

# BolivianExpress

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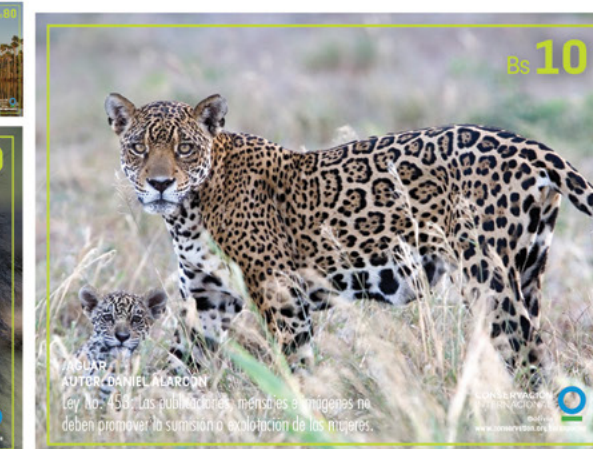
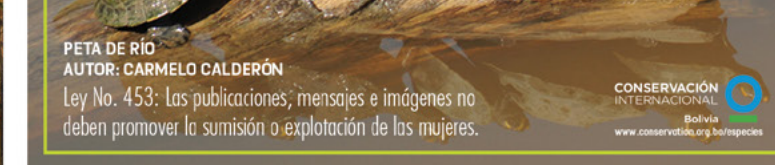
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**ESTOS SON LOS GANADORES**  
del 6to. Concurso Nacional de Fotografía  
de Especies Bolivianas en Peligro de Extinción



In many parts of rural Bolivia, whether people have come together to hold a community meeting or to celebrate a milestone or holiday, there are many occasions for an **apthapi**, or communal meal. Most of my experiences with these events have been in areas populated by potato and quinoa farmers and llama herders. In these places, women gather in a nice shady spot and empty their **aguayos** of their contents: boiled potatoes, chuño, corn, cheese. . . whatever they can bring from their small farms. At an *apthapi*, everyone contributes food to share, which is laid out in a long line on the ground, local foods cooked separately but brought together into one heaping mound.

Once everyone sits around the spread, the real purpose of the gathering begins. After a short greeting and message of thanks from community leaders, everyone leans in and takes their first sampling. Their bare hands search for the perfect potato and tear off a small piece of cheese to accompany it. Their fingers begin to peel the red and brown skins, dropping the casing in the ground to reveal the potatoes' white, starchy flesh. Everyone digs in, laughing and chatting all the way.

I once described an *apthapi* as 'a potluck on the **Altiplano**', but the truth is it is more than that. It is an old tradition with unspoken yet set rules: where people sit, who eats first, how to give thanks. The event happens with a surprising amount of order if you look closely. But many of these rules are in place to set expectations, to make sure things go smoothly. With a communal understanding of what is taking place, you can focus on what is important: spending time with the people around you. You can talk business, ask others about their families, trade jokes. It is usually held outside, and the entire community is present. With communal food as the binding factor, it is a gathering not to be missed if given the opportunity to attend.

In this issue of Bolivian Express, we looked at all forms of gatherings, and how opportunities to come together with others make for great experiences. We visited a fine-dress motorcycle rally that brought dapper motorists together for a good cause in Cochabamba. We visited mosques in La Paz and saw how muslims pray together to practice their faith. We rocked out with heavy metal fans and watched young women skateboard together, both groups collectively defying community expectations to find a home amongst their like-minded friends. And we learned what it means to be a citizen in a large city, the permanent gatherings many of us navigate every day.

With every issue of this magazine, we try to bring everyone together to share our Bolivian experiences. Our writers tell their stories and adventures in this great country, and we amplify the voices of the people who make Bolivia a fascinating place. While not everyone may be lucky enough to experience a Bolivian *apthapi*, hopefully this magazine allows people to connect with Bolivia in the same deep way. And hopefully you will enjoy the stories we experience together as we explore the people and places around us.

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

By William Wroblewski



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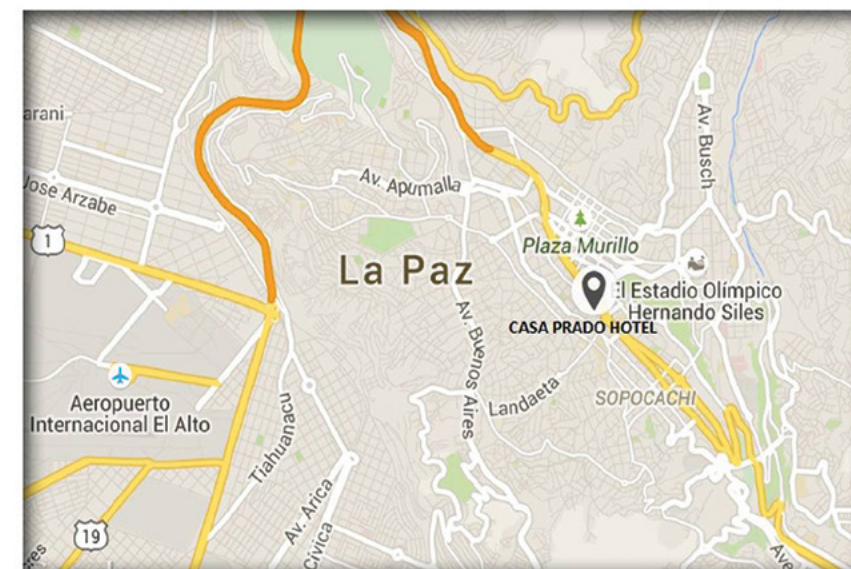


