

# Mapping Change in Laguna Blanca: Rituals, Indigenous Communities, and Tourism in Andean Argentina

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## Abstract

This chapter focuses on the interconnections between rituals, indigenous communities' sociopolitical dynamics, a potential ecological crisis, and tourism development in Laguna Blanca – a highland village in the Province of Catamarca, Northwestern Andean Argentina. We present an ethnographic description of a ritual offering called *corpachada*, which is made by the villagers to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) on 1<sup>st</sup> August every year, both in private family and public ceremonies. We are interested in tracing and building connections between the *corpachada* ritual and the current political, social and ecological transformation of the area; especially as regards new mining projects which have stirred conflicts within the local communities and families. Drawing on the methodologies of sociocultural anthropology and geography, we propose mapping the spatial and temporal dynamics of the different ritual offerings to understand how sociocultural change in the communities of the Biosphere Reserve Laguna Blanca is interconnected with the processes of *politicisation*, *festivalisation*, and *touristification* of the mentioned *corpachada* ritual. In addition, we argue that the ritual can be seen as an open *cosmopolitical* arena in which new possible strategies of alliance among indigenous communities, researchers, and even tourists, can be experimented with.

## Introduction: Tracing Processes of Change in Laguna Blanca

At the end of July 2023, we travelled to Laguna Blanca, a small village of about 200 inhabitants, at around 3,300 m a.s.l., in the Andean highland (called Puna), which is the main settlement in the area of Laguna Blanca.<sup>1</sup> The Laguna Blanca area forms part of the municipality of Villa Vil, Department of Belén, Province of Catamarca, in Northwestern Argentina. We reached the village Laguna Blanca to carry out a short ethnographic fieldwork on the ritual offering to *Pachamama* on 1<sup>st</sup> August, called *corpachada*, a word that means “to honour” or “to invite” in Quechua. The celebration is one of the most important festivities in the Andean ritual cycle, as many anthropologists of the Andean macro-region have indicated. In August, Pachamama is said to be open and hungry (Fernández Juárez, 1996), and local communities show thanks for her gifts by feeding her with ritual offerings within a framework of reciprocity. This ritual used to be a rite performed in private by families; however, over the last few decades it has also developed into a public celebration involving not just the local community, but also political authorities and tourists. Every year it seems to attract more national and even international tourists, whereas in other Andean localities similar rituals continue to be mostly confined to the family and local community levels. This significant change in the ritual aroused our interest in asking how it relates to the sociocultural, economic, and ecological context of that village, which is part of the Laguna Blanca Biosphere Reserve. This area is particularly interesting for academics because since the beginning of the new millennium eight indigenous communities have been constituted as political entities (Delfino, 2025), and five of them have obtained recognition of their legal personality through the entry in the Argentinian National Register of Indigenous Communities. In addition, a mining project for gold extraction is currently under planning review. Therefore, mapping change in Laguna Blanca by focusing on the ritual offering can help us to ana-

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1 We refer to the area of Laguna Blanca as the zone that belongs to the Municipality of Villa Vil, and that includes several villages, hamlets, and dispersed residences. In this zone, which is a large part of the southern zone of the Biosphere Reserve of Laguna Blanca, there are currently about 600 inhabitants most of whom are engaged in agriculture and livestock rearing, as well as in craftsmanship and tourism, especially within the village of Laguna Blanca. There are four main settlements in the area, which are often formed around schools: Aguas Calientes, La Angostura, Corral Blanco and Laguna Blanca (see Figure 1).

lyse sociocultural, political, and economic changes linked to ongoing processes of ethnogenesis, glocal socioeconomic frictions, and a possible ecological crisis caused by the potential future mining activities.

We will address the topic of change in Laguna Blanca by focusing on the processes of *festivalisation*, *politicisation*, and *touristification* of the ritual offering. The term festivalisation<sup>2</sup> refers to the transformation of a ritual into a festivity or festival (Boos, 2024), which can include a ritual part, as well as a more ludic, festive one. The concept of politicisation means not only the increasing political use of the ritual and festivity to produce community and social cohesion, as Delfino (2020) highlighted in the case of Laguna Blanca, but also that it is a potential political arena where it is possible to express conflicts in subtle ways and promote new political agendas.<sup>3</sup> When a formerly private ritual becomes a public event, this may imply its politicisation; meaning it has become a way to negotiate power relationships in a wider public space. This, in turn, invites questions about what kind of political configurations have changed and what is being negotiated. Finally, following the work of Picard and Robinson (2006), we use the notion of touristification to refer to processes whereby rituals or festivities are turned into touristic events. Crucially, this concept reminds us that in addition to local communities and political authorities, tourists can also play an active role in shaping festivities and the social relationships attached to them.

Recent studies of rituals and festivities that have undergone processes of festivalisation, politicisation and touristification (see, Boos, 2020) indicate that such cases provide good opportunities for analysing sociocultural change at a local level, as well as shifts in local-global power relations. The concepts of politicisation, festivalisation, and touristification, appear to be transferable to the case of Laguna Blanca and the recent touristic valorisation of the *corpachada* ritual.

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2 The concept of festivalisation is mostly applied in urban European contexts, where academics (Boos, 2024; Cudny, 2016) have noticed that it leads to an increase in tourism, which in turn is a driving force of festivalisation.

3 Studies of rituals and festivals show that both social cohesion (Geertz, 1973) and political conflicts are negotiated through ceremonial and festive activities by those present (Chacko, 2013; Quinn et al., 2022) and, at the same time, through media communications (Boos, 2017). The practices of personal and collective identity formation and change seem to gain momentum, especially at public events, when a wider public, e.g., in the form of tourists, partake in the festivities (Boos, 2020; Quinn et al., 2022; Sassatelli, 2011; Smith et al., eds., 2022).

Further, these dynamics must also be situated within the wider Andean context, which includes conflicts on mining projects, and other forms of economic and ecological exploitation, and indigenous communities' struggles for social rights and the recognition of their mode of life. We propose, therefore, to connect the interlinked processes of politicisation, festivalisation, and touristification with the concept of cosmopolitics as coined by Isabelle Stengers (2005) and further developed in Andean studies by anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2010). The concept of cosmopolitics is intended to include more-than-human relationships in sociocultural negotiation processes and provide the academic tools to capture changes in political alliances. Accordingly, this concept enables us to incorporate more-than-human actors in our analysis and to hypothesise about the current formation of strategic alliances that could determine the territorial development in the future.

