

ETNOLOGIE ȘI CULTUROLOGIE

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The Carnival as an Andean Ritual System: Music, Dance, and Reciprocity in Achoma (Colca Valley, Peru)

CZU: 394.25(85)

<https://doi.org/10.52603/rec.2026.39.01>**Rezumat****Carnavalul ca sistem ritualic din Munții Anzi: muzică, dans și interacțiune în Achoma (Valea Colca, Peru)**

În acest studiu se examinează ciclul festiv din Achoma, în Valea Colca din Peru, urmărind succesiunea carnavalului de la *tinkachi* (ofrandă) la *kacharpari* (sfârșitul ritualului) prin dimensiunile organizatorice, economice, muzicale, performative și culinare. Prin observație participativă pe parcursul întregului ciclu, interviuri cu purtători locali de cunoștințe și interacțiunile triangulare cu înregistrări audiovizuale comunitare, acest studiu acoperă lacune privind patronajul festiv, leadershipul local și rolurile femeilor. Rezultatele obținute arată că *mayordomía cabecillas* (liderii spiritului) susțin celebrarea prin mobilizarea *ayni* (interacțiunii) și a prestigiului, pentru a asigura muzicanții, hrana și *chicha* (băutură tradițională din porumb). Ansamblul tradițional, compus din *lawatas*, *tarola* și *bombo* (instrumente muzicale de percuție), structurează *pukllay* (competiție) și alimentează *contrapunteo*-ul (dialogul muzical ritmat) dintre grupurile sociale Hanansaya și Urinsaya. Trupele feminine conduc performanța publică și întruhidează o formă de reprezentare colectivă. În ansamblu, carnavalul funcționează ca un sistem ritual care reproduce reciprocitatea, leadershipul și participarea marcată de gen, negociind totodată procesele de patrimonializare care reconfigurează sensul și continuitatea intergenerațională.

Cuvinte-cheie: carnaval, Munții Anzi, sistem ritual, patrimoniu cultural

Резюме**Карнавал как андская ритуальная система: музыка, танец и взаимность в Ачоме (долина Колка, Перу)**

В статье рассматривается праздничный цикл Ачомы в долине Колка (Перу), прослеживается последовательность карнавала от *тинкачи* (дары) до *качарпар* (завершение ритуала) через организационно-экономическое, музыкальное, перформативное и кулинарное измерения. Используя включенное наблюдение на протяжении всего цикла, интервью с носителями местных знаний и триангуляцию с аудиовизуальными материалами общины, исследование восполняет пробелы в описании роли спонсорства праздника, местного лидерства и роли женщин. По-

лученные результаты показывают, что *майордомия кабесильяс* (духовные лидеры) поддерживает празднование, мобилизуя *айни* (обратную связь) и престиж по обеспечению музыкантов, пищи и чичи (напиток из кукурузы). Традиционный ансамбль из *лаватас*, *таролы* и *бомбо* (музыкальные духовые инструменты) структурирует *пуклай* (конкурс) и задает *контрапунктео* (музыкальный ритмичный диалог) между социальными группами Ханансайя и Уринсайя. Женская сторона возглавляет публичное представление и воплощает коллективную форму репрезентации. В целом карнавал функционирует как ритуальная система, воспроизводящая интерактивность, лидерство и гендерно-маркированное участие, одновременно регулируя процессы формирования наследия, которые переосмысливают смысл и обеспечивают преемственность поколений.

Ключевые слова: карнавал, Анды, ритуальная система, культурное наследие

Summary**The Carnival as an Andean Ritual System: Music, Dance, and Reciprocity in Achoma (Colca Valley, Peru)**

This article examines Achoma's festive cycle in Peru's Colca Valley, tracing the carnival sequence from *tinkachi* to *kacharpari* through organizational-economic, musical, performative, and culinary dimensions. Using participant observation across the full cycle, interviews with local knowledge bearers, and triangulation with community audiovisual records, the study addresses gaps on festive sponsorship, local leadership, and women's roles. Findings show that the *cabecillas' mayordomía* sustains the celebration by mobilizing *ayni*-based reciprocity and prestige to secure musicians, food, and *chicha*. The traditional ensemble of *lawatas*, *tarola*, and *bombo* structures *pukllay* and drives *contrapunteo* between Hanansaya and Urinsaya. Female troupes lead the public performance and enact collective agency. Overall, the carnival operates as a ritual system that reproduces reciprocity, leadership, and gendered participation while negotiating heritage-making processes that reshape meaning and intergenerational continuity.

