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#74 *Knowledge (s)*

Editorial #74: Knowledge(s)

By: Caroline Risacher

This is the story of a girl—let's call her Lizeth and let's imagine she's 10. Lizeth grows up in a small town at the edge of the Bolivian **altiplano**. She goes to public school, the proudly named Unidad Educativa Litoral Boliviano, which she has attended since primer grado. Every week starts the same way, with the raising of the Bolivian flag and the singing of the national anthem. Lizeth's favourite classes are Science, **Aymara**, and Physical Education However, school days don't last very long: only four to five hours. To fill her free time, she learns how to play rugby from a gringo who recently arrived to teach this unheard-of sport. (She and her friends greatly enjoyed playing against a boys' team from La Paz and beating them with ease). The other day, her professor of **Valores** mentioned that an organisation involved in something called 'integral education' will come to the town and teach its spiritual programme in the afternoons.

This imaginary but very possible town is closer to reality than you might expect, with Lizeth's story demonstrating very real changes to Bolivian schools.

Education throughout Bolivia is indeed developing, and has made major, if slow, strides since Law 1565 of 1994, introducing the idea of 'intercultural bilingual education' to the country. This has since been consolidated by Law 070 Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez (ASEP) in 2010 which is based around four main areas: decolonisation, plurilingualism, intra and interculturalism, and productive and communitarian education.

Inspired by the latest law and the defining concept of **Vivir Bien (Suma Qamaña)**, the municipality of La Paz has started a programme of emotional intelligence to teach kids how to understand and manage their emotions. In order to advance a 'secular, pluralist, and spiritual' education, classes focusing exclusively on Catholicism have expanded their content to values, spirituality, and religions. The new law aims to redefine education to shape a new generation and a new decolonised identity, reinforcing what it means to be Bolivian.

The formation of one's identity is certainly influenced by education with the Museo del Litoral, for example, illustrating the role of history and how the way it is taught affects the Bolivian psyche. Nevertheless, for some, school education doesn't impact much; you can encounter some mechanics and antique photographers, self-taught professionals who, from a young age, have chosen their own path.

Bolivia does not lack spaces where people share and transmit their knowledge in unexpected ways, from a climbing school in the mining town of Llallagua to talks on the presence of LGBT+ literature in Bolivia; learning is not limited to the classroom.

The long-term effects of ASEP on Bolivian identity and future generations are yet to be seen. Unfortunately, it appears that Bolivia is still divided. There is a very clear disparity between rural and urban areas, rich and poor, boys and girls. Implementation of the law is slow at best. However, this glimpse of the state of education in Bolivia does shine a light on positive developments. ASEP promotes a vision of inclusivity, plurality, and interculturality, combined with an integral idea of education that can only bode well for the future of Bolivian students—young, old and self-taught.

For this issue, we travelled to the towns of Carmen Pampa in the Yungas, Santiago de Machaca in the Altiplano, the mining town of Llallagua, we visited schools around La Paz and saw some of these changes in action. The students and teachers, masters and apprentices we have met, inspired us and showed us what the future of Bolivia might look like. For schoolchildren like Lizeth there are many opportunities opening up and we wanted to share some of these opportunities with you.

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

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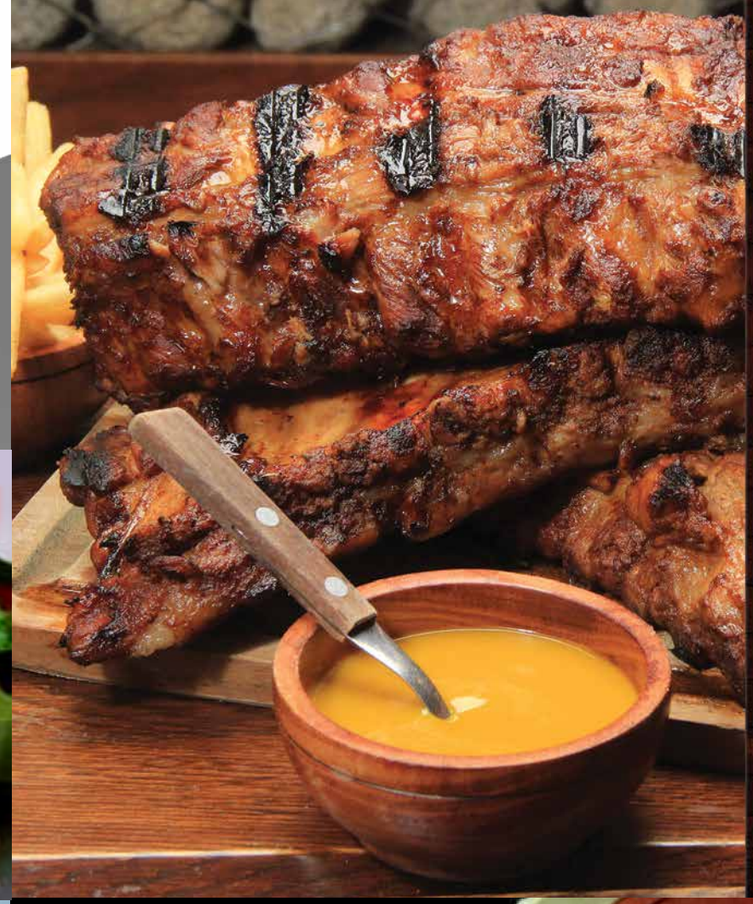

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ANTIQUE PHOTOGRAPHERS

PORTRAIT OF GREGORIO ALCÓN BELTRÁN

TEXT & PHOTOS: FABIAN ZAPATA **TRANSLATION:** NIALL FLYNN

GREGORIO ALCÓN BELTRÁN:

An intrepid traveller who spends his day relaxing in the square he has grown fond of and with his old friend, the sun, which has been inspiring his photographs for over half a century. He earns between 10 and 15 bolivianos per customer, offering a portfolio that includes a couple of small portraits he shoots with his old camera.

A master of light. A bronze-skinned gentleman wearing a grey jacket, clean shirt and striking tie. The esteemed 82-year-old photographer spends his afternoon astride a stool, under which he stores his equipment, and alongside his old camera named 'Mobile machine'. Don Gregorio's relationship with this square goes back over 50 years. He makes a living off portraits of **paceños**. He charges between 10 and 12 bolivianos for a set of 2 ID-card photos. After a long conversation swapping tales of our love of photography, discussing lenses and brands, this honourable man tells me about his style of work and how he had to adapt to technology to be able to continue in the field.

It turns out that Don Gregorio was one of the first photographers in Bolivia. He was trained by Marco Kavlin, whose family brought photographic innovation to La Paz. It brought Kodak to Bolivia, which arrived with all the gadgets to teach the art of photography. Don Gregorio was amongst Kodak's apprentices. But the interesting thing is that rather than the arrival of digital technology, it was counterfeiters' low prices that put an end to this brand.

This photographer chiefly enjoyed travelling the country in military garrisons. He proudly recalls the good times: 'I had the opportunity to travel all over Bolivia: Villazón, Tupiza, Los Yungas, Puerto Guaqui, the Chilean border, and many other places. In 5 minutes my photos were developed and ready, no matter where I was. This little box was more than sufficient for development, as well as great camera equipment, different lenses and tubes.'