Our short fieldwork in the village of Laguna Blanca was conducted in collaboration with the Interdisciplinary High Mountain Institute (Instituto Interdisciplinario Puneño) and its team, led by Prof. Daniel Delfino<sup>4</sup> who has been working in the area of Laguna Blanca as an archaeologist and anthropologist for more than thirty years.<sup>5</sup> To address the question of change in Laguna Blanca, we draw on the critical and reflexive ethnographic methodologies of sociocultural anthropology and geography; in particular, we produced ethnographic descriptions during our stay in the field, writing an ethnographic journal, complemented by interviews with locals, political authorities and tourists who participated in the rituals, photo-documentation, and the elaboration of cartographic maps. Our ethnographic fieldwork was based on participant observation as a "general framework of the inquiry" (Olivier de Sardan, 2015, p. 25), as well as on the "observation of the participation" from a reflexive point of view (Tedlock, 1991). In line with a hermeneutic, anticolonial ap-

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4 We are grateful to Prof. Delfino for his academic and professional support, as well as for his friendship and hospitality. We would also like to thank Luciana Moreira, a member of Delfino's team, who assisted us in work and logistics during our short stay in Laguna Blanca in 2023. We are especially thankful to all the generous friends and people we met in Laguna Blanca, for sharing with us some of their knowledge, practices, and memories. Without their collaboration, our work would not have been possible.

5 Already in 2015, one of us did ethnographic research in Laguna Blanca on rituals and family patterns (Salvucci, 2016, 2018), at the same time working together with Delfino and his team and contributing to the production of the anthropological-territorial report for one of the local indigenous communities of the area to support the community's claim to be officially recognised by the State as an indigenous people (*pueblo originario*).

proach, we understand the ethnographic method as a way of producing systematic empirical data as interpretations based on dialogue with the participants.

In the first part of this chapter, we present the historical developments and sociocultural context of the communities of the Biosphere Reserve Laguna Blanca, highlighting the main dynamics of continuity and change connected to the area's mountain ecology and sociocultural technology of production. Doing so, we aim to situate our analysis of the *corpachada* in its historic and current sociopolitical context, both locally and at a wider level. In the second part, we outline Delfino's (2020) analysis of rituals in Laguna Blanca which has helped to pave the way to reconstructing the historical development of the sociopolitical context in which the *corpachada* is situated. Crucially, Delfino argues that rituals such as the *corpachada* to Pachamama on 1<sup>st</sup> August are a form of political resistance<sup>6</sup> (Delfino, 2020, p. 222), which serves among other things as a strategical tool for strengthening the social and political cohesion of the indigenous communities. We will connect his findings with the concepts of politicisation, festivalisation (Boos, 2024), and touristification (Picard & Robinson, 2006) of rites. In the third and fourth parts, we offer an ethnographic description of the ritual activities that take place on the eve of the *corpachadas* (31<sup>st</sup> July) and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. In the fifth section, we analyse the spatial and temporal dynamics of the ritual-festival, paying attention to how the spatial and temporal structure of the festivities changes in relation to the processes of festivalisation, politicisation and touristification. Lastly, we conclude this chapter by proposing that the *corpachadas* should be interpreted as a changing cosmopolitical arena, which includes researchers and tourists, too.

## Inhabiting the Biosphere of Laguna Blanca: Between Continuities and Changes

Over the last thirty years, Delfino and his team have conducted extensive archaeological research in the Laguna Blanca area which they have labelled as "ethnoarchaeology" or "socially useful archaeology" (Delfino & Rodríguez,

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6 All translations from Spanish to English are by the authors of this text.

1991, pp. 15ff.). This body of work demonstrates the continuous presence of human dwellings in Laguna Blanca from 5,000 BC to the present (Delfino et al., 2007). According to Delfino et al. (2015), especially from the first millennium AD the Laguna Blanca area – which corresponds roughly to the present-day zone of the Biosphere Reserve Laguna Blanca (see Figure 1) – was already well-populated due to its favourable ecological conditions. Indeed, in comparison to other parts of the Argentinian Puna, the Laguna Blanca area is relatively wet due to the extended network of aquifers and small water streams, which are fed by the nearby Nevado mountain range (see Figure 1). The local plane and dispersed dwelling pattern, according to Delfino et al. (2015, p. 393), was based on a network of interconnected villages and dispersed residences, as well as a set of exchange relationships at a regional level.

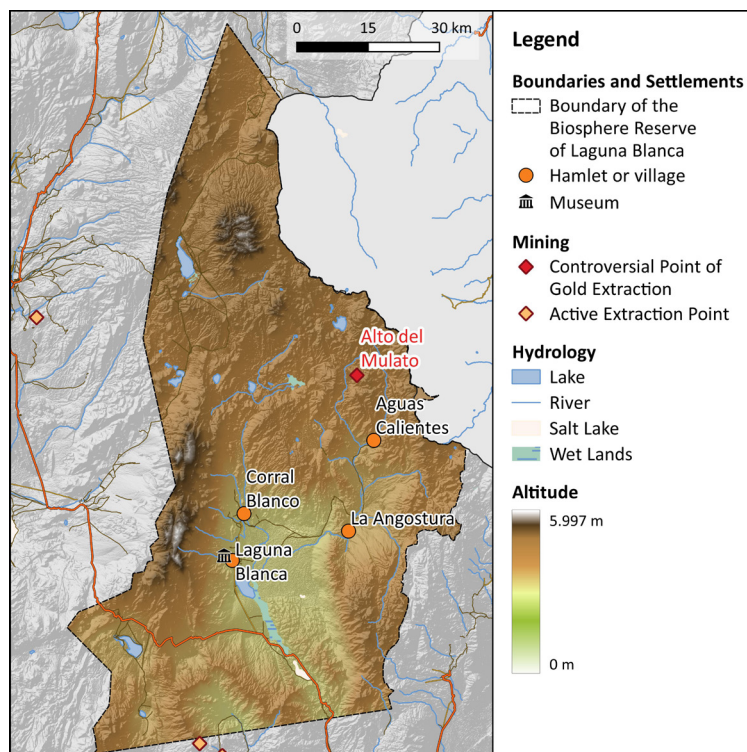


Figure 1 – Map of the Biosphere Reserve Laguna Blanca and the potential mining site. Map by Tobias Boos. Vectorial basemaps: OpenStreetMap, 2024, CC BY-SA 2.0; digital elevation model (30 m): Instituto Geográfico Nacional de la República Argentina, 2019, free use license <https://www.ign.gob.ar/descargas/tyc1.html>.