Key words: carnival, The Andes, ritual system, cultural heritage

Introduction

The anthropology of carnival explains how ritual and performative practices build social cohesion, negotiate identities, and challenge symbolic and material power. Carnival does not function as a “simple celebration”. Instead, it operates as a multimodal enterprise that combines dance, music, performance, and popular leadership. Through these elements, it activates myth-making, role inversion, and community sustenance in changing social contexts (Marcelli, Sousa, Fonseca, Silva, Melotti & Costa 2022).

Recent scholarship shows that anthropology approaches carnival as a dense, contested arena in which people negotiate meanings, hierarchies, and belonging, rather than as entertainment alone. In large cities, heritage-making processes expose tensions between community appropriation and tourist exploitation, so the same event can operate both as a touristic spectacle and as a neighborhood celebration grounded in affective belonging (Roberge 2010). At regional scales, carnivals also foster collective identification by condensing languages and knowledges into cultural imaginaries and by sustaining networks of coexistence, as in Barranquilla (Navarro-Hoyos 2022).

At the same time, the field has increasingly foregrounded power, race, and gender. In Belo Horizonte, structural racism and “narcissistic pacts” constrain Black women’s agency even within cultural spaces, which strengthens the case for intersectional analyses (Rezende & Pereira 2023), while in Brazil the intersections among anthropology, the arts, and literature have expanded carnival scholarship since the 1970s and more recently have incorporated the pandemic’s effects on festive sociability (Neto, de Sá Gonçalves & Barbieri 2022). From an ethnological perspective, studies of Mardi Gras in New Orleans show that groups contain most excess within their own boundaries while maintaining interactional norms toward outsiders (Jankowiak & White 1999); in other settings, collective singing generates carnivalesque atmospheres that affirm multicultural identities and channel resistance to dominant orders, as in Australian fan groups (Knijnik 2018). Drawing on Bakhtinian readings, researchers highlight motifs of fertility, thresholds, and life and death, tracing them in rituals that sustain social and ecological continuity (Yilmaz & Kamalova 2019). Diasporic studies also conceptualize carnival as a cultural archive that transmits genealogies and collective memories through performative language (Bastian 2009), which helps interpret Bolivian carnivals in Argentina and cases such as Barranquilla and Oruro, where heritage-making can strain relations between tradition and the market (Mariano & Endere

2017). Taken together, this literature frames carnival as a laboratory of social organization, cultural politics, and collective identity (Marcelli et al. 2022; Navarro-Hoyos 2022; Roberge 2010).

In the southern Peruvian Andes, Achoma, one of the twenty districts in Caylloma Province (Arequipa), hosts one of the Colca Valley’s most distinctive festive expressions: the Achoma Carnival. The festivity unfolds in two stages, the tinkachi of the animals and carnival week, and it intertwines music, dance, and communal reciprocity. *Lawateros* (male musicians) and *danzarinas* (female dancers) perform under the *mayordomía* of the *cabecillas*. Cabecillas and their families organize the celebration, cover key expenses, prepare chicha, and coordinate ritual activities.

This study reconstructs the ritual sequence and examines three interconnected dimensions. First, it analyzes the organizational and economic dimension through the cabecillas, ayni, communal spending, and the provision of musicians and food. Second, it examines the musical dimension by tracing how *lawatas*, *tarola*, and *bombo* structure the *pukllay* and the musical dialogue (*contrapunteo*) between the two partialities. Third, it explores the performative and gendered dimension through female troupes, clothing, the *wirinchichi*, and embodied symbolism.