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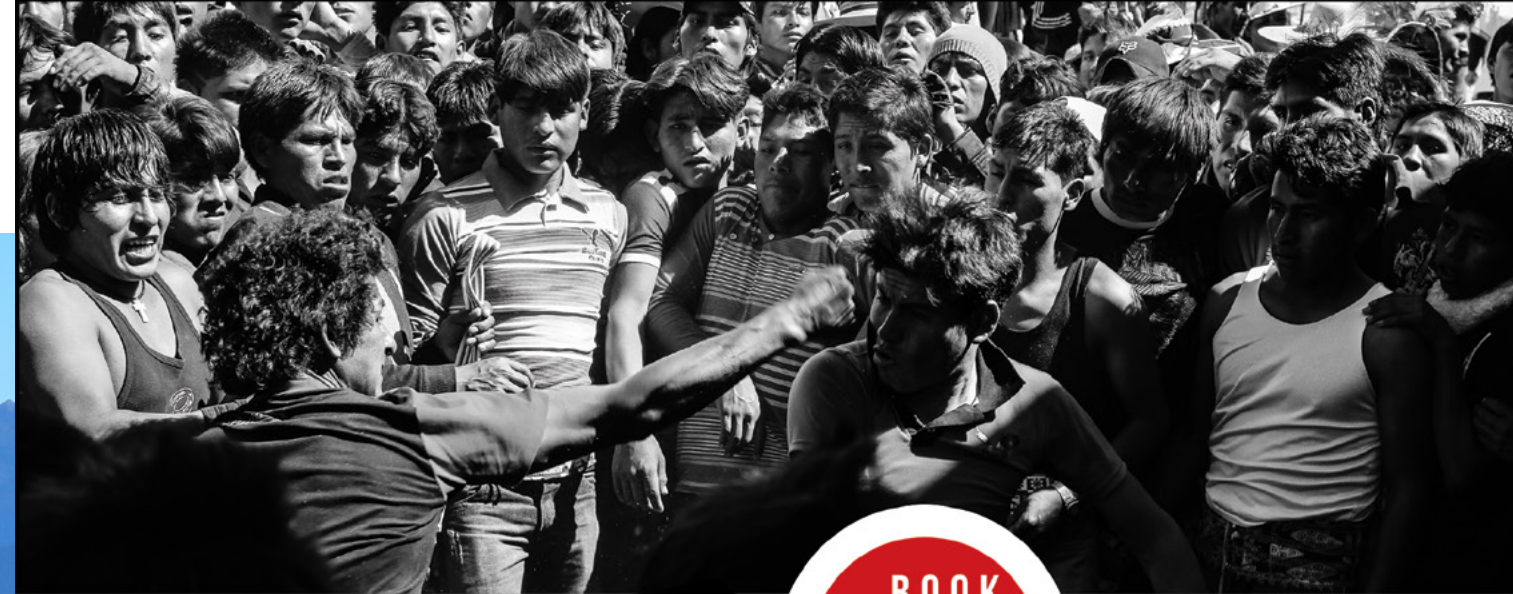
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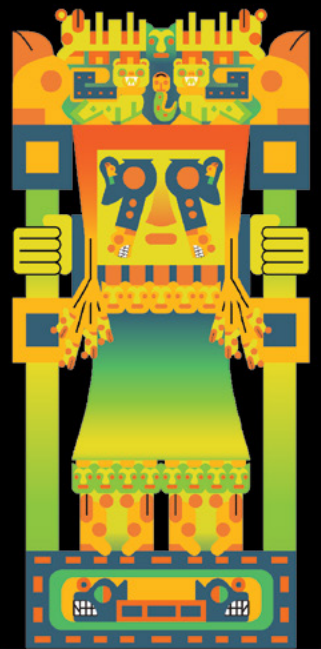
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## PEOPLE OF THE TELEFÉRICO

COMMUTERS LINE UP TO GO TO THE CITY

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JET DE KORT



Ronald

01

'I'm working as a security guard at the teleferico stations in El Alto. My job is to create a safe environment and to protect our users. I like my work, especially the people. I'm a social person and with this work I meet many different individuals. Before I got this job, I took classes for a year in order to learn how to talk to people and how to deal with conflicts. Sometimes, our users argue with me. Someone tried to enter the teleferico cabin with a dog once, which isn't allowed. He got very angry, but it didn't upset me. I calmly explained the rules and then he walked off.'



Karen

02

'I'm using the teleferico to go down to work in Sopocachi. I'm an independent consultant in the field of development. For me, the teleferico is a great example of how development should be approached. Tomorrow there will be a roadblock, which limits people's ability to go to work. The teleferico provides an easy alternative way of public transportation. When I'm riding, I always listen to music, mostly classical. Many people of my age don't listen to this type of music, but I don't like contemporary music as much. It has very little content, which I don't find interesting.'



Lucía

03

'I'm cooking food. My specialty is **masaco**, which is fried chicken with **ahogado**. I have six children who like my food a lot. They don't eat at **agachaditos**, because it isn't fresh and for some people the food on the streets causes a lot of stomach problems. I normally wake up at 6:00 am and start cooking rice and **fideos** in my house. When I finish with that, I wrap it up and go to the streets where I sell my food. When I'm done, I pack up my stuff again and leave.'



Juanma & José Alejandro

04

'We are going to a hospital in the city with the teleferico because down there, the specialists can help my son. He is only one-year-and-nine-months old, but he has problems with his heart. The doctors are going to operate him today. Luckily the operation is not too risky, but they will open his chest during surgery. In general, he doesn't have too many problems with his health. Complications with his heart can occur only when it's cold. Lately, I have been preoccupied with his well being. Hopefully this operation will improve his situation. The doctors promised the surgery will make him better.'

# (Iconoclasta)

BREAKING IMAGES WITH  
A FASHION SHOW

TEXT: VALERIA SALINAS MACEDA  
PHOTOS: DARIO MONSTER

Continues on Page 12



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This year, fashion designer Galo Sanchez selected the mystical Lake Titicaca as the location for the fourth installment of the Iconoclasta Fashion Show. And so, in October the world's highest navigable lake was the stage to show the haute couture of Bolivia. The waters of the lake formed a backdrop for an incredible runway that mixed fashion, beauty, culture, and tourism. Over 40 national and international models carried out an exceptional show, walking the runway at 3,810 meters above sea level. They looked gorgeous wearing outfits made by more than 15 fashion creative geniuses from Bolivia's fashion world and from a few neighbouring countries.

