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**más+menos**

student magazine  
fall 2011

cíee  
seville study center

# SUPERHEROES



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Editor's Note

Oscar Ceballos

Superman wore a cape

Capes may be normal in Krypton, but on planet Earth they're kind of weird.

In one of my favourite absurd dialogues from the iconic '90s sitcom "Seinfeld," George Constanza, the plump, middle-aged maniac played by Jason Alexander, gets quite upset when he realizes that his parents are planning to divorce. As an only child, the mere idea of having to celebrate two separate Thanksgiving dinners is making him mad. Though one thing unsettles him the most. Jerry and Elaine, George's reluctant best friends, have seen George's father, Frank, talking that same morning to a man wearing a *cape*:

George: *You know what this has to do with? The man in the cape. I bet you he's mixed up in this. I don't trust men in capes.*

Jerry: *Wait a second. You can't cast dispersions on someone just because they are wearing a cape. Superman wore a cape and I'll be damned if I'm gonna stand here and let you say something bad about him.*

George: *Alright, Superman is the exception.*

With or without capes, having faithful fans is implied in the condition of a superhero, though so is having critics. Much is expected out of a superhero; far too much. And what's



One of the most exciting parts of working with our students on this publication is the possibility to rediscover, semester after semester, the place where I grew up and, once again, live. Our students come to Seville with an honest and uncompromised gaze, and –confession be made– I try to take advantage of that.

In this issue of *más+menos* I've been lucky to work with an impossibly talented and cool group: Yvonne, Katy, Gabby, Becca, Michelle, Brigid, Naomi, Tess and Alison. More than a pleasure, it's been a piece of cake making this magazine with them. They've been excellent heiresses to the 216 students who, before them, also made the effort to look into our community with eyes wide open and a broad smile.

Eight years into our publication, this is the first issue of *más+menos* produced inside of the newly created Communication, New Media and Journalism program at the CIEE Study Center in Seville. Our magazine, small though constant, has led the way to this new and exciting academic venture. The same spirit that *más+menos* has always had as an experiential learning project based on immersion is embedded in the overall design of the new program.

Though let's not make it sound so easy. Our magazine wouldn't really work as an educational tool if things were in place and pre-packed before our students arrived. I believe that a certain degree of perplexity is needed in order for this project to become, just like any

worse, once people get used to them, they're taken for granted.

All superheroes are gifted—or cursed—with some sort of superpower, and they won't be left alone until they put it to what the general consensus thinks might be a good use. That is why, utterly disappointed by our selfishness, many superheroes end up venturing into the dark side. And who can blame them? "With great power comes great responsibility. This is my gift, my curse," said Spiderman's alter ego, Peter Parker, in despair.

Besides, a life without limitations and under the constant scrutiny of others is not only hard to fulfil, but it can also lead to solitude and, in the most severe cases, to self-denial. This was true of the characters in Greek tragedy and modern superheroes represent the human condition to the maximum of its dramatic capacities. They epitomise our joys and fears, our endeavours and phobias, our successes and failures, our luminous as well as our dim sides. Perhaps the world would be a better place if we weren't so harsh on our superheroes, if we showed them a bit more sympathy and respect. After all, they're just an exaggerated version of us.

In the pages of *más+menos 17*, we've tried to cover the whole superhero spectrum, even including the cursed ones. We have stories about stars that once shined brightly, iconic figures who died young, brave bullfighters who become pathologically shy out of the spotlight, women surrounded by personal threats and violence who still manage to make life better for others, individuals who, much like the superheroes, put on a costume to go to their jobs or to participate in the worship of a stellar cult, and teachers who sacrifice the comfort of their homes in order to defy a law that they consider unfair.

We respect and admire all of the superheroes portrayed in this and in all past issues of our magazine. Some of them are in a position of an uncertainty and bleakness that is hard to imagine. In order to succeed, they must set their own standards and rules, which in reality makes them privileged individuals, because cursed and all, they are ultimately what we all long to be: *free*.

other project in study abroad, a long lasting or a life-changing experience. That is why I feel that dealing with "culture shock" preventively does not quite make our students more independent or better equipped for their new environment. Life is life.

Aren't our students capable of confronting things more or less as they are? Do they need the answers that we provide for questions that not they, but also we, have made?

In truth, few people would be as shocked and perplexed by this culture as I am, so I try with the help of our magazine's contributors to revisit each semester what's new, unique, extraordinary, positive or moving about this place and its people, about us.

\* "Seinfeld" was a sitcom produced by Columbia Pictures and created by Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David between 1989 and 1998. Several specialized publications voted it the best television comedy of all times. The lines are from the fourth episode of the sixth season, "The Chinese Woman," which was first aired on October 13th, 1994.

## Stellar Devotion

**“Star Wars” fans from *HoloRed Estelar*—the largest “Star Wars” fan club in Spain—gather at the Plaza de España in Seville, one of the sets from the George Lucas saga. There, they explain to us why they’re drawn to the films and how they see the story as a universal myth.**

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, before Luke Skywalker destroyed the Death Star or wielded a lightsaber, the forbidden romance between his parents, Anakin and Padmé, began to blossom as they strolled through the semi-circled palace grounds in Naboo.

The arcaded entryways, the multitude of columns and the magnificent fountain in the center of the palace from the scene in “Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones” is unmistakably familiar to every *sevillano*. The Plaza de España in Seville, Spain is not only a set in the famous space opera but it’s also the beautiful backdrop to a bi-monthly meeting of *HoloRed Estelar*, a die-hard “Star Wars” fan club.

One by one, fans appear at the site on a chilly Sunday morning in November. Men in their black *HoloRed* Staff shirts; a tall man with long gray hair in a half ponytail wearing a chef uniform; a young teenager sporting a C-3PO shirt; a woman with pink hair. Within a half hour, 22 people have congregated at the gazebo near the Plaza de España, or Spain Square. They exchange hugs and laughs and begin catching up with one another. Soon they sit in a circle, just like the Jedi Council, to convene for their regular meeting.

Santiago Benítez, president of *HoloRed Estelar*, did not always like “Star Wars.” His father’s friend, Julián, was the one who loved the original trilogy. Julián recorded “Episode VI: Return of the Jedi” along with the semi-animated movie “Who Framed Roger Rabbit” on the same VHS tape for Benítez when he was a kid. The problem was that he recorded the “Star Wars” film first so Benítez had to fast forward every time he wanted to watch the cartoon.

“I pressed fast forward and then I pressed play,” Benítez remembers. “Then out of nowhere, Jabba the Hutt appeared on the screen laughing. I was so scared, I ran out of the room. It’s my first memory of ‘Star Wars.’ ”

The 26-year-old English teacher is the leader of the largest “Star Wars” fan club in Spain. With about 80 active members,

*HoloRed Estelar* hosts social and educational events for children, provides entertainment like choreographed lightsaber shows and offers workshops on do-it-yourself costumes, armor and sabers.

*HoloRed*’s biggest event of the year is JEHES, the acronym for *Jornadas y Exposición HoloRed Estelar Sevilla*, an open invitation for the public to step into the world of “Star Wars.” For the members, it’s an opportunity for all their friends, even those who live in different countries, to meet. The eighth consecutive JEHES was held at La Casa de las Sirenas in the Alameda de Hércules this past October, where the members showed off their collectibles from the saga, played table role-playing games and had laser tag tournaments.

**“I pressed fast forward and then I pressed play,” Benítez remembers. “Then out of nowhere, Jabba the Hutt appeared on the screen laughing. I was so scared, I ran out of the room. It’s my first memory of ‘Star Wars.’ ”**

Twenty-eight-year-old Alejandro Pérez, a founder of the group, remembers when *HoloRed* consisted of only himself and five friends in 1999. They held meetings at a comic shop and talked about the movies and comics, looked at memorabilia and shared video games. He explains it started out with friends but over time the group grew. Pérez says that now the meetings have become more serious and less casual.

“What’s important though is we are a group of friends with one common interest: ‘Star Wars,’ ” the former club president of eight years says. “You socialize with people who share the same interests. It’s the same as soccer. Devoted fans travel to watch a game. This is totally different but in the end it’s just like any hobby.”