From an ethnographic perspective, the study contributes cultural evidence that supports the intergenerational continuity of knowledge and community-based safeguarding strategies. It argues that the Achoma Carnival operates as a ritual system that sustains and reworks Andean reciprocity, leadership, and gendered participation while engaging contemporary heritage-making and broader cultural change.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, ethnographic approach to examine the Achoma Carnival’s practices, meanings, and organizational arrangements in its local context. Two researchers conducted the fieldwork with the support of local facilitators and community authorities to access domestic and ritual spaces. To address the power and gender asymmetries implied by this position, the team maintained sustained reflexivity through field journals, methodological self-critique sessions, and community feedback on preliminary findings.

Fieldwork took place between February and March 2025 and covered the full festive cycle, from tinkachi to kacharpari. The researchers carried out participant observation in domestic and public settings, including cabecilla houses, neighborhood routes, and the main square, with attention to interactions between the Hanansaya and Urinsaya partialities and to the cabecillas’ work as organizers.

They also conducted semi-structured interviews with purposively selected knowledge bearers: Roberto (67), Aurelia (69), Alejandrina (71), Sergio (83), Celsa (83), Victoria (90), and Agripina (90), using an interview guide built from emic categories identified during observation.

To keep local voices central and strengthen internal consistency, the team triangulated interviews and observations with specialized literature and community audiovisual materials, including recordings by former cabecillas and local videos. The corpus included detailed fieldnotes and verbatim transcripts, which the researchers analyzed through in vivo and descriptive coding, inductive thematic analysis by constant comparison, and narrative-sequential interpretation of ritual plots and bodily and sonic itineraries. They reinforced credibility through prolonged engagement, persistent observation of key moments (entrance, contrapunteo, kacharpari), triangulation, and participant validation; they supported transferability with thick description and ensured dependability and confirmability via an audit trail and corpus preservation. Ethically, the researchers obtained verbal consent, protected dignity and cultural sensitivities.

Historical, Territorial, and Cultural Context of Achoma

Achoma lies in the middle basin of the Colca River (Figure 1), within a highly cultivated and strongly ritualized landscape where people experience territory as a living field of relations among Apus (tutelary mountains), Pachamama (nurturing earth), and Hanan Pacha (the celestial realm of stars and rain). Everyday life unfolds among pre-Hispanic terraces, slopes, rivers, and plains that sustain agriculture and also anchor sacred obligations through offerings, pilgrimages, and seasonal celebrations. The long-running activity of the Sabancaya volcano reinforces this sense of an animated valley: many residents interpret its “breath” as a sign of creative and destructive forces that require balance through ritual work. In this setting, rainfall, sowing, and harvest organize not only production but also the ritual calendar, so festive time follows ecological rhythms and frames reciprocity as an ethical and practical principle.



Figure 1. Panoramic view of the district of Achoma

The village's social organization inscribes these meanings onto space. The main square functions as a ritual center where the routes of the Hanansaya and Urinsaya partialities intersect and stage local expressions of duality. From the square, routes extend toward family estancias and communal nodes, including paths, corrals, and the mill, where collective meals and musical duels (contrapunteos) unfold. The spatial arrangement also registers the layered history of the valley: the colonial church and atrium materialize Catholic order, while routes toward fields and mountains sustain offerings to earth and place. With a population of roughly eight hundred inhabitants, Achoma maintains a subsistence and festive economy grounded in ayni and communal labor, supported by crops such as corn, potato, fava bean, and quinoa, alongside camelid herding. Collagua identity emerges in this context through the continuity of agricultural and textile techniques and through festive languages of music and dance that translate territory into symbolic practice.

The Carnival of Achoma

Achoma's Andean festival follows agro-astral cycles that set the timing of work, harvest, and gratitude. At this time of year, when the earth yields its first fruits and animals reproduce in their corrals, residents honor their tutelary deities, Pachamama and the Apus. Spiritual reciprocity then joins festive joy. In Achoma, carnival serves two purposes: it functions as an agricultural rite of gratitude and renewal, and it foregrounds youth and anonymity. The community organizes space and time to balance the sacred sphere of tinkachi with the festive sphere of dance, where young women, the carnavalonas, lead the public scene with energy and laughter (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Young carnavalona women entering the main square of Achoma, wearing traditional costumes adorned with streamers and balloons that conceal their identity during carnival

Within this cycle, tinkachi enacts offerings to the earth, the mountains, and the ancestors. Carnival, in its contemporary form, channels human vitality through play, paint, song, and dance. As Victoria

explains, “on Monday, carnival would begin and last until kacharpari Sunday”. The festive cycle therefore lasted eight days. It opened with offerings to the Apus and ended with the great farewell, kacharpari, which closed the time of abundance.