Iconoclasta is the name chosen for this event because the word is associated with innovation: an iconoclast is a person who breaks rules to develop new genres and styles. And the presence of such people was apparent in the collections presented, as each designer was careful to design their collections so that each piece had its own special characteristics.

would tear down religious icons, such as sculptures and paintings. Throughout the centuries, the meaning of the word has come to include those who, through reason and verbal argument, seek to destroy cherished beliefs and institutions – religiously motivated or not.

The fashion show started at 4 pm, and the designers acted as authentic iconoclasts. Despite their lack of religious tendencies, these creative minds gathered to overshadow one of the most important church icons in this territory: La Virgen de Copacabana.

Every day, particularly on weekends, the white-stone Basilica of Our Lady of Copacabana plays host to scores of visitors who travel to the statue of the Virgin Mary and pray to her for favors. But on this day, this sacred location attracted fashion lovers, who prayed for the wisdom to set new trends and join the fashion vanguard. The Catholic piety that is usually on display

Iconoclasta Fashion Show also addresses the surrounding area's Incan background. According to legend, many years ago the Father Sun sent his son and his daughter

### Stylists and makeup artists ensured that the models looked impeccable – Titicaca's newest goddesses and gods.

to the earth with a mission: to found a grand empire. The two siblings, Manco Kapac and Mama Ocllo, emerged from the waters of the Lake Titicaca to establish the capital of the Inca Empire in Cuzco. For this reason, the lake is a sacred cultural symbol: the place where the first Incas were born.

But at the Iconoclasta Fashion Show, Mama Ocllo and Manco Kapac were replaced by human divinities. Stylists and makeup artists ensured that the models looked impeccable, their physical perfection making them Titicaca's newest goddesses and gods. As people applauded each design, I imagined a new legend being created in the collective consciousness of the audience that day: 'One day, beautiful young boys and girls arrived in Copacabana wearing pieces of art, and they dressed Titicaca like a fashion model...'

The spectacle of the event reached its apex when the setting sun painted the water with deep hues of orange, red, and purple. The fusion of creativity and elegance, set against the natural beauty of the lake with traditional **titora** boats floating in the distance, created a perfect aesthetic experience. On this special stage, both locals and visitors admired an extraordinary fashion show and experienced Copacabana and Lake Titicaca as home to one of the most important runways in Bolivia.

It is interesting to imagine that, while everybody gathered to see the designs, models, and designers on the shores of the lake, the Indigenous Virgin and the children of the Sun God were relaxing and enjoying their day off, as beauty worship supplanted the worship of centuries-old gods. Iconoclasta was a territorial revolution, in which fashion took the role of the tool used to break traditional images and give a new meaning to Lake Titicaca, if only for the weekend. Fashion lovers left Copacabana, models and designers did the same, Iconoclasta finished, and everything returned back to its religious condition in Copacabana.

in Copacabana was overshadowed for a few fashionable hours as beauty became the center of attention. The sacred image carved in wood – known as the 'Indigenous Virgin' because of the color of her skin and her big Andean eyes – took a rest for a moment while devotees left the church to and approached the runway on the shore.

In addition to its nod to Catholicism, the



However, the word 'iconoclastic' has another significant meaning related to the runway built in Copacabana. In Europe in the eighth century, a new Christian religious movement began to spread an ideology in which the veneration of religious images was discouraged. Adherents to the new philosophy were known as 'iconoclasts', or 'image breakers', from the Greek eikon, meaning 'image', and klastes, meaning 'breaker'. These iconoclasts



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# COCHABAMBA AND CHROME

CLASSIC BIKERS IN SHARP SUITS  
RAISE AWARENESS OF MEN'S HEALTH

TEXT: TOBY CLYDE  
PHOTO: MATT COLEMAN



Like a sea captain with an expensive taste in motorbikes, Nicanor Calderón arrives, dressed not so much to impress as to command, dismounting a rumbling Harley-Davidson. He's wearing a white dress shirt, black bow tie, and a ponytail finished with a peaked Harley cap. The look is somewhere between a pirate, a biker, and someone at home in a smoking lounge.

The reason for his flamboyant entrance on a warm Sunday in Cochabamba is equally strange. Today marks 'The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride' (DGR), an event in which classic motorbike enthusiasts meet for a ride in various cities around the world, dressed in their most dapper clothing. If you actually needed a reason to dress in a three-piece suit and climb aboard a Royal Enfield, the tweeness of this event masks a serious purpose. This motorized pageant ultimately aims to raise funds and awareness for men's

health, specifically prostate cancer and suicide prevention.

It seems strange that a niche biking event, created in Australia only five years ago, should reach across the Atlantic to a city right in the middle of Bolivia. Yet Nicanor is certainly not alone; within half an hour, he is surrounded by a coterie of well-dressed men and women. It is Nicanor and his friend Ramiro Estrugo who brought DGR to Bolivia last year, galvanizing fellow members of the Club de Motos Clásicas Cochabamba to meet and raise money. As Nicanor puts it, the event is 'perfect for us'. Many of the members are over 60, and all of them share an expensive taste in classic bikes.

The group isn't huge – roughly 22 people with 14 bikes eventually arrive – but these **cochabambinos** are from many areas of the motor biking community, particularly

the increasingly numerous group Royal Enfield owners. In many ways, this is a model tale of how Internet connectivity can join disparate communities. Not only did Nicanor hear about the DGR online, but it is the availability of rare parts through virtual dealers that has driven the growth of niche motorbike groups in Cochabamba.

Although they are officially registered, the meetup is not completely orthodox as far as the DGR is concerned. The event guidelines are a strange mix of inclusive fundraising zeal and restrictive specifications on what bikes are allowed. The website mandates a list of rides like the 'Tracker', the 'Chopper', and the 'Scrambler', and even a 'Mad Men' inspired outfit. In places like London, where thousands of riders take part, it serves, in part, to keep numbers from getting dangerously big. In Bolivia, the turnout is smaller and the bikes far more varied. Many of the riders signed up only the night before, and the total amount raised is around US\$215, in comparison to the almost US\$3.5 million pledged worldwide. As Nicanor confesses, 'Most of them are here just for the ride.'