According to Delfino et al. (2015, p. 394), although the Laguna Blanca area has long fallen within the territories of a number of statal regimes – including the Incan and Spanish empires, and the modern Argentinian state – from an ethnoarchaeological point of view, it is possible to draw a line of continuity in the “ways of dwelling” (Ingold, 2000) of the people who inhabited the area from around the first millennium onwards; specifically grounded in an “agro-centred communal mode of life” (Delfino et al., 2015, p. 398). Importantly, that “mode of life” entailed a material technology of production associated with rituals, myths, and a cosmology according to which the world is alive and agriculture is a form of reciprocal “rearing” among humans and non-humans, as anthropologists working in the macro-Andean area have highlighted (see, among others, Arnold, 2017, 2021; Bugallo & Tomasi, 2012; Bugallo & Vilca, 2016; de Munter, 2022).

Such a mode of production and reproduction of sociocultural life is based on Andean ecological verticality and the complementarity of different ecological floors (Murra, 1975) for accessing resources and diversifying production, integrating agriculture (especially of tubers) and pastoralism, with craftsmanship and barter (on verticality in mountain studies, see, among others Boos & Salvucci, 2022). This mode of life relies on social organisation at the level of the domestic group, as well as the “supra-domestic” level of the community, especially for the purposes of water control and political administration (Delfino et al., 2015). According to Delfino et al. (2015, pp. 410, 412), evidence for the importance of the community level in Laguna Blanca can be seen in petroglyphs found in Pantanito (Laguna Blanca), which depict people holding each other’s hands to form a circle to capture vicuñas, a wild camelid (see also Yacobaccio et al., 2023 on rock paintings from the Holocene in the Atacama area, including Northwestern Argentina). Today, in the wider Andean region a practice for capturing vicuñas called *chaku* is in use which was revitalised in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup>

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7 According to Rowe (1946, p. 217), there are two main Andean collective hunting practices – in particular of wild vicuñas – that were described by the Spanish Chroniclers of the early colonial period (namely, Bernabé Cobo, Pedro Cieza de León, and Balthasar Ramírez). One is the *chaku*, associated with the periodical public great Royal hunt organised by the Inca and involving a large number of hunters who formed an extended ring around a wide area, closing ranks into several concentric and progressively smaller circles, making the an-

According to Delfino et al. (2007), the agro-centred peasant mode of life continued during the colonial period even though the Laguna Blanca area was appropriated by colonisers and converted into latifundios (large estates) in 1687. Although Quiroga (1999, quoted in Delfino et al., 2007, p. 180) has argued that the colonial exploitation of the latifundio fostered a reorientation of the local highland economy toward extensive animal rearing – especially mules for the Potosí market – weakening the community ties and promoting dispersed residence patterns and mobility, Delfino et al. (2007) suggest that even during the eighteenth century a pre-Hispanic model of ecological complementary and integrated agropastoralism was intact. According to them, long-term historical changes in the political powers that dominated the region went hand in hand with a long-term rearticulation of the material and sociocultural mode of life of the local population.

More recent transformations and short-term changes – such as the constitution of the Biosphere Reserve in the 1980s, the activities of archaeologists since the 1990s, the reintroduction of the *chaku* in the late 1990s, and the establishment of the indigenous communities as political entities since the 2000s – have contributed to further rearticulating the local agropastoral model of life in the Laguna Blanca area. However, unlike in earlier times the new socio-political context favours the political empowerment of local peasant farmers and indigenous communities.

The Biosphere Reserve was established in 1982 (see Figure 1) in an area that had already been designated a Provincial Natural Park in 1979. This change has had implications for how the area's natural environment should be managed alongside the local inhabitants' way of life. The biosphere concept was instituted by UNESCO as part of its Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) in 1974 to conserve biodiversity and cultural diversity. One of the orig-

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imals converge into the smaller final human circle to capture them. The second practice, called *caycu* (meaning to corral), was a collective hunt, organised at a community level and based on building fences, toward which the hunters drove the animals to trap them inside. In the 1970s, in Southern Andean Peru, Custred (1979) collected oral memories according to which this last form of collective hunting was still practised in the 1920s. These two hunting techniques (*chaku* and *caycu*) enabled people to collect the animals' meat and fleeces. Wild vicuñas were sometimes killed, but more often only sheared and then released. Meat and fibre were then redistributed by the Inca or among the members of the involved communities. During Inca times, vicuña fibre was highly valued and only the nobility was entitled to wear cloths made of it as a sign of power and prestige (Murra, 1962).

inal intentions behind the establishing of the Biosphere Reserve in Laguna Blanca was to protect the vicuñas from the risk of extinction.<sup>8</sup> A hunting ban thus came into enforcement, leading to a rapid recovery of the animal population by the 1990s. The success of this conservation programme eventually led in 1997 to a relaxation of the level of protection due to requests and pressure from the local population. Since then, commercial use of vicuñas for wool production has been permitted, although killing of the animals is still prohibited. According to Delfino (2025, p. 242, footnote n. 6), the first “modern chaku” was organised in 1998 in Laguna Blanca as a training event to adjust the method for capturing wild vicuñas. On that occasion, a *corpachada* was also enacted at a collective level. However, it was not until 2002 that the *chaku* was instituted as a way of capturing the animals for shearing in Laguna Blanca, organised regularly by the local craftsmanship association, under the supervision of the Provincial Environmental Department (see Gonzalez Cosiorovski & Moity-Maizi, 2019)<sup>9</sup>.