During February and March, the village changes visibly. Corn and bean fields inspire street decorations, costumes display colors, streamers, and flowers, and people mark faces with flour and water as masks multiply identities. The festival includes all ages. Although youth and women often lead the celebration, carnival energy draws in men, women, children, and elders. Farming families sustain this tradition and adapt it to social and cultural change in the twenty-first century.

Beneath the revelry, cabecillas, also called mayordomos, coordinate the dance troupes and cover key expenses. This work demands commitment, prestige, and reciprocity. Each moiety, Hanansaya and Urinsaya, organizes its dancers, brings musicians, and leads the troupe to the main square. There, both sides meet in a ritual contrapunteo of steps, songs, and gestures. This friendly rivalry restages an ancient dual logic rooted in pre-Hispanic forms of social organization, where the community split into complementary halves to sustain balance.

At the same time, elders express concern about shifts in meaning. Recent changes have brought orchestras, contests, and new choreographies, and these additions have weakened some ancestral rituals. Agripina voices this concern: “I would like them to encourage it again because, since childhood, if we love our dances, we come back, you see. Now, because of work, they can’t come; for example, my daughters danced until they finished high school, and every time there’s a festival, my family always comes, they have to make sacrifices, ask for leave”. Her testimony shows how cultural transmission now relies on family effort and negotiated time away from work.

Carnival does more than entertain. It sustains cultural continuity. Through song, dance, and reciprocity, the community renews ties to land and history. In each tinkachi, contrapunteo, and kacharpari, Achoma affirms present abundance and invests in a future where its identity continues to live through Andean rhythm.

Organizational and Economic Dimension of the Achoma Carnival. The Achoma carnival relies on year-round organization. After kacharpari ends, outgoing cabecillas prepare the succession, and the new cabecillas assume the role with enthusiasm and respect. In Achoma, the cabecilla, also called mayordomo, holds strong symbolic weight. Cabecillas not only lead the celebration but also sustain its continu-

ity and collective meaning. Those selected, together with their families, friends, and especially local youth, coordinate preparations, mobilize resources, and keep the tradition active (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Carnival entrance: the mayordomos or cabecillas, mounted on their horses, enter Achoma's main square to mark the beginning of the festival

Achoma organizes the celebration through two ancestral moieties, Urinsaya and Hanansaya. Each moiety maintains its own group, customs, and style of celebration. Roberto recalls: “The cabecillas are in charge of organizing the festival; they volunteer themselves. Before, we used to choose them when it was time, about three young men and three young women. Now, it’s just one or two. Young men would usually volunteer, but the girls not so much; you had to persuade them”. His testimony contrasts earlier forms of broad youth participation with current difficulties in recruiting organizers.

In the past, community youth chose cabecillas through collective discussion and consensus. Alejandrina explains: “We cabecillas would choose each other among the young people; the whole group would discuss who it would be”. The role conferred trust and prestige and demanded energy, leadership, and months of work. Although local conditions have changed, Achoma still preserves public commitment to organize the celebration, and this commitment strengthens intergenerational ties and affirms communal identity.

The cabecillas’ work extends beyond carnival and continues across the religious calendar, especially during Holy Week, when they participate in Catholic rituals. Aurelia notes: “Yes, I passed the role to one of my sons. But this was about twelve years ago. I remember before, during Holy Week, the young men and women had to go pray; there was a priest living here then, so they went every morning to pray, I suppose preparing for Easter”. Through these practices, cabecillas link carnival organization with devotional obligations and embody the syncretic configuration that shapes Andean spirituality.