Since 1977 when the first “Star Wars” movie premiered, the trilogies have enjoyed

much success. They’ve turned into a cultural phenomenon spanning many generations and “Star Wars” has become a franchise with action figures, collectibles, comics, books, video games and music. Benítez believes the saga has had so much success internationally because the basis of the story can be related in all cultures.

“At the beginning of ‘Star Wars,’ the story is your typical adventure,” Benítez says. “The isolated, humane hero, then something happens where he has to save the world and discovers he is powerful or has special abilities. That story has been told in all types of cultures: Greek, Roman, Chinese and Japanese. There is always some kind of mythical character with that role so the story is familiar.

George Lucas just set it in a galaxy.”

Many of the members’ favorite character is Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin’s former Jedi master. Benítez says Han Solo is also a favorite character because he’s not the typical protagonist. He says he personally prefers sidekicks or secondary characters, like Sam from “Lord of the Rings.”

“Luke and Frodo from ‘Lord of the Rings’ are good characters, but in reality they lack personality,” he says. “The typical hero doesn’t interest me because they are boring and plain.”

Eighteen-year-old Bella López is the newest member of *HoloRed* but she says she has been interested in the saga since she was 13 years old. Her older brother led her to be a fan of “Star Wars” and of everything related to fantasy and science fiction. She identifies with the character Ahsoka Tano from the “Clone Wars.”

“Ahsoka is young, impulsive, but always wants to do well,” López says. “When she doesn’t reach her goal, she becomes very depressed because she believes she could have done a better job. I can identify with her so much.”

Bella López adds that she has never had a problem with being a girl in the world of male-dominated world of “Star Wars” fans. “I’ve always had a good relationship with my brother

and with boys instead of girls. I’ve never had problems feeling like I’m ostracized because I’m a woman.”

At 14 years old, Alejandro Loreto is the third youngest member of *HoloRed Estelar*. He was only 5 years old when the second episode premiered. He says that when he was younger, he was interested in the lightsabers and the armor. Now what interests him the most is the Jedi’s attitude.

“The Jedi try not to have any strong feelings and are always at peace,” Loreto explains. “They don’t get agitated or sad, nor are they

really happy; that’s why they are always calm. Many times I suddenly become agitated or I feel very happy. I want to become calmer and peaceful like the Jedi.”

Before Anakin turned to the dark side, he said, “Compassion...is essential to a Jedi’s life.” The members of *HoloRed Estelar* show their compassion by periodically going to local hospitals in their costumes and spending time with the children. They bring “Star Wars” toys donated by businesses like Hasbro. In the spirit of the holiday season, their next visit will be at the Virgen del Rocío Hospital on Dec. 27.

“We mainly go to make the kids at the hospitals happy,” Benítez says. “It’s really gratifying to see them smile because of us.”

As the meeting continues, *HoloRed Estelar* discusses how to improve their next JEHES and votes in favor of helping their fellow sci-fi friends with their “Star Trek” convention. Amidst the talking, Darth Vader’s Imperial March rings out. One of the members urgently steps out of the circle to answer it.

“Must have been his wife,” another member says. ●●●



STORM TROOPER ON PATROL: JOSÉ MIGUEL CÁRDENAS, EX-PRESIDENT OF HOLORED ESTELAR, AT THE ALAMEDA DE HÉRCULES IN THE HEART OF SEVILLE DURING THE JEHES VII FESTIVAL / HOLORED ESTELLAR, 2010

## Schools, Style and Sacrifice: the Nonviolent Revolution of the Women of Western Sahara

Since the Moroccan occupation and subsequent repression of the people in Western Sahara began in 1975, some Sahrawi women have taken the lead in the nonviolent pursuit of independence and human rights.

### FATMA'S STORY

One afternoon in December of 1975, a young girl named Fatma was playing in her hometown of Elgelta, Western Sahara, just like any other day that winter. At 4 p.m., airplanes appeared overhead. They were followed almost instantaneously by fire all around caused by mines dropped from the sky.

Unable to locate her whole family, she grabbed the hand of her aunt and began to run. Thus began a four-day journey to seek refuge in the Algerian desert, a journey that included the stillbirth of her cousin and days spent in hiding. She finally reunited with her family, and along with all the other civilians that arrived, her mother and grandmother began to build tents for a refugee camp out of nothing but the clothes on their back. Thirty-six years later, they still live in this same place.

When Fatma was 18 years old, she gave birth to her first child, Selma, who became ill from a polio epidemic in the refugee camp when she was 11 months old. Fatma worked in the National Union of Sahrawi Women while at the same time caring for her child on her own. Her husband was fighting in the war for independence against the Moroccan army.

As Selma grew sicker and sicker, Fatma sent her to receive treatment in Spain, the country that had been the colonial power in Western Sahara until 1975. She lost contact with her daughter for a full year. During this time, Selma learned only Spanish and could not communicate in Arabic.

The first time they talked, her daughter did not believe Fatma was her mother, insisting, “If she were my mother, she would speak as I do.” Through years of studying, Fatma learned Spanish and the two developed a relationship, even though Selma remained with a family in Spain and Fatma remained in Western Sahara.

### A UNIQUE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Within a Muslim society like that of the Sahrawis, it may be surprising that a

woman would carry such great responsibility as Fatma did in the refugee camp. But the history of the Sahrawi people differs from that of many other societies in the region.

The Sahrawis are nomadic residents of the desert and “children of the clouds” who follow the rain in order to provide for their families. Historically, men had the role of leaving the home in order to make these provisions and women were charged with organizing and administering society. Given this role, women could not be pushed to the margins of society; instead, they gave order to it.

The conflict between the Moroccan government and the Sahrawis amplified this role. In November of 1975, Morocco occupied Western Sahara in the Green March and claimed

**Despite the infrastructures that women put in place during the war, men took over the majority of administrative roles in the Sahrawi community when they returned to the refugee camps in 1991 after a United Nations-brokered ceasefire.**

sovereignty over the region based on alleged pre-colonial ties. Shortly thereafter, Spain gave up Western Sahara, then its province, to the occupiers in the Madrid Agreement, despite a previous ruling from the International Court of Justice’s declaring that the Sahrawis deserved a right to self-determination.

The Moroccan position, shared by the vast majority of its population, is that the conflict is essentially Europe’s fault, as Western Sahara was a part of Morocco prior to colonization and was rightly returned to Morocco in Europe’s decolonization process.

Though there were very strong economic ties between Morocco and Western Sahara prior to European intervention, the Sahrawi independence movement claims that this doesn’t constitute political sovereignty.

Therefore, the Sahrawis declared an independent state on Feb. 27, 1976—the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic—which marked the beginning of a 16-year war in the region. The war divided the population between those who stayed in occupied Western Sahara and those who fled to refugee camps in Algeria, where they established their own government.

Until the 1991 ceasefire, many Sahrawi men from the camps fought in the war against Morocco and women again were responsible for the organization of society. Sahrawi women set up schools, food distribution, hospitals, administration and all other necessary aspects for the framework of a refugee camp society.

Previously unable to attend school during the Spanish colonial period, Sahrawi women are acutely aware of the importance of education in society. According to Abidin Bucharaya, a delegate in Andalusia of the Polisario Front, which has been Western Sahara’s government during the exile over the last 36 years, 50 percent of students sent to study outside of the refugee camps are women, as required by Sahrawi law.

In addition, the Sahrawis have organized the *Escuela 27 de Febrero* in their refugee camps. The *Escuela* is a women’s school that trains students to teach younger generations, which encourages female empowerment among the Sahrawi community.

### POWER THROUGH ART

Despite the infrastructures that women put in place during the war, men took over the majority of administrative roles in the Sahrawi community when they returned to the refugee camps in 1991 after a United Nations-brokered ceasefire.

“The problem right now is that Sahrawi women are returning, to some extent, to housework,” said Fernando Peraita, the president of the Association of Friendship with the Sahrawi People in Seville. As a result, many Sahrawi women and organizations have been



SDRAHA (LEFT), DRAIA ADAI (CENTER) AND MEIMUNA MOLUD (RIGHT) AT THE THE WORKSHOP OF *ENTRETELAS, SAHARA LIBRE WEAR*. SAHRAWI REFUGEE CAMP “27 DE FEBRERO” IN TINDOUF, ALGERIA / ALONSO GIL, 2010

working for the past 20 years to reestablish the power they previously held.