'Now I spend my afternoons here in the sun,' he says, with a serene smile.

Our conversation became more and more enjoyable. He mentioned that the city government is urging them to continue using the cameras of yesteryear to preserve the square's emblematic heritage, but says that this is no longer sustainable due to the cost of developing photos and the difficulty of sourcing the required materials. First and foremost, Don Gregorio would like to continue working with black and white film reel. But these photographers have had to modernise their methods to make their work profitable. They are artists who have survived the passing of time, but who retain their identity striking an amicable accord with technology. Don Gregorio showed me his new equipment and admitted that he has been using a digital camera for five years.

He uses a small, simple and discreet PowerShot camera and a printer that is hidden and padlocked under his seat. The brand new digital printer constitutes his entire studio, along with a couple of coloured backdrops.

As we chatted, a client arrived who wished to have her portrait taken. It was then that I witnessed Don Gregorio's skills. Reading the intensity of the light, he oriented his seat to his subject; a lady in a traditional skirt. The sun is the only flash at his disposal, and I can testify that it is all he needs.

Don Gregorio is a member of a trade union made up of 600 independent photographers, and he lives entirely off this business, but says that it is no longer profitable. 'Some young people come, but they quickly disappear because they say that they are not earning money. But I don't have that option. I have been here for over 50 years. Photography is all I know. I've had a studio, I've taken portraits on my travels and I've been set up here for several years now,' says the man who has seen the growth of this square, formerly known as Churubamba.

THEY ARE ARTISTS WHO HAVE SURVIVED THE PASSING OF TIME, BUT WHO RETAIN THEIR IDENTITY STRIKING AN AMICABLE ACCORD WITH TECHNOLOGY.

Many people seek him out because he is a well-known character. His most loyal and longstanding clients come to him today for portraits of their grandchildren. He is also sought by journalists and curious tourists who offer to buy his camera. He even appeared on television demonstrating his photo development techniques, and he has taught friends with an interest in photography.

These quirky figures who sit by their wooden tripods are greatly revered by society for capturing part of Bolivia's history through their lenses; recognised for their modest but impeccable work that is capable of intimidating any professional studio.

I have now made a commitment to Don Gregorio. He promised to teach me his development techniques if I provide him with black and white film reel. Although many of his negatives have sadly been stolen, I am keen to see the work of this guardian of tradition; the composition of locomotives and the faces of traditional family life on camera reels never previously developed.

KICKING DOWN BARRIERS

A FRANCO-BOLIVIAN BRINGS **RUGBY TO THE ALTIPLANO**

TEXT: LILY TURNER **PHOTO:** FABIAN ZAPATA

'IN BOLIVIA, **EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE.'**
—JEAN FONTAYNE

I meet Jean Fontayne under the shadow of the Basilica of San Francisco, in central La Paz, on a crisp morning. We have a four-hour bus journey into the heart of the altiplano ahead of us. For Jean, this is a routine trip, as he has been travelling this route weekly since March. But today we miss the bus to Santiago de Machaca, a town that sits just south of Lake Titicaca on the **altiplano** near the Peruvian border. We are told that the bus will wait for us down the road so we frantically board a minibus heading in the same direction. I have little faith that the bus will be there waiting for us, but I am proved wrong. As we find our seats, we let out a harmonious sigh of relief and Jean remarks, 'In Bolivia, everything is possible.' This has never felt more true.

This philosophy—'In Bolivia, everything is possible'—is what has inspired Jean throughout his life and led him to teach rugby in Santiago de Machaca. Here, in this small town of 4,000 people, something decidedly untraditional is occurring this year. We pick a quiet spot on the edge of the town to sit down and discuss what is happening.

Born in Oruro in 1990, Jean spent his first few months of life in an orphanage. He was discovered by a friend of a couple who would eventually become Jean's parents, who noted that Jean 'was holding on to life by holding on to him' when he picked the baby up. The man phoned his friends back in France who had a desire to adopt and told them about this sweet Bolivian boy he had just met. Within weeks, Jean was adopted.

Growing up in France was fantastic, Jean recalls, but when he was 26 and had finished his studies, he decided to travel to his country of birth. He arrived in Santiago de Machaca a few months later, for work with Macha'k Wayra, a French non-governmental organisation. Based here since 2005, Macha'k Wayra educates populations with agricultural projects. While doing this, Jean soon began brainstorming other ways he could aid the community.

When asking him whether he found it difficult to transition into such a culturally different place from France, he expresses few qualms. He mentions how the language was tricky at first but he made sure, with intensive lessons, that when he returned to Bolivia he would be able to speak coherent Spanish.

Having played rugby since he was five years old, Jean is passionate about the sport, and he is talented too—he was even pre-selected to play for the Bolivian national team. Seeing how much spare time the children had when not in school, he decided that teaching them rugby would be a productive use of their recreational time.

Setting up training sessions at the town's artificial pitch, he taught boys and girls ages 8 to 12. After beginning with the basics, he could tell they were enjoying it and therefore wanted to expand and reach out to surrounding places. This past May, he organised a tournament for boys and girls from Santiago de Machaca alongside a mixed team from Catacora and a 'boys team' from La Paz's Franco-Bolivian school. It was a great success, with most of the town turning up to watch the game and the children sharing traditional Andean food.

Jean says that the school day here 'usually starts at 8:30am and ends at 12:30pm, meaning the children have a lot of free time to try and occupy themselves until their parents come home from work at around 6 pm.' Jean's rugby league is vital, providing the kids with an activity and an outlet for their energy.

It is clear how admired Jean is in Santiago. Everyone we pass recognises him. '**¡Hola!'** and **'Buenas tardes'** greetings fly at us from all angles. Children run up with arms extended, and Jean greets each one with similar and generous affection.

And Jean has more plans. He wants to open a socio-cultural centre where, in their free time, children can come and learn about different cultures. It will also be a place to read, watch movies and play games—activities that the majority of children here rarely have the opportunity to partake in.

Waiting to board the bus back to La Paz, I watch the town wake up with the rising sun. I feel fortunate to have visited a place where so much has positively changed in recent years.

Whilst watching the children of Santiago de Machaca make their way to school, I remember their infectious enthusiasm for rugby. Who would have thought that in such a rural town in a country obsessed with football, rugby could spark such a sense of community? I recall one of the first things Jean said to me just 24 hours before: 'In Bolivia, everything is possible.' The future for both Santiago de Machaca and Jean Fontayne looks blissfully bright.

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Macha'k Wayra: www.machakwayra.org

ZERA: LESSONS OF LIGHT

TEXT: JULIE GAYNES **PHOTO:** ALVARO MANZANO

The state of public education in Bolivia is slowly improving despite slippery oversight and limited funding. Even massive reform from money-lending institutions won't transform Bolivia into the generative, egalitarian nation it aims to be. Agents of change in education insist that true promise comes from within. Give a child a coin, and she'll fill her stomach. Teach a child the tools for self-discovery, and she'll tip stagnation.