During Holy Week, cabecillas also tie the litters (andas) used to carry saints in procession. Sergio de-

scribes the earlier artisanal process: “Yes, sometimes I had to tie the litter of the Virgin of Sorrows, or of the Lord of Agony... Oh yes, just for the Virgin of Sorrows. Some years it was Hanansaya’s turn, others Urinsaya’s. Once, it was my turn to tie the litter for the single women; we also tied those. It took about a month; you’d start collecting little ribbons, thinking about apples; you had to go as far as Tapay to get apples. Today they tie with twine; before, we tied with maguey. You had to bring it or ask for it; they brought a lot, soaked it in a barrel, the young men would pound it, and the women would braid it to tie everything”. His account highlights the material discipline of ritual labor and the collective work that transforms fibers into signs of service and faith.

Cabecillas’ wives also play a central role. They accompany their husbands in festive duties, represent the role publicly with embroidered insignias, and help distribute food, chicha, and gifts. They also care for guests and musicians and sustain reciprocity (*ayni*) through attentive hosting (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Wives of the mayordomos or cabecillas, responsible for the carnival festival, showing the embroidered insignias that represent their role

Carnival financing depends on shared effort. Cabecillas contribute their own resources for food, drink, and musicians, and relatives, friends, and other supporters also provide resources. Some donate animals, corn, or potatoes, while others bring liquor, beer, or chicha. Through these contributions, the festival operates as a communal enterprise grounded in collaboration.

Achoma sustains the carnival through communal offices (*cargos*), intergenerational participation, and a close link between ritual and festivity. Each cabecilla, each spouse who prepares food, and each youth who braids maguey or tunes the lawata strengthens a shared memory that persists across time. In doing so, the celebration honors life and renews the social fabric by reinforcing ties among people, land, and the deities who accompany them year after year.

Musical Dimension of the Achoma Carnival.

In Achoma, sound announces the festival before words. Music and dance drive carnival as intertwined practices. Young women rehearse steps to the rhythm of lawatas, bass drums, and snare drums, while musicians prepare melodies that accompany the cabecillas from sunrise to the final night. The musicians do not perform from a fixed stage. They walk, dance, and share the celebration with the town.

Local tradition distinguishes two kinds of musicians. Traditional musicians guard the valley’s older sound, while modern musicians add electric instruments and new rhythms. The lawateros belong to the traditional group (Figure 5). They play flutes of pre-Hispanic lineage and accompany the cabecillas throughout the celebration. They also carry Colca’s sonic memory across generations.



Figure 5. Lawateros accompanying the opening of the carnival celebration

In the past, musicians came from Achoma or nearby communities. Aurelia explains: “There weren’t ‘musicians’... ahhh, the musicians are the youth, you see; some play the lawata, the bass drum, the drum. If there weren’t any, we hired them; we didn’t have them here. Now, actually, each moiety has bought its own musician”. Her account shows how participation has shifted over time. As carnival builds momentum, more lawateros join each moiety. During the first days, the entry moved to guitars and flutes. Alejandrina remembers: “Uh-huh, we did the cucuchi entry at the start of the carnival, with guitars and lawatas”, and she links that sound to the opening of the festive cycle.

In Achoma, the lawatero also embodies youth and gallantry. Young women draw close and offer woven thread rings, called wajtos or angoñas, as signs of admiration. They tie these multicolored rings to the quena, and many musicians keep them as lifelong amulets. Celsa explains: “Now, in the wajta they carry rings to give to single men, to their sweethearts; sometimes they were lawateros”. Roberto adds: “They would go to ask permission at the parents’ house, who would be waiting with a little jug of chicha and a small bottle of wajchito to encourage the lawateros. They also brought their rings to give to the lawatero” (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Musicians with their lawatas or quenás, showing the ribbons or angofías woven by a single woman and given to the musician

For Victoria, these rings function as personal relics: “These watos are old; this one from my mother... it isn’t woven, it’s braided; now they’re all woven, very fancy. The day I die, I’ll be buried with these in my coffin; these watos are typical of Achoma”. Each ring carries an affective history as a promise, a memory, and a gesture of attachment.

