

# Ancestral Songs, Rites, Dances and Bodies in the Carnival of Jujuy Argentina

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## Introduction

Many have researched on the subject of Carnival, according to some authors the Carnival was considered as a festivity linked in antiquity to agrarian cults, which was later incorporated into the Christian calendar preceding Lent; thus, it would have arrived on our continent together with the Spanish conquerors and Portuguese's, as a pagan festival, "medieval; and "popular". Once in America it was profoundly transformed as a result of the processes of conquest, colonization, resistance of the pre-Hispanic peoples, those who already inhabited this soil. Thus, these processes shaped different ways of celebrating Carnival [1-5]. It is also known that before the Spaniards arrived in America there were many celebrations, because there was the agricultural calendar that today is symbolized in the chakana. One of the ceremonies that was celebrated is Qhapaj Raymi [6] and that although it was political of the conquest the "extirpation of idolatries" [7] the celebrations of the festivities of the harvest season are still carried out and many of the ceremonies of the ancient Andean calendar. The so-called Carnival for the Andean world is the "Celebration of the Anata 3," this celebration is held once the agricultural work is finished in largely rural Andes, with other particularities it is organized in the cities and urban environments, but under the name of Carnival. [8], that is why in the Mojónes<sup>4</sup> we find part of the corn crop. It is in this rainy season where they play these instruments, where Mother Earth Pachamama is in her most feminine stage, today her real name was lost precisely because of Western impositions, but the communities know them.

## Lines of research

The present work aims to address the relevance of certain physical and symbolic places in the Carnival of Copleros also called Cuadrillas 5, highlighting the centrality of the "circulo o rueda coplera" as a collective ritual space that relates the Andean spiritual life resented by the Pachamama, as a deity of the Andean region

with the community, formed in this case by the members of the gang of copleros or cashiers.

We will focus on ritual, understood as a formal behavior related to the belief in mystical beings or forces of the mountains. We will also address the importance and the religious and festive significance of the spaces that are transited between the two moments in which the community meets in the Cairn 6, to ritually signal the beginning or of a special time: the Carnival, through the ceremonies of Desentierro of the Carnival symbolized by the Pujllay/game, framed in the worldview of the copleros and the copleras. The centrality of this space, its geographical location, as well as its persistence through time as a privileged ritual center to which the community participates, only for these dates, will be taken into account; but that represents, since ancient times, a fundamental space of worship to the main deity of the area: the Pachamama. These are some of the questions that we will answer in this work. What do the couplets express? What does counterpoint mean to them? Why do female and male bodies make these circular figures what do they mean? What do this human community express?

## Humahuaca: Cultural Heritage of Humanity

In the province of Jujuy, it is located in the northwest of Argentina, border with Bolivia, the Carnival acquires, as in different parts of the world, particular forms. Among the different regions of the province that celebrate Carnival, the Humahuaca gorge is one of the most famous and visited, especially since the latter was declared a World Heritage Site by the Organization of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in 2003, including cultural landscape. To locate ourselves from the physical geography, we can say synthetically that it is a narrow, arid mountain valley, with sparse vegetation, which is part of the eastern and es mountain range and extends in a north-south direction for

more than 150 km, from an altitude of 3343 meters above sea level, in It urbe, to 1290 m above sea level, south of the town of Volcán, a few kilometers from the provincial capital, following the route of the Rio Grande and bordering the Puna. Through this ravine, the current Pluri national State of Bolivia is reached, which is why in colonial times, it was known as the Gorge of Peru. However, throughout the work, we will see how geography is not reduced to just marking this physical place on a map. In Humahuaca, as well as along the ravine that bears his name, the Carnival party is held in March, highly anticipated all year round by the local community and also by the people of Jujuy.