IF YOU ACTUALLY NEEDED A REASON TO DRESS IN A THREE-PIECE SUIT AND CLIMB ABOARD A ROYAL ENFIELD, THE TWEENESS OF THIS EVENT MASKS A SERIOUS PURPOSE.

Nicanor, however, is not. He spoke passionately to the crowd about the significance of the ride and the necessary safety requirements. 'The most important thing,' he says, 'is awareness of prostate cancer and knowing not to delay the situation,' irrespective of how successful they are in other areas of the event. These are sentiments echoed by a number of riders, including Kevin Rivas, a man dressed so sharply in a matching three piece that you have to be careful not to cut yourself. Leaning over the hood of a Ducati SportClassic, his composure belied the severity of his words. 'I'm so afraid of cancer,' he admitted, 'I'm terrified.' Alexis Trigo, another rider, shared these concerns, noting that, 'In Bolivia there's not really prevention in health, men especially. This is about getting people to check up and not wait until they are sick.'

Nicanor's aspirations certainly aren't modest. He hopes to draw 50 to 100 riders in future years in order to send out a more effective message. Yet the niche, chrome, and well-dressed absurdity of the event seems to exist far more for its own sake than for a practical purpose. In part, it is a performance of manicured masculinity, one that aims to challenge the negative stereotypes that often surround male bikers. Ultimately, though, on this sunny Cochabamba morning, it simply feels like a chance for like-minded men and women to meet and put on a real good old-fashioned show. ♦

To see more photos by Matt Coleman, visit [https://www.instagram.com/matt\\_coleman\\_photography/](https://www.instagram.com/matt_coleman_photography/)



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# IN A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

FEMALE SKATEBOARDERS  
BREAK DOWN STEREOTYPES  
IN LA PAZ

TEXT: IZABELA WLODARCZYK  
PHOTOS: MILTON ARELLANO

Every day, skateboarders gather in **plazas** all over La Paz to try out new tricks, learn from their friends, and wind down. They come to skate in Plaza Avaroa in Sopocachi and at the skate park at Pura Pura, near the edge of El Alto, to break away from their daily routines and experience the thrill of being airborne, even if only for a few seconds. The female boarders come with yet another mission: to challenge themselves and face their fears. As every female athlete knows, the fear and thrill are a valuable part of the process.

'We just want to express ourselves,' says Rosa Orquieta Aguilar, one of the 10 girls who regularly skate together. 'It's better to be outside doing a physical activity than inside with our eyes on the TV or on our cellphones.'

But in Bolivia, old standards of femininity still reign strong, with the expecta-

tion that women will look and behave like respectable girls, daughters, and mothers. These expectations can become damaging when women have no other option but to conform to these standards and are reprimanded when they do not.

The skate girls of La Paz say they need to have a welcoming space to explore their identities and their potential. They know that in order to become creative and independent, they need a space of their own. They also know that if they want to express themselves and pursue their passion in La Paz, they must create that space themselves.

At 16 years old, Rosa is one of the younger female skaters, and she already considers skateboarding a way of life. Luckily for her, Rosa's family supports her, and even comes to watch her skate occasionally. But most of the girls in Rosa's group experience pressure

from their families to stop skateboarding and take on more 'feminine' hobbies, such as dance. Andrea Condori Nattes, age 20, says, 'Our families think that skateboarding is dangerous, that it means too much time spent with boys, and that the streets of La Paz are not safe for girls.'

With the opening of La Cumbre, a new skate shop on Calle Sanchez Lima near Plaza Avaroa, skateboarders have another place to meet. At La Cumbre, which opened in September, skaters come to check out the latest gear and accessories, as well as to have a chat with owner Milton Daniel Arellano, a Bolivian-American who shares their passion and understands the need for a space for skaters to call their own.

To La Paz's young skaters, the store is much more than just a skateshop; it is a place where some of the girls work to support their studies and housing,

and motivate one another to challenge themselves daily. For her, skateboarding is a way for her to face her fears. 'It's a place where new friends meet and share. No longer just a space to gather, it is now a place where new families are made.'

Danna Valencia Lozano, a 21-year-old law student who works at the shop to support herself, says the boys and girls she skates with support each other

feel free,' Danna says. 'There are no uniforms, there are no rules. We confront our fears, and [by doing so] we get rid of them. It's beautiful.'

Danna also says the friends she's made through skateboarding are now her family. 'Through this I've met new, really good people who are my new fam-

**'Our families think that skateboarding is dangerous, that it means too much time spent with boys, and that the streets of La Paz are not safe for girls.'**

**- Andrea Condori Nattes**

ily, and I can always count on them to be there,' she explains. 'Skating is creative and independent - you decide every

move and you can be creative. Everything about boarding is creative. It also teaches great values - to be in solidarity with other skaters and to help each other out.'

It's not always easy to be a skate girl in La Paz. While Andrea hides her skateboard, others have to hide their passion. Some can't be honest with their families, who think that skateboarding is a distraction from their studies. Some parents believe that it's a dangerous activity - an activity that risks their safety as much as it threatens to destroy their femininity. Luckily, the strong-minded skate girls of La Paz seem to be ok with that.

Watching the girls in the skate park, I start to feel a sense of pride. Here in La Paz, and in skate parks all over the world, young women are redefining what it means to be a young woman while shaping the kind of world they want to live in - or skate in. ♦

# MUSLIMS IN BOLIVIA

## BEHIND THE WALLS OF A LOCAL MOSQUE

TEXT: JET DE KORT  
ILLUSTRATION: HUGO L. CUELLAR

“**A**llahu Akhbar” (Allah is the Greatest) sounds through the prayer room of the As-Salam mosque on Friday afternoon, the holy day for Muslims. In La Paz, about forty people, mostly men, gather at the mosque in Sopocachi. Before entering the prayer room, imam Ayman Altaramsi, the religious leader of the mosque, gives me a hijab, or headscarf, to cover my hair. Without it I wouldn't be allowed to attend the prayer, he explains.

