Bolivian Express Magazine

Free Distribution — Issue 9

FRINGES

Bolivian Express
Grupo Express Press

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The Bolivian Express would like to thank: Maddy Sryle, Maria Delgado, Sergio Quevedo, Angel Pinedo, Gonzalo Vargas Laserna
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Website: www.bolivianexpress.org

La Paz – Bolivia, June 2011

GLOSSARY

Agrarian Reform	refers to the redistribution of agricultural land initiated by the Government
Amanecer	daybreak
Api	a thick, purple drink made from corn and spices that tastes like cinnamon apple cider and is served warm with a fried dough pastry.
Aymara	a native Indigenous group, with its own language and culture, inhabiting areas of Bolivia and Peru
Barrio	neighborhood
Camino de la Muerte	Death Road
Chola	female city-dweller wearing traditional attire, sometimes used pejoratively
Cumbre	top
Mantas	the shawls that the cholitas wear that are often colorful or adorned with a long fringe
Pollera	skirt

EDITORIAL

By Lorange Dao & Amaru Villanueva Rance

In a country such as Bolivia, to talk of minorities is paradoxical since practically everybody belongs to one. This is the land where, for every trait a group of individuals share, they are divided by at least twice as many differences. Who or what the majority is has always been open to interpretation and the official answer has changed over time largely due to shifts in people's self-assigned identities (recent Censuses report an increasing number of people identifying as indigenous). However, one of the few hints of certainty in this impossible tapestry of communities, ethnic groups and nations is the influence played by Western cultures over the past five centuries. From the Spanish conquest to the present, indigenous groups have come under increasing pressure to abandon their original traits and customs in order to survive, first through enforced Catholicism and more recently through migration to urban areas.

In spite of this, the local customs never really went away; they were passed on through the pueblos and waited until the dawn of the 21st century to emerge again in the cities. Indeed, over the last few years, many efforts have been made to reinstate and preserve these original cultures, as well as to put an end to oppression against individuals on the base of their culture, ethnicity, or creed. Indigenous languages (such as Aymara) are nowadays both taught in schools and demanded from all civil servants. Discrimination against groups of people - (such as the cholitas or Afro-Bolivianos we cover in this issue) is punishable by the law, opening new possibilities for groups which were hitherto relegated to the margins of society. They now increasingly constitute government and occupy a larger range of positions of authority in society.

Although these changes in the law have been celebrated across the borders, it would be naive to assume that they will have an immediate and lasting impact on social barriers and power structures. Certain prejudices have been ingrained for so long that it may take generations for things to truly change. This has meant that vulnerable groups cannot always fully integrate in a society with too many margins and no clear unifying centre around which they can coalesce.

Interestingly, the ensuing process of amalgamation between disparate peoples has not been a homogenising one: if anything, it has produced a yet larger fragmentation of cultures and customs, as well as the emergence of new ones. Notably, emerging groups which are perhaps byproducts of modernity and liberalism (such as drag-queens and expats) have been added to this interminable list of minorities.

Bolivia is a land of extremes. This not only applies to its landscapes but also to its people, whose multiple backgrounds and cultures are said to be represented on the wiphala, the indigenous flag. Faced with the irreconciliable tension between traditions and modernity, groups must anchor their identities more strongly, lest they become diluted and vanish completamente.

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

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BACK TO AYMARA

It is dispiriting (though perhaps inevitable) that Aymara, once the dominant language of large sections of Bolivia and neighbouring Andean regions, has become relegated to the backstage of everyday life in modern-day society.

TEXT: MARYAM PATWA

Originating several centuries before the Spanish conquest, Aymara developed to become both a language and a culture marked by its bellicose spirit and commercial edge. During the Colonial era, Spanish conquerors attempted to eradicate indigenous languages and unify the continent under one language: Spanish. Because of education policies during this era, even the public use of indigenous languages (including Aymara) was punishable. While the archetypal helm-clad and lance-bearing Spaniards have long been gone, it is plain to see that their main legacy has been their language. However, their attitudes towards indigenous languages such as Aymara also appears to have lived on.

According to Sonia, student of Aymara at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA), part of the stigma that Aymara carries has to do "with racism and social status". She tells me: "the world moves in English and since education is expensive those people who speak Aymara cannot even think about studying at university. Consequently, Aymara has a relation with the indigenous poor, not cultivated, less educated people so if you learn this language you are relating yourself to it."

Sonia adds that however, "attitudes have been changing". Not very long ago, it was unlikely for an Aymara-speaking cholita to enter a bank and communicate fluently with the person across the counter, rendering inaccessible this and many other public institutions, such as many of the free museums around the city. Although they are allegedly there for everyone to enjoy, language barriers coupled with cultural prejudices can make them appear daunting to an Aymara speaker. But over the last few years, clear strategies have been established to try and promote the plurality of indigenous languages, especially amongst the younger generations.
In 2009 the Bolivian government granted official national language status to Aymara, Quechua, Guarani (and 33 other indigenous languages) alongside Spanish. Another interesting move has been to set a requirement that all those seeking jobs within the government must speak an indigenous language to a certain level. Although it could be argued that this move has been symbolically motivated, it gives clear evidence that measures to promote the plurality of languages and the use of Aymara are being put in place.