### A New Time Is Coming: Carnival

In the province of Jujuy every year, 15 days before the Saturday of Carnival is held on the Thursday of Compadres, and then on the Thursday of Comadres, where all the women leave their homes to meet to sing that special Thursday, the meeting takes place in a plaza, shed or community center or in the house of a comadre. In those first meetings a good Carnival is desired, drinks, meals are invited, they are talquean (they put talc on the face and head). And the most important thing is the Coplas that the women and hombres share, all that afternoon, the night, is sung, danced on the wheels are armed and disarmed the circles of copleros. In Jujuy towns such as Guerrero, Yala, Bárcena, Pumamarca, Humahuaca, Tilcara, Tumbaya and other places there is the "topamiento" of Comadres. And it's very exciting to see. Women come down from the hill-many had not seen each other again for just a year, and once they step on the same ground, they start, couplets go, couplets come. And so, the "coplera wheel" is assembled, a circle that grows expands when more men or women enter the wheel.

### The Edge With Box

The canto con caja, is a pre-Hispanic song, the chronicler Guamán Poma de Ayala (1615) described the ceremonies of the song. "The festivities throughout the qollasuyo were sung from Cusco to the south," Haze fiesta, dansan the saynatas and other songs. Dize; "aya imilla saynatasaynata" the man answers "a, o, ao, ao, ao" and dize the muger; "cayquiro pinananta saynata conarupi manata saynata", replies the man; "ocaraacaro pimanha, ocaracaro pimanha halla find ana ana anacabado this man is given a rrisa and anci uan singing and each ayllu, each ayllu hasn it songs, the mosos su quen quena in all the qollasuyo" [8]. This historical reference on the couplets and songs to the earth, we can say that there we have a kind of counterpoint, which today survives in this area. The couplets is a stanza of four verses, almost always octosyllabic, of a popular character, with assonant or consonant rhyme in the even verses. It can be recited or sung. There are couplets of love, humorous, sad, picaresque, patriotic, customs, religious, etc. This song with box is a folkloric species of our lands, but it is above all an essential element in the sacred and festive rites of the Andean communities. It is accompanied with erkencho 9 or pinkillo 10 in summer. It is sung at Easter; it is sung when someone dies and for the aya markay

kill 11 month of our dead. The singing with box does not follow the parameters of Western music, in terms of the aesthetic but is nourished by the elements and nuances of our lands is divided into three styles: tonada, vidala and baguala. The tunes express a common spirit that promotes dialogue and communication through singing. All of them have a common spirit at the same time they have each a different modality and root. In these instances, we will analyze the copleras wheels of the ravines of Jujuy.

### Rituality: The Unearthing

The unearthing takes place nine days before celebrating Carnival. At noon on Saturday when carnival begins at the home of an old organizer or the one who leads the gang. The celebration begins with libations and typical artisanal meals, the containers of sweets, everything is small. In addition, both children and adults participated in children's games; all together with the boxes, the erkenchos and the flag of the previous year, as well as the white flag 12, which symbolizes the Carnival and the qollasuyo region, the wiphala (which is emblem-symbol of the original peoples). The women are singing couplets, beating the flags and carrying the flowers and offerings on a pilgrimage that takes us to the Cairn where the Pujllay or Carnival devil is unearthed.

"Wedig up the devil, who is actually the Pujllay, who is the one who goes out to play, we are not afraid, the church says that the devil is bad for us is bad is fun. The little devil or Pujllay represents joy and abundance, we do not rule out the dangerous context the cairn, since it is an energetic place and is not always positive for the thought and quantity of people approaching, it becomes a dangerous place when the person's intention is negative. Reason why the elders who are stronger do it, we dress as devils, we are there the Pujllay" [9,10].

The most clearly Andean sense attributed to Pujllay is the content in its festive, playful ritual character, since it presents the "permission to go play and give free rein to everything" to do everything, get sorrows, cry and laugh. In Jujuy you can escuchar at this time this phrase "let go carnival!!" That alludes to the devil who is inside the body and dominates the man or woman, nothing stops him, it is a moment of liberation of the body of the person, he no longer owns the body, he is possessed by the alegría of the Pujllay and also by his mischief. Unearthing this little devil or Pujllay, represents unearthing the festive spirit of reunion with the Pachamama and the Mojón. It also represents digging up the repressed part of some who are more tied to the earth, it is the time to play, today they call this moment Carnival, but it is a concept that was brought by the colonizers and was attached to this ceremony and the region. It is interesting to note here that many carry the stems of corn plants, planta very important in the Andean diet, which also reminds us that although the Carnival concept has come from Europe, for many of its attendees, this festival is in relation to the Andean agricultural calendar, specifically, with the festivities with which they celebrated the harvests.