I take off my shoes and sit down in the women's area, which is separated from the men's by a curtain. On the other side of the room, men kneel down on the carpet as Altaramsi starts the service by thanking Allah (God) for the people's coming. He begins by reciting Arabic verses and hymns that are elusive to me. Most of the attendees call out the words with full commitment. Looking through the transparent curtain, I see the silhouette of Altaramsi wearing a loose-fitting robe and a head cap.

After the service, I meet Altaramsi in another room, and this time he's wearing a modern suit. When I ask about his metamorphosis, he talks about his job as a doctor and briefly recounts his life story. He was

born as a Muslim in Palestine and came to Bolivia to study medicine. Today, Altaramsi volunteers as a mentor for the Islamic Association of Bolivia, which includes tasks such as leading the prayer ceremonies and giving Arabic and Quran lessons.

across the country. The one in La Paz has existed for 11 years. 'Ninety-five percent of the people who visit it are Bolivian converts of all ages, generally converted between the age of twenty to forty,' he claims.

The majority of the people attending the Friday ceremony are young men and women. This is because most of the adult men have work responsibilities. According to the National Statistical Institute of Bolivia, the majority of Bolivian citizens self-identify as Catholic. 'Bosses don't really keep in mind Muslim duties as they do in the Middle East,' says Altaramsi. 'Bolivian society is not structured around Islam.'

The As-Salam mosque functions as an informal center where they teach the values and principles of Islam. People come together to read the holy Quran and to learn about Islamic traditions. 'Sharing information on the religion is what we do with members of the mosque, but also with newcomers,' Altaramsi says. 'As a result, every month we welcome at least three converts to our community.'

Youngsters are crucial for the community because they will continue Islamic traditions in Bolivia. Islam prohibits alcohol and drugs. 'These stimulants are part of contemporary life,' Altaramsi acknowl-

edges. 'Nevertheless we try to persuade youngsters to adopt Islamic identities by showing them the rules of Allah. During the Quran lessons, they learn and read about how to be a good Muslim.'

Another part of being Muslim is eating halal food, which means food that is approved by Islamic law. It is very hard to find it in Bolivia. 'Five years ago we started producing our own halal meat,' Altaramsi

says proudly. During the month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, 'about one hundred people come to our Mosque to eat this meat and share their spiritual experiences,' he says.

The Islamic Association of Bolivia also organizes sessions in which women come together to discuss Islam. I joined a gathering where all participants were either Bolivian converts or born as Muslims in Bolivia. They called me **hermana**, and were open about how they converted. Morah Bacinello converted eight years ago after growing up Catholic because Christianity didn't bring her satisfaction. 'I came to this mosque to try something else,' she explains. 'They told me about eternal life, and this especially caught my interest because I lost a son,' she says. Bacinello adopted her Arabic name and, two years later, her children also converted to Islam. Now Allah is guiding their lives.

Little by little, Bacinello has taken up the Muslim lifestyle. The separation of men and women is one of the key differences she has had to get accustomed with. 'This process develops gradually,' she says. 'Over time you grow along with the faith that will embrace you for your whole life.'

Like many Muslim women, Bacinello wears a hijab, but only two years ago she started to use it in public. 'I never had any experiences with people approaching me in a negative way,' she says. 'In general, people in Latin America are more spiritual than usual, and perhaps more tolerant in terms of religion.'

'Some people look at us in a suspicious way,' says Amina Morales, who was known as Marilyn fourteen years ago, before her conversion. This might have to do with the limited knowledge some Bolivians have about the religion. 'I have even met people who have never heard of Muslims,' she adds and shares a laughable experience in which people thought she belonged to the Hare Krishna community. 'We also wear loose-fitting clothes, but Islam is very different,' she says with a smile.

When I leave the mosque, I find myself outside on the street, back in the vivid neighborhood of Sopocachi. I look at the mosque, which has a golden minaret on top, and think of my conversations with the faithful inside. People are walking down the hilly road, not knowing what is happening behind the walls of this intriguing place. They disappear in the bustle of La Paz, where the members of the As-Salam Mosque also work, live, and thrive.



# COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

BATTLING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN BOLIVIA

TEXT: JET DE KORT  
ILLUSTRATION: HUGO L. CUELLAR

*'We invite you to a briefing about job opportunities in France's most prestigious hotel chain: "Hôtel Fleur de l'Ixora". We are looking for receptionists and valets among others, for our two new hotels on the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. We offer: €1000 per month, medical insurance, accommodation, and French lessons. You haven't finished your studies yet? No problem. You don't speak French? It's okay. Most of our guests are Spanish speakers.'*

*'The chance of your life is closer than you think! Don't waste it!'*

*- Hotel Fleur de l'Ixora Facebook Page*

This advertisement, calling college students in La Paz and El Alto to an informational gathering about a foreign job opportunity, was distributed on fliers across two university campuses. The recruitment, however, was not organized by a Caribbean hotel chain. In fact, Fleur de l'Ixora doesn't even exist.

The Service and Training Center for Women (CECSEM) created this fake hotel with fake opportunities to raise awareness on the issue of human trafficking. Executive Director Dra. Patricia Bustamante says it was easy to gather students eager to work at this questionable hotel. It shocked her, but unfortunately this is a reality. Across Latin America and other

regions, human traffickers promise anything, most of all economic security and a life of excitement and opportunities for young individuals.

Over the past few years, the number of women trafficking cases has increased in Bolivia. According to CECSEM, last year there was a two-percent increase in reported victims than the year before. The trend is particularly felt in rural regions, where women and young girls flee home for a better future. 'The areas provide little opportunities for development,' Bustamante explains. 'Municipalities don't invest in proper education and training to prevent girls from becoming sex workers.' These girls are vulnerable, susceptible, and therefore easy targets.

CECSEM addresses human trafficking through research, public awareness, and policy initiatives. According to Bustamante there is a gap between victims and legislation in Bolivia. She believes the government is focused on drug trafficking in the country, but that it needs to

**'b a bank, there is a law; if you steal something, there is a law; but if you traffick a person, there is simply no proper law.'**

**- Patricia Bustamante**

tackle the problem of human trafficking as well. 'If you rob a bank, there is a law; if you steal something, there is a law; but if you traffick a person, there is simply no proper law,' she points out.