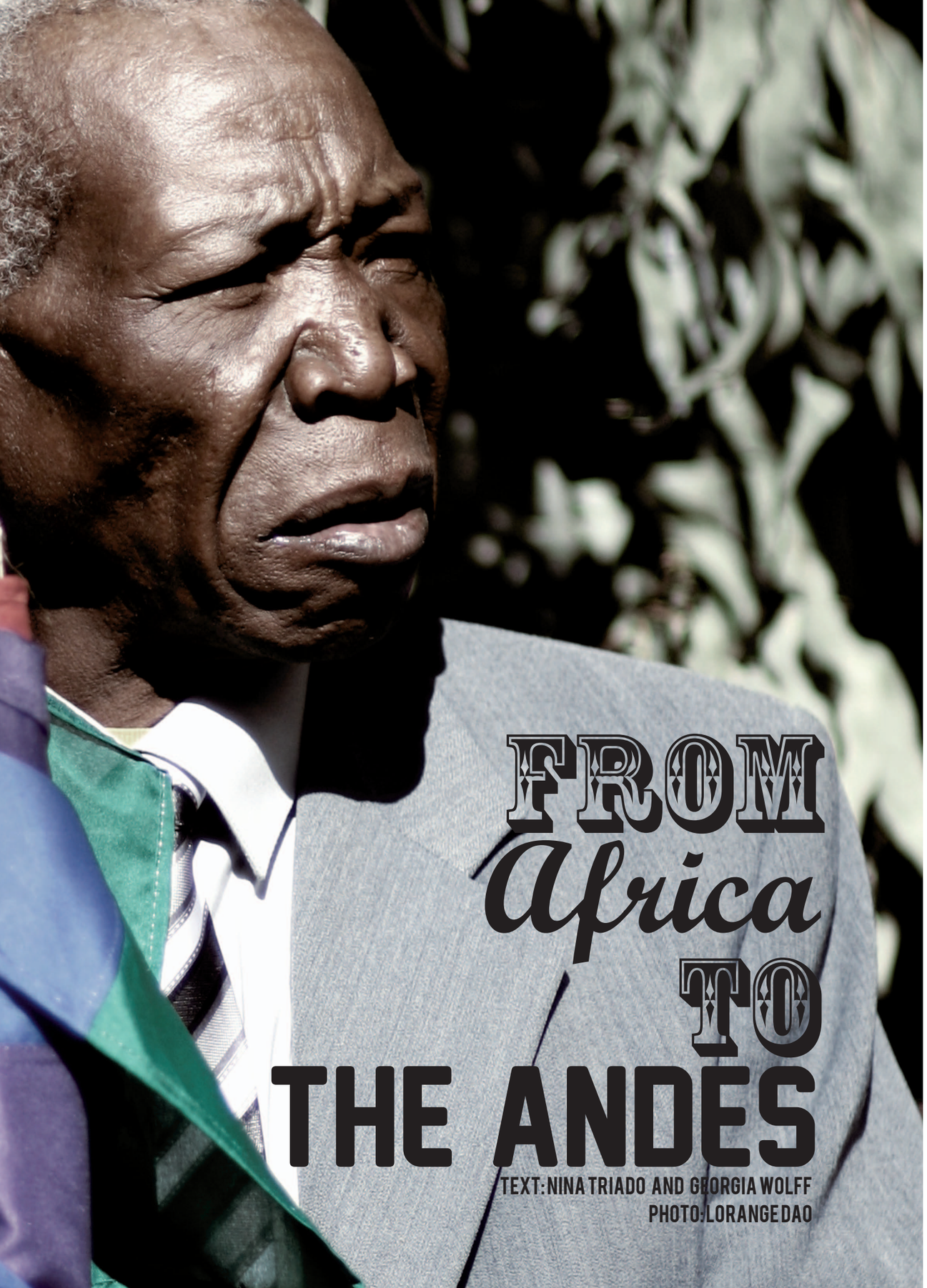
Central to these changes is the current peoples president Evo Morales. He is the first indigenous president, who initially pursued llama herding before he settled into growing coca and became involved in the coca growers´ trade unions. Evo Morales is of native Aymara decent.

Pascual Gutierrez, professor of Aymara at the UMSA, admits that at university there has not been more interest in studying the course, which revolves not only around the language but also the culture. However, he adds: "in La Paz, when you take into account all the institutions where they teach languages, the number of students who study Aymara has increased. Not only this but most of the institutions which used to only teach Spanish, Portuguese and English, now teach indigenous languages."

All this means that when civil servants are dealing with people from outside the cities they can actually communicate with the people they are working with. It means that children have the chance to learn the same language they speak at home while in school. It also means that young people recognize the importance of the indigenous languages in their own country. The influence of Aymara in the local vernacular is certainly palpable. Many Spanish expressions in Bolivia such as 'chiji' (grass), 'llokalla' (young boy) and 'wawa' (baby) are used and widely understood by Spanish speakers, many of whom don't fully realise the indigenous origin of these words.
When asked why she decided to learn Aymara, Sonia offered several reasons relating to culture and her sense of identity. 'I lived in Uruguay for 6 months. During this time I realised that I didn't know that much about my culture so I decided to learn more about it, about my identity, and therefore about Bolivia. In this area there is a strong Aymara influence on the culture, especially in this part of the country.' Sonia also plays native musical instruments so she is keen to know more about their context and, as a civil engineer, she's likely to need to work in the countryside where Aymara is more widely spoken.

As one might imagine, the prospect for Aymara speakers from the rural areas to attend even a public university are slim. A recent extension to the public university in La Paz which provides studies in topics related to land management and agriculture will hopefully reverse this trend.

This widespread increase in the teaching of indigenous languages and culture may not result in a simple shift in attitudes. Out of the several reasons Sonia gave me for studying Aymara one was ideological: "I think that since I have the opportunity to learn Aymara I should. The people who speak Aymara are more removed and may not have the opportunity to learn Spanish so I should try myself." The minority Aymara speakers may have held themselves back without understanding that this would perpetuate a feeling of being 'outsiders'. However, I am told that many use it to their advantage in certain commercial settings - using the language as a code used to conduct business with other people with whom they share an origin. Since Aymara is beginning to become more widely embraced, this could enhance the educational opportunities of rural inhabitants, and thus increase their chances of becoming economically prosperous. If this is the case, the entire population stands to benefit in the long run, whether they speak Aymara or not. The same could no doubt be said about any of the other 30 odd languages spoken across the country aside from Spanish.



FROM Africa TO THE ANDES

TEXT: NINA TRIADO AND GEORGIA WOLFF
PHOTO: LORANGE DAO

AFTER A FRIGHTENING NUMBER OF CASES OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AFRO-BOLIVIANS WERE DISREGARDED BY THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT, JORGE MEDINA EVENTUALLY MADE A BREAKTHROUGH IN HIS STRUGGLE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF AFRO-BOLIVIAN PEOPLE. ON 8TH OCTOBER 2010 MEDINA'S "LAW AGAINST RACISM AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION" WAS PASSED THROUGH PARLIAMENT. WHAT HAD SO LONG BEEN A DREAM FOR THE POLITICAL ACTIVIST AND THEN DIRECTOR OF CENTRO AFRO-BOLIVIANO PARA EL DESAROLLO INTEGRAL Y COMUNITARIO (CADIC) HAD NOW BECOME A REALITY. BUT WHILE MEDINA'S ACHIEVEMENT IS CERTAINLY A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION AMONG THE COMMUNITY, IT WAS SHORT LIVED: AFRICAN-BOLIVIANS ARE STILL FACED WITH MANY INJUSTICES IN DAY-TO-DAY LIVING.