One such organization is called Sahara Libre Wear (SLW), a clothing brand that grew out of two projects featured in the annual Sahrawi Art Festival ArTifariti. These projects —*¡A pintarropa!*, run by artist Alonso Gil, and *Entretelas*, run by artists Angustias García and Esther Regueira—merged in 2009 to form SLW.

The clothing line seeks to express the pain and hopes of the Sahrawi independence movement through fashion made by Sahrawi women. SLW produces traditional clothing depicting Gil’s unique designs, such as guns that fire flowers and the name of the independent Sahrawi state written in the Roman alphabet and Arabic script.

The three artists said in an interview with the French-language magazine *Rézo* that they created this project because “clothing serves as a vehicle to make visible and evident the situation in which the Sahrawi community lives, [which has been] forgotten and silenced by

those who choose to see only their own interests in the Sahrawi condition.”

At the same time, the artists emphasize that the Sahrawi women are the heart of the project, and that the choice of traditional clothing as a medium of expression lends itself to “a space of feminine communication, reflection and debate, with and for women.”

As this program grows, the three founding artists have been working with Sahrawi women to give them complete control of the project. It is a challenging task, given that it takes far less time to create the clothing in Spain, where Gil presses the designs onto the fabric ten at a time, than it does in Western Sahara, where the climate requires women to press the designs separately to keep the paint from drying too quickly.

“But even though it takes time, I think that the process of self-administration of the project is going to go very well. The Sahrawi women are already creating their own unique designs for Sahara Libre Wear,” Gil says,

beaming with pride for what the women of SLW have accomplished.

Reflecting the continuing pain of the Sahrawi community, many of the recent designs created by the women depict the Gdim Izik (also written Gdeim Izik or Agdaym Izik) incident. As reported in Amnesty International’s 2011 Annual Report, Moroccan security forces dismantled a peaceful protest outside of Laayoune, the capital of occupied Western Sahara, on November 8, 2010. The forces physically assaulted the protesters and destroyed much of their property. This incident sparked violence in the camp, ending in casualties on both sides as well as hundreds of arrests of protesters. The women of SLW responded to the Gdim Izik incident by making icons of the Sahrawi victims of the violence.

### THE FIGHT CONTINUES

Individual Sahrawi women such as Aminatou Haidar have continued to promote the roles of women in the fight for Sahrawi rights and freedom in recent years.

Imprisoned and tortured from 1987 to 1991, Haidar is one of the most well known representatives of the plight of Sahrawis. On Nov. 13, 2009, Moroccan authorities denied her re-entrance into Western Sahara because she refused to write that she was going to Morocco, which would have demonstrated a recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Characteristically nonviolent, she responded with a month-long hunger strike while exiled in the airport of the Spanish island of Lanzarote, which resulted in her being hailed as a “Sahrawi Gandhi.”

Fernando Peraita, who served as her spokesman during her hunger strike, praises her as a woman who “never surrenders to any adversity,

and has very clear in her mind that her fight is a pacific one, and that what gives her strength is that she never raises a hand against anyone.” On Dec. 18, 2009, under international pressure, the Moroccan government permitted Haidar to return to Western Sahara.

Like all these women who work for the rights of the Sahrawi community, Haidar’s work has come at a great personal cost. In addition to the arrests, beatings and threats that she has suffered, she is pained further by the threats against her two children.

Still, she sees herself as an individual who can influence the future of Western Sahara and she is prepared to give her life in pursuit of that future. She does not stand alone. Fatma El Mehdi, the same Fatma who fled her home

in December of 1975, is now the secretary-general of the Union of Sahrawi Women, one of the highest posts within the Western Sahara independence movement.

In a speech given at the European Conference of Solidarity with the Sahrawi people in 2002, she summed up the contributions of these superheroines of the Sahrawi cause, saying: “The constant violation of human rights, the lack of freedom, the arbitrary arrests, the abductions and forced deportations reflect the level of resistance and determination of our women who are the backbone of the Sahrawi society, which has introduced a network of solidarity with any and all persons who defend and love peace and justice in the world.” ●●●



SANDSTORM APPROACHES THE SMARA CAMP, OCT. 9, 2008 / NICK BROOKS

#### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT IN WESTERN SAHARA

**1884:** Western Sahara becomes a Spanish colony.

**1973:** The Polisario Front (the Spanish acronym for Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro) organizes as the political representation of the Sahrawi independence movement.

**1975** (October): The International Court of Justice rules that the Sahrawis have a right to self-determination.

**1975** (November): Over 300,000 Moroccans enter Western Sahara in the “Green March” ordered by King Hassan II. Through the Madrid Agreement, Spain allows the northern two-thirds of the territory to be acquired by Morocco and the southern third by Mauritania.

**1976** (February): The Polisario Front declares the independent Saharan Arab Democratic Republic and organizes its first government.

**1978:** The Polisario Front orders a coup that results in Mauritania’s renunciation of its claim to Western Saharan territory.

**1976-1991:** The Polisario Front fights a guerrilla war against Morocco, exacerbated by Morocco’s occupation of Western Saharan territories liberated from Mauritania.

**1978:** Algeria allows the Polisario Front to set up its base in refugee camps in Tindouf.

**1991:** The United Nations organizes a ceasefire between the Polisario Front and Morocco and establishes the United Nations Mission for the Organization of a Referendum in Western Sahara (Minurso).

**1996:** Unable to reach an agreement between Morocco and the Polisario Front over voter identification and the options that should be available for voters in the referendum, the UN suspends the process.

**2001:** James Baker proposes Sahrawi autonomy under Moroccan authority, followed by a referendum in four years with voting rights for all who have lived in the territory for over a year. The Polisario Front and Algeria reject the plan.

**2003:** A plan similar to the Baker Plan is proposed; Morocco rejects it.

**2010:** Moroccan authorities destroy a protest camp outside of Laayoune called Gdim Izik, resulting in violent clashes between the two sides.

Source: BBC News Africa: “Western Sahara Profile”

## 09 Kathryn George

### The Alter Ego

**Leonardo Hernández Narváez, a mild-mannered young man, transforms when he goes to the *plaza* to perform the bullfight on his horse as a *rejoneador*. He came back after an accident that almost left him completely blind. In 2003, we interviewed him for the first issue of our magazine. He was then starting what would become his superstar career.**

It is a Saturday afternoon in early November and Leonardo Hernández, a young superstar in the world of *toros* and one of the top three mounted bullfighters competing today, is being scolded by his mother for the second time in an hour. The biting wind of the Extremaduran plains blows through the low-ceilinged kitchen, cutting through the cozy warmth of the rustic house.

“*Mi vida*, the door!” the middle-aged woman admonishes as she stirs a pot of stew big enough to fit a toddler inside. “How many times do I have to tell you?”

“I closed it!” the young man protests, not bothering to turn around and check.

His mother scoffs loudly. “Look!” she commands, pointing to the swinging iron door with her free hand.

He rolls his eyes and glances over his shoulder. Seeing the kitchen door wide open, he laughs.

“*Joder*,” he swears with a good-natured grin, and crosses the cozy kitchen to push the door closed.

A slim, curly-haired 24-year-old, there is nothing about *Nonayo*, as his family calls him, that indicates his Superman-like status among fans of bullfighting. If the Leonardo Hernández Narváez that this year earned the greatest distinction in bullfighting—the opening of the gates in Madrid to recognize an excellent *corrida*—is the superhero, then this reserved young man with a warm smile and a penchant for the word “phenomenal” is the mild-mannered alter ego. Until he puts on the costume and joins forces with his equine sidekick, Leonardo seems like a normal, if extremely polite, Spaniard. But in the ring, he is the bold and talented *rejoneador* Leonardo Hernández, universally renowned for his classic style.

“I fight with my heart and soul,” he says with a solemn expression. “Of course it’s a scary thing, but when I’m in the ring I can’t think about fear.”

The *rejoneo*, as Leonardo’s specialty is called, is not as well known outside of Spain as bullfighting on foot, but it’s just as adored by true *aficionados*. “I heard a beautiful fact the other day,” Leonardo says. “At the big festivals, there are more spectators in the stands for the *rejoneos* than there are for the bullfights on foot!”