But Bustamante is hopeful for the future of human trafficking victims. Her organization is working with rural municipalities to improve local support and gather testimonies from the victims. 'We hope to track down the real numbers to create an evident representation of the problem,' she says.

In the busy streets of La Paz and El Alto, there is another organization that works with victims of human trafficking, specifically sexual exploitation. Munasim Kullakita, which means "learn to love yourself, sister" in Aymara, aims to provide a safe haven for victims and restore the confidence of these women and girls. Some of the victims are underage, abandoned, and homeless. They don't have money, a place to stay, or work opportunities.

This is where Munasim Kullakita comes in. For the past ten years, the organization has worked with victims of sexual commercial violence in La Paz and El Alto and has recently expanded to other cities in Bolivia. Subdirector Ariel Ramirez Quiroga says it is a challenge to identify and contact the victims. Every week, Munasim Kullakita hits the streets to talk and listen to women and girls who might have been exposed to

this type of violence. 'They are damaged, so we have to be careful with them,' Ramirez says. 'Helping them rebuild their trust is a complex and important process.'

of professional psychological help,' Ramirez explains.

The women and girls stay in a safehouse for a minimum of three months. During this time, the organization tries to contact their families, because eventually the women will have to return to their homes and continue their lives. 'This is a

of professional psychological help,' Ramirez explains.

The women and girls stay in a safehouse for a minimum of three months. During this time, the organization tries to contact their families, because eventually the women will have to return to their homes and continue their lives. 'This is a

complicated part of our work,' Ramirez says. 'Some of them have families who don't want to take them back.' For these women and girls, a special program has been created in which they do light work for five hours a day and are expected to study. The goal is to help them build an independent future.

'This trajectory takes time, but it's definitely worth it because the rewards are very encouraging,' Ramirez says proudly. Generating personal contact is time-consuming and costly, but it allows the organization to do the work that the police simply cannot handle. Munasim Kullakita accompanies the victims in their healing process and assists them in reporting their cases to local authorities.

The workers of CECSEM and Munasim Kullakita encounter the bottlenecks of tracking and preventing sexual commercial violence. Reliable data is limited, and many say there isn't proper legislation for the perpetrators. The voices of the victims are not loud enough to raise more awareness on this issue. They find themselves in onerous situations that are hard to escape from. Both organizations try to tackle the problem from its root by giving girls and women a safe and prosperous environment to protect them from ending up in the hands of the traffickers.

With its fake hotel, CECSEM has demonstrated how easy it is to become ensnared by people looking to exploit others. Along with Munasim Kullakita, it collects horrifying and telling testimonials. In one of them, an anonymous victim, who is only fifteen years old, delineates the hideous atmosphere of the **plazas** where the girls and women gather and are picked up by men. It is a sad story, but the organizations are working hard to give her and other women a better future.



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## THE SOUND OF THE FURY

### BOLIVIA'S METAL SCENE

TEXT: CECILIA SAAVEDRA  
PHOTOS: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

**A**t a metal concert, it's easy to find friends, beer, brutal music, and cool performances. Among the numerous tattoos peeking out from under even more numerous band shirts, there's an amazing energy radiating from that can only be created by this thunderous musical mayhem.

Metal might seem aggressive, and it's sometimes even blamed as a trigger for a violent behavior. But according to a 2015 study by the University of Queensland in Australia published in the journal *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, metal and other extreme genres of music – emo, hardcore, and punk, for example – can actually lead to a state of relaxation and calm in its listeners, producing a result similar to sitting in silence.

These styles of music help their listeners to explore the full gamut of human emotions. And contrary to what many people think, metal typically does not make its fans angrier; listening to it may actually present a healthy way of processing an-

ger for these listeners. And when **metaleros** congregate with each other at concerts and meet each other, it creates a community and a sense of togetherness. In Bolivia, the chaotic, loud and powerful sounds of metal have attracted young people for decades, turning the taste for this genre of music into an addictive lifestyle difficult to drop.

**'METAL GIVES YOU GREAT STRENGTH, MAKES YOU THINK ABOUT THINGS, KEEPS YOU QUESTIONING EVERYTHING.'**

— GONZALO MARTINEZ HINOJOSA

Gonzalo Martinez Hinojosa has been a metalhead since he was a kid. Now 44, he has an office job like many people. He's an athlete and leads a healthy life, but his devotion to metal means he takes every opportunity to enjoy the music that he says nourishes his soul. At a young age, he discovered the records of Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, and Deep Purple, thanks

to his uncle who played guitar in a rock band at the time. From there, he discovered a whole new world that he doesn't want to leave. 'Music chooses you,' Gonzalo says. 'It's something you like so much you never leave. Metal is a style of music of great intensity. It gives you great strength, makes you think about things, keeps you questioning everything.'

During the week, Gonzalo has to wear a suit and tie to go to work. But perhaps the real Gonzalo is the one who wears Anthrax, Slayer, and Megadeth T-shirts. He saves for months in order to attend concerts in different countries, or even in international waters: he is a two-time attendee of '70000 Tons of Metal', an annual Caribbean cruise for metalheads and musicians.

In metal, women play a large and very present role in the scene. One active member of the Bolivian metal community is Julia 'Hexe' Ascarrunz, a singer for more than 10 years. She is 28 years old and an anthropologist, but metal will always be one of her main passions.

Julia's first performance was in El Alto, when she was invited onstage to sing a song alongside the band Effigy of Gods during an album-release show. Her first official band, *Metastasis*, gave her the opportunity to tour throughout Bolivia and in neighboring countries with the bands *Decomposing Flesh* and *Black October*. From 2009 to 2014, she played with her brother Pedro in a project called *Blood Rituals*. And now she's currently the lead singer of *Carcinoma*, a death metal band.

**'NOW IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO HAVE A GIRL BAND PLAYING ON YOUR STAGE.'**

— JULIA 'HEXE' ASCARRUNZ

'It's nice to see new people approaching metal music,' Julia says. 'The scene is growing apace.' But despite this growing interest, however, she points out that today in La Paz there aren't many spaces where you can listen to or play metal. She also says that not so long ago, discrimination against female metalheads was rampant, but that women themselves have demonstrated their strength and passion for this genre, changing perceptions from within. 'In recent years, things have changed,' she says. 'Now it's a privilege to have a girl band playing on your stage.'