The transformation brought about by the constitution of the Biosphere Reserve and reactivation of the *chaku* has in more recent years been influenced by the presence and work of ethnoarchaeologists. Since 1992, Delfino and his collaborators have been carrying out research in Laguna Blanca

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8 Starting from the colonial period, new hunting practices were introduced that led to a drastic decline in the wild vicuñas population across all Andean countries where these animals live (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru). According to Lichtenstein and Cowan Ros: “(B)y 1960, it was estimated that the vicuña population had dropped from its pre-colonial population of 2 million to an estimated 10,000 individuals” (Lichtenstein & Cowan Ros (2021, p. 104). Between 1967 and 1972, a new pilot plan for vicuña population recovery was promoted by the Peruvian government and two NGOs (from the USA and Germany), which led to the constitution of the Reserve of Pampa Galeras and successful revitalisation of traditional Andean techniques for capturing and shearing vicuñas (Gonzalez Cosiorovski & Moity-Maizi, 2019, pp. 65–66, 68). At the same time, during the 1970s the Andean countries approved new laws and international agreements for the protection of vicuñas, aimed at promoting conservation and sustainable ecological management. This paved the way for an extended revitalisation of traditional Andean practices (such as the *chaku*) for capturing and shearing vicuñas, especially since the 1990s (Lichtenstein & Bibiana, 2003; Lichtenstein & Cowan Ros, 2021).

9 Whereas in some countries the sustainable management of vicuñas is a specific right of indigenous and local communities, in Argentina (especially in the province of Catamarca) private companies that own wide estates where vicuñas live are also allowed to capture and shear the animals for profit. Vicuña fibre is very highly valued in the global market for its role in the luxury fashion industry. Despite the high prices of luxury fashion products made using vicuña fibre (see, for instance those of the Italian fashion brand Loro Piana, that belongs to the multinational holding company LVMH-Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton), local Andean communities make very little profit from this industry (Azócar & Lichtenstein, 2022, p. 22).

within the framework of what they define as a “socially useful archaeology” (Delfino & Rodriguez, 1991); that is, a form of research that serves local people’s needs, claims, and desires for social justice. It led to the creation of the Museo Integral de la Reserva de Biosfera de Laguna Blanca (Integral Museum of the Biosphere Reserve of Laguna Blanca) in 1997 in the village of Laguna Blanca and to the formal institutionalisation of the Instituto Interdisciplinario Puneño (Interdisciplinary High Mountain Institute) in 2002, based at the National University of Catamarca.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Delfino and his team have also supported the local inhabitants by producing territorial-anthropological reports, which are required by the national government for the legal recognition of indigenous people (*pueblo originario*); a status that grants legal rights of recognised groups to the lands they dwell on. Cooperation between Delfino and his team and the local population has thus been essential for gaining legal recognition for the latter.

Gaining legal recognition as an indigenous community only became possible in Argentina following constitutional amendments made in 1994, the passing of a new law (no. 26.160) in 2006, and finally the ratification of the UN Declaration on indigenous people’s rights in 2007. These legal guidelines enabled the creation and renewal of indigenous communities in Argentina. Nevertheless, they have also been criticised for their promotion of multiculturalism as they reinforce neoliberal national and international regimes based on cultural diversity and the reproduction of social inequalities (Pisani et al., 2019). Since 2009, eight indigenous communities have been formed in the Laguna Blanca area (Delfino, 2025, p. 242): Aguas Calientes in 2009, La Angostura in 2010, Corral Blanco and Laguna Blanca in 2015, Carachi in 2016, Peñas

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10 In line with Delfino and his collaborators (Delfino et al., 2012), the concept of the “integral museum” was promoted by UNESCO in 1972, aiming to “give an integral view” (Delfino et al., 2012, p. 1) of the ecological and sociocultural local environments to the inhabitants, for their own benefit, and through their participation. Therefore, the integral museum is a form of “community museum, made by the community, for the community itself” (p. 3). During our stay in 2023, two women worked at the museum: one as a museum guide and the other as a housekeeper. Apart from the exhibition, open to visitors, about the archaeological artifacts found mostly at local sites, and the anthropological development of the territory, the museum features an archaeology laboratory, a library, and a research centre including a kitchen and bedrooms, where, periodically, academics work and live. Information can be found on the website of the Museo Integral Laguna Blanca and the Instituto Interdisciplinario Puneño: <https://lagunablanca.unca.edu.ar/?c=17> (last accessed on 19 November 2024).

Negras and Llastay Ñan in 2021, and Vicuña Huasi in 2023.<sup>11</sup> Today these communities form part of the Diaguita Nation of Belén. However, their unity has recently come under threat by new provincial mining plans.

Since 2017, the provincial government, together with a multinational enterprise,<sup>12</sup> has been promoting a gold mining project in the Laguna Blanca area. This has led to conflicts within and among the local indigenous communities, as some favour the project while others are against it. This seems in part due to the project's backers having tried to use backdoor negotiations with some local communities, or just the indigenous authorities, to gain permission to start mining in a hidden way. For example, there were no formal consultation meetings with local indigenous communities to provide information that would help them to make their own informed decisions on the matter (Pisani et al., 2019). As a matter of fact, there was a sudden shift between March and September 2021; initially none of the local communities had committed support to the mining project, yet by September the promoters were able to announce that half the communities had agreed to support it.<sup>13</sup> This sudden change of heart gives the impression that a set of divergent and disarticulated politics emerged between March and September, as differing and conflicting understandings of "nature" among local people came into play. Thus, caused by the mining project, it seems that a political arena is emerging among the people living in and interested in the area of Laguna Blanca.

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11 Five of them were legally recognised: the Indigenous Community of Corral Blanco, the Indigenous Community of La Angostura, the Indigenous Community of Aguas Calientes, the Indigenous Community of Laguna Blanca, and the Indigenous Community of Carachi (Pisani et al., 2019, p. 57).

12 Millaray Mining Corporation (concessionaire) and Elevado Gold Corporation (operator). (Delfino, 2025, p. 244).

13 See the following online newspaper articles: W.A. (2021): Comunidades originarias afirman que no hay consenso para proyectos mineros, in: *Página12* vom 25.03.2021, online: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/331690-comunidades-originarias-afirman-que-no-hay-consenso-para-pro>, W.A. (2021): Cacique acordò con mineras y su comunidad se dividió, in: *Página12* vom 01.10.2021, online: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/371959-cacique-acordo-con-mineras-y-su-comunidad-se-dividio>, W.A. (2022): Discrepancias por la creación del municipio indígena de Laguna Blanca, in: *Página12* vom 02.07.2022, online: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/433901-discrepancias-por-la-creacion-del-municipio-indigena-de-lagu>.