## The Milestone Center of Andean Rituality

In the Cairn the men are in charge of removing the stones; then a grandmother asks that the little devil be unearthed, the mouth of the cairn is opened and sahumar is begun, with local aromatic herbs, such as k'hoa, it is sahúma, placing the container in the bottom and covering the mouth with a rebozo or cloth, so that it permeates the place and prepares it for the ceremony, this moment is called "make the k'hoasleep" so that it may penetrate deep into the earth. Then lasofrendas are placed on the side of the mouth, facing the sun, and the mouth of the cairn is adorned with streamers. Cigarettes are also distributed; some can be smoked, and others will be placed lit on the earth taken from the cairn, which remains surrounding it in the form of a mound. An elderly couple are the first to offer as Juan Carlos said they are the strongest in this spirit.

Grandparents are always the first to offer they do so by kneeling before Mother Earth and ask permission for this new time and everything that opens in it. Indigenous peoples have always known that human life is only one part of the great family of life, which includes plants, animals, the earth and the stars, all beings with life and consciousness who deserve respect and should be treated as brothers. The body of mother earth is also the body of the Andean hombre, many times we hear "we are land that walks, we are land that thinks", from there the respect and care of the body is lived, Josefina, a coplera woman from Jujuy told me: What do I feed the earth? I give her healthy, natural meals, because she gives me that and I must give back. The Earth has been considered by all traditional cultures as the Pachamama, the home, a here and now full of life and values, which human beings learned to honor and care for [11].

After this ceremony the party begins and a grandmother coplera is singing with the following phrase: "With your permission, gentlemen, we are going to offer to the Pachamama", the rest responds: "May it be in good time". Then they will reach the offerings, which must be done with both hands "To receive a lot, you have to give a lot, and if you give with one hand, you give less and you will receive little" so said the grandmother. It is also given to the land chicha and coca leaves. After the ceremony de Corpachar 13 feed and drink the Pachamama, talcum powder or flour will be placed on the face, and papel picado on the head, as a sign of joy and abundance "So that the plate is not missing".

In every way, the drink will also circulate, which will always be a game with the Pachamama through the challa (Aymara ritual that pours drink into the earth before drinking), by each one who takes, pouring a part into the earth. Carnival is the time to summon the spirit of the Pujllay and thank the Pachamama, as the coplera Marta tells us: "In Carnival we take out the Pujllay to have fun after everything worked in the year, and the land is bearing fruit and it is time to harvest potatoes, peach corn all this green and that is why we celebrate, we make our corpachada and we thank the pachamama everything given" Marta de Humahuaca, 2017. The joy at the milestone will be overflowing and contagious: Carnival is

officially inaugurated. From that day, the copleros and the copleras, will go through the houses to which they have been invited, in a pilgrimage that they waited all year, and the wheels of community songs will begin. Indigenous worldviews are based on a deep sense of belonging and connection to the Universe. The mission of the human being is to maintain fluid communication and therefore, the balance between the different planes and dimensions in which that world is organized, which he usually does through the celebration of ceremonies.

## The Muyu, The Singing Circle, The Medicinal Wheel

The dance of the copleros is linked to a system of spiritual and festive beliefs, linked: to the earth, which are expressed in the cult of the Cairn and the Pachamama giving life and food in these times, because the earth is Kausay pacha, abundant land. This dance is also constantly related to cycling. The circle is another key element included in the idea of wholeness. Time is measured in the Andean cosmovision and other peoples usually through circular calendars that propose a different idea from what we know fundamentally non-linear, not a progressive succession of events but a constant renewal of cycles through the observation of ceremonies [12].