African-Bolivians have been inhabitants of the country from as far back as the sixteenth century. In 1544, the Spanish explorers arrived in Bolivia after learning of the wealth of silver reserves in Potosi, which to that date had not been exploited. As conquerors of the land, the Spanish enslaved the native people and made them work on the mines. However when the native Bolivian workers in Potosí began to perish due to the harsh climate and inhumane working conditions, the Spanish were forced to look elsewhere to replace them. It was then, from the year 1545 onwards, that they forced the African people into slavery. This horrific period for the Afro-Bolivians only began to end towards the dawn of the colonial era in 1825.
Throughout the decades of the twentieth century, Bolivia experienced a number of revolutions. However, the most significant of these for Afro-Bolivian rights was that of 1952. By this stage, the Afro-Bolivians were working as slaves in the Yungas, farming coca, cotton and coffee, after the decline in the mining sector. Angel Pinedo, director of the Commission of Indigenous People, explained that during this period a strong relationship formed between the two Indigenous groups in the area, and professed that "Nowadays we live in harmony with the **Aymara** people".
The left-wing overthrow of the Government by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) in April of 1952 paved the way for the **Agrarian Reform** in Bolivia allowing Afro-Bolivians some form of ownership of land which had previously been outside their control. However, as the land had to be divided among many thousands of people, there was little to go around, forcing many to migrate away from the Yungas. Despite the fact that this gave many an opportunity to start a life elsewhere, it also signified the loss of much of their traditional culture and customs as they began to separate from one another.
While the Agrarian Reform technically ended the enslavement of the Afro-Bolivians, those left in the Yungas were forced into poverty due to the low market price of the agricultural products they were farming.
The publication of Bolivia's new constitution on 25th January 2009 did little to improve the Afro-Bolivian situation. It did however recognise them as one of the thirty six Indigenous groups in Bolivia for the first time. Despite the fact that they comprised 2.2% of the population and had lived in Bolivia since the sixteenth century, in the census of 2001 they were still not recognised as a distinct ethnic group. While the new Constitution professes a "multi-ethnic" and "multicultural" democracy, Afro-Bolivians form such a small percentage of the country's population that their existence remains ignored and generally disregarded (compounded by the fact that communities are concentrated in specific areas of the country). Jorge Medina believes that while the changes in the constitution are an improvement from those in the past, the Constitution itself "will never take away the hunger [of the Afro-Bolivians] – it is only a piece of paper".
Despite the continuous mistreatment of the Afro-Bolivians, there are a number of individuals like Jorge Medina who continue to strive for equality for all Bolivians. Medina's commitment to eliminate the discrimination faced by Afro-Bolivians is made manifest in the number of positions he has taken on over the years. In 2000 he was the President of the "Movimiento Saya Afro-Boliviana", an organisation aimed at promoting Afro-Bolivian values and strengthening their cultural identity.

Medina was re-elected president and served as the leader of the Saya Movement until 2005 when he began CADIC. Medina then served as director of CADIC until 2010, his intention being for the organisation to be more of a political movement. Medina sighs when questioned about the difficulties individual activists (such as himself) encounter when striving for equal rights for Afro-Bolivians, explaining "If you have the power, you can do it, if not, well –" he shrugs his shoulders.

Currently, Medina is working as the leader of the National Unity Front, and stands as a representative for six indigenous groups including the Afro-Bolivians, Kallawayas, Tacanas, Lecos, Mostenes, Araonas. Another individual who champions this model of equality among Bolivian Diversity is Evo Morales, Bolivia's first (and current) Indigenous President. Morales' work for the Afro-Bolivian population is evident in the changes to the Constitution he was responsible for. Still, we are told that in spite of his focus on the welfare of Afro-Bolivians, much of Morales' work has been overshadowed by political conflict in other areas of his administration, including tensions within Parliament.

On many levels, there are a number of individuals working towards improving the lives and day-to-day needs of the Afro-Bolivians: Jorge Medina remains dedicated to the cause, as is evident in his success with seeing the law against racism and discrimination become a reality, while Evo Morales' efforts as President to give Afro-Bolivians a voice in Parliament demonstrate the power of having government support. It is the work of these people, as well as that of many other Bolivians throughout the country, that have seen slight improvements since the days of Afro-Bolivian enslavement in the sixteenth century.

Unfortunately, though, the problem remains. As Afro-Bolivians form a small minority in Bolivia, and consequently have few representatives in powerful positions, many continue to struggle to receive a proper education, healthcare and other necessities that many other groups in society take for granted.

BLONDE but Bolivian

Expats and their offspring

TEXT AND PHOTO: CAMILLA SWIFT

After 5 months of living and working in La Paz, I became increasingly intrigued with the idea of expats who, by moving abroad, end up raising their children in a different culture to their own. I often asked myself what it was like for them. Did they feel Bolivian? How did they feel when assumed to be 'gringos'?

Considering Bolivia's first expats were the European colonisers who arrived in the 15th Century, it is safe to say that intermixing has been part and parcel of this country's history. Comparatively speaking, the presence of white descendants is perhaps less prevalent in Bolivia than in many of its South American neighbours such as Argentina or Uruguay. Nevertheless, by some accounts Caucasians make up as much as 15% of the population*, predominantly constituted by the descendants of families who arrived here decades (and even centuries) ago, as well as expats who've only recently moved to the country.

Within my first few weeks in La Paz, I started noticing the numerous European cafes, restaurants and libraries around town - especially in La Paz's wealthier **barrios** such as Sopocachi and Zona Sur (Le Bistrot, La Comédie and Kuchen Stube to name but three within walking distance from where I live).

To understand what it means to be blonde in Bolivia I set out to meet the children of these families. Three schools located in Zona Sur appeared to be the indicated places to look for those answers: the German Colegio Alemán "Mariscal Braun", the French Lycée Franco Bolivien, and the American Cooperative "Calvert", all of which offer bilingual education programmes, covering all levels from pre-school to graduation. At first sight it seemed there were two entirely different worlds within La Paz. Here in the Zona Sur, a different species of parent drop off their children at the school entrance: it's not just their conspicuous wealth (evident in their 4x4s and dress sense), there's a noticeable ethnic difference too.
My language skills were tested when I stepped into the Lycée Franco Bolivien and had to switch from Spanish to French - I hadn't prepared myself for this but after a few minutes of staggered, rusty French, I got into the swing of things. For a moment, I envied those children who had the ability to switch from one language to the other without even thinking, but after looking into it further, I started wondering what it must be like for these blonde-haired, blue-eyed children to grow up in Bolivia with a dual-nationality. Did they have difficulties fitting in? Did they feel Bolivian or did they identify themselves more with their parents' culture?

During my visit to the Lycée Franco Bolivien, I met Iris, 12, daughter of a Bolivian mother and a Belgian father. Born in Cochabamba, she spent the first nine years of her life in Belgium.
"I feel more Belgian than Bolivian because I still speak much more French than Spanish," she said timidly. "I like it here but it's very different from home." Although she admitted that she was happy here in the country where she was born, and she told me she would be sad to leave her friends when her father's contract ends, it was clear Iris still considers Belgium to be her "home".