ZERA INTEGRAL EDUCATION THE INTEGRAL APPROACH

Sharoll sits next to Tani in a well-lit office in San Miguel. Tani, age seven, has just drawn a rainbow flowing from her heart. Within the rainbow, sandwiched between the words 'happiness' and 'love', Tani has written 'anger' and 'sadness'. Sharoll Osnat Fernandez Siñani, educator and director of ZERA, asks why. She helps Tani articulate her feelings and the two decide that the 'light' flowing through the prism of her heart refracts into grander light that projects onto others and leaves no room for negativity. Tani covers up her unwanted emotions with coloured markers and felt stickers. She glams up the rest of her symbolic diagram with neon glitter.

This is where spirituality comes in. ZERA, which means 'seed' in Hebrew, uses the globally acclaimed curriculum, Spirituality For Kids (SFK), as one of the sources for its programmes to implement tools for introspection through interactive methods for Bolivian youth.

Bolivia has long boasted a wealth of natural resources and cultural diversity, but has never been at the forefront of artistic, economic, or technological development. ZERA teaches students that they have the power to change the future, that there is no 'light' in bowing to former power relationships. Instead, there is a 'seed' worth fostering in every person, regardless of status or origin.

'People are insecure everywhere, including Bolivia,' says Sharoll, helping nine-year-old Maxi apply glue to the perimeters of his silhouette. 'We need to teach children to look inside themselves, help them realise that they are already good and whole.'

Since its early work in women's prisons three years ago, ZERA has reached over 1,000 children. It conducts workshops in the city and countryside, weaving together expressive disciplines—art, dance, games, media, reading and writing—to ensure active engagement among its participants. The objective of the sessions are to provide Bolivian children of all backgrounds with the instruments necessary for a self-determining future.

According to ZERA's philosophy, the instruments are empowering tools rather than imposed values. They are:Appreciation, Sharing, Effort, Wishes, Responsibility, Consciousness, Perseverance, Certainty, Unity and Love.

Sharoll nods at the paradox that selflessness might lead to personal benefits. 'Actually, technical problems can be resolved quickly in education with the right administration, but what's essential is working in the community. Even with little resources, but with willingness to work with others, we can get what we want.'

It's a tough grab at gratification, but the kids get it. They learn that, 'like a macaroni necklace', everyone is connected. Despite the fact that everyone has a different story, all people seek fulfillment.

Most of ZERA's lessons are expressed through the motif of light. Through these 'classes of light' children learn that their happiness is shared. In internalising this metaphor, participants of ZERA's programmes have been reported to enjoy improved relations with their peers, teachers, parents and greater community.

'We're trying to raise conscious people,' Sharoll tells me, 'who are willing to sacrifice for others in ways that are unglamorous, and moreover continued daily. All of us, with our quirks and nuances, have something unique to give to the world.'

In the future, ZERA hopes to work with the global network Teach for All in its development of Teach for Bolivia, to ensure excellent education and inspiration across the nation.

For more info:
Facebook: ZERA Educación Integral
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kY99bU79QA

PROGRAMA INTELIGENCIA EMOCIONAL (PIE)
THE EMOTIONAL APPROACH

TEXT: JULIE GAYNES

At the forefront of new education developments are both private and public organisations strategising for equality in schools and empowering children through interdisciplinary classroom pedagogy. One of them is Programa Inteligencia Emocional (PIE), a project set up by the local government.

The instructor contorts his face into a mimetic frown and pretends to cry into his hands. After a few moments of gleeful giggling at the grown man's theatrics, 32 children join him in crying. The classroom erupts in wailing, and it is understood by every 5-year-old present that this concept, sadness, belongs to everyone.

Within this 2.5 hour session, a similar process will be repeated with five other emotions: anger, happiness, fear, disgust, surprise. In six other classrooms at this school in central La Paz, kindergarteners undergo the same emotional cycle with educators who have been trained to reach—and teach—where sensitivities lie.

This is the second of three emotional intelligence sessions that these children will participate in this year, as part of a government initiative to reduce the presence of violence in the community. According to the Pan American Health Organization, Bolivia has the highest rate of intimate-partner violence within South and Central America.

The Programa Inteligencia Emotional (PIE), which belongs to the Dirección de Coordinación de Políticas de Igualdad will visit 55 schools this year to provide sessions for young children on how to positively channel their emotions.

PIE's approach is threefold: 1) Teaching to recognising one's emotions, 2) Teaching to identify the emotions of others, and 3) Teaching to manage one's emotions. After only two years of operation, the programme currently works with children ages 5-6 and 10-11, but hopes to serve youths ages 15-16 in the coming year.

Victor Hugo, the founder and coordinator of PIE, has built a curriculum on principles of Neuroscience, Evolutionary Psychology and Teaching Pedagogy. While responses from teachers and families have been consistently positive, Hugo acknowledges that the limited number of sessions per child poses a challenge to PIE's impact. He hopes the programme will inspire teacher training in emotional intelligence so the entire educative community can work towards eliminating discrimination and violence in Bolivia.

A PLACE TO MOURN THE LOSS OF THE SEA

TEXT: DANIEL JOHNSON
PHOTOS: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI
WITH PERMISSION FROM GAMLP, SMC-DECM

Calle Jaén, with its colourful houses and its long history going back to the 18th century, often overshadows the small museums which call it their home. Amongst these, Juica Tadić Pereira presides over the small Museo del Litoral Boliviano. This museum charts the history of the War of the Pacific, from 1879 to 1883, in which Chile took significant stretches of coastline from its adversaries, Peru and Bolivia.

Considering the powerful hold that the idea of the sea has for many Bolivians, I set out to learn why history is important to them, and see whether it still holds any relevance today.

On a six-month tenure in charge of research at the museum, Tadić Pereira's passion for history is a family affair. 'Both sides of my family are full of history,' she says. Her paternal grandfather fought in the First World War, when he was only 13 years old, and she claims descent from a commander during the Latin American Wars of Independence, León Galindo.

I asked how this extraordinary tale, which manages to weave its way through some of the biggest events of the past two centuries, brought her to the Museo del Litoral.

'It's part of my life,' she says, 'it's like living it…we had grandparents who made history.' This is certainly true. León Galindo reportedly fought in the Battle of Boyacá, which ensured the independence of Gran Colombia from Spain, as well as the battles of Pichincha and Ayacucho.

'MANY OF THE CHILDREN WHO COME HERE HAVE NEVER SEEN THE SEA,' PEREIRA SAYS. 'THEY CAN SEE WHAT THEY HAVE LOST.'
—JUICA TADIĆ PEREIRA

Tadić grew up with history, which has helped fuel her passion for the subject, but not many can claim to be descended from such an impressive family. In some ways, the elitism of academia is only reinforced in the disparity between Tadić's and the general population's access to history. It is worth noting that the Museo del Litoral is tiny, with only four rooms split over two floors. It is ironic that Bolivia has chosen to commemorate a humiliating defeat with such a museum, yet does not provide for a fully fledged space that would be able to house more information about this critical period in Bolivia's history.

Tadić argues that history is still and should remain important. 'We are the result of what happened in the past,' she says. She goes further, mentioning the Chaco War, between Bolivia and Paraguay from 1932 to 1935, fought over petroleum reserves. It's clear that she is trying to make history more relatable.

This is a step in the right direction. But how successful has the Museo del Litoral been in engaging Bolivians with their history? The clearest evidence of any success would be the schoolchildren who explore the museum during our interview.