Many indigenous ceremonies throughout the continent are preceded by the circle; from the circular dances (such as the pim pim of the chiriguanos) to certain rituals such as the sweat lodge (sweat lodge or inipi), the sun dance or teepee ceremony or meeting of the North American Indians, to mention just a few examples, are full of circular manifestations that are the symbol of the total 14. The copleras and copleros arrive from different mountains, valleys, ravines, to enter this circular time, in this coplera wheel and meet again after a year. This place is also surrounded by 360<sup>a</sup> hills around. The puno woman and man see the mountains as a symbol of protection to the community, there are their apus and achachilas<sup>15</sup>, ancestral grandparents and protectors of the community. The testimonies of Jesus and Mary tell us about the meaning of Carnival: "The cacti you see in the mountains are our grandparents who became soldiers and walked there, there they are, look at one goes behind the other and at dawn they seem together, or they are going to coplear, that's not how my dad said" [13]. "We get together in Carnavalear to coplear in Barcena, Tumbaya, Humahuaca, where this cute, or where we see that there is a coplera vamos wheel, sometimes in the homes of families and people even if they do not know you make you sing, there we sing the sorrows, what hurts us, what hurts us, what we miss there we let go, we say laughing ha, by the way we take everything out and heal the sorrows you have to dance, if you do not take anything dying" [14].

In this context there is the singing and wheel of copleros and copleras, as Maria says they come together from different places, there is not a single place but many. In these spaces the voice intervenes, the percussion as heartbeats, the individual body and the group body intervene, there is a sonorización of the body and the box, where bodies are confused and become a voice, a single soul that rumbles in the mountains. There are moments when there are

noises of singing talks, crying laughter, then the singing continues. A human matrix is formed whose gear is the couplets that generate movement, generates memories, memories of past couplets, couplets recovered without owners, “the motor experience of our body is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way to access the social and cultural world of the community. To be a body is to be knotted to a certain world, which is why the body radiates its “meaning” without leaving its spatial and temporal place” [15]. The voices come together in different vibrations, voices that draw in the air the words to the pachamama, to the wayra (wind), there is a union with the cosmos and with the community of parents, brothers, comadres, compadres. In the couplets you can hear the sorrows, the joys, the sorrows there the emotions are released, it is the moment where the Andean man and woman heal their souls by singing and dancing, their spirits and return to the rite of the *muyu*/circle, rite of circular singing. This action of singing the things that they like or not, come out sometimes unconsciously, sometimes rhyme others do not rhyme, there also come out their sorrows, in community singing the aesthetics of showing themselves is not sought or if the rhyme hits or not, here there is another deeper search, perhaps, as *Marí saysto* “we sing and heal”.

In these ancestral songs you can find phrases, metaphors linked to nature that leave a message of wisdom, among so many voices sometimes difficult to hear but can be felt. In this sense, the full/open concence is developed, which implies the abandonment of habits of mental absence or fixation of the mind on some idea (that is, the dissociation between mind and body given the volatile character of the former) and in the body the alert and embodied reflection manifests itself as a natural activity [16]. The wheel is all the time in motion, in a continuous and slow turn, it works as a device that contains the bodies of the *copleros* and *copleras* in their materiality and in their sonority [17]. In the original peoples the bodies play a very important role in the correspondences with the cosmos, for many *culturas* the body is like a replica of the mysteries of the universe and is observed in the energetic structure of the human being is like a metaphor of that [18]. For the Andean woman and man, the body is something very respected, so much so that avoid operating the body<sup>16</sup> must remain closed because it escapes the energy or part of the *ajayu* or *nuna* <sup>17</sup>, the body is like a stone, it must be that strong, that’s why the food is strong, *Doña Geronima* told us:

“To take care of the body you have to eat well, corn, white, black potato of all colors and motes, that makes you strong and they do not operate you will never be healthy, we take care of ourselves we do not let them manoseen our bodies, there are people who operate on anything and do not take care of themselves, so they get sick more” [19]. The body is thought of as something closed like a strong, hard stone. This experience this primordial relationship with the world and the body is primary is first with respect to the relationship of knowledge that it establishes with mother earth [20]. According to *Husserl* (1991) the world is a sensitive experience that is given in advance from its culture, from there the man and the woman will answer and affirm the questions “from the soil and consciousness of

this previously given world” a world for the *mujer* and the Andean man who has his own voice his own spirit of all *pamama*.