On entering the smart German Mariscal Braun school, encircled by the towering cliffs of the Zona Sur's Achumani district, I was greeted by a real mixture of blonde and dark-haired Bolivian and German children in the playground.

"I will go to university in Europe because higher education is better there, but I want to return to Bolivia afterwards because of the the higher quality of life that we can have here" 16 year-old Klaus explained. "I want my children to have the same exciting, bilingual upbringing as the one I've had."

Chatting with these children made me realise how important the language issue was when growing up in a country like Bolivia: if you don't manage to speak the local tongue or if you struggle to express yourself in it, as young Iris does, it affects how easily you settle in and feel part of the Bolivian community. On the other hand, it also highlighted many advantages in growing up in Bolivia with a dual-nationality - the most valuable perhaps being "you have an exit," as Klaus told me. Having a German, French or any other European passport gives you more opportunities. Besides, "a Bolivian passport is checked over and over again", Klaus explained.

Later on, as I spoke to 18 year-old Gustavo about his experiences here, I realised how, sometimes, one could be made to feel like an outsider in their own country . His father's family moved here after the Second World War and, although Gustavo feels very much Bolivian, he told me that he and his family still had many German traditions. When I asked whether he had ever felt like he didn't fit in here, he replied, "I do sometimes feel like a foreigner in my own country." He then added that sometimes, as he walked around town, he could tell that people were looking at him thinking he was a gringo; "I hate that", he said. "I think it's a form of racism."

As I was leaving the school, I paused to speak to a blonde-haired, green-eyed mother who was waiting for her daughter outside the school gates. She concluded my visit to these schools by summing up what the children had been trying to convey all day... "Just because I'm blonde doesn't mean I can't be Bolivian. I'm proud to be Bolivian" she said.

*This is arguably an overestimation, as it's entirely possible that well over two thirds of the population have a mixed ethnic heritage (yes, that includes those apparently indigenous as well as those seemingly white). Part of the complication is that many of these figures depend on how people define their own identity in the national census. As an interesting aside, the number of people who self-identify as indigenous has been on the increase. Culture and identity are clearly shifting faster than genes.

COCHABAMBA EXPRESS

LIFE IN BOLIVIA BEHIND BARS

TEXT AND PHOTO: MATTHEW GRACE

ON MAY 19, 2008, THREE YOUNG NORWEGIAN WOMEN, STINA BRENDEMO HAGAN, THEN 17 YEARS OLD; MADELEINE RODRIGUEZ, THEN 20; AND CHRISTINA ØYGARDEN, THEN 18–ALONG WITH MADELEINE'S THEN 2-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, ALICIA–ARRIVED AT THE COCHABAMBA AIRPORT TO FLY BACK TO NORWAY AFTER A THREE-WEEK HOLIDAY IN BOLIVIA. NONE OF THEM MADE THEIR FLIGHT. AIRPORT POLICE FOUND 22.5 KILOGRAMS OF COCAINE IN THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LUGGAGE. INSTEAD OF BOARDING AN AIRPLANE FOR A LONG FLIGHT HOME, THE YOUNG WOMEN FOUND THEMSELVES FACING UP TO 25 YEARS IN A BOLIVIAN JAIL.

Madeleine and Stina live in the San Sebastian women's prison in Cochabamba, a crumbling adobe structure facing a ramshackle park where young glue-sniffing kids sleep during the day. Inmates' families line up in front of the prison gate every afternoon at 2, jostling in line, surrounded by plastic bags stuffed full of food and gifts to deliver to their loved ones. Shortly after 2:30pm, the steel door creaks open and the families shuffle into the prison.

It's easy to find Stina and Madeleine in the prison's courtyard, where visitors mingle with prisoners amid a constant clamor of activity. It is here that vendors sell lunches, sodas, and beauty products, and inmates line up to use payphones; a woman speaks visitors' names into a microphone, announcing to prisoners that they have guests; laundry lines and electrical cables hang helter-skelter, crisscrossing under orange and blue tarps that shield the courtyard from fierce sun; raw meat dries next to laundry, in preparation for charquekan, a traditional Bolivian dish. Stina sticks out with her typically Scandinavian features—bright blond hair and pale white skin. She has curlicue bangs, coiffed just so, and the rest of her hair flows down her back and over her shoulders. Every day that we meet, she wears carefully applied makeup that accents her eyebrows and tints her cheeks. Madeleine, who has a Uruguayan father and a Norwegian mother, fits in a little better, although with her colorful clothes she's much more fashionably dressed than the other women in the prison. She has a defined, thin face, and her curly dark brown hair is pulled back in a feisty ponytail set high on the back of her head.

When I first visited them in 2008, shortly after their arrests, Stina haunted the edge of the mass of women in the prison courtyard. She seemed nervous, suspicious of my intentions, and she didn't easily smile or speak to me. I found myself struggling to talk to her, and silence filled much of our conversations.

Now, however, Stina locks eyes with me whenever I visit; she's calmer and more assertive. It's as if prison has made her grow up, made her more at ease with herself.

And in a way it has: five months ago Stina gave birth to a baby boy. She's also learned Spanish—and a bit of Quechua—in the past three years, and chats with the other inmates, who constantly approach her and ask to hold and play with her baby.

Madeleine, however, was always at ease. She has a confident demeanor, self-assured, almost cocky, which didn't help her too much during her trial in 2009, when the prosecutors tried to portray her as the ringleader of an international drug ring. When I first met her, Madeleine was angry. She disobeyed the prison rules and found herself in solitary confinement several times after being caught with mobile phones—contraband in the eyes of the authorities. Now, however, she's calmed down a bit, and even participates in prison life. She has a prison job—ironing laundry that's dropped off by locals—and manages six other workers.

She's also quicker to smile when we sit at a plastic table in the courtyard and share a litre of soda while we talk.

Madeleine's shock at being incarcerated has dulled, and while her separation from Alicia still saddens her, it's gained a certain familiarity. Alicia stayed with her mother in prison for the first two weeks of imprisonment, after which her grandmother flew to Bolivia and brought her back to Norway. They now live in Lillestrom, a suburb 10 minutes outside of Oslo, where both Stina and Madeleine grew up. But Madeleine still dreams about her daughter all the time. "We used to drive around in my car"—a silver Golf Volkswagen—"and listen to R&B and hip-hop. We used to go fast! She's still used to my driving, and when she rides with my mother now she always tells her to drive faster!"