'In the mornings it's amazing,' Tadić says. 'Children from schools both private and public come. At least 300 each morning. They come from the **Zona Sur** and El Alto. They even come from the provinces.'

As it turns out, the majority of visitors are Bolivians rather than tourists. According to Tadić, this has has been due to a concerted effort to make the museum more accessible to Bolivians, who she says are not used to the museum-going experience.

A good example of this is a small room off the courtyard of the museum, often the first room visitors see. Inside, a projector shows an image of the sea on the opposite wall. A hidden speaker plays ambient sounds of the ocean.

Tadić says that once a Dutch couple came out of the room laughing, telling her that the room was ridiculous. The room's purpose, however, was quickly explained.

'Many of the children who come here have never seen the sea,' Tadić says. 'They can see what they have lost.'

Another reason for the museum is to serve as a rallying cry for regaining Bolivia's lost coastline. It's an emotional task, perhaps not the best basis for good historiography, but it does, however, engage Bolivians with their country's past.

This emotional framing of Bolivia's history seems to benefit the museum—a quick glance at the guest book confirms the museum's popularity. However, with so much concern for regaining the coastline and anger at politicians' perceived failings on the issue, people could fail to engage critically with the history they are being shown.

As we wrap up, after a whirlwind of politics, history and family, there is an opportunity to ask one last question: whether the government could do more to promote this museum, and history in general.

According to Tadić, that's unlikely. 'When a country has a mediocre political class, 'it' has an interest in having an indolent population. We are trying to tell history in a way that people become startled, to wake in people the inquisitiveness to know more.'

Let us hope that this is true, that this museum can engage Bolivians with their history, and that the emotional significance of this age-old conflict does not impede this.

MECHANICAL WORKS

SERVICING YOUR CAR IN **LA PAZ**

TEXT AND PHOTOS: FABIAN ZAPATA
TRANSLATION: MICHAEL PROTHEROE

In almost every corner of the city, there are built-in makeshift mechanical workshops that meet the demand of ramshackle cars in La Paz. Inside there are hand-painted advertisements, made-up sponsors, disorganised tools, greasy walls, pornographic posters and abandoned cars. The mechanics are exceptionally inventive people who keep all kinds of scrap to create replacement parts for other cars.

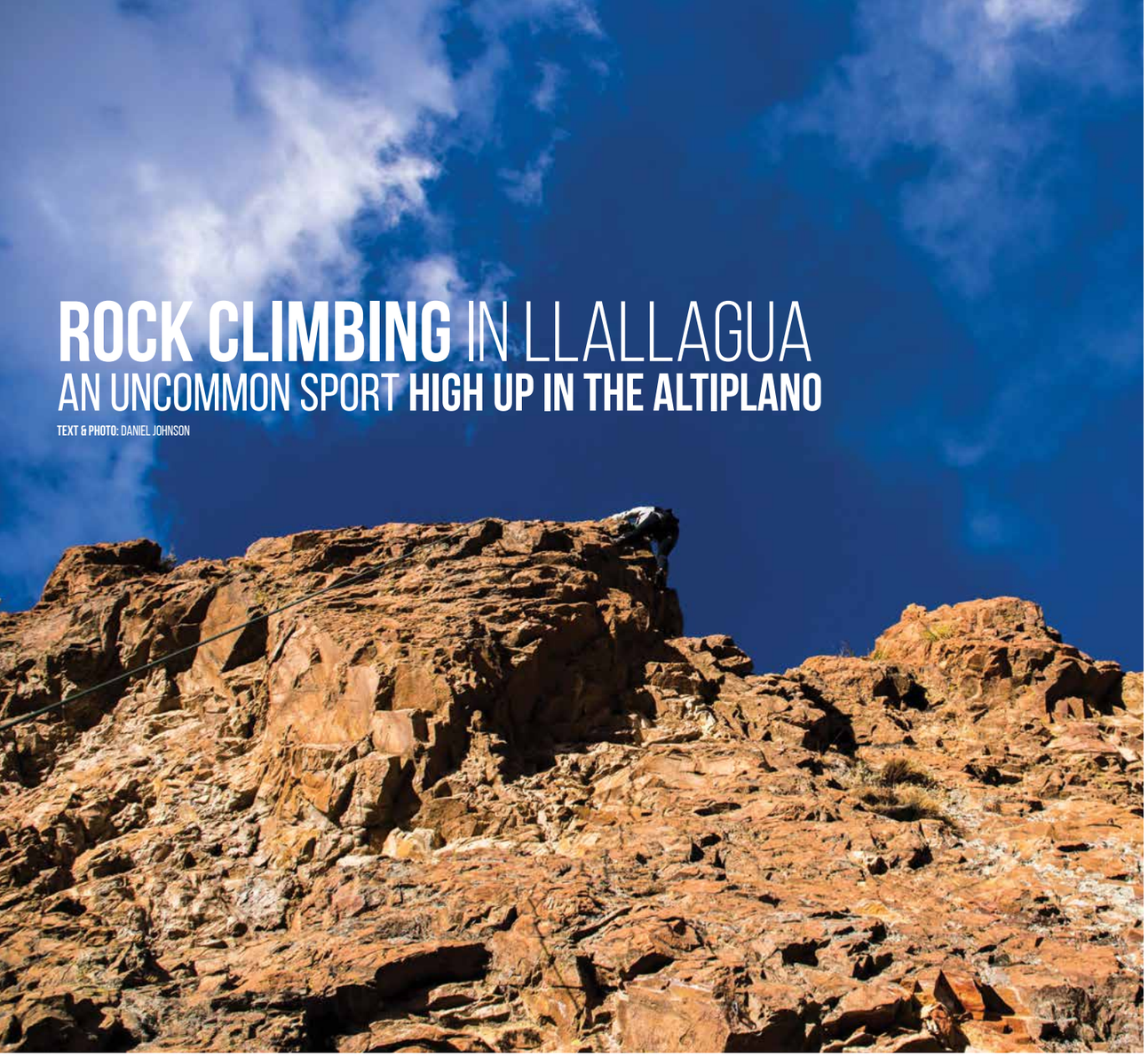
I interviewed a few **chapista** mechanics and **torneros** to see how they work. I met two brothers: Reynaldo and José who are self taught, needing only to buy themselves some mechanics manuals in El Alto. Today they work from the door of their house, in the middle of the street. On the other hand, there is Don Macario, a personality much loved by **Peta** enthusiasts. Macario learned in **Hansa** workshops and today dedicates himself solely to these classic cars which have invaded the city.

Regardless of the amount of clients they have, the remarkable thing about these mechanics is that they work without specific prices. It is very easy to have a car running for a very low cost.

They could install a carburetor into a fuel injection car. With rubber residue and some welding, they give a Suzuki a Toyota's suspension, a Subaru's engine, tractor tyres and the electronic brain of a llama. I am obviously exaggerating, but their inventiveness did surprise me.

ROCK CLIMBING IN LLALLAGUA
AN UNCOMMON SPORT HIGH UP IN THE ALTIPLANO

TEXT & PHOTO: DANIEL JOHNSON



On a chilly Sunday morning, we set off down a valley next to a spa near Llallagua, a town between Oruro and Potosí, to meet the climbers. Outcrops of rock rise up out of the landscape, with silhouettes clambering over them. A small group of people cluster around a promontory, looking up and waiting to start their ascent.