De la Cadena (2010) has described the connection between mining projects and the formation of new political arenas in her extended fieldwork in the Peruvian Andes, where she has observed indigenous peoples' protests against gold mines. She highlights how in this context a special type of political arena emerges which is characterised by, first, "unusual alliances", and second, a clash of worldviews. She suggests that when indigenous people and capitalist "extractivist" logics encounter one another, divergent "worlds" collide, which include the worlds of non-human "Earth Beings" and ancestors. De la Cadena calls the outcome of these colliding worlds – following Stengers (2005, p. 995) – a cosmopolitics:

[A politics where] cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulation of which they would eventually be capable (Stengers 2005: 995). In creating this articulation, indigenous movements may meet those – scientists, environmentalists, feminists, egalitarian of different stripes – also committed to a different politics of nature, one that includes disagreement on the definition of nature itself. (de la Cadena, 2010, p. 346)

The power of this sociocultural clash can lead to the redefinition of political alliances or the formation of new ones. For example, traditional relationships with "Earth Beings" can be reinterpreted or expanded into political alliances, and new alliances are formed with, for example, scientists or regional and global activist movements (de la Cadena, 2010).

Political changes such as these can be observed in the Laguna Blanca area as a result of, inter alia, the establishment of the Biosphere Reserve, changes to the Argentine Constitution, and the economic desires evoked by the mining industry; all of which have generated "troubled correspondences" (de Munter & Salvucci, 2024) among people, communities, external powers, and the Andean environment. Additionally, the resulting cosmopolitical arena seems intimately linked to changes in local rituals; therefore, in the following sections we will trace the connections between changes to local rituals and social and political transformations. In addition, we will show that certain changes to the corpachada ritual, including the involvement of tourists, seem to reflect a strategy adopted by the local population to express its political claims, sometimes explicitly and sometimes more subtly, at the local, regional, and national levels.

## Rituals, Indigenous Communities, and Tourism

According to Delfino (2020) and his team, indigenous rituals in Laguna Blanca have long formed part of a political strategy of resistance. Firstly, this can be seen in relation to the various statal hegemonies that have asserted control over the area, from the Incan Empire to the Spanish colonies and the modern Argentine Republic, including – we can add – the latter’s current neoliberal form. Crucially, the area’s local inhabitants have constantly rearticulated their practices and cosmologies in response to each new statal regime. Rituals, therefore, have helped previous practices and cosmologies to survive, persist, and to be rearticulated in new ways.

Second, Delfino’s (2020) study suggests that through the process of indigenous ethnogenesis in Laguna Blanca, rituals have been, and still are, a part of the political strategy to consolidate local communities as political entities, strengthening social cohesion among their members especially in situations of crisis that could potentially disaggregate them (Delfino, 2020). In this sense, according to Delfino rituals are a “device of intensification” (Delfino, 2020, p. 226) for social relationships both within and among communities. He observes how over the past 25 years rituals have been multiplying in Laguna Blanca: some newly created, such as the *Punchau Raymi* (celebration of the winter solstice); while others have been reinvigorated on a different scale, as is the case with the public *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August. In this way, the indigenous ritual calendar has undergone significant renewal and change in recent decades.

In 1999, a group of inhabitants, led by the traditional healer and health-care assistant Don L.G., started promoting the organisation of an annual public ritual offering to the Pachamama; namely the *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August. They suggested the village’s ceremonial square as the site of the performance, where it has been carried out ever since. Since 1999, this ritual has become a collective event, which reproduces, and thereby transforms, a formerly domestic and familial ritual into a collective public one. According to Delfino (2020), the organisation of this event entailed a discussion within the local committee in charge of designing a new style for the ritual, leading to the consensual creation of a “new liturgy” (Delfino, 2020, p. 228) with both fixed elements and the possibility of variation – to be established collectively – year

by year. One aim of introducing this new collective rite was the “socialisation of the young people” (Delfino, 2020, p. 228), as a form of didactic heritagisation. At the same time, the collective *corpachada* has reinforced the local sense of community, playing an important role in the process of local indigenous ethnogenesis.

The new public form of the *corpachada* soon started to attract visitors, therefore contributing to the development of tourism in Laguna Blanca. In line with Delfino (2020), the scaling up of the ritual from the domestic to the public level has produced a set of relevant sociocultural transformations. First, the role of ritual leader has shifted from the head of the domestic group, who in many cases is a single mother, to the community leader, the *cacique*, who in the case of the indigenous community of Laguna Blanca is also a woman. This shift has contributed to a process of empowerment of the local indigenous leadership, as well as of female leadership (Delfino, 2020). Second, the change toward a public ceremony has attracted the interest of political authorities, such as the mayor and provincial officials, who use the public ritual as a space for performing speeches. In addition, official political emblems have been incorporated into the ritual, such as the national, provincial, and local administrative flags, hymns, and symbols. According to Delfino (2020), the frequent use of governmental emblems and hymns in this respect shows how the state, provincial and municipal officials have attempted to exert control over local communities, as well as to promote institutional hegemony by appropriating new public rituals that have gained visibility and even popularity. To counter these efforts by government representatives to appropriate the ritual, indigenous communities and their *caciques* have established a wide and independent ritual calendar that explicitly commemorates and valorises indigeness (Delfino, 2020, p. 225).

New rites, which nowadays form part of the indigenous ritual calendar, are usually inspired by the wider Andean rituality that people have come to know through contacts between indigenous community leaders, both at a regional and transnational level, as well as by personal experiences and online research (Delfino, 2020). One of these “new traditions” is the *Punchau Raymi*, or celebration of the winter solstice and the beginning of the Andean New Year, which was organised by the *caciques* of the Union of People of the *Diaguita* Nation of the Department of Belén, and performed for the first time in

2018 through the burning of ritual offerings to the Sun (Delfino, 2020, 232f.). In summary, new collective and public rituals in Laguna Blanca have come about as a result of strategic practices of ritual multiplication and political resignification, as well as the creation of new rituals inspired by personal experiences and mediated representations – through TV, the internet, social media, etc. – of a wider Andean rituality.

The scaling up (Delfino, 2020) of the *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August went hand in hand with its festivalisation. Today the *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August is not just a single event within an annual ritual calendar; instead, it entails a series of *corpachadas* and other rituals that are normally performed at other times and/or locations throughout the year, as well as various other coinciding ludic gatherings. Further, it has acquired more visibility and, accordingly, a higher political profile than before. Indeed, the *corpachada*'s organisers have managed to transform it into a so-called "festival," which, unlike private rituals, may include a collective part, but is especially characterised by recreational activities, such as concerts, dances, games, and ludic performances, as well as the sale or exchange of food, drinks, and other merchandise which are less available in the ordinary, non-festive period (see Boos, 2024).