The core carnival ensemble includes one snare drummer, one bass drummer, and more than ten lawateros, although the group can grow as the celebration intensifies. This ensemble sustains the pukllay, the festive play, through continuous sound and movement. During contrapunteos between Hanansaya and Urinsaya, musicians compete in virtuosity and volume as they push rhythm to prevail (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Musicians with bass drums, snares, and lawatas or quenás

Over time, modern bands joined valley celebrations. In Achoma, orchestras and electric groups now play at night and perform cumbias or huayllachas. Some elders view these additions as a shift in festive tone. Alejandrina comments: “Yes, today it’s a bit more distorted; now they do it with an orchestra, and all the youth take part, men and women. This appeared roughly from the Macon project; in the seventies, more or less”. Her words register both nostalgia and resignation.

In Achoma’s carnival, music not only invites dancing, it also activates memory. People gather to dance through the night, drink chicha or pisco, and sing verses that mix joy with melancholy. Some singers seek reconciliation, others recall childhood, and others narrate departures for work far from town.

Cabecillas and elders compose many lyrics, which recount agricultural life, love, and military experience. Aurelia explains: “The lyrics of the songs were composed by the cabecillas. There are also older relatives who give the tune to the cabecillas”.

In earlier times, women’s voices often led carnival singing. Victoria recalls: “Yes, there were just the lyrics like that; we women sang; yes, both sides would link arms and sing, we danced and that was our day, our own”. Sergio also remembers verses that still circulate in collective memory:

“Little cotton bud, why are you so sad,
knowing that carnival is already here?”
“Salaverry barracks, Bustamante barracks,
we are ready for war...”
“Colored streamers,
I’m going to buy you, no matter the cost”.

These songs referenced life beyond the valley. They evoked youths who migrated to army barracks or to coastal fields to work with cotton and grapes, and they voiced identity and resistance. Sergio adds: “The young men who went to the barracks made up tunes mentioning the barracks: Tiabaya, Salaverry, Samegua; then those who went to the valley too: about fruit, grapes, cotton”.

Today, however, elders often note that singing has weakened. Younger generations, more reserved or shaped by modern music, rarely raise their voices as before. Alejandrina laments: “Women don’t sing anymore; they barely go out, just like this, hand turning, lifted to shoulder height. They only carry streamers; before, big onions, cidras... like oranges; that’s what we went out with. Now, tiny like this; barely, like this, without this”.

The Dancers’ Dimension. Carnavalona dancers shape the luminous center of Achoma’s carnival. These women animate the festival through movement and presence. They stand out in the Colca Valley as daughters, sisters, friends, and neighbors who embody the spirit of their moiety, Hanansaya or Urinsaya. Their participation goes beyond aesthetics. They carry the cabecilla’s prestige and represent the group in public. Many women assume this role early, learn steps and songs, and transmit practices across generations through mothers and grandmothers (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Different dancers from the carnival

Victoria recalls: "It was women only who danced; the lawateros, those, were men. Girls of about twenty danced; two lines of women only. They braided our hair beautifully, because in those days our hair was long. Now I don't have hair... They made many braids". Her memory links long hair and braids to youth, beauty, and collective preparation.

Women also produced their clothing through sustained labor. Polleras (skirts) often used bayeta that women spun and wove by hand, and embroidery, even when imperfect, displayed pride and care. Roberto notes: "The clothing is the same. Women dress in their polleras, blouses, and hats. Men, any clothes will do". His comment highlights a contrast that persists between feminine attention to dress and masculine simplicity. Sergio adds: "The *ch'ucu* was of bayetilla or castilla; a bit longer, with embroidery. And the dancers carried their packed meal, streamers, sweets, peaches, bread or corn and wheat rolls, *buñuelos*, *humintas*. Not necessarily to eat themselves, I also danced at one time, and perhaps we didn't have enough snare and bass drummers in Achoma. Before, there weren't the invitations you see today". His testimony situates attire within a wider economy of preparation, provisioning, and festive obligation.