The small mining town of Llallagua has a very strange atmosphere, sharing remarkable similarities with Soviet-era towns. Its squares are dedicated to revolutionary miners, with statues depicting them alternatively holding rifles or hammers and sickles. Yet **El Tío**, the lord of the underground, is regularly left offerings to safeguard the wellbeing of the miners. Rusted infrastructure lies scattered around, and the valleys that surround the town feel more like walls keeping the townspeople in. However, we are here to visit Llallagua's small community of rock climbers.

Climbing is an emergent sport in Bolivia, with indoor climbing gyms in many of its cities and countless sites throughout the country's share of the Andes. However, as one of Llallagua's climbers puts it, 'There are lots of places to climb, but there aren't many climbers.'

In 2008, a Belgian climber Niels Jespers arrived in Llallagua to work for an NGO. While there, he noticed a series of rocky outcrops—made of a rock called **Chiquitito Picante** by the locals—that looked perfect for rock climbing. The work took Niels elsewhere, but in 2013 he and eight other climbers returned and set out to create a school for climbing in Llallagua, called Arriba Bolivia. For five weeks, they taught locals advanced climbing techniques, including the use of harnesses and belay devices.

'It was about Llallaguans getting to know their own environment,' Niels said. Indeed, in a documentary about his project, many citizens of Llallagua spoke of how they considered their mountainous environment purely as scenery before learning to climb.

Niels' goal was to create an independent and self-sufficient group of climbers. 'We don't want 100 people to climb just once,' he said. 'Rather, we need a few people who can climb independently.' The objective was that when the folks from Arriba Bolivia left, the climbing community in Llallagua could continue without them.

Today, it appears that Niels was successful. There are now ten active climbers in Llallagua. César Alejandro, the leader of the climbing community and a professor at the local university, has been here since the beginning. Rubén Quispe learned to climb during his period of compulsory military service, and Sergio Nina and Tania Maribel Torres Calisaya, César's students, started climbing last year.

My guide for the town, Eduardo, and I, as well as Eduardo's girlfriend Jazmín, decide to join them in their climbing.

The group decides that a route named Goollie would be the best place to start, and we begin to climb. Six metres up, I realise that my Converse shoes aren't suitable for climbing, and after I fall I'm handed a worn pair of climbing shoes. This time I make it to the top.

Stopping to rest, I get the chance to observe the group's dynamics. There's a sense of camaraderie, with banter flowing easily. Someone brought their small dog, who excitedly runs up and down the ridges.

Sergio, 23, who studies civil engineering at Llallagua's university, tells me why he loves the sport: 'I love to climb a lot. I want to stay here...it's always a little difficult for me, but this is what I love—the difficulty.'

Tania, also 23 and an accounting student, started climbing out of curiosity, but now climbs regularly. 'Everything is beautiful,' she says, 'even though it makes me afraid.'
'Fear is good?' I ask.

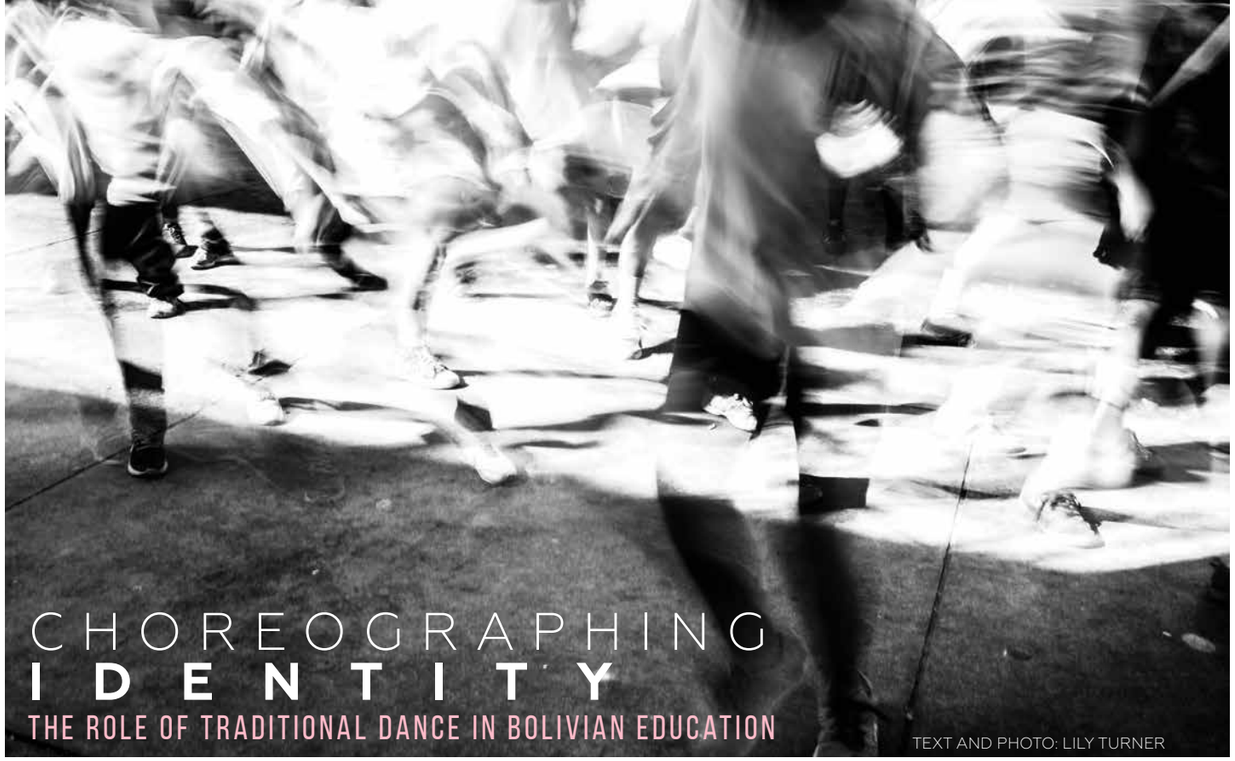
'Yes, I like this, to feel fear,' she replies.

Sergio feels the same. 'When I find a new route,' he says, 'it makes me afraid, and each day is a challenge. I love each one, and I don't leave here without finishing what I've come to accomplish.' Another challenge that both Sergio and César mention is the unending quest for climbing equipment. 'I need more money for equipment,' Sergio says. César concurs: 'We are missing equipment and money. Now we only a have the little equipment that we have bought, and we practice with this.'

The group's motivations go even further. 'I would like to teach more and more people,' Sergio says. 'I don't know much but I would like to teach more people what I know. But I need equipment, I am concerned about wearing out the little equipment I have.'

By now, the sky has grown dark and it is time to return to La Paz. This little band of climbers starts to pack up as final routes are climbed and last photos taken. As we bid farewell, I leave fully confident that this unlikely community will continue to thrive up there in Llallagua.