Alicia, who's now 5 years old, is also Stina's niece. Madeleine and Stina have been good friends for nearly 10 years, and Madeleine had Alicia with Stina's brother.

Both Madeleine and Stina have private rooms in the prison, which they were able to buy from the previous owners for about US$500 each. Madeleine's room, which has a Norwegian flag hanging in front of the door, is decorated with dozens of pictures of Alicia. Other inmates, who aren't from such relatively wealthy backgrounds, bunk six each to a room. When their husbands or boyfriends drop by, they must pay to rent out a room for conjugal visits.

Madeleine's now engaged, to a 26-year-old Bolivian named Brian, who was introduced to her by a mutual friend on the outside. "He asked my friend if he knew any cute girls," Madeleine says. Now Brian, who grew up in Virginia, visits her most days, bringing her lunch from the outside. "We've both had a lot of shit going on," Madeleine says. (Brian served a two-year sentence in Cochabamba.) "One day we'll be together [on the outside] with kids and jobs—we'll have a life."

Both Stina and Madeleine say they had no idea they had the cocaine in their luggage on that day in 2008 at the airport, claiming they were set up. "I was calm when [the airport police] went through our luggage, because I didn't know [the cocaine] was there." Even when the cocaine was found, says Madeleine, she thought she'd be quickly released, "because it wasn't mine." Madeleine says the police were polite and professional, although the prosecutor threatened to take Alicia away and place her in an orphanage. Madeleine didn't yet know that it's customary for children to live with their mothers in Bolivian prisons. "My biggest concern was Alicia," she says.

Stina, Madeleine, and Christina spent two days in the airport police station, which was "disgusting," they say; they weren't allowed any phone calls for three days, although Madeleine was able to sneak off a text message to a friend after she realised they were in serious trouble and wouldn't be making their flight home.

Finally, Stina was able to call home. "My mom was in shock," she says. While the young women languished in jail, Stina's mom grew depressed, couldn't sleep, and lost weight. Her grandmother cried when Stina phoned her. "It was very hard to talk to her," Stina says.

Then, in February 2010, Christina, while out on bail, managed to obtain a copy of her passport (all three had to surrender their passports when they were arrested) and caught a plane to Norway.

A small diplomatic crisis ensued, with the Bolivian government—and some vocal law-and-order types in Norway—demanding her return. The Norwegian government does not, however, have an extradition treaty with Bolivia.

But Stina and Madeleine were relieved that Christina wasn't around any more. While they were in jail together, Christina started to blame Madeleine for their incarceration, and isolated herself from the others. "Whenever her family came to visit they wouldn't even talk to us," Madeleine tells me.

In April 2010, Madeleine and Stina were found guilty of attempted drug trafficking. They were both sentenced to 13 years and four months. Then, in November last year, they appealed their sentences; the court reduced both to 10 years and eight months. "For the first year and a half, everything was really against me," says Madeleine. "But with the appeal, that was the first time in two years that I had good news." And Madeleine will probably qualify for another reduction in her sentence, due to her work in the laundry. Ironically, the prosecutors originally wanted Madeleine to serve 10 years longer than Stina; now Madeleine will most likely be released first.

I ask them how they cope with being locked up for so long, and what advice they'd give to other young women in their situation. "Go and shoot yourself," Stina says before laughing. "No, I'm joking. Get visitors—don't be alone! If you're alone you're going to go crazy." But she also cautions not to trust anyone on the inside. "When you are sad or when you are down, you can't trust anyone to keep a secret."

Madeleine says that she's learned to be patient, and that "in every situation there's something good. I've got another point of view in life. I've learned how people live in poor countries." And she takes a philosophical view to get her through the seemingly endless days ahead in the same place: "In the end, everything is OK. And if it's not OK, it's not the end."

For now, though, both Stina and Madeleine while away their days in the San Sebastian prison. Madeleine works from 7am to noon every day, and evenings when there's extra work. They watch DVDs in Stina's room at night, and voraciously read books that visitors—including people from the Norwegian consulate in La Paz and the small Norwegian community in Cochabamba—bring them.

In the end, though, both Madeleine and Stina struggle to cope with being in jail. Or, as Madeleine puts it, "It's not about being in jail, it's about being alone. The more time you have, the more alone you feel."

Sometimes, Stina says, she dreams about being home. "I dream about freedom, in Norway, and about my grandma and Alicia, my niece." But that happiness is elusive upon waking. "It's still tough, every day. I'm never really happy. There's always the fact of being in jail."

Both Madeleine and Stina would welcome any travelers who might want to visit them.

BOLIVIA IN DRAG: A PORTRAIT of THE FAMILIA GALÁN.

TEXT: AMARU VILLANUEVA RANCE

PHOTO: K-OS GALAN

"WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU USUALLY GET ASKED IN INTERVIEWS?" IS THE LAST QUESTION I ASK DAVID ARUQUIPA. THIS IS PERHAPS THE BEST PLACE TO BEGIN.

'I get asked a lot of rubbish. They ask me about discrimination and exclusion, 'When did you first realise you were like this?', the usual everyday stuff they think should happen to you. What they expect should happen to "diverse" [he quotes/unquotes with his middle and index fingers] people'. They tire me.'

This will do nicely by way of an introduction as it sets the scene for what will follow.
We shall return to this later. First, let's rewind back to the beginning of the recording, where one would normally begin. Question beggingly, the first thing I ask David Aruquipa, is "What is your name"?
'Politically it is Danna Galán. It is an acquired name, a name which I have constructed and which carries with it symbolic and political meanings. In emotional terms, it has greater value than my given name, or the name which has been imposed upon me. David Aruquipa has other times and spaces. I have learnt to coexist with this name. David Aruquipa has become 'the professional', 'the father'. Legally, he has become a civil servant, continually accumulating titles and diplomas which certify his existence.'
David Aruquipa is one of many 'Galán'. In Spanish, 'Galán' means something like ladies' man or seducer but for the purposes of this article it is a mere distraction. It is simply a surname like any other, for a family unlike most.