The Andean body is also taken care of from food, they try to consume foods that give physical resistance and strengthen the spirit, such as *coca*, *quinoa*, *potato* and *corn*, according to *Geronima* in food is the strength of the body and also gives you energy, to be strong. This body that simulates stone as a grandfather told us, is stone is part of the earth. A stone that is moistened in time of *jallu pacha* or rainy season, in this case the *Carnival*, where that body is moistened, softened with *chicha*, with wine and lets out the joy, therefore, there appear the spicy couplets, *bravas*, daring words (sexualized) that is only said after a few glasses of *chicha*, *aloja* or wine. We can say that unlike the West in the northwest, the aesthetics of the body are not prioritized but health, there is another concept of body that the West hierarchizes in the sense of the visual, above the *dmore* [21]. On the other hand, in Andean practices a reunion of the bodies that are expressed in touch, smell, taste, the senses that connect us with the community, the family and the neighbors that imply the recovery of other ways of experiencing the world. We can say it seeks to “awaken” the asleep, the *sentidos* beyond sight is to locate the “*ñawis*” eyes in different parts of the body; “eyes” on the feet, eyes on the hands, on the sword etc., and why not put hands on the feet to caress the earth when dancing.

### The Wheel, Dances, Copleras

The wheel between so many bodies work like a gear that rotates and from time to time it stops when a “counterpoint” is given, the counterpoint can be for competition, for love or Play, usually occurs between a man and a woman. Competencies arise between women who encourage women and men to their representative. In the counterpoint are said words of praise, flirtation, and sometimes mockery, depending on who it is. The counterpoint of *coplas* the figurations of “*mozo*” and “*moza*” are instituted as they order, classify and identify the participants in the *Carnival* of gangs, remaining like the rest as “hidden group”, but hidden only for a moment. There is the game of the *conquista*, the desired bodies, remember that in *Carnival* is the time to find a partner, each one sings couplets to the desired couple, that is to say their love is declared by means of couplets example: “*aritos* I would like to be of your ears pending, to know what your heartfeels” this is a clear example of statement, where the woman will respond with a couplet giving her a favorable or unfavorable answer. According to *Buttler*, (2001) the performance of counterpoint would contribute to the pointing out of the “bodies that matter”, desired bodies. On the other hand, we must consider that during this *Carnival* the *Pujllayis* assumed bodily symbol of fun, excesses and human sexual reproduction, performance of the counterpoint of couplets would constitute a collective and public instance that would regulate the institution of the legitimate and legitimized bodies of the *Carnival* in men and women.

In the wheel both men and women are transformed into a great collective body, community, circular body that resonates and expands as the heartbeat is sometimes pleased sometimes shrinks,



pulsations to the beat of the step, to the compass of the pinkillor and the box and its resonator chirlera. Another important feature is the turn that is given, this turn is almost always against the hands of the clock, formerly the pre-Hispanic ceremonies and even today the ceremonies are in a circle and at the time of smoking, the grandfathers or grandmothers, do it against the hands of the clock to keep the *ergía*. In the same way that the *copleros* rotate. First, they turn left always and to compensate for duality, then right. Body movements do not make strict sense, they only follow rhythms, they are done without being intentional from a bodily linguistic point of view, to communicate, encode, symbolize or signify thoughts or things that lie outside or before speech (Bets1978: 139-145) Thus the understanding of a body movement does not depend *varia* mentally on an explanation of what that movement “means”. As Bets (1978) points out “human movement does not symbolize reality but “is reality”, it is what is being at the moment is to be, that man that woman, is “to be and to be” at the same time dent or of oneself connected with the song, the word.

The box 19 *coplera* is not only an instrument is considered a companion who is told the sorrows and joys is a person with whom one dialogues and the couplets are born, the box speaks has a mouth and cries, so say the *comadres*, we must remember that in the Andean zone all living beings are respected, everything has spirit and the box also has its spirit, because it comes from a tree and an animal, it is made from materials from nature. The box “is respected,” said Doña Lucrecia, “has her body, has her back has her face, her eyes and mouth, her hair is the *albacas* and the serpentine colors in the Carnival.” This couplet names and personifies her; “this little box I touch, has a mouth and knows how to speak, it only lacks its eyes, to help me cry.” In the times of Carnival, according to some women the box or *chaya* is baptized on the Thursday of

*comadres*, it is given a name or quality of person, according to the region they place a name in others not.