Documentary on Arriba Bolivia:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9ObwZVH8oM
Climbing Gyms in Bolivia: climbinggym.org/bolivia



CHOREOGRAPHING IDENTITY

THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL DANCE IN BOLIVIAN EDUCATION

TEXT AND PHOTO: LILY TURNER

When visiting the Unidad Educativa Piloto Adhemar Gehain in La Paz, I stand on the sidelines watching a Physical Education class take place. I explain to the teacher that I am learning about traditional dance in schools and she turns to the children to ask if they would like to do some dancing. The group of 30 children suddenly erupts in cheers and gleeful giggles.

The teacher then conducts the dances by varying rhythmic clapping. Each time, the children respond and recite different styles of dance, including the **Diablada**, **Morenada** and **Caporales**. I imagine them practicing their steps in front of the mirror at home in preparation for their end-of-year evaluation—a parade through the streets of the city.

In 2010, a new education law was passed in Bolivia with the aim to promote a greater sense of cultural identity in the young. As traditional dance has always been a significant characteristic of Bolivian culture, it begs the question as to whether the new law has had any effect on the role of dance in Bolivian society in general, or within the classroom in particular. Children grow up feeling an immense connection to their identity, cultivated through activities such as dance.

In Bolivia, children are taught dance throughout their primary education in public schools, starting at age five. From a western perspective, the idea that dance is taught in schools is unusual, as it isn't in the United Kingdom. Although the director of the Unidad Educativa Piloto Adhemar Gehain is surprised to hear, it is only in recent years that the activity has been advocated from a governmental level in the country.

Indeed, under President Evo Morales, Bolivia's public education system has seen a dramatic reform. With the passing of the Law Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez (ASEP) in 2010, it is now necessary for children to speak Spanish, at least one indigenous language and one foreign, usually English. One of the main objectives of the ASEP law is to 'provide historical and cultural elements to consolidate their own cultural identity and develop attitudes of intercultural relationship.'

Therefore, traditional dance can be seen as a vital part of this reform, ensuring the children of Bolivia grow up conscious of their cultural identity. In his book, *Customs and Culture of Bolivia*, author Javier A. Galván notes that 'to promote this recent cultural pride, the Ministry of Education actually developed a folklore department.'

Although many will argue that the education reform has helped to reaffirm the importance of indigenous culture, some disagree. Carlos Macusaya Cruz, a social communicator whose focus is on decolonisation, tells me that it is 'not necessary to make a dedicated Department of Folklore because Bolivian culture is not dying; therefore, it does not need to be rescued.' Macusaya believes that folkloric traditions were 'never under any threat', as they are rooted deep in the identity of the Bolivian people.

'THE LAW DOESN'T MAKE MUCH OF A DIFFERENCE, AS THE CHILDREN LOVE THE DANCING LESSONS.'
—LOURDES CATORCENO

Decolonisation is one aspect of the ASEP law that aims to recuperate the past and return to more authentic roots devoid of Western influence. For instance, at the last **Gran Poder**, which is a celebration of traditional Bolivian dances, outfits that were too revealing were prohibited in the name of respecting the past. However, this authenticity can seem slightly forced. As Macusaya explains, 'the *Morenada* used to be played with a **siku**, which was a typical native wooden instrument. Today it is played with metal instruments. Also, fifty years ago women did not participate in the dance and today participate.' These changes are arguably the result of a natural social progression in Bolivia and of inevitable global influences.

With or without the law, the joy that traditional dance in education brings to the children and those who teach it, suggests it will always have a place in the Bolivian education system. According to Lourdes Catorceno, a teacher at the Unidad Educativa Piloto Adhemar Gehain, 'the law doesn't make much of a difference, as the children always love the dancing lessons. They would take part regardless.'

In La Paz, specialist dance schools such as Artistik teach traditional dance to children who want to learn different styles beyond what they are taught in school. 'Sometimes children come here simply to improve their technique', the director, Karem Terrazas, tells me. When I ask Terrazas why she thinks traditional dance is so important, she places her hand on her chest and says it is simply because of the love for it.

Some argue it is not necessary to dedicate time and money to preserve Bolivian folklore. However, I believe there is no harm in promoting something that brings positivity and happiness to children across the country. Many teachers teach traditional dance not because it is in the curriculum, but because children love it.

A WORLD WITHOUT EVIL

TEXT: JULIE GAYNES

Jesus welcomes readers with open arms on the covers of books teaching **Valores** in Bolivia. But in practice he is just a familiar face, breathing a message of unity without diminishing other truths. Within the inner layers of Bolivian society, amidst Bolivia's numerous ethnic traditions, lives a depth of faith too vast to capture—or to squelch—with formal education.

Courses on values, spirituality and religion exist in public schools here, even after Bolivia's constitutional declaration in 2009 as a secular state. According to Pedro Apala Flores, Director General of the Plurinational Institute of Languages and Cultures in Santa Cruz, teachings on values and religion are 'not official, but are part of the country's curriculum in order to create a world without evil.'

In Bolivia, religious education and other sources of spiritual truth are not single-sourced from 'on high'. Each ethnic group, through their unique worldviews, perceives knowledge in different spheres—some in schools, some in homes, some in faces of nature outsiders might not perceive. This renders it difficult for one 'voice of truth' to obscure another.

The traditions of Bolivia's ethnic majorities—**Quechua**, **Aymara** and **Guarani**, for example—hold that truth circulates in three dimensions: externally, internally and alongside. While ordinary Bolivians today don't parse out these realms as their ancestors did, most still maintain this multitiered perception of reality, allowing for a more inclusive approach to education.

THE WORLD ABOVE: PUBLIC SCHOOL & THE CHURCH

Before the Spaniards arrived, the 'world above' for many Bolivians encompassed the gods of the sun, moon, stars and thunder. Since the reign of the missionaries, the Christian Church has commandeered this realm. Over 75% of Bolivians today identify as Catholic. Until 2009, Roman Catholicism was acknowledged as the sole religion in Bolivia.

Today, Catholicism remains as only one spiritual influence in a multidimensional system of belief.

In the years preceding President Evo Morales, the country's first modern indigenous head of state, Catholic education was more invasive, and religious education was forceful in challenging local views.

'When I was a student,' says Epifania Mamani, teacher of *Valores* at the Unidad Educativa Piloto Adhemar Gehain in La Paz, 'I was forced to embrace the catechism.' Now, however, pragmatism is emphasised over that more dogmatic approach.

During her class, Mamani encourages her 36 young students to evaluate the meaning of 'kindness'. 'How do you know that my heart is kind?' she asks them. At the end of class, the students rush from their desks to hug her.

'Sometimes I work with families who are struggling,' Mamani says. 'The children come from different types of homes, all with unique challenges. As a teacher of *Valores,* I am also a psychologist. Other times a social worker. When the mothers are young, I guide as an older sister.'

Teachings on values range beyond kindness and towards human development. As students grow older, topics become increasingly complex. The content of the curriculum on values, spirituality and religion incorporates everything from nutrition, eating disorders, world religions, multiple intelligences, sexual education, a woman's right to choose, community service and earth appreciation.

THE INTERNAL WORLD: INNER EARTH, INNER FAMILY

'There are 500 entrances to the earth's interior, **Ukhu Pacha**, and that's just in this mountain alone,' says Soledad, who has worked in Potosi's mining community for 22 years. She places one hand on a centuries-old wooden statue of **El Tío**, the lord of the underworld. Every morning *El Tío's* fingers accept cigarettes, given by miners for his protection. On Fridays his head, arms and penis are splashed with local liquor in gratitude for another week without catastrophe.