On the most basic level, mounted bullfights operate the same way as those conducted on foot. The fight is divided into three distinct sections during which the *rejoneador* and his horse must attack the bull with different weapons.

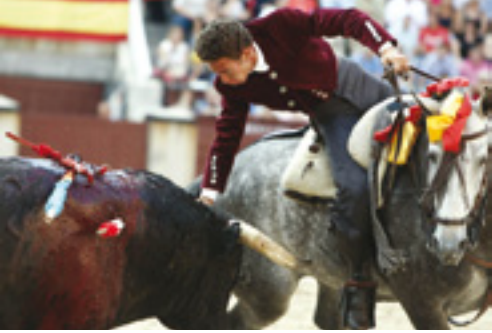
During the first *tercio*, the bullfighter uses *rejones*, wooden rods about 3-and-a-half feet long ending in a sharp tip, followed by *banderillas*, a much shorter, brightly colored version. The final task is the grimly, but accurately,

**“I debuted when I was 15 or 16,” Leonardo says, a smile sneaking onto his lips. “I remember being nervous beforehand, but when I rode out into the *plaza*, I wasn’t scared.”**

named *rejón de muerte*, or spear of death. All of the weapons must be stabbed into the bull’s back while riding a galloping horse and avoiding those rather dangerous horns. Oh yeah, and it has to look pretty.

“Bullfighting is an art,” Leonardo says, echoing millions of *toreros* throughout history. “You have to be conscious at all times of your form,” even when there’s a 2,000-pound bull scant inches from your horse’s haunch.

This is what makes Leonardo a true superhero to fans of the *rejoneo*. Watching him fight is like watching an expertly choreographed ballet, if both of the dancers could kill you. On horseback, Leonardo is both graceful and deadly. He is a showman in the ring, using breathtakingly dangerous techniques throughout the fight. One of his favorite tricks is the difficult practice of attacking with two *bande-*



*rillas* at the same time. He ties the reins out of the way and steers his horse at a controlled gallop towards the bull using nothing but his legs. Then, when he is in the perfect position, just inches from an enraged animal, Leonardo leans completely off his horse and slams the short spears between the bull’s shoulders.

“He loves that move,” says Nicolás, Leonardo’s 20-year-old brother, with a knowing smile. “Everyone does it, but he uses it a *lot*.”

The juggling of tasks is impressive—from keeping the horse at the right speed to the crispness of his accurate stabs and avoiding the inevitable attempted goring from the bull, Leonardo’s movements are fluid and aesthetically pleasing. But what makes the feat even more impressive is the fact that Leonardo is completely blind in his right eye.

“It happened in 2007,” Leonardo says, shifting uncomfortably at the memory. His lips are slightly pursed as he speaks about the accident that many thought would end his career. During the last *tercio* of a bullfight in Íscar, Valladolid, Leonardo raised the *rejón de muerte* to deliver the final blow, but slipped and took the blunt end of the spear to his right eye. The blow damaged his ocular nerve so severely that initially he was blind in both eyes.

“For a long time people thought I would never come back,” Leonardo says. “At first I wasn’t sure I would come back. It was one of the worst times in my life.”

Thankfully, the swelling went down in his damaged nerve the vision in his left eye returned. Leonardo was able to compete again the following season. “It was never an option to stay away,” he says emphatically. “This is what I do. But I admit I was scared to fight again.”

The recovery process was brutal, Leonardo says. “I felt very strange all around. I didn’t feel normal. Sometimes I would just be eating and I would have trouble,” he said in a 2011 interview with *Mundotoro*. “But I went out to

ABOVE: LEONARDO HERNÁNDEZ IN THE BULLRING OF LAS VENTAS, MADRID, JUNE OF 2009 / CLAUDIO ÁLVAREZ

fight in the ring and the *torero* just came so fluidly. I had the sensation that in the ring, I had no problems.”

Three years after his return, Leonardo says he hasn’t had to compensate for his right eye. “Nothing has changed. I don’t do anything differently,” he insists.

He credits his speedy return to bullfighting to his years of experience riding. “I was practically born on horseback,” he says matter-of-factly. “I’m comfortable riding. Probably more so than I am on foot.”

This is no exaggeration on Leonardo’s part. His father, Leonardo Hernández García, was also a *rejoneador* who by the end of his ca-

reer was at least as famous as his son. Leonardo Jr. was riding before he could walk, and by the time he hit 14 years old he was learning the tricks of the *rejoneo*.

“I debuted when I was 15 or 16,” Leonardo says, a smile sneaking onto his lips. “I remember being nervous beforehand, but when I rode out into the *plaza*, I wasn’t scared.”

Not even eight years later, Leonardo is considered one of the top three *rejoneadores* in the world. His efforts are consistently rewarded with trophies (including the traditional ear or two from the bulls he’s killed) and grand door openings in his honor at the biggest *plazas de toros* in the country. The media coverage

of the bullfighting season is rife with photos of Leonardo triumphantly waving at the crowd as adoring fans carry him from the stadium on their shoulders.

But at home on the ranch, as the family prepares for an afternoon training the up-and-coming mounts, he’s just Nonayo, same as ever.

“Wear your jacket, it’s freezing outside,” Leonardo’s mother commands, spotting his attempts to sneak out the back door in just a sweater.

“*Joder*,” laughs the superhero, but grabs a fleece on his way out all the same. ●●●

# Wonder Woman in Disguise

Ana Chavarro, the 37-year-old Colombian woman who cleans at night in the CIEE Study Center in Seville, has overcome a past full of trying events through her heroic fight for a better life for herself and her family.

Every Monday through Friday, Ana Chavarro spends the morning taking care of a 10-month-old baby that isn’t hers. She rocks her, feeds her, holds her, changes her diaper and puts her down for a nap. When Tula wakes up, Ana straps her into a stroller and the two of them wander over to pick up Tula’s 3-year-old brother, Eliot, from school.

When I first met this 37-year-old Colombian woman, I knew instantly that she was extraordinary.

“Who’s my spoiled little boy?” Ana asks Eliot, who is holding her hand with a fierce grip as I push Tula in her stroller.

“Eliot!” he answers with a priceless smile plastered across his little face.

“That’s right,” she says, and she picks him up and plants a big smooch on his cheek. This kid might not be hers, but there’s a whole lot of love there.

The children’s parents, Morgan and Óscar, work at the CIEE Study Center in Seville. That’s how Ana and her husband, Duber, also got jobs at the center. They both clean the building at night.

“Óscar and Morgan have seen me happy, sad, everything. I’ve felt all of these things and I’ve never only felt one at a time,” Ana says. Even as she recounts her life story, she does so through tears and laughter. It changes from moment to moment and story to story. But one thing is constant: her strength.

Ana works two jobs in Seville, but at one point she was working four. She used to care for an elderly woman named Mimi during the weekends and she worked for the *Fundación Gota de Leche*, an organization that provides mothers who are struggling financially with food, diapers, milk and other necessities for their babies.

Ana gained job stability with Óscar and Morgan and also at CIEE. This allowed her to quit her other two jobs. “I am so lucky that I found them here,” she says, especially because she arrived in Seville at the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008.

She refers to Oscar, Morgan, Eliot and Tula as her other family. The original one lives in Pitalito, a town located 100 miles south of Bogotá, where her story began.

Her parents, Daniel and Chiquinquirá, always thought of her as the rare one among their eight sons and daughters. “Rare in the sense that I wanted to be myself. I wanted to be my own person,” she recalls.

Ana left her home when she was only 10 years old to live with her professor. “I lived with her, ate with her, cooked with her and went to school with her. I was extremely happy at that point in my life.” She says it was a way for her to study, work and provide herself with her own things. Ana was practically her professor’s daughter at this point, but her father had other plans.

“My mother said to me that I could stay or leave. She told me that she loved me and what had happened to me had really hurt her. But she said that she would prefer to have a daughter far away, but alive.”

“My father was a wealthy and powerful man because he was a pawnbroker, a rancher and a landlord for many houses. He was a very loving man, but when he wanted something done his way, that was the way it was going to be done.”

He met her at school with a suitcase full of her things and he took her onto a bus to her sister’s house. Her sister Alicia, who was pregnant and needed Ana to help in the house with her children, lived in the city of Neiva, six hours away from Pitalito. Ana was 13 years old.