Women treated clothing production as a disciplined process. Agripina recalls: "Formerly, two months before carnival you had to make the clothes. We spun to make what we called bayeta; it was a pollera of pita fiber. We spun, had it woven, then dyed it: green, blue, pink, maroon, all colors. Then it went to the embroiderer. With that multicolored clothing they went out to dance, with their hat, what we now call '*collagua*'; it wasn't embroidered; it was natural". Women complemented these garments with fruits, streamers, and handmade adornments.

Aurelia adds further detail: "Women wore polleras of castilla, *vayquiria*, *ch'ucu*; before it was bayetilla and castilla. We had three or four embroidered ones; they were beautiful, not like this. We put on our *ch'ucu*, our fruit, a peach, cheese, streamers, *huajcho*, *wirinchichi* with onion or quince. The hat was of white cloth, old-style; it wasn't embroidered. They put grapes on it and just a few small balloons". Her description shows how dancers combined simplicity, ingenuity, and color.

The *collagua* hat, a distinctive marker of local identity, carried its own visual grammar. Aurelia says: "Yes, natural; and when they went out to dance, they went out with their hat, with grapes, huge. Now, nowadays, they only wear the *llicllas* as decoration... And the hats were of cloth and with grapes, but now, you see, the system has changed... they look...".

Her laughter registers both continuity and change. Alejandrina adds: "They dressed well, with cloth hats and grapes. Hardly any balloons; we artisans used them that way. We made *wirinchinchis* and slings for defense; it was for the competition between *Urinsaya* and *Hanansaya*". Her account links adornment to rivalry and to practices of playful defense.

Streamers have also changed over time. Celsa explains: "From Tuesday to Sunday, they used small streamers; before, big streamers came, brands *Llama* and *Loro*. On Tuesday the girls already went out to dance; Wednesday and Thursday we went to the mill. We danced, but with our *huajcho*; we always used that". Roberto adds: "Streamers too; but not balloons anymore. Small balloons, not like now, so many and so big, it looks ugly. The fruits they wore were quince and onion: for defense, to strike *pukllay*, we used to say, in the *tinkachi* of cattle". These comments connect adornment to chronology, movement through space, and ritual play.

Over time, many dancers migrated to other cities for study or work. Yet many return each year for carnival, dance again, and reunite with their community. The festival then becomes an affective gathering point and a symbolic return. Today, polleras often appear more colorful and expensive and often use machine embroidery. Blouses and bodices shine with sequins, and crossed *llicllas* carry fruit, colored powders, and bottles of liquor for sharing.

Dancers cover hats with balloons and streamers until they partially veil their faces, and they dance with a degree of anonymity within color and movement. In the *cabecilla*'s house, they prepare together, adjust garments, braid hair, and place decorations. In the same festive space, *cucuchis*, the masked ones, also prepare and move among laughter and murmurs (Figure 9).

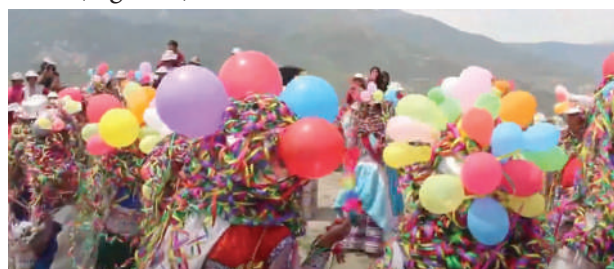


Figure 9. Young carnival dancers hiding their identity with streamers and balloons.

Women's attire also includes the *wirinchichi*, a braided cord with a quince, apple, or onion tied to one end. Dancers use it for play and for defense. Sergio explains: "And then the single woman carried the *wirinchichi*. For what purpose? Often children tease and pull the streamers; so it was to defend themselves,

right? And if someone else bothered her too, well...". To the beat of the music, young women swing the wirinchichi in circular motions, up and down, and they combine grace with strength and autonomy.

Discussion

This study shows that the Carnival of Achoma operates as a ritual system that promotes social cohesion and symbolically redistributes communal power through intertwined organizational-economic, musical, performative, and culinary practices. Structured around tinkachi and carnival week, the celebration reaffirms ayni as a principle of reciprocity that organizes social, material, and symbolic relations. In this process, the festival becomes a privileged arena in which residents negotiate continuity and change, while Collagua, Andean, and Catholic syncretism orders ritual time, space, and hierarchy across the Colca Valley.