'All the people who come down here are taught to worship *El Tío*,' says Soledad. 'Young, old, women, atheists, Catholics. It's different from how it is out there, with Jesus and **Pachamama**. Inside the mountain *El Tío* is king, and we must respect him.'

The family too, can be interpreted as a form of *Ukhu Pacha*. Religious upbringings inside the home are informal, and often involve some form of Christian worship. They also include indigenous ceremonies: **ch'allas** in honor of Mother Earth and the burning of **palo santo** for good luck. A quarter of families in La Paz believe in the power of witchcraft, even if they don't practice it.

Household beliefs are acknowledged and respected among all circles of Bolivian society. These inner teachings are just as strong, if not stronger, than the voices from 'outside'.

THE WORLD ALONGSIDE US: PACHAMAMA AND COMMUNITY

Pachamama, or Mother Earth, controls the middle realm. Even non-religious Bolivians tip glasses to her on important occasions, and in the countryside she receives the first plate of sustenance after a harvest.

Tradition tells us one should thank *Pachamama* for everything in our plane of existence. Whether one believes in God or an energy, ritual thanks to the earth is necessary appreciation for everyday blessings. Without *Pachamama*, crops die and disaster falls.

Some Christian authorities still condemn rituals offerings to *Pachamama* as a form of paganism. But within the curriculum on values, spirituality and religion, she is accepted as inspiration for humility and consciousness of nature.

Fé y Alegría, a popular division of Catholic schools in Bolivia, accepts homage to *Pachamama* under the understanding that children must learn to accept responsibility towards their God-given cosmos. More importantly, young Bolivians must learn to celebrate differences among their fellow human beings (among *Pachamama's* creations) to heal their discrimination-torn country, even if this means lending both ears to another's belief.

'Our primary goal is justice, social responsibility and equality, not the transmission of occidental values,' says Rosemarie Sauma, Fé y Alegría's national education coordinator.

Teachings of the middle realm, whether they are from *Pachamama's* fruits or from formal teachings on community justice, insist that all living things demand respect on a single plane of consciousness, even in the hustle of global meritocracy.

So why still teach religious education in Bolivian schools? The true fear is not that of one faith imposing itself on another. It's the fear of losing communal solidarity, which Bolivia desperately needs in order to mobilise itself for the future. One of the best ways to bolster community is by fostering the spirit.

ART & IDENTITY

LGBT+ LITERATURE IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: MICHAEL PROTHEROE

With a series of LGBT+-related events running over the last few weeks in La Paz, I discovered a '¿Literatura homosexual en Bolivia?' panel, and, not knowing much about Bolivian literature, I was intrigued. The idea of a dialogue on whether such a literature exists in Bolivia clashed with stereotypical preconceptions I had of the **machista** culture present in Latin America. The question marks in the title were telling, at least for me, as the questioning of the existence of the literature would seem to imply a questioning of the LGBT+ community in Bolivia, or rather their visibility.

Before the event took place however, I had an interview with one of the participants, Mónica Velásquez, an award-winning poet and professor of literature at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés. Velásquez took the conversation from a more literary point of view, claiming that the other people speaking at the event were 'much more activist.' We talked about how art and literature can allow someone to avoid reducing their work to their identity, citing one of her favourite poets, Fernando Pesoa, in saying, 'Poetry invents subjectivities, and because of this you can have many voices.' An interesting viewpoint, given the event Velásquez was soon to speak at was about a specific identity found in literature. She did, however, tell me, 'I believe that one of the first functions of the art of these groups we have spoken about is about making them visible; art is testimonial.' Velásquez further noted, though, that there was a danger surrounding agendas and 'pamphlet literature' or propaganda, that focusing too much on identity could diminish the quality of writing. The literature student in me tended to agree; the would-be activist was not so sure.

> 'I BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE FIRST FUNCTIONS OF THE ART OF THESE GROUPS WE HAVE SPOKEN ABOUT IS ABOUT MAKING THEM VISIBLE; ART IS TESTIMONIAL.'
> —MÓNICA VELÁSQUEZ

I headed to the event itself the next day, where Rosario Aquím, Lourdes Reynaga, Virginia Ayllon and Mónica Velásquez were speaking. The four analysed the presence of LGBT+ authors, characters and narratives in the canon and debated the merits of intermingling activism and literature. The event was quite popular, with people crowding a small room at the Centro Cultural de España, which fittingly appeared to be a kind of library. The evening culminated in a brief interview with the organiser of the event, Edgar Soliz Guzmán, also a poet. When asked why the **conversatorio** was important to have now, he told me that government legislation hasn't solved enough of the problems faced by members of the LGBT+ community. 'There is a sort of invisibility that exists in the canon and society,' said Soliz Guzmán.

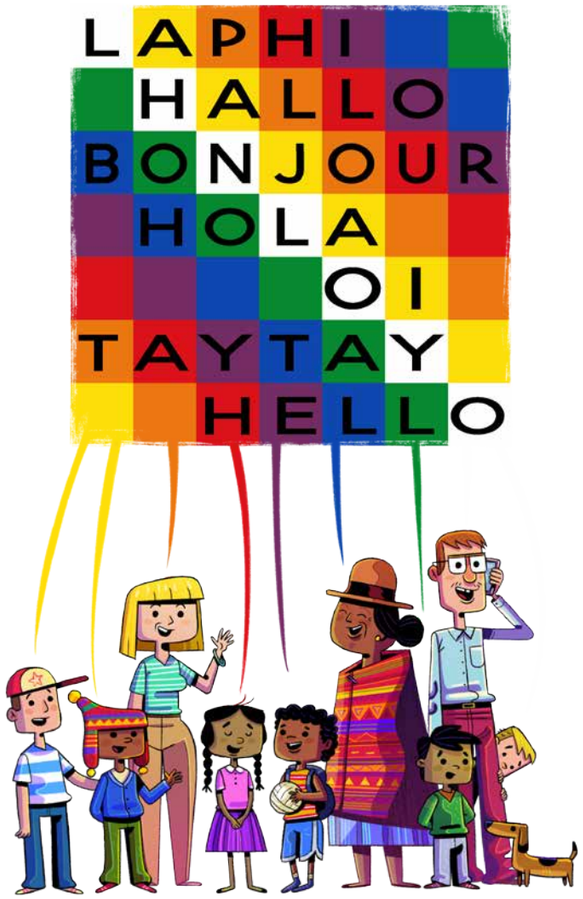
Our conversation ended on the point that identity is in art but does not constitute it, which suggests to me that who you are seeps into what you do, but doesn't necessarily have to define it. Soliz Guzmán said, 'Literature isn't written to justify existence.' But it seems to me that the mere act of writing and looking for this literature helps to make the community visible and to normalise it. I agree, literature should not have to justify existence, but then nothing should have to justify existence. If art really is testimonial, then existence is implied.