“I didn’t want to leave. I had a boyfriend and a good life with my professor and her children,” she says. Ana and her father arrived at her sister’s house late at night and her sister’s husband was waiting for them.

“From the first time I saw him, I didn’t like the way he looked at me. And that’s where it began.”

When her sister went to the market or left the house, her husband touched and violated Ana. When Ana told Alicia, she didn’t believe her. Ana seized an opportunity to live elsewhere and work. But after Alicia had her baby, she asked Ana to come back and help her, and she accepted. One night, she was alone in Alicia’s house with her baby, and Alicia’s husband came home drunk. He raped her. And when she told her sister, she still did not believe her.

But Ana soon became pregnant with his child. “It was a very difficult pregnancy because I was so young. I also knew I couldn’t tell my father. My sister didn’t want me to tell him either, because she knew he would kill her husband,” she says.

Ana moved back to a small neighborhood outside of Pitalito. When Ana was four months along in her pregnancy, she saw her father. She thought he didn’t know about her pregnancy, but he did. But he didn’t know the right story, because Alicia had invented a fake one, saying that Ana had a boyfriend and it was his child.

“He became a different person when he was angry, and he took his anger out on me,” she says through lots of tears. Her father dealt with the news violently.

There was so much pressure on the shoulders of 13-year-old Ana: her sister’s marriage, her family’s name and image, her own health and the future of her baby. Her father wanted her to give her baby away, but she wouldn’t hear of it. “I told him no. I said if I have to work every day for food and for a place to live, I’ll do it,” she remembers now.

Ana speaks about her difficult past through tears, but never with shame. What happened is what happened. Ana has a scar on her face that is a metaphor for her life and a symbol of her vivacity.

One day, at a time when Ana lived with a woman named Vicky and her family taking



LEONARDO HERNÁNDEZ AT HOME WITH *TEMPLARIO* / KATY GEORGE, 2011

care of her children en Pitalito, Ana helped Vicky’s husband, Orlando, change a light bulb. The light bulb broke and cut his face and Ana accompanied him to the hospital. While she was there, two men came looking for her at the house. One of them was the father of her child, Alicia’s husband.

Ana thought nothing of it when she was told that these two men had come searching for her. But the next day, she heard on the radio that those men had killed her best friend. It was then that Ana realized a broken light bulb had saved her life. It was after this that she decided to move further away from her family.

“My mother said to me that I could stay or leave. She told me that she loved me and what had happened to me had really hurt her. But she said that she would prefer to have a daughter far away, but alive.” After that, Ana left for Rivera, in the department of Huila, eight hours away by bus.

Ana’s past doesn’t seem to weigh her down or make her bitter. It amazes me how a woman who has been through so many horrible things can laugh so genuinely. Tula pulls on her hair and Ana shrieks and laughs while wiping away the tears.

She continues to talk about her daughter, Constanza. One night, Ana received a phone call from her sister saying that her daughter was in the hospital. “She was working at a restaurant. She went to work that evening and never came back.”

Constanza was drugged, robbed and raped. “It was so hard for me to hear, because I had been through a similar situation. And it completely changed my life.”

Ana’s greatest dream was to come to Seville and earn enough money to buy her daughter a house. Constanza, who is 24 years old now, has three children: Natalia (9 years old), Karen Daniela (7 years old) and Julián David (18 months), the son that she has with her current husband, Adolfo, a corporal of the Colombian army who fights the FARC’s guerrillas in the jungle.

Ana and Duber were married in Colombia on Sept. 11, 2008, and three days later they moved to Seville to work and support the family. “I have always liked to work, for myself, for my daughter, for my grandchildren, for the things that are important to me. When I decided to come to Seville, it was very difficult. But I always had a lot of dreams and goals to achieve, and now I’m achieving them little by little.” For example, she has helped her sister and her brother-in-law to open an auto parts store with the money she earned and sent home.

Ana is now far away from her daughter but speaks with her on the phone every day. She loves Constanza more than anything else on earth.

This 37-year-old grandmother has been married twice; she’s dealt with deaths of loved ones, traumatizing illnesses and unimaginable hardships. She’s had to make the most difficult

decisions, and many of them before she even celebrated her 15th birthday, or *quinceañera*.

She is Wonder Woman incarnate. She doesn’t have superpowers and she doesn’t wear hot pants or a headband. She wears bellbottom jeans and black V-neck shirts, and she pushes a stroller around and holds the hand of a 3-year-old boy who absolutely adores her. She mops the floors of a beautiful palace where privileged American students spend their days studying. She doesn’t look like a superhero. But she is one. Her strength is awe-inspiring and unfathomable. She is a warrior.

We reach a main road and I turn to Ana to tell her I’m going home. I thank her for her time and her willingness to share her story with me and I get a goodbye kiss from Eliot and Tula. I watch her walk away, one hand pushing Tula’s stroller, the other holding onto a dancing and singing Eliot. I smile because I know she’s happy, even though it’s impossible for me to imagine how. I smile because I feel honored that I am the one who has the privilege of sharing her story with others.

But most of all, I smile because she’s with her family and she’s so purely and genuinely happy; I believe that’s exactly what she deserves.

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Ana’s greatest dream was to come to Seville and earn enough money to buy her daughter a house. Constanza, who is 24 years old now, has three children: Natalia (9 years old), Karen Daniela (7 years old) and Julián David (18 months), the son that she has with her current husband, Adolfo, a corporal of the Colombian army who fights the FARC’s guerrillas in the jungle.



RIGHT: ANA WITH TULA AND ELIOT / ÓSCAR CEBALLOS, 2011

## Superteachers without Students

Weeks since the start of an interim teachers' protest in the cathedral of Seville, the sit-in against the government's recently established Decree 302 of Andalusia continues. This law has dramatically changed teacher's lives and they will do whatever it takes, day after day, signature by signature, to change it.

"I have tried other jobs, I need the money, but this is my vocation, there is no *one* reason why I became a teacher. There is no thought in my mind of permanently getting another job. Why would I stop doing what I love?"

Jessica Riquelme Llorca sits atop two mattresses stacked on top of each other. Her curly dark brown hair is piled on her head and almost spills around her face every time she begins to talk.

Within the somber atmosphere that surrounds the gothic cathedral in Seville, the neon colors of posters, the hastily-made beds and the liveliness of the teachers' protest capture the attention of tourists who crane their necks to observe the scene. The protest is still going on now, 41 days after its commencement. Signs declaring "Against Decree 302" cover every space of the protest's gated boundaries. The slogan is printed on the T-shirts of some of the protesters.

"Because of this decree, in order to be qualified as a teacher, you must get a good grade on this test," Jessica says. "But in order to get a good grade you must study; studying takes up time so you are unable to gain work experience, but experience is also factored in whether or not you get a job."

"The government wants to avoid paying full salary so they fill positions with interim teachers. It is a cycle that no one knows how to break with this decree in place."

Jessica looks around at the other teachers for affirmation as she begins to speak. "I have only been teaching for five months but already I can see this decree is not helping the future of education. It has begun to change the minds of students who are studying to be teachers in college. I have a 17-year-old cousin who wanted to be a teacher, and now that she has seen what I am going through, she has changed her studies entirely. She does not want to have to deal with all of the stipu-

lations, and who can blame her?" Fellow protestors nod in solemn agreement and a silent moment passes.

Jessica shakes her head briskly and continues talking. It's Nov. 5 today and the Spanish general elections on Nov. 20 are just around the corner.

"The current government and both candidates [Rajoy and Rubalcaba] act as though they support us, but it is just a ploy for them to win votes," Jessica says. "Once the election happens, though, it will probably be worse. It *will* be worse. The government will disregard us once again because they figure this situation is as bad as it's going to get, you know?"

**"This decree violates constitutional principles of equality, merit and ability, and weakens the quality of teaching in Andalusia."**

***The platform against Decree 302***

Despite her exhaustion from protesting, a look of determination settles on Jessica's face with her next words: "But there has not been a single person who has an objection to our cause! There have, however, been religious people who disagree with our choice of a location. They believe the cathedral is an inappropriate place to hold a protest."

José Luis, the only male teacher present, adds with a sarcastic chuckle, "But if we protest in the streets it is a 300€ ticket per day, and since we have no jobs, there is no one with enough money to pay that. Ironical, isn't it?" They both lower their voices and glance around at the tourists whose eyes focus on the elaborate chapels of the cathedral.