I saw the Galán Family years ago during one of their 'outings', marching down La Paz's main avenue on a sunny Sunday afternoon. Their presence was almost theatrical, curiously androgynous, kitsch, demonic, extraterrestrial and verging on the monstrous. A few metres behind them, a group of spectators of all ages, sizes and backgrounds followed like a school of fish, too scared to come any closer but irresistibly drawn in waves towards the light shining off the sequins of their dresses. At almost seven foot tall, five or six drag queens serenely rose above the masses, leading them gently like pied pipers. They halted and offered themselves for closer inspection. The crowds drew sheepishly near and slowly began talking and touching, asking questions and taking photographs. I can imagine a peaceful arrival of aliens to earth proceeding in a similar fashion.
Galán is the family name of a group of… well, explaining who they are is not that easy. The Galán Family members I've met seem to share no common denominator. In their manifesto they explain:

Las Galán is formed by sub-groups of 'transformistas', transvestites, drag queens, androgynes, theorist groupies and followers.
To the outsider, they appear to be predominantly a group of gay men who occasionally dress up as seven-foot tall colossi covered in latex, flowers, feathers and whatnot. Their membership includes a white-haired female academic and a straight librarian. There have also been innumerable groupies in their ranks. As Danna Galán/David Aruquipa tells me

The Galán Family is like a colony of mushrooms which grow everywhere, we don't know how many of us there are.
Later, David gives me some clues as to the family's raison d'être, or indeed why they choose to associate in the first place.
You can experience diversity within the Familia. I think disobedience and transgression are what connect us. Subversion in any situation, be it gender-related or even aesthetic.
I am curious as to what they gain by associating and what they have set out to achieve.
People say that the Familia Galan has strategic plans and objectives. What do we want to achieve? We don't want to achieve anything whatsoever. We just want to be in the places we care to be in. If anyone is lucky enough to meet us then sure, let's meet.
What makes them a family? Many will protest that their claim to family-hood is vacuous, given that they share neither blood nor a legal bond. I ask David Aruquipa about this:

'We have appropriated the term 'Familia' in order to give it a meaning. We are not a consanguineous family, but we are a diverse family where one can find conflicts, fights, love, incest and everything you can imagine. It is a different family, but a family which exists by virtue of a number of people deciding to come together.'
The Familia Galán's political message moves beyond individual claims to sexual freedom and becomes seditious to the basic unit upon which society is traditionally conceived to be based: the family. The cultural revolution they are spearheading stems from their appropriation of this term.

'We have seized language in order to give it subversive and contradictory meanings.'
Curious about their ideology and discourse, I try to find out more. I am invited over to lunch at Danna Galán's house so I can talk to some other people in the Familia. Paris Galán, one of the founding members of the group (and perhaps a spiritual mother to many of them), tells me in passing how she paraded at a sexual diversity march with her cousin's baby in her arms. As if to say, 'even a baby is part of the tapestry of sexual diversity'. Granted, it is not an association one would usually make but it seems legitimate enough. Over lunch, the group bitch about other drag-queen groups and emphasise how distant they are from the mainstream plight of what are sometimes seen to be 'sexual minorities'. David explains:

'Being gay or lesbian are pre-packaged concepts which no-one believes, but which one takes on because you have to fit in to the 'being gay' menu, being a 'good gay'. The same applies to discrimination and exclusion. As a 'good gay' I have to be discriminated and excluded in order to exist. If you're not like this 'you're so weird', you are not a 'good gay'.

The mainstream of GLBT (the first three letters standing for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual, more on the fourth one later...) discourse in Bolivia has tended to focus on the usual topics: discrimination, exclusion, rights and respect. Not that there's anything wrong with these things, but The Galán Family make them sound so passé. This brings us back to the beginning of the article, where David reminded me of the clichéd media coverage of gay issues. This applies as much in Bolivia as it does in the UK. Groups which build their discourse and presence around sexual identity are rarely given spaces in the press or television unless there is a political 'rights' component to the story. These groups are seldom featured aesthetically and at face value.
David seems to be telling me that The Galán Family won't gain the spotlight they are after until they cease to be viewed through this lens.

'I don't believe in exclusion and discrimination as concepts in themselves. By giving meaning to concepts such as these you are bringing them into life and adding strength to their existence. I believe that discrimination and exclusion are preconceived concepts, just as much as identities are.'
Perhaps it is this ideology which has caused The Galán to grow distant from a great part of the GLBTTT (the sophisticated TTT standing for Transsexual, Transvestite and Transgender) community. Over lunch, The Galán tell me (with perverse satisfaction) how they are seen by many of these groups as being frivolous, vain and ridiculous. The Galán Family have subverted the liberal boundaries of the (by now 'traditional' and mainstream) GLBTTT community. This has led the media to decreasingly equate The Galán with spokespersons for the gay or tranny community. David remembers:
'After an incident, when someone threw a Molotov bomb at a gay rights parade -of which we weren't part-, we were asked 'what position do you have in relation to the gay community these days?' They no longer asked us 'how did you feel', they asked us to comment on what had happened to them. People have realised that the Galán Family advocate a stronger discourse […] from above.'
The Galán seem to tower above it all, both literally and metaphorically. They have come to inhabit more sophisticated spaces by becoming involved in cultural movements and abandoning ethical issues in favour of aesthetic frivolity and subversion. What do the Galán believe in, if anything at all? According to David:
'We have a basic and simple discourse. We are everywhere and our politics stem from aesthetics and culture. […] It is a movement which has revolutionised and politicised sexuality and aesthetics in Bolivia. It has not done so by assuming a Trans identity within a gay or tranny ghetto.'

To many, the existence and activity of such a group would seem improbable in a country like Bolivia, usually associated with llamas, bowler hats, archaeological ruins and cocaine. Indeed, it is one of the poorest countries in the Latin American region and a large proportion of its population is indigenous or of indigenous descent. Understanding Bolivian society, and how it could give rise to the Galán Family requires an explanation which is more complex and subtle.
Institutions in Bolivia would seem to be stacked against diversity. The oppressive influence of the Catholic Church in Bolivia has been ubiquitous since the Spanish invasion in the sixteenth century. In the twentieth century, the country was ruled by a series of violent military regimes which ended in the early 80s. On the other hand, Bolivia is all about diversity. The country's territory extends from the frozen peaks of the Andes to the tropical heat of the Amazon. In evolutionary and demographic terms, this has given rise to a land where people look and sound very different across these regions. The deep historical roots of these differences have in turn given rise to myriad of cultures, societies and nations.

Local folklore is flamboyant, rich and varied. Carnivals and festivals are among the few events where the country comes together to celebrate its diversity. These festivities take place both in urban and rural regions. Dressing up, dancing and getting really drunk have become an important part of Bolivian heritage in the twenty first century. Indeed, in a country where wearing flamboyant costumes for social events is part of everyday life, it is unsurprising that the Galán have blended so seamlessly into the urban landscape.
It seems almost inevitable for a group such as the Galán to exist in a country which more than anything else can be characterised by its wealth of diversity. Like The Galán, Bolivians don't share a common denominator and instead associate by virtue of a common history and territory. In their manifesto they declare:
We are not a UNITED group.
We have many DIFFERENCES.
We don't aspire to THE SAME things.

