PLAY REPEAT

TEXT: SARA SHAHRIAR
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS

When the bell rings and school is out, there's a new dress code: shorts and shirts ready to get sweaty and dirty. The classroom becomes the pitch and books become footballs. Silence, sitting and listening to the teacher are over now. It's time to shout for passes from your friends and work for the perfect goal. Pent-up energy is burned until it's dark outside. After sundown it's time to go home, go to bed, and do it all over again tomorrow.

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN

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