Women are also working behind the scenes. Lucia Zarratti Chevarria and her production company, *Dantalian Overactive Producciones*, promotes and organizes metal concerts and events and manages several national bands. Lucia's introduction to metal came 20 years ago, when she first heard the song 'Symphony of Destruction', from Megadeth's classic *Countdown to Extinction* album, at a friend's house. 'I started to copy tapes, buy records, attend concerts, and to choose bands and genres,' Lucia explains. For Lucia, as for many fans, metal music is a passion that can't be explained logically, it's simply lived and applied to daily and professional life. It was with this energy that she started *Látex*, a clothing business exclusively for female metalheads.

While metal originated far from Bolivia, several national bands have emerged in recent years, and they've given the genre a Bolivian flavor. *Armadura*, which formed 12 years ago with members from La Paz and El Alto, is still going strong, constantly presenting new sounds to its audience. The band's version of the song 'Ama Sua, Ama Llulla, Ama Khella' (originally by the Andean folk group *Kalamarka*) is metal fusion, but guitarist and songwriter Franz Thames Rossel says the band makes music inspired by the environment, everyday life, and the social problems affecting their country.

Franz, Lucia, Julia, and Gonzalo all highlight the importance of organizing festivals and supporting emerging bands. With their collective energy, they are leading the charge in keeping alive the metal scene in Bolivia. Stay heavy, metalheads!

*Special thanks to Capotraste Music Bar in San Miguel, La Paz, for providing a location for our portrait of Julia.*

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# TINKU

## A Festival of Ritualized Violence

TEXT: KARINA GUZMAN  
ILLUSTRATION: HUGO L. CUELLAR

Even in Bolivia, a country well known for its many folkloric dances, the **Tinku** stands out. It is a dance that immediately catches your eye with its energetic style, mesmerising fighting moves, and the majestic attire of those who perform it. However, *Tinku* – a word that means ‘encounter’ in Quechua – is more than simply a dance. *Tinku* is ritualized combat that the members of the **ayllu** partake in, sometimes with fatal consequences. These members of the *ayllu* are divided into up and down – **aransaya** and **majasaya** – to grow different crops across various topological zones, and every year the two sides come together and fight each other, a practice that has deep roots that can be traced back to pre-Incan times.

For some, the tale of *Tinku* begins with a great nation of warriors, the Qara-Qara, who had great prestige for their fighting techniques and war-making abilities. The Qara-Qara would demonstrate their martial prowess in ceremonies in Macha, their nation’s capital, located in the north of the present-day Potosí department. Their skills were so good that when the Inca colonised the Qara-Qara, the Sapa Inca’s bodyguards were recruited from their ranks through organised battles of the conquered population. The best Qara-Qara warriors would compete and the winners would serve the emperor.

In time, a religious component merged with these fighting demonstrations. In the Andean cosmovision, ‘balance’ is one of the central metaphysical principles. It gains even more weight when considered alongside humanity’s relationship to **Pachamama**, the source of all life and fertility. Those killed during the *Tinku* are considered offerings to *Pachamama* during this early May celebration.

Intimately linked to the agrarian cycle, this celebration involves feasting, drinking, music, and **wijlla**, a special ritual in which llamas and sheep are sacrificed, their blood offered as sustenance to *Pachamama*, who in return provides a good harvest. And of course, this celebration also included the famous inter-communal *Tinku* fights.

After the Spanish conquest, indigenous communities were forcibly stripped

of their traditional idols, which were often replaced with depictions of Catholic saints. However, the roots of local culture were too strong to merely disappear, and a type of syncretism appeared. In the case of *Tinku* the original meaning of the Andean Cross celebration was adjusted to fit Catholic festivals: the Feast of the Cross (Fiesta de la Cruz) and sometimes the Lord of the Exaltation (Señor de la Exaltación), among others. This intricate weaving together of different cultures underlying *Tinku* means that today it is celebrated with a mix of customs: the demon-

### Tinku means ‘encounter’ in Quechua - and it’s more than simply a dance.

strative fight; rituals to *Pachamama*; and components of the Catholic faith. This richness has kept on growing, especially since the music accompanying the feast played by **charangos** took off. Today, the fighting moves and magnificent clothes of *Tinku* have become integrated into mainstream Bolivian identity, and the dance itself is now a celebrated feature of Bolivia’s main carnival celebration held in Oruro every February.

One of the clearest illustrations of *Tinku*’s gathering strength is the massive rows of migrants that come back to their communities year after year to join in on the celebrations. The young people who have emigrated to neighbouring countries for employment frequently travel back to their ancestral communities for the celebration, and, having been exposed to other cultures, bring new elements to festival. Now one can see drones, mp3 players, jeans, and football T-shirts alongside the more traditional elements of *Tinku*. And instead of only traditional **chicha** and **guarapo** drinks being available, beer is also now consumed massively.

### This fighters have a cordial, grudge-free attitude to each other before and after combat

Despite the image of nonsensical violence that outsiders might perceive from the dance, the reality in these communities is expressed by an elder from Aymaya, a village in northern Potosí where the *Tinku* is practiced: ‘*Tinku* is the complementary encounter of the people from up and down: *aransaya* and *majasaya*.’ This is reflected in fighters’ cordial, grudge-free attitude to each other before and after combat. *Tinku*, rather than being about power and dominance, is at its heart about ‘balancing’ the two halves of the *ayllu*.

The *Tinku* remains at the heart of the culture in northern Potosí, where it originates, and continues to act as a bridge for the indigenous people who have left their communities in recent years. It continues to provide the Andean notion of ‘balance’ in the ever-changing indigenous communities of this rural area of Bolivia.



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# ALL TOGETHER FOR BOLIVIA

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES OF URBAN LIFE IN LA PAZ AND SANTA CRUZ

TEXT: ADRIANA MURILLO  
IMAGES: COURTESY OF REVOLUCIÓN JIGOTE



the authorities have to continue our work,' he says. 'Sometimes there is a very big disparity between political and civil institutions.'