In the case of Laguna Blanca, the festivalisation process has contributed to strengthening local community ties and even to supporting the emergence of local political indigenous groups (Delfino, 2020), while also raising the *corpachada*'s appeal to national and international audiences – as can be seen from the growing number of visitors to the ritual from outside the village over the last decade. During our fieldwork in 2023, local visitors to the *corpachada* came from hamlets, such as Corral Blanco, La Angostura, and Aguas Calientes, within the extended area of Laguna Blanca. Visitors also included people with familial connections to the area living in nearby towns such as Belén and Londres, or even the provincial capital city of San Fernando del Valle de Catamarca; many of these used the occasion to visit family and friends. On the national level, tourists came from towns across Argentina's provinces, including Córdoba, Mendoza, and Buenos Aires, and during our stay even a couple from México attended the festival.

Our observations indicate that the process of festivalisation is paralleled by the rising global phenomenon that scholars have labelled as "festival touristification," or "festival tourism" (Picard & Robinson, 2006). On the one

hand, festival touristification describes a strengthening desire among tourists to seek out both “traditional” and “new” festival experiences. This phenomenon is associated with the transformation of festive activities and even the creation of new festivals, especially driven by local institutions and municipalities wishing to promote tourism development.

Although scholars from festival studies (see Quinn, 2006; Picard & Robinson, 2006) have critically highlighted the potential risks of cultural essentialisation and commodification inherent to festival tourism, they have also called for a nuanced understanding of this phenomenon, cautioning against the inclination to view festivals as exclusively organised just for the sake of tourism. For instance, Picard and Robinson (2006) argue that festivals which attract many tourists are mostly still an arena of sociocultural “creativity” that enables local people to “cope with change” and “social crisis” (p. 14). Further, they imply that tourists should be seen, in general terms, “as elements of the social system of host societies” (p. 19). In the following ethnographic descriptions, we will, therefore, not only trace the links between processes of economic, social, and political change in the context of a potential ecological crisis from the perspective of the locals but also discuss the role of tourists. We do so by describing how people in Laguna Blanca perform the *corpachada* and the role taken on by tourists in this ritual.

## The Eve of the *Corpachada*: Rituals and the Party on 31<sup>st</sup> July

As mentioned above, the *corpachada* to Pachamama takes place every year on 1<sup>st</sup> August. However, the festivities actually begin the day before on 31<sup>st</sup> July, which can be described as the eve of the event. The eve festivities take place in the triangular space of the village square which contains the communal *apacheta* (see Figure 2); a mountain-like shrine consisting of piled up, white or light-coloured stones dedicated to Pachamama. At the base of the shrine, the local people dug a hole which becomes the mouth of Pachamama and a point of contact with her; this is where the ritual offering is placed and later buried. Also in the square, the community has built two small stone columns with a memorial plaque on top dedicated to Don L.G., who, as men-

tioned above, was the inventor and main promoter of the new communal form of the *corpachada*. He was active in the organisation of the collective event from its inception in 1999 until his death in 2021.

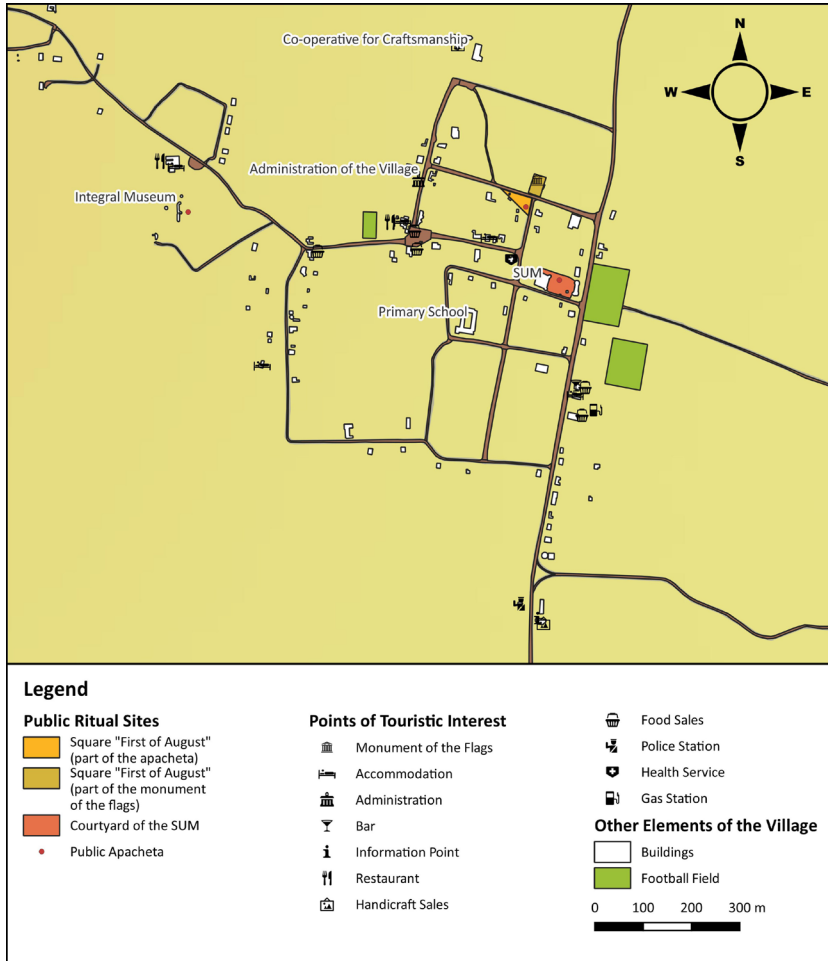


Figure 2 – Map of the village of Laguna Blanca, its main square and other important public ritual sites. Map by Tobias Boos based on interviews and observations.

On the morning of 31<sup>st</sup> July during our fieldwork, people gathered at the communal *apacheta* in the “Square of the First of August” to “open the Pacha”

– as one of our interview partners put it. A hole was then dug, which is the mouth of Pachamama where the ritual offering would be deposited the next day; this ritual marked the start of the festival which continued into the next day (see Figure 3). Among the participants we observed, there were: the cacique of the indigenous community of Laguna Blanca, a small group of inhabitants and organisers, the village’s municipal representative, and the mayor of the municipality of Villa Vill. Further, the mayor was accompanied by an announcer hired from a local radio station to introduce the participants and provide commentary on the main acts of the event. On several occasions he also promoted the mayor’s political campaign for the next municipal election. There were also tourists present, such as a woman from Buenos Aires and her children; she explained to us that she was a friend of the cacique and had been participating in the event for years. There was also a journalist from the region who filmed the whole ceremony.