María, who has been teaching for nine months, adds, "Enough money for a ticket? I had to cancel my own wedding because I was



SIT-IN INSIDE SEVILLE'S CATHEDRAL / REBECCA SMITH, 2011

unsure if I would have enough money to pay for it. You can see how this decree affects our jobs; we have none. But my wedding? That is an event in my life that I have had to push back *because* of the instability of my job." Her voice softens. "I just want to teach children. It's not fair that I've been punished because of that."

Jessica reaches over to pat María's hand and says through a smile, "That's why we're here."

Another young woman approaches the protest, takes her jacket off and embraces the teachers with hugs and a knowing smile. She introduces herself as Alicia and relaxes on the bed that the others have pointed out as hers for the night.

Jumping into the conversation, Alicia says: "I recently bought a house with my boyfriend and although we can fortunately still afford it, I contribute almost nothing to the payments. Thank goodness my boyfriend has a stable and well-paying job, because otherwise we would have to move out. Can you imagine that? I appreciate him paying but I want it to be *our* house, not *his* house."

The buzz of chatter picks up as a large group of tourists gathers around the protest and slowly inches forward. Jessica laughs. "We're like zoo animals in here. People just walk by and stare as if we can't see them back."

A few tourists approach and ask her questions about the cause. Jessica smiles good-naturedly as she slowly and accurately gives the facts about Decree 302. The tourists read its conditions with furrowed brows and sign the petition asking the regional government to change it.

A new crowd follows in its wake, and another after that, each with the potential to help the teachers by signing the petition.

In an unwavering and hopeful voice, Jessica asks yet again, "Would you like to sign the petition against Decree 302 to help education?"

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## The Flame that Burns Brightest Burns Fastest: Silvio, 'Rockero de Sevilla'

Silvio Fernández Melgarejo is still remembered as a local music superhero 10 years after his death. He stayed true to himself in the spotlight and never tried to hide his addictions.

I want to tell the story of Silvio Fernández Melgarejo, just Silvio, the spontaneous, carefree poet, with a voice like Elvis and a live fast, die (not so) young story, who loved rock n' roll, the Holly Week processions and his soccer team, Sevilla F.C., with just the same passion.

Ten years after his death at age 56, hundreds of fans showed up to a concert on October 2010 in Seville to pay tribute to his memory. The musicians who played with him throughout his career in different bands, including Luzbel, Barra Libre, Sacramento and Los Diplomáticos, were all there.

Those who have seen Silvio in concert or knew him personally were intoxicated by his magnetism and intensity. They got drunk off of his presence as he sipped a gin and tonic and pressed the microphone to his lips.

Alonso Gil, a local artist and activist, describes his first experience seeing Silvio live in Seville: "I was stunned by the charisma of this figure. His presence on stage, which I would later find out was the same off of it, wasted genius, his freely expressed words, shouts, gestures, contortions and hip movements were like a slap in the face."

The fame didn't change Silvio, his life-long friend Paquico explains. "When his work hit an international level he was always around the talented elite but he didn't care; he was an extremely simple guy."

Paquico explains that it wasn't exactly humility, but more that Silvio just "did what he did" in every moment, and nobody's status—including his own—changed that.

He thought little about the future and though his past was rough, with the suicide of his sister and strained relationships with his ex-wife and son, he wasn't stuck in the past. Silvio lived as though there was only the present moment at hand. And he lived like there was no tomorrow until there really wasn't.

Silvio first started playing drums, then he and some friends in Seville started a group called Smash. Around then he met his young wife, Caroline Williams, the British heiress to Rolls Royce. He loved to party, Paquico recalls. "We would go with Silvio and drink in the

*discotecas* and Silvio would immediately spend all the money he got from his wife, or he would go to the Málaga airport and asked, 'Where is the next plane headed?' and he'd take it."

Not surprisingly, his wife left him and went back to England with their son, Sammy. Silvio went to England to visit Sammy but his ex-wife would not let him near. The father and son did not have a personal relationship.

But since Silvio's death in 2001, Sammy Taylor, who is now a musician as well, has performed in Seville with his father's band, The Dealers, singing his father's songs in Spanish while surrounded by his father's dedicated followers and friends.

In 1962 Silvio returned to Seville, where he and his friends partied constantly. Paquico describes those nights: "I was a disc jockey at a disco and he was a drinker, so many cocktails...

**"Silvio's concerts were a party. His audiences were ecstatic when he performed in his town, like fans at a home game."**

but we weren't alcoholics. There's a difference. Silvio loved the good stuff, fine wines." The singer and his friends drank heavily and partied often. They tried "loads of drugs, every type, every color, every dimension," Paquico recalls.

Silvio had international fans and groupies and lived the outlandish life shared by most rock stars. He loved having a good time and didn't walk on eggshells for the sake of his health. Fun took precedence.

Álvaro Aspe, the owner of a bar in the old neighborhood of La Macarena who is also a rock star in the making and a huge Silvio fan does not judge the artist for his alcoholism. "I'm part of the same [rock] world now. I don't think the fact that he was an alcoholic is important to his memory."

Today, Silvio is everywhere in Seville. You might not know who the man in that photo is, the one hanging above the bar at Álvaro's local. He stands with friends in black and white, wear-



SILVIO AND "PÁJARO" ON STAGE / SR. MAESE

ing ray bans and a wrinkly smile below his mop of messy hair. Alonso Gil has made numerous portraits of the rock star. "After his death I made my own tribute to Silvio. First I made a picture using the full range of orange, from red to yellow, in which I painted him like a burning coal, an unquenchable warmth emanating heat around him, forever."

Silvio was the crashing symbol and snare drum that broke the silence of the dictatorship under Francisco Franco. "He represented freedom of expression and the glory of losing yourself in fun." Álvaro recalls. "Silvio's concerts were a party. His audiences were ecstatic when he performed in his town, like fans at a home game," he also explains. "There are many groups that sing better, but here in Seville we value locality. Silvio sings about Betis and Sevilla soccer clubs and *Semana Santa* (Holy Week)."

He is idolized not because he was rich (he wasn't at the end, at least) or famous, but because none of the money or fame went to his head. Even people who have never met him, but have listened to his five albums (like "*Al Este del Edén*" or "*Fantasia Occidental*") and know the stories about his legend, love him like an old friend.

While most icons must create an identity to become famous, it was Silvio's true character that made him popular. Silvio put his entire life out on the table in front of everyone. He is a musical superhero because he stood as himself in the spotlight and he didn't try to hide his addictions. There was no shame in who he was or what he wanted in any moment, and that is truly living. ●●●



## Waiting on Miracles

**For many people in Seville, a saint is like a comic superhero: someone to ask for extraordinary help in times of need. Devotees of Saint Judas Tadeo, a nun and an actress who has dedicated the last 11 years of her life to playing the role of the Virgin Mary in a comedy show explain what these sacred figures mean for them.**

As the waiter approaches the table to take our order, he immediately recognizes my company. A grin spreads from one ear to the other, taking up most of the space on his face. He interrupts Lola midsentence. “What you guys did with the lights in your last show, ‘*Carmen, confía*,’ was brilliant. It left me mesmerized as I watched the performance on stage.”

Lola Marmolejo and Juanma Buzón have been partners for many years in life and in the work place. Working with the theater company *Bastarda Española* and its director, Antonio Campos, they have put on more than 200 shows. More than 25,000 people have attended their plays, which include “*Carmen, confía*” and “*Estrella Sublime*.” The waiter leaves and Juanma continues to talk: “If I had to describe Lola as a superhero, she would be an invisible one; she takes the stage by night, but off stage she likes to keep to herself and go unnoticed.”

For 11 years Lola has dedicated her life to playing the role of the Virgin Mary, portraying realistic views of religious myths and conveying the importance that people have placed on religious figures.

“The Virgin suffers like any other woman, or human for that matter, but people expect great things from her,” She explains. With lines like, “I am the Virgin, not President Obama,” Lola brings the holy mother of God down to an earthly level. “The Virgin is a unique character, but even she has her limitations,” Juanma says as he sips his coffee. Lola smiles from the other side of the table.