We don't seek UNITY.
The Familia Galán became prominent local celebrities a few years ago and were able to saturate the media with their mere presence. Initially they only appeared at sexual rights events and GLBTTT beauty pageants but they quickly grew bored of this circuit. All they had to do was walk out on to the streets of La Paz to attract the attention of most of the newspapers and television channels. They have even been asked to pose next to former Bolivian President Carlos Mesa.

Their activity is expansionary and relentless. They work by occupying urban and rural landscapes and claiming them as their own. Politically, their presence and imagery speak volumes and often consists of a trivialisation of Bolivian and Latin American iconography. As David explains:
'We have taken claim over 'politically correct' spaces, over quotidian spaces. What makes the Galán Family different from other Trans groups around the world is our political presence, which has been subversive […] we have intermixed with ordinary people in order to provoke and subvert from the inside.'

The acts of posing next to pictures of Che Guevara; a Potosina beggar woman; ancient ruins; the Houses of Parliament; a Cathedral. These are all outdated icons of a country which can no longer be seen in terms of a socialist revolution, facile conceptions of poverty, an archaeological place of interest, a de jure government or a religious institution. The presence of the Familia Galán is enough to desecrate and defile any iconic platitude. In England, what they do would pass as conceptual art.
This is not an accusation or a condemnation. For many, like me, this is a necessary and welcome process. Aesthetics trends in Bolivia need to move beyond the worn images in which they are rooted in order to discover new identities for the twenty first century. Many people (mainly earnest lefties, do-gooder tourists and local entrepreneurs) would disagree. There is money to be had from selling traditional Bolivian iconography to the world but people don't realise that a great part of this Bolivian 'reality' is artificially being preserved in the name of commerce and tourism.

In short, the Galán Family are attempting to high-jack Bolivian heritage.
La Paz would not be La Paz if it didn't have the Galán Family. The Galán Family have become part of the urban landscape. We have started a project titled 'We Are Heritage'.
And they have indeed become heritage, or at least a familiar part of the local scenery. Understanding their cult status and historical significance, I feel privileged to be talking to these individuals.

Over lunch with the Galán, I start to wonder whether I could also be part of La Familia. Dressed in a white shirt, black pinstripe trousers and patent leather shoes, I feel I might stand a chance. After all, I could claim the formality of my attire is part of this world's diversity, and that I am subverting by working from the 'inside'. During the interview, David Aruquipa mentions

'Do you want to be part of the Galán family? You can be, if you want to, any time you want.'

I am told by K-os Galán that I would need another name if I wanted to be part of The Family. I am informed 'ISIS Galán' has been taken, a testament to their reproductive success. Amidst an ocean of confused gendered pronouns, I begin to feel self-conscious about writing an article on sexual diversity when I consider myself to be pretty boringly mainstream. Maybe there's no room for me here. Maybe everyone is just passing by. It's spelt out clearly in their manifesto:

WE'RE NOT A HOME, WE'RE A BROTHEL.

SER CHOLITA

What makes a cholita a cholita

There's no need to go looking for cholitas around La Paz. It would be unusual and even noteworthy not to bump into one while walking around town or glancing down a busy street. With their distinctive pleated layer skirts, vibrant **mantas**, and eye-catching bowler hats, cholitas colour the city of La Paz with their unique style. But is it the just the outfit or is it something more that defines what it means to be a cholita? That was the question I set out to answer as I greeted Luisa, a local cholita who agreed to meet with me and talk about what it means to live life as a cholita in modern day Bolivia.

After a warm greeting, Luisa returns to the reserved, and sometimes timid nature that is sometimes associated with cholitas. We began to talk as the fruit shakes and empanadas arrived. While shy, Luisa quickly begins to open up as she speaks animatedly about her upbringing. For her, it was not so much a decision as a slow and steady process. From childhood, she was raised to be a cholita like all the women in her family. She even adds that if she has a daughter someday, she plans to dress her in cholita attire from a young age so the tradition can live on

Wanting to do so is becoming a rarity. Nowadays, most cholitas are opting to dress their daughters in more modern clothes to give them greater opportunities later in life. Luisa recalls not so long ago when men would yell "**Chola**!" at her as she walked down the street. Cholitas were kept out of universities, which left them with the stigma of no education. With the election of President Evo Morales, things began to get better and the 'Law Against Racism And All Forms Of Discrimination' (see article on Afro-Bolivians, page 9) passed in 2010 was another major step. Changes in the law and in social attitudes makes Luisa feel confident that in the future she will no longer suffer from discrimination. These changes notwithstanding, cholitas are not only known for their occasional timidity, but also for their stoicism. It could be argued, however, that their strength is more a product of the history of discrimination they have lived through, rather than one of their intrinsic qualities.

From an outsider's point of view, what defines a cholita is her outfit: it distinguishes them and gives them their iconic identity around the city. Luisa informs me that it's become so prominent these days that even some pseudo-cholitas try and pull off the style. To her, the clothing is very important, and she believes that without following the fashions, a cholita cannot be fully recognised as one. But is this the central characteristic of cholita life? Apparently not. With the question still not answered, I feel it's time to be blunt and get my answer . What makes her and her fellow bowler-hatted, timid-yet-thick-skinned women cholitas? Family, she tells me. One can dress up and get all of the customs right, but essentially, a family makes a woman a cholita. Just as Luisa's mother dressed her in **pollera**, shawls and jewellery, so will she to her daughter one day because it is not just a cultural tradition, it is a family one.

TEXT: SENECA GARRISON PHOTO: GABRIEL BARCELO

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUMS

TEXT: SENECA GARRISON PHOTO: LORANGE DAO

Saturday May the 21st marked the fifth annual 'Noches de Museos' in La Paz. Every year, the doors of museums and galleries are left open from the evening, through the wee hours of the morning, and until the **amanecer** to give the public free access to the artistic side of the city for one special night. This year's Night of the Museums was bigger than ever and drew crowds almost too large for the narrow street where the event first originated, the supposedly haunted calle Jaen.

All types – from parents and toddlers to hippies and three-piece suits – mingled in the queues to get into the museums. For those less interested in the local history or too impatient to wait out the lines, vendors and musicians filled every empty crevice on the cobbled road. Nothing can beat enjoying a hot **api** while shopping for local handicrafts to the sound of an acoustic guitar on a chilled Bolivian night.

While the street was undoubtedly teeming with people, the crowds flowed with ease and affability. The real highlight of the night was the local photography, paintings, and handicrafts on display in the galleries hidden between the museums. But don't get carried away by the feelgood ambiance of the streets; the museums themselves are not to be missed. While they are open to the public all year round, the galleries fill themselves to the brim for this event to help boost awareness for the city's artistic activities and cultural heritage. Once a year, for one night only, some of the most remarkable works produced in the city come together in one single place.