Figure 3 – The *apacheta* in the main square with the “open mouth” of Pachamama. Photo by Tobias Boos.

During the “opening of the Pacha,” all the participants stood around the Pachamama’s mouth while two women, one of them in Andean dress,<sup>14</sup> tied

14 At the “opening,” all the local men wear ordinary clothes – just one of them wore a hat – whereas the *cacique* and one of young woman-organisers were dressed in Andean dresses, with an Andean traditional skirt (*pollera*), woolly socks, and traditional sandals (*uyutas*). The

woollen threads, each of two colours, around the stones. This ritual practice is called *chimpear* (to tie with threads) the stones and contributes to “enact” the fertility and wealth of the Earth, as well as the herd, family and community. Then, one of the young women covered part of the apacheta with the international indigenous Andean flag, the *Wiphala*. Afterwards, all participants moved northwards from the apacheta in the square to the monument of the flags in front of the square (see Figure 2). The monument consisted of a small square with three flagpoles at the top of a small hill, which could be reached via two stone steps that frame a stone wall. Here the flag ceremony was performed, during which the officials raised first the Argentine national flag, then the flag of Laguna Blanca,<sup>15</sup> and lastly the *Wiphala*.

The second part of the eve events took place in the courtyard in front of the new Centre for Multiple Uses (SUM) (see Figure 2), which in the official festival flyer is described as “a space for the development of tourism, sport, and culture.” The SUM was built by the municipality of Villa Vill southeast of the village square. It is a two-storey modern building with two octagonal towers on both sides, made up of natural stones and painted in red. Its shape and architectural style are reminiscent of a *Pucara*, a pre-Hispanic fortress (see Figure 4). Indeed, public and associative buildings built in Laguna Blanca since the 1990s have frequently been constructed in a neo-pre-Hispanic style.<sup>16</sup> The employment of this architectural style could be seen as an indication of the strengthened indigenous identity in Laguna Blanca that Delfino (2020) mentions. The SUM was inaugurated to serve as a festival location, but before entering it, permission had to be asked by way of enacting a *corpachada*, a ritual offering to Pachamama.

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cacique also wore a hat with an Andean ribbon and a little bag with the coca leaves inside, called *chuspa* in Quechua.

15 The flag of Laguna Blanca features two horizontal fields: the white one represents the mountain covered with snow, and the clear brown one stands for the fleece of the wild vicuña.

16 Examples are the Integral Museum, the Municipality Hostel, and the Co-operative for Craftsmanship.



Figure 4 – The SUM with the apacheta on the right. Photo by Tobias Boos.

When we arrived at the SUM's courtyard, we noticed that the mouth of Pachamama near the apacheta had already been opened. The cacique of Laguna Blanca asked all attendees – a group of approximately 40 people – to build a cycle around the apacheta where the corpachada was to be performed a few minutes later; the cacique of the indigenous community of Peñas Negras and his family joined in for this part of the ritual. Further eye-catching participants were a veteran of the Malvinas War, dressed in army uniform and accompanied by friends, and the boys of the local football team. Two groups of youngsters did not join the cycle but remained at the margins of the courtyard during the whole ritual.

First, the announcer introduced via microphone the local officials and honoured the mayor of Villa Vill for building the SUM, as well as for supporting the nomination of Laguna Blanca for the international competition of the world's "Best Tourism Villages". The competition was organised by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and Laguna Blanca was among the seven participating Argentine villages.<sup>17</sup> Then, the representative of the village Laguna Blanca, the mayor of Villa Vill, and the cacique of

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17 See also the online newspaper *La Nación*, 15/11/2023:<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/propiedades/construccion-y-diseno/desde-un-bosque-sumergido-hasta-minas-de-oro-los-siete-pueblos-argentinos-que-compiten-por-el-titulo-nid15092023/>

the indigenous community of Laguna Blanca, one after the other, greeted the audience and thanked the inhabitants and everybody, especially naming the tourists, for attending the ritual. At that point, the announcer called for the caciques of the indigenous communities of Laguna Blanca and Peñas Negras to start the *corpachada*. One after the other, they thanked in a rather religious tone Pachamama for her gifts, especially for the everyday bread and for the “water that brings life,” as they said literally. They offered alcoholic drinks and water by pouring them into the hole. Then they deposited food and solid stimulants, such as coca leaves, in Pachamama’s mouth. After the performances of the caciques, the announcer called in an ordered manner all the other participants to make the offering: first, the political authorities, then the local administration staff, a schoolteacher, the tourists, the football players, and finally anyone else wishing to make the offering.

After the *corpachada*, all participants got the opportunity to inspect the new SUM. Then people left the scene, going back home or to watch a football match that was about to start at the nearby football field. In the afternoon, games and activities at the SUM attracted people: the young members of the association for chess of Catamarca arrived by bus and started a competition in the first-floor room; in the big hall on the ground floor, people sat in chairs, in front of the stage, waiting for the musical performances. In the courtyard, where food stands and seating had been set up, small groups of people played traditional games. From the evening until the middle of the night, local people thus came to the SUM to join the ludic part of the festival. People socialised, ate, drank, played in the yard, listened to music. In addition to the performances of traditional music and dance, more commercial pop music, such as cumbia and reggaeton, was played. In short, everybody had a lot of fun.

### The Corpachadas on 1<sup>st</sup> August: Ritual Offerings at Different Scales

In the village of Laguna Blanca, people woke up at around 6 am on the first day of August. They began with a family rite of drinking an alcoholic herbal tea called *quemadillo* (“the little that burns”), burnt fragrant herbs in their

houses (chachapoma, rosemary, etc.), and tied the so-called *lloque* to their wrists, ankles and neck. The lloque is a double-coloured woollen thread – in Laguna Blanca it is usually black and white – that is spun specifically for the corpachada by rotating the spindle (*puska*) leftwards instead of rightwards. It is common for this thread to be cured in alcohol and spirits and scented with garlic and the rue herb so that it protects properly during the dangerous month of August (see Salvucci, 2015, 2016b, 2022).