Meanwhile in La Paz, Aire Limpio [Clean Air], a project by the private foundation Swisscontact with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, presented its Bolivian street design manual at the city's annual book fair in September. The manual is colorful, graphic, and technical, a detailed

Peter Hotz, an expert on urban mobility who has worked on transportation matters throughout Bolivia, says that it is possible to make radical changes in the streets and avenues of the city. For example, alternative transport methods, such as cycling, can help improve the environment. There are also design solutions too: 'You don't always need giant structures or to be complicated,' Holt explains. 'Sometimes you just need to optimize and simplify. For example, **pasarelas** are not the best solutions to

**'You don't always need giant structures or to be complicated. Sometimes you just need to optimize and simplify.'**

**- Peter Hotz, Expert on urban mobility, Swisscontact**

study of the state of the streets and avenues of different cities in Bolivia, with a particular focus on La Paz. The stated mission of the book is to improve Bolivians' health by reducing air pollution caused by motor vehicles and improving urban mobility.

reduce the number of [people getting hit by cars]. They usually cost a lot of money, and the investment is often not justified because they are not used often. Instead, you can use simply use speed bumps... [and vehicle speed] is reduced.'

The Aire Limpio manual lists various areas in which Bolivian cities can improve – for example, narrow sidewalks can be widened and repaired, infrastructure can be built for cycling or for bus lanes, more parking spaces can be provided – and the project also holds training sessions, in which participants discuss the benefits of mass transportation in curbing air pollution. Real-world evidence is given, so that every citizen, no matter how they move around a city – by car, by bus, by foot – can do so in a way that will improve the city for everyone.

Bolivia, with its unique geography and population distribution, won't find a one-size-fits-all solution to the growing pains it is experiencing. Its two megalopolises, La Paz–El Alto and Santa Cruz, are growing quickly, gathering more and more people in their urban dynamism. But the future looks promising, especially with help from far-sighted planners who are looking to improve the lives of all Bolivians. ♦

We've all struggled in the chaos of the cities of Bolivia. We've seen garbage in the streets, old buses belching smoke, cars ignoring red lights and honking for seemingly no reason. It seems an impossible task to change things for the better here, but some people have hope.

Revolución Jigote is a citizen-training program aiming to promote more organized street planning, public education, and protection for the environment. It's the brainchild of CEDURE, a Santa Cruz-based nonprofit specializing in urban and human development. In Bolivia, **jigote** is a dish of stewed meat, but this movement doesn't focus on food: it's a set of values and attitudes that its authors hope will improve Bolivia's often chaotic cities.

José Antonio Prado, Revolución Jigote's director, says the program

'analyzes how social marketing can combine with Santa Cruz's idiosyncrasies to make civic education a theory that works locally.' In other words, Revolución Jigote is trying to leverage today's media to inform Bolivians, making them a better, more civic-minded populace. The group comprises about a thousand registered volunteers in total, plus a staff of 20.

'Santa Cruz severely punishes those who do things right,' José Antonio says. 'For example, if you respect one traffic signal or the markings on the street, you feel like a **burro** for following rules. Therefore, doing the right thing becomes a heroic act. And this makes people feel they are doing things wrong when they are not.'

The philosophy of Revolución Jigote is espoused in the project's manual: 'Everyone has a **mojigote** [negative civil behaviour] inside, which manifests itself when we are not alert, and

it acts when we stop thinking about others. The challenge is to control our *mojigote* from inside, little by little, until it disappears.' The manual lists 200 types of socially unacceptable behaviours in 60 categories, including environment and health, urban mobility, space and public property, and democracy and governance.

José Antonio says Revolución Jigote is intended to nudge people into making positive change from the inside out. And he thinks the program is helping many people in Santa Cruz – professionals, retired ladies, and students alike – be more friendly, hospitable, and kind, both in relation to one another and to the environment.

The principles that Revolución Jigote promotes are applicable to any field and any location, but José Antonio believes they have created a movement specific to the **cruceño** context. 'We created the idea, but









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## GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress

**AGACHADITOS** - food carts that offer cheap food, often located in crowded locations

**AGUAYO** - a traditional, colourful weave

**AHOGADO** - Bolivian red spicy sauce, not to be confused with llajwa

**ALTEÑO** - citizen of El Alto

**ALTIPLANO** - Bolivia's high plain

**APTHAPI** - an act of communal eating and togetherness practiced in rural regions of Bolivia

**ARANSAYA** - 'upper half of the *Ayllu*' in Quechua

**AYLLU** - A traditional formation of familial and social relations in the Andes that created ties between individuals and families of various geographic regions

**BURRO** - 'jackass'

**CHARANGO** - a small guitar-like instrument popular in the Andes region

**CHICHA** - a fermented beverage often made from maize

**COCHABAMBINO** - resident of the city of Cochabamba

**CRUCEÑO** - resident of the city of Santa Cruz

**FIDEO** - 'pasta' or 'noodles'

**GUARAPO** - a fermented beverage made of sugarcane, grapes, or fruits

**HERMANA** - 'sister'

**JIGOTE** - a popular dish of stewed meat

**MAJASAYA** - 'lower part of the *Ayllu*' in Quechua

**MASACO** - a typical dish from eastern Bolivia consisting of mashed ingredients formed into a round shape and fried

**METALEROS** - slang for 'metalheads' or fans of heavy metal music

**MOJIGOTE** - slang for 'negative civil behaviour'

**PACEÑO** - citizens of the city of La Paz

**PACHAMAMA** - a Mother Earth figure in Aymara and Quechua cultures

**PASARELAS** - Lifted foot bridges used to allow pedestrians to cross roadways without disrupting traffic

**PLAZA** - a public square

**TELEFÉRICO** - 'cable car'

**TINKU** - 'encounter' in Quechua and Aymara; the name of a traditional fight and war-like dance with origins in northern Potosí

**TOTORA** - a type of reed plant found growing in Lake Titicaca used in the construction of traditional boats

**WIJLLA** - a ritual llama sacrifice

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