DECOLONISING LANGUAGE EDUCATION

THE CHALLENGES OF REFORM IN A DIVERSE BOLIVIA

TEXT: MICHAEL PROTHEROE **ILLUSTRATION:** HUGO CUÉLLAR

Bolivia, or the Plurinational State of Bolivia, has 37 official languages. Roughly 70% of the population identifies as indigenous and 68% has **mestizo** ethnic ancestry. Against this complex background, the task of defining one's identity is not a simple matter. How language learning fits into this vast web of linguistic and identity politics is undoubtedly equally complex. What I want to know is how educational reforms have been received and whether they are perceived as being successful or even relevant.



Recent educational reform began with the Law 1565, which introduced 'intercultural bilingual education' in 1994. The first article of the law states that 'Bolivian education is intercultural and bilingual, because it assumes the cultural diversity of the country in an atmosphere of respect among all Bolivians, men and women.' Historically, however, Bolivian society has been deeply stratified along ethnic lines. Colonialism still weighs heavily. Efforts to construct a Nation state and shape a unifying national identity have naturally problematised cultural diversity.

The more recent Law 070 Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez (ASEP) addresses four main areas for change in Bolivia's educational system: decolonisation, plurilingualism, intra and interculturalism, as well as productive and communitarian education. Plurilingualism, in practice, means that children learn at least three languages: Spanish, an indigenous language and a foreign language, generally English.

Aiming to see policy in action, I visited a school in **Miraflores**, La Paz. I was largely disappointed however, as the teacher seemed unprepared for her class and after making the children recite some English and **Aymara**, admittedly quite enthusiastically, she informed me that there was no plan for the class. The director of the school clarified later that there was not a dedicated teacher of *Aymara*, which explained what happened to a certain extent. Although I may not have had a representative experience, my visit raises questions about large scale implementation.

To find out more, I spoke with Carlos Macusaya Cruz, a social communicator and educational activist. In his opinion, ASEP is 'poetic, rhetorical, literary' but in practical terms he believes that both rural and urban populations are more preoccupied with handling 'modern' technical knowledge, i.e. computers, mobile phones, cars. When asked about language teaching, Macusaya said, 'I think that the practical sense has to do with people learning more than one language. It's going to allow them locally, in Bolivia, to link to certain populations. If I speak *Aymara* I can communicate with the people for whom that language is more common, but it is also important to learn English because it's a language that is handled in a globalising world.'

His viewpoint is one of practicality and not a romantic recuperation of 'lost culture'. In his opinion, discourse on identity politics doesn't seem to chime with people outside the government bubble. As he says, 'It was never a problem of "I am *Aymara*, I am **Guaraní**, I don't know." It has always been linked to other topics such as: I am *Aymara* and because of this I am marginalised from work spaces, I have less agreements with the State, the State neglects my neighbourhood.'

There is a concern surrounding the essentialisation of indigenous cultures. That is, reducing them to stereotypes promoted by language teaching and attempting to recover a past that never really existed. 'I remember saying somewhere several years ago that I was *Aymara* and people asked: "Where are your boat and your poncho?"', Macusaya says. 'Looking for an essence in Andean cultures is like taking them from history', he continues. 'At the time of colonisation, the indigenous were portrayed as subhuman, as savages, as if that was their nature. In other discourses, promoted by the United Nations, the indigenous are no longer subhuman. Instead they speak with the cosmos, with animals, they are above others. In the end, it always reduces them, it denies their humanity.'

> EFFORTS TO CONSTRUCT A NATION STATE AND SHAPE A UNIFYING **'NATIONAL' IDENTITY** HAVE NATURALLY PROBLEMATISED CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

Pedro Apala Flores, Director General of the Plurinational Institute of Languages and Cultures in Santa Cruz, begs to differ, illustrating the other side of the debate regarding language education. 'Already less shame is felt,' he says, 'already there is more openness in wanting to express things in their native languages. 10 or 15 years ago, that would have been very difficult. We hear people conversing in their language in public transport, in markets. Indigenous languages used to be family languages. A certain fear was felt because it categorised people as indigenous. So, there is that evolution, that empowerment.'

This matches a 2006 audit which claims that 71% of Bolivians identify as indigenous, whereas the 1992 census shows few Bolivians doing so. Getting back to the practical reality, however, I asked Apala Flores about the implementation of teaching and he was obfuscatory at best: 'There are advances that we qualify as very positive and other things that are moving more slowly. In the topic of languages, we are moving with a firm but slow pace, because the linguistic complexity of this country is really alarming. For example: there are some teachers that speak indigenous languages but don't write them.' The teacher I met in Miraflores told me that she had to learn *Aymara* to teach it. Although a 2004 study suggests that reform has been better implemented in rural areas than in the cities, another study made in 2000, points out that only 25% of the indigenous population live in rural areas. It seems there are both practical and structural challenges for reform in a country where the process is only beginning.

If there is to be hope for a future generation in touch with indigenous culture and languages, the romantic and practical need to be balanced, with stereotyping and essentialising deftly navigated. Linguistic complexity aside, the teacher I spoke with told me, 'The children find it difficult, but really interesting.' Children, however, offered a different perspective. Urban children admitted they found language education boring and rural children seemed more enthusiastic. People want to be empowered, not forced into a prescriptive box. Whatever the way forward, people need to be respected, not reduced to essentialised images of cultures that ignore the complexities of reality.

GLOSSARY

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ALTIPLANO	A high-altitude plateau found partially in western Bolivia
AYMARA	Indigenous people in the Andes and Altiplano regions of South America
BUENAS TARDES	'Good afternoon'
CAPORALES	Traditional dance from Bolivia
CH'ALLA	A ceremony of blessing to Pachamama
CHAPISTA	Worker in a body repair shop
CHIQUITITO CALIENTE	Name of a rock given by the inhabitants of Llallagua
CONVERSATORIO	A kind of round table discussion or discussion group
COSMOVISIÓN	A way of viewing the world; The Incan/Andean cosmovision is different than the Western one, and involves worshipping nature
DIABLADA	The dance of the Devil, originating from the culture of miners
EL TÍO	Variation on the word for god (dios); used to describe the ambivalent masculine spirit within the mines
GRAN PODER	Religious celebration in La Paz
GUARANÍ	Indigenous people living in the Eastern part of Bolivia
HANSA	German car distribuitor
HOLA	'Hello'
MACHISTA	An attitude, quality, or way of behaving that agrees with traditional ideas about men being very strong and aggressive
MESTIZO	A person of mixed race, especially one having Spanish and American Indian parentage
MIRAFLORES	A neighbourhood of La Paz
MORENADA	Dance of the Black Slave, often seen during the Gran Poder festival
PACEÑO/A	From La Paz
PACHAMAMA	A Mother Earth figure to the Aymara and Quechua people
PALO SANTO	A tree found throughout South America
PETA	Volkswagen Beetle
PRIMER GRADO	'First grade'
QUECHUA	Indigenous people in the Andes and Altiplano regions of South America
UKHU PACHA	The interior world in Quechua culture
SIKU	Traditional Andean panpipe
SUMA QAMAÑA	Aymara-Quechua system of thought, commonly translated as 'Living Well'
TORNERO	'Fitter and turner'
VALORES	'Values'
VIVIR BIEN	'Living Well'
ZONA SUR	Neighbourhood in the south of La Paz

PHOTO: LILY TURNER & BETHAN MORRISH