Crossing her legs, Lola appears to be smaller than she already is. As she creates even more room in her loose winter dress, she says: “So long as there is a crisis, people will hold on to their beliefs; so long as there is something to ask for, they’re going to keep on asking.”

### ASKING FOR HELP

It’s a Saturday morning and as the people walk into the small courtyard of the San An-

tonio church on Alfonso XII street, they all seem to gravitate towards the statue of Saint Judas Tadeo. Stopping at his altar before reaching the church doors, the mass of bodies spreads out, giving each other space to pray. Maria Lara walks from where she stood behind the crowd and as she makes it to the front she holds her arm out to the wall, looks up at Saint Judas and then looks down.

“Make use of this particular privilege given to you to achieve visible and quick help where it is almost impossible. Come to my assistance in this great need so that I may receive the consolation and help of heaven in all my needs.” María finishes her prayer and steps out of the crowd. With wet eyes she says, “I have been coming here for 25 years to pray to Saint Judas Tadeo because my mother brought me here since I was a child and he has always helped me.”

**“Make use of this particular privilege given to you to achieve visible and quick help where it is almost impossible. Come to my assistance in this great need so that I may receive the consolation and help of heaven in all my needs.” María finishes her prayer and steps out of the crowd.**

“I do not pray to all of the saints, I only pray to the ones that are closest to me,” says Carmen Carmona, one of the few other people who graciously spare a few moments to talk about the Catholic martyrs.

Ludris Úbeda, a woman accompanying Carmen, adds: “I pray everyday without a doubt to Saint Judas, Saint Antonio, Saint Expedito and the Virgin, for good health and work. I pray that they take care of my children and grandchildren.” If one thing is apparent among the hundreds of red-lit candles and flowers that crowd the floor near the saint, it’s that there is plenty of faith in miracles here in Seville.

The role of a saint is much greater than its religious aspect. The saints have become part of the culture intertwined with the daily life of the Spanish Catholics. Figures of saints inhabit almost just as many homes as Spanish people do. From churches to houses, to restaurants and bars, you can find one of these familiar figures in paintings or sculptures almost everywhere.

“My mother’s friend died a few weeks ago,” says Álvaro Langford, speaking to me in English. “She lights a candle for her in our home, every night. It’s the fear of death that makes people pray so much; they believe that the saint holds special powers and that they can protect us,” he explains. “I can not say that I am really religious, but when I come across one of these figures, I get a rush of *emoción*, not because of the religion, but because of the culture.”

*Semana Santa*, the Holy Week, is one example of religion and culture mixed together. In this age-old holy tradition, one is guaranteed to see shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ and as many saints as you can imagine. This is not just a celebration for Catholics, because nearly the whole town participates. As the streets shut down, so that processions can take place, you begin to see people of all ages coming out and joining in the commemoration of the Passion of Christ. The band plays its tunes, making the emotional ceremony much more intense.

But why celebrate these figures? How is it that they have come to be worshiped by the whole city and by millions of other people across the world?

“Take away the plastic and you are left with the same thing: two invented stories about people with powers who save the day,” says Lola Marmolejo, comparing the idea of comic book heroes like Superman with the idea of a saint. The only thing missing really in the second case is the cape.

“What we try to express through the play ‘*Estrella Sublime*’ is that people spend too much time looking up, waiting for someone to help them, when in reality the Virgin and the saints were all just as human as anyone else at one point. People think when they ask something of the Virgin like, ‘Help me find work,’ boom, she is automatically going to make it happen with her magic wand, but no, the Virgin says it takes a lot of hard work to make a miracle happen.”

Sister Adela from the Madre de Dios monastery agrees with Lola’s viewpoint. “Saints are not really superheroes, they are merely role models. They’re everyday people who have learned to live each day of life with love, love for God. People ask for a huge amount of things from saints because they view them as the medium between here and heaven. The people pray because they have faith that the saints are doing what they can to help God in

that world as they did in this one.” Although Sister Adela believes we should all have faith, she says that better than waiting for miracles, we should try and help ourselves, work hard and live everyday with love.

Juanma Buzón concludes: “People will continue to seek out explanations for things that happen in this world. They will continue to ask for help in times of need. If there wasn’t religion, people would invent it.” ●●●



CHARO URBANO AS “LOLA” AND LOLA MARMOLEJO AS “MACU”, IN “ESTRELLA SUBLIME” / JUANMA BUZÓN

## Camarón: Inmortal

**The flamenco singer’s talent and spirit were so great that he continues to inspire people 19 years after his death. He lives on through his music and his fans that worship him up to this day.**

Sitting in the bar he owns in San Fernando, Nicolás Cotariella points out a wall crowded with framed black and white photographs of Camarón de la Isla. The pictures show the flamenco legend on stage, his huge curls of light brown hair forming a halo around his head, his face wrinkled in concentration. “He’s like a god,” Nicolás says, chuckling a little, leaning forward and nodding his head in affirmation.

“He was a very simple man. That’s just how he was. The fame never changed him. He was always the same quiet person,” recalls the 54-year-old bar owner and flamenco guitarist, who has served a few beers to Camarón himself at the very table we’re sitting at.

Despite his godlike status, Camarón encountered some controversy in his lifetime and surely lost some fans as a result of his drug use. Nicolás is quick to dismiss this. “No, it doesn’t bother me,” he says, shrugging, “There are so many artists in the music industry that are involved with drugs, and for me, it really doesn’t change how talented he was or take anything away from his fantastic work.”

Camarón de la Isla, or José Monge Cruz, was born in San Fernando, a town built on the Isla de León close to the city of Cádiz, on Dec. 5, 1950. Later he moved to La Línea, near Gibraltar. He grew up poor but his life changed drastically once he began to sing at flamenco shows. The boy, who was the sixth of eight children and was given a nickname that means “little prawn from the island,” started in the industry because he needed money to support himself and his family. Forty-two years and 20 albums later, lung cancer took the flamenco legend’s life in 1992. His spirit has survived through the fans that worship his work, while his music continues to influence people around the world.

A shiny plaque on a tiny house in a narrow street marks the place where Camarón was born. The white paint is wearing off in large sections and exposing the dirty concrete beneath. Vertical bars in a tiny window are decorated with a patchwork of orange rust and the decaying wooden door is splintered into spikes as if to ward off passersby.

The house is somewhat characteristic of Camarón, who was quiet, simple and private. It seems unlikely that someone with these characteristics would become such a public person. Camarón’s widow, Dolores Montoya, known as *La Chispa*, or “the spark,” once said in an interview with Eduardo del Campo in *El Mundo’s Magazine*: “It didn’t even seem like he knew how to sing. He rose to the occasion the moment he got on stage. There was where he became Camarón.”

Situated five minutes from La Carbonería, a popular flamenco bar in Sevilla, is Peña Flamenca Camarón de la Isla, where flamenco artists from all over come to perform on week-ends. Antonio, a 65-year-old man with sparkling clear blue eyes, walks in the door with his wife, patting his friend on the back as he yells to someone else across the room, laughing the whole time.

**“He would put on his tapes in the studio and ask me for my opinion. But he, like all of the greats, always said, ‘This could have been done better.’ And you listen to it and it’s perfect! He always had this doubt. He was never satisfied,”**

When he finally sits down he explains, between side conversations and making jokes with everyone in the room, that Camarón continues to have a great influence on the music industry 19 years after his death. “Before every artist starts to sing, they first turn to the portrait of Camarón behind them for a moment of applause. After all, he was the greatest,” he says.

These artists and their audiences show respect and gratitude to their deity in the same way that churchgoers give a moment of silent thanks to the crucifix above the altar.

Not everyone adores Camarón’s work, though. “When some flamenco artists hear his music, they say, ‘This isn’t flamenco, it isn’t pure,’ ” Antonio says. Camarón’s unorthodox style, as seen in albums like “*La Leyenda del Tiempo*” (1979) or “*Potro de rabia y miel*” (1992),

is far different than anything that came before it. Some people dislike his different approach and think it veers too far from the traditional. Camarón came with a darker and more mysterious approach to flamenco. His style was overtly personal and subjective. His strong personality allowed him to abandon the discipline of orthodox singing and become the first *cantaor* to experiment with rhythms outside of flamenco. Together with his companion of many years, the revolutionary guitarist Paco de Lucía, he introduced instruments never before used in flamenco music.