While you'll have to wait for next year's Night of the Museums to get the full experience, you can visit the four municipal museums (Museo Costumbrista Juan de Vargas, Museo del Litoral Boliviano, Museo de Metales Preciosos Precolombinos, and Museo Casa de Murillo, all located on calle Jaen) any day but Monday, or the Nacional Museum of Art (calle Comercio) every Thursday. For free!

Bolivian Express
Grupo Express Press

Cultural Calendar

TEATRO MUNICIPAL "ALBERTO SAAVEDRA PÉREZ", Calle Jenaro Sanjinés, corner w Calle Indaburo

Thursday 16 and Friday 17 – hrs. 19:30
Charango Festival
''La Sociedad Boliviana del Charango Filial La Paz'' organises the first festival "Bolivia en Charango", which aims at promoting new performers – the charango is part of Bolivia's cultural patrimony.

MODESTA SANGINES THEATRE – FRANZTAMAYO Cultural Centre – Av. Mariscal Santa Cruz corner w Potosi

From Wednesday 1 to Sunday 5 - hrs. 19:30
Biafra Productions on stage
"Niños de la Cárcel" is the work of the Bolivian writer Sonia Alemán Uribe, presented by Biafra Producciones, with Cacho Mendieta.

Tuesday 7 and Wednesday 8 - hrs. 19:30
Teatro del Sol y la Luna
"Mentiras que matan de risa" is the title of the theatre troop created by Luis Zamorano Tapia, director of the Teatro del Sol y la Luna, which will then be inaugurated.

Sunday 19 and Monday 20 - hrs. 19:30
Dance Studio "Pandora"
Those who love alternative dance will enjoy the performance "Cosmogonía del agua, tierra, aire y fuego" (Cosmogony of the water, earth, air and fire), a project of the Estudio de Danza "Pandora" focusing on ecological dance.

Wednesday 22 - hrs. 19:30
Paceña Urban Music
Nandes & Don Flow is a hip hop duo launching their new album titled "2.0.6.2. A lo paceño", a production where they gather their experiences.

Friday 24 - hrs. 19:30
Autoctonous Concert
The Cultural Centre Jalsury has been working for 20 years to spread autoctonous music to the La Paz communities and with this purpose in mind, they will present their new album "Buscando un sueño".

Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 - hrs. 19:30
La Orquesta Típica Nacional
In order to present their new musical production, la Orquesta Típica Nacional will come on stage under Edgar Lupa's direction.

CAMARA THeATRE - Calle Jenaro Sanjinés corner w Indaburo
Sunday 12 and Monday 13 – hrs. 16:00 y 19:00
Time for Cuentacuentos
7th Cuentacuentos International Meeting

CINE TEATRO MUNICIPAL "6 DE AGOSTO". Av. 6 de Agosto corner w Rosendo Gutiérrez

Tuesday 14 – hrs. 19:30
Guitar in Hand
As part of the activities carried out by the association 'Guitarra en Mano', this group of minstrels launches the first Author's Songs Festival in La Paz.

From Tuesday 21 to Sunday 26
Enjoy black and white horror movie, every night at 19:30
Nosferatu (Tuesday), Frankenstein (Wednesday), The Wolf Man (Thursday), The Birds (Friday), Day Watch (Saturday), Psycho (Sunday)

TEATRO AL AIRE LIBRE "JAIME LAREDO" Avenida del Ejército corner w Avenida del Poeta

Wednesday 22 – hrs. 20:00
A.B. Quintanilla once again
After his acclaimed performance in La Paz in April, the Mexican-American is coming back to the open-air theatre with his tasty cumbia.

Saturday 25 – hrs. 20:00
La Paz Open Air
Music festival with Enanitos Verdes from Argentina, Track from Santa Cruz and Octavia from La Paz.

CASA DE LA CULTURA - Mcal Santa Cruz corner w Potosí

Until Friday 10
Salón "Antonio Gonzáles Bravo"
Exhibition "Fotografías Cotidianas" (Daily Photographs), by Alfredo Coloma

From Monday 13 to Thursday 30
Exhibition of drawings and Altiplano textiles "Herederos de los Símbolos" (Symbols Heirs), by Pablo Lliulli.

From Monday 13 to Thursday 30
Small format exhibition "Descodificación en vez de Descolonización" (Decoding instead of Decolonizing), by Lucio Guarachi Baltasar.

From Monday 13 to Thursday 30
Photo exhibition "Dibujando con la Luz" (Drawing with Light), by Miguel Burgoa Valdés

Salón "Cecilio Guzmán de Rojas
From Wednesday 1 to Thursday 30
Exhibition "Paisajes Urbanos" (Urban Landscapes), by Francisco Ramos

LIVING THE DEATH ROAD

As you wake up early in the morning, you experience your first adrenaline rush as you understand that you're about to start one of the most intense days of your life; or at least, that's what you've been told and that's how you imagine it, thinking how you'll soon be riding down the road as if falling from the sky.

Finally, it's time to go: the Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking bus arrives, its roof covered with what seem like enough bikes for an entire football squad (plus subs, plus entourage). As you hop onboard and look out of the window you're overcome by pangs of adrenaline: you're feeling strangely excited and scared at the same time. But hold your horses, it takes a while to make it to the top of the **Cumbre**, whose deceptive mist artfully hides what lies below.

As we get there, the guides start to prepare the equipment: knee pads, elbow pads, gloves, helmets. All the kit makes you not only virtually unrecognisable - it also makes you feel like a professional warrior - such is the level of protection. According to your size, you're then assigned a bike which feels so perfect that when you mount it you feel ready to face any obstacle that lies ahead. Dragons, carnivorous plants, pirates - bring it on.
The route starts with the chunky wheels gliding down the asphalt road. The army of bikes invades the road followed by crazed war-cries from the troupe. What an amazing feeling: the curves, mist and frozen air come together in an experience which seems otherworldly. There's something not quite right though - perhaps you assumed you'd be riding down mud and stones the size of heads; this almost seems too easy in comparison. But as the guide stops at the end of the asphalt road, you're just able to glimpse a small dirt track - a promise of what lies ahead. As you begin your second descent, patches of green emerge from round every corner and through the thick fog, which will soon envelop you completely. Before you know it you're in the belly of a cloud and halfway down the **camino de la muerte**. Read our next issue to discover where you'll end up next.

TEXT: IVAN RODRIGUEZ P.
PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN CACERES