From an interpretive perspective, the sequence of tinkachi, pukllay, and kacharpari reveals a cyclical movement between sacred obligation and festive play. Music and dance do more than accompany the ritual: they preserve social memory by encoding migration, courtship, rivalry, and communal history. In this sense, the findings resonate with Turner (1969) and Goffman (1974), who understand ritual as social drama and symbolic framing, and with Bakhtinian readings that emphasize inversion, fertility, and continuity, as discussed by Yilmaz and Kamalova (2019). Achoma's carnival also functions as a living cultural archive, transmitting memories, genealogies, and foodways through performance, in line with Bastian (2009) and Marcelli et al. (2022).

In organizational terms, the cabecillas, supported by kin and local networks, enact a form of festive governance that combines redistribution with moral prestige. Through ayni, contributions of labor, food, drink, and money reactivate reciprocity as a moral economy, as theorized by Mauss (1950) and Sahlins (1972). This moral economy legitimizes hierarchy while reinforcing cohesion. Likewise, the rivalry between Hanansaya and Urinsaya balances competition and cooperation. Although this dynamic recalls the duality between community appropriation and spectacle described by Roberge (2010), Achoma differs from more commodified cases such as Barranquilla, analyzed by Navarro-Hoyos (2022), because strong local control limits commodification and preserves a logic of non-monetary prestige.

The gender dimension is equally significant. Women occupy the visible center of the public performance through dance, adornment, song, and the embodied symbolism of the collagua hat and

wirinchichi. Their ritual centrality expands female public agency and ensures intergenerational continuity. However, visibility should not be confused with authority. As Rezende and Pereira (2023) warn, symbolic representation does not necessarily imply decision-making power. At the same time, collective singing can be read as a practice through which belonging and hierarchy are negotiated, as Knijnik (2018) suggests.

Contemporary changes such as orchestras, prizes, and youth migration should not be understood simply as decline. Rather, they reveal the festival's capacity for historical reinvention, adapting to new audiences and symbolic economies while preserving cohesion, as DeWaal (2013) argues. Comparisons with Mardi Gras also show partial convergence in the management of excess within group boundaries (Jankowiak & White, 1999). Overall, the Carnival of Achoma emerges as a total ritual system that integrates reciprocity, memory, gender, and leadership within a changing Andean festive economy (Mauss, 1950).

Conclusions

This ethnographic study shows that the Carnival of Achoma operates as a complex Andean ritual system that articulates organizational, musical, performative, and culinary dimensions within an agro-astral cycle structured around tinkachi, pukllay, and kacharpari. At its core lies ayni, which organizes social, economic, and symbolic relations and links ritual life to everyday communal practice.

The festival sustains social cohesion by connecting ritual practice with communal governance, symbolic hierarchies, and the agro-ritual calendar. Within this system, young women occupy a central role in ritual performance. Through dress, movement, and objects such as the collagua hat and the wirinchichi, they embody beauty, memory, and collective agency. However, visibility in performance does not always translate into decision-making power or equitable control over resources. At the same time, cabecillas and ayni networks sustain a moral economy that redistributes prestige, labor, and costs, while the ritual rivalry between Hanansaya and Urinsaya reinforces belonging without breaking communal unity.

The study also shows that Achoma's carnival expresses a syncretic articulation of Collagua, Andean, and Catholic traditions through offerings to Pachamama, Lenten practices, and forms of ritual governance rooted in reciprocity. Recent transformations, including orchestras, migration, and the festival's projection beyond the village, should not be

read simply as decline, but as processes of cultural reinvention that adapt the celebration to new audiences and conditions while preserving its festive meaning.

The Carnival of Achoma functions as a living cultural archive through which memory, identity, and communal renewal are reproduced. To strengthen its continuity, the study recommends community-based safeguarding measures, including a living archive, intergenerational heritage education, participatory monitoring, and local support mechanisms that protect cultural transmission without folklorizing the tradition.

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Received 15.01.2026

Accepted 16.06.2026

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