Antonio and his friend make a point to add that Camarón is not the only successful artist to come from San Fernando; to them it’s no coincidence. “It’s the salt of the earth here,” Antonio says, adding just a little more magic to Camarón’s already godlike image. “It really is!”

Camarón also has a special connection to the gypsy community. A gypsy himself who had great pride in his heritage, he came from a culture where he was surrounded by the sights and sounds of flamenco from birth. Many gypsies are especially devoted to him because he so proudly represented them.

Gerson Pisa, a 17-year-old gypsy from a poor neighborhood in Seville, is a testament to the importance of flamenco in his culture. “Flamenco runs in our blood, it’s not something I learned, it’s something I was born with,” he says. Though the singer died before Gerson was born, the artist is still an influence on him. “For me, Camarón is an idol in our era,” he says.

Though Gerson jokes around with his classmates and seems to take little seriously, the young student sings flamenco with remarkable self-pride, maturity and focus. In those moments, he says, “I think about the feelings; flamenco is all about the emotions.”

The same was true for Camarón—listeners could absolutely see and feel the emotion when the master Camarón sang.

Seated on stage he would sing with his head slightly down, eyes shut and eyebrows furrowed in concentration. His hands quietly kept the beat in his lap, only stopping when his entire body tensed, every muscle working in unison to



JOSÉ MONGE CRUZ, “CAMARÓN DE LA ISLA” / EFE

release his powerful yet controlled voice with a crescendo of energy and emotion, resulting in a roar of applause from the audience.

It wasn’t just Camarón’s talent that brought him success. He put a lot of time and work into his music.

“He would put on his tapes in the studio and ask me for my opinion. But he, like all of the greats, always said, ‘This could have been done better.’ And you listen to it and it’s perfect! He always had this doubt. He was never satisfied,” *La Chispa* said, recalling her husband’s work ethic.

There’s one final aspect, apart from talent and hard work, that made Camarón so great: his genuine kindness and selflessness. In her interview with *El Mundo*, *La Chispa* said her late husband was “an artist and a person, he was good with children and people. He was simple. He liked to go unnoticed and wanted to be treated like any other person.”

But he was like no one else, which is why his spirit lives on two decades after his death. To many of his fans, like Nicolas the bar owner, Camarón will always be deified among the flamenco greats.

“There is a before and an after of flamenco,” Nicolas explains. “Before and after Camarón.”  
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**These artists and their audiences show respect and gratitude to their deity in the same way that churchgoers give a moment of silent thanks to the crucifix above the altar.**

## 150 Costumes for Survival

**The story of an African migrant who fled from Liberia, became popular in Seville for the way he sells tissues to drivers and who dreams about someday becoming a judge “to work for humanity.”**

Upon first glance, he is a gentleman in a top hat. He is a Spanish knight and a flamenco dancer in a flowing pink dress. A blue grocery basket swings from his arm as he weaves through stopped and still-slowng cars, waving as friends, acquaintances and everyday passersby catch a glimpse of the day’s outfit.

“¡Hola, amigo!” he calls out as he approaches drivers stopped momentarily by his side. He grins as he offers them packs of tissues for 1€ each. “Thank you, *amigo*, thank you! Have a good day!” he calls out in English, heading back to the sidewalk as the cars begin to roll forward. He welcomes his guests with a bow and sends them chuckling on their way.

“They always laugh with me,” he explains. “I love this happiness. Because of this, I love my job.”

The spotlight on Plaza de Armas is his territory, one he staked out almost nine years ago. Howard Jackson, more commonly known as Howie, weaves through the stopped cars from 10 a.m. until he leaves for class in the afternoon. Some nights he returns to work for a few more hours if he hasn’t gone home to study.

### FLEEING THE WAR

But for the happiness he offers to others, Jackson’s story is one of struggle as much as joy. He fled his home in Liberia in 1993 and travelled through eight African countries before finally reaching Seville, where he has lived since his arrival 13 years ago.

“I was just looking for a way to come to this place,” he says, motioning to the passing cars and the families munching calmly on their McDonald’s lunches. “My country is not safe for me to live. I was caught as a student and was sent to prepare for war as a child. I was only 16 years old and it was too difficult for me. We had to escape from the camp. I began to travel, passing countries and countries and countries and it took me three good years before getting to this place.”

So, with only a map, Jackson and two friends travelled north toward Europe for what he hoped would be a better life. In 1996 he

arrived in Melilla, a small Spanish territory on the northern tip of Africa.

“In 1997, I was sent [to Seville] by the government of Spain,” he explains. “They received me like a refugee. They received me like someone running away from his country and from a situation of war.”

The civil war in the Republic of Liberia lasted 14 years and claimed more than 200,000 lives by the time it ended in 2003. Liberia was founded in the 19th century by black African Americans of slave origin. It’s one of the poorest countries in the world, and even now Liberia struggles to maintain a lasting and stable government and society.

**“From the beginning when I arrived here the Spanish people accepted me very well,” he says. “They helped me in whatever way they could. I cry sometimes but not a lot and someone is always behind me to say, ‘No, don’t cry no more.’ ”**

Although Liberia has seen many changes since Jackson left, including the election and later the re-election of a new president (a woman, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who is also a recipient of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize), Jackson has witnessed this transition with his feet firmly planted in Spain.

“I don’t have any desire to return to Liberia,” he says. “I don’t have anything and they don’t recognize me as a citizen either. I left with nothing. And they asked me, show me your passport or whatever you have from your country and we’ll recognize you.”

But because he left without these documents, the Liberian government does not recognize his citizenship. And although he has tried, he says that since he left he has been unable to reach his family and friends at home.

“I cannot reach my mom, I cannot reach my dad,” he says. “I have no uncles. I don’t know anyone.”

### A NEW LIFE

Despite these challenges, Jackson has built a new life for himself in Seville.

“From the beginning when I arrived here the Spanish people accepted me very well,” he says. “They helped me in whatever way they could. I cry sometimes but not a lot and someone is always behind me to say, ‘No, don’t cry no more.’ ”

This support has also come from the *Fundación Sevilla Acoge*, an organization founded to help immigrants find their places in the social and economic fabric of Spanish society. According to the government of Andalusia (Junta de Andalucía), in 2009, the latest data available, there were 12,302 immigrants in Seville from sub-Saharan African countries, the third largest foreign population in the city if we count them together as a single group regardless of nationality.

With help from Sevilla Acoge, Jackson began to learn Spanish, found a place to live and began working. But even though he was in the country legally, he did not have the documents to work. And, he says, after working in other short-term positions, he settled on selling tissues because there is always a need.

“You can’t sell newspapers because people already have them,” he explains, laying a hand fondly on the packages arranged neatly in his blue basket. Although some days are better than others, he can sell between 15 and 30 packages of tissues in a day.

But it is not only the money that keeps him coming back to his corner. It is also the relationships he has built with local shopkeepers and those who pass daily through his district.

“I’m here through everything,” he says. “And I have good friends at the stoplight who pass in their cars and pedestrians greet me. I know the big, small, rich, poor, ugly, beautiful... everything.”

Soon he digs his cell phone from his basket and dials a friend. Joke and Gerrad, tourists when they met Jackson, moved to Granada not long ago. For one of his few trips from Seville, Jackson visited them in Granada and now offers their home to a student passing through.

“Hello my white sister. Fine, fine. Listen, I am here with a friend of mine, she is from America. She is here for four months. If she comes to Granada I have given your telephone number to her. She will give you a call. Take care of her for one or two days? For me?”

Aside from these relationships, he says he enjoys making people laugh with his costumes;

he currently has more than 150 costumes from stores throughout Seville. His inventory would be bigger, he explains with his ever-present smile, had rain and fire in his house not ruined his first two collections, forcing him to begin again.

Although he has spent close to a decade at his stoplight, Jackson says he will leave his post at some point. Two years ago he wanted to be-

come a lawyer once finished with his current studies of English, Spanish, math and psychology. But now, he says, his dream has changed.

“My future, my goal, should I achieve that, I will dedicate it to humanity. And I will work for humanity too as a judge in the court.” ●●



HOWIE JACKSON AT WORK AND WITH HIS SPANISH TEACHER / ALISON DIRR