So important is the *coplera* box, that when a being of the *puna* muere, it is buried with it or a replica is built and placed next to the body of the owner of the box, it is burned or buried, because it is believed that one does not die, it continues to live in the *hanan pacha* (the world above the earth) and there he will continue singing the *coplas* [20]. Reason why everything is ritualized, and everything follows its path and must return to the spiritual cycle and continue with its existence. Why do they all sing together? Why isn't it sung one by one? Why don't we listen to each other? These are the questions I once asked myself when I was young, and today they answered the *copleras* on the way I understood community singing collective singing, without the other does not exist, we cannot sing because our thought is communal, our feeling is community, and that great meeting is expected. Today we can understand why man cannot live in solitude. Because it is always accompanied by nature or singing, about it some grandmothers told us the following.

“I wait all year to *coplear*, I am not interested in listening to each other, or listening to it one by one, what I want is to release my little *coplitas*, I do not know if you understand me, if you get into the wheel you do not listen to the other wheels, it will not bother you, when or you get into a wheel you are only in your wheel and one is only in his wheel listening to his wheel, is that the one who sees from outside does not understand, you have to live it and sing” [20] (Figure 1). “We sing all together you do not sing this one by one, this is not the school, it is to is something else” (Maxima, 2016). “we sing for us, this is no show, here there is neither better nor worse here it is good to sing and cheer up the sorrows, that is what matters” (Norma, Humahuaca. 2017) (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Pumamarca Meeting.



Figure 2: Copleros de Volcan.

## Conclusion

This investigation of the Copleras de Jujuy, like other rituals, such as sikus, mortuary dances, are linked by a common bond that is the ancestral Andean matrix of the muyu/circle/wheel with all its social, symbolic and cultural implications. This dance and wheel song, as they call it, express the festive social practices that reproduce an Andean worldview that has been inherited as a tradition of our ancestors, we say ours, because I am part of the area investigated, with Aymara-Quechua identity committed to our ideals of respect for cultural diversity. Therefore, our discourse is not only academic, but a political commitment and cultural reaffirmation of two peoples who are united by rituals, music and dance that build community of knowledge, where the bodies are released in the festive celebrations of Carnival. Therefore, we can note the following conclusions.

- a) The coplero song, the word, the rec dance institutes the community social body through the rituals to the ancestors, the expression of the carnival dance to the sound of the drum, provokes impulses of linking the bodies that invites to hold hands between men and women, not precisely in the sense of chacha-warmi, but independently between the women who unite in the dance, as well as the men who do the same, and then, the bodies come together freely to form that closed communal identity.
- b) The circular dance copera is not a rigid expression of the dancing bodies but marks free movements that reproduces a symbolic festive logic of the muyu/muruqu/ circle that closes the community as a cohesive body of men and women. Likewise, this circle opens in a row of dancers who move like the Katari-amaru snake that advances back and forth, in that Aymara

philosophy of aqat keparux nairakata uñtasiña sarantañani that means that to walk we must know where we have come from or, to advance in the construction of the future.

c) The passage of the copleros and coplera is dragged, and their corporal expression of music and dance is not separated from the ground, this allows to feel the material presence of the sacred mountain, as well as the Pachamama, mother fertile land, in that relationship of the Andean human being with the time of juyipacha/ winter that is necessary to elaborate the chuño and the tunta.

d) The Andean worldview of the Carnival/Pujllay of northern Argentina and its expression of the Copleras perform the rituals to the Pachamama through the bodies, the singing, the dance in circle that expresses between women and men.

e) The dance the song of the Copleras construye closed and open community, strengthening family and neighborhood ties. It is a time of freedoms, where one is even allowed to say rudeness in couplets, in this context only one living among the mountains would realize what Carnival means the Quechuas.

f) The corporalities promoted by the sound of the Boxes and the couplets engage in loving dialogues, friendship, sexuality, claims, thanks, claims and other feelings that come out as impulses of the body to exclaim in public.

g) Finally, the circle or wheel is formed that continuous movement that reproduces a festive logic, symbolic of the muyu/ circle, where one meets with his song, with his body and becomes a sound box of all voices, men and women enter into consonance losing the notion of everyday time to enter the festive time.

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