It was still dark when the family members lit a fire in the yard of their houses. As one of our interlocutor told us: “we gather the bones, the bones of the meat we eat are not thrown away, they are collected. On the first of August we make a cairn and burn the bones for the Pacha, there is a strong smell of meat and bones.”<sup>18</sup> Then people *corpacharon* – the past tense of “to host” or “to offer” – by offering to Pachamama food, drinks, alcoholic beverages, candies, coca leaves, and cigarettes – that is, whatever they thought Pachamama would appreciate. The ritual is done first in every household, which has its own apacheta in the yard; the items are placed in holes, conceived of as Pachamama’s mouth, that are dug at the feet of the apacheta. As one local explained, the offering is made to thank the Pachamama for her gifts, and to ask for health and protection: “so that the Pacha does not take us, so that the Earth and the Aires do not harm us.”

At around 8 am, a second corpachada is performed by the owners of hostels in the village with their guests. We were able to participate in these rituals at the hostels. At the latter, our friend, who lives and works in Belén, the nearest town in the valley, performed a corpachada in the yard of the family hostel managed by his parents. He was the successor of his grandparents, who had done the performance before him, and was assisted by his friends. Next to the apacheta, on a traditional shawl, called *aguayo*, there were several drinks, such as the traditional *ulpada*, made of toasted wheat flour and water, and also hard liquor, a bottle of wine, and a bottle of liquor of local high mountain herbs produced in Londres (Catamarca). Food was also offered, such as fried *empanadas*, boiled beans, and stew, as well as stimulants, such as coca leaves and cigarettes. The performer of the rite explained the ritual’s

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18 On the role of bones during ritual offerings to Pachamama, see Arnold (2022, pp. 65–70), who draws on ethnographic examples from the Northwestern Argentinean province of Jujuy provided by anthropologists Lucila Bugallo and Francisco Pazzarelli.

significance to a group of around a dozen tourists including ourselves, while being assisted by his friends who gave us a drink called *quemadillo*. They then tied a black and white, left-handed thread to our left wrist, saying that we had to cut and burn it on the last day of August to burn the bad luck.

At around 10:00 am, people started moving to the village square. The unpaved streets next to the square were now filled with vans, and the area had become crowded with around 400 participants, many of them tourists who were enthusiastically taking pictures. Additionally, a drone from the local press flew in the air to film the event. Indeed, the whole event was documented by the press, who recorded videos and interviews with attendees. One journalist came from Hualfín, another young journalist from Belén, and a middle-aged Argentine filmmaker was making a documentary which he intended to sell to an international agency, as he told us. At a later point in the festivities, we even noticed two drones filming the event at the same time.

In the square a stage had been set up next to the apacheta where the Andean band, Hilos del Viento, were playing music. The political authorities in attendance lined up right in front of the stage, with some of them dressed in their very expensive vicuña ponchos which have been a symbol of political power since Incan times (see, Murra, 1962). Further inside the square, several groups of tourists assembled to look at the officials and the band performing on stage. A few metres further away from the line of officials, young girls and boys bearing flags were preparing to perform a parade in front of everyone. The same announcer as the day before provided commentary over a loudspeaker for most of the event.

As the parade began, the girls and boys, some dressed in school uniforms and others in Andean costumes, paraded with the flags of Argentina, Laguna Blanca, and the Wiphala; they were also accompanied by two teachers and some women in Andean costumes. Then, together with the authorities, they left the square and walked to the monument, where they raised the same three flags as the day before. The announcer named the following authorities: the mayor of Villa Vil, the vice mayor, the municipal delegate, a provincial deputy, the mayor of Belén, the provincial director of the craftsmanship department, the provincial director of the social development department, the local school director, the caciques of the indigenous communities of Laguna Blanca and of Peñas Negras, and the president of the craftsmanship commit-

tee of Laguna Blanca. Afterwards, the authorities returned to the square with the apacheta, where the Andean music band played the national anthem, and most attendees joined in singing. Then an audio player was started, which re-played the anthem of Catamarca.

Next, the announcer introduced the authorities, who, one after the other, delivered speeches that all highlighted the importance of local traditions and of tourism for the wellbeing of the people of Laguna Blanca. For example, the municipal delegate, dressed in a vicuña poncho, concluded his speech by saying: "Long live Pachamama, long live Laguna Blanca, long live the tourists!" The cacique of the community of Laguna Blanca, dressed in Andean clothes, thanked the tourists and stressed that the villagers would defend their territory "to the death, to the last consequences," which very likely referred to the current conflict over mining. The mayor of Villa Vil was the last to give his public address. In their speeches, all authorities spoke in remembrance of Don L.G. and a young boy who had died recently and had been a very appreciated member of a local folk music band. After the speeches, the mayor of Villa Vil presented certificates to distinguished local people or to families who were in mourning for recently deceased community members, and then the flag bearers left. This part of the event, where political institutions and organisations got the opportunity to present themselves, we will call the "institutional" part of the ritual.

Next, the announcer proclaimed the arrival of *Coquena*, the mythological guardian of wild animals, asking the tourists to leave space for him. Coquena was personified by an inhabitant in Andean costume, wearing a poncho, woolly trousers, and goat hair slippers. He entered the scene from behind the hill of the monument, where he could not be seen by those present, as if he were coming from the "wilderness" outside the village. He carried a baby on his back and was accompanied by a boy in Andean costume and a young, ritually decorated llama. The Andean band played in the background, and the tourists closed around Coquena when he finally arrived at the square. Coquena took the microphone from the presenter and announced the arrival of Pachamama. From this point on, Coquena took on the role of the presenter commenting on the ritual activities, marking the end of the institutional part of the ritual and the start of the practical and educational part of doing and performing rituals.

Pachamama entered the scene (see Figure 5), personified by a person wearing a mask, a vicuña wool shirt and gloves, a skirt in a mountain lion skin pattern, and shoes made with armadillo armour. On the back she carried rhea feathers, in her hands a walking stick made of a rhea leg, and on her head, she wore a fox fur. This personification of Pachamama never spoke; she only danced by jumping around. Subsequently, the boys and girls from the Pachamama dance school performed a circular dance in honour of Coquena and Pachamama to the rhythm of commercial Andean music, dressed in Andean costumes and wearing feather crowns. The tourists excitedly and greedily took pictures and filmed the scene. Some tourists even started to do the offering before the offerings had officially been started and without having been asked to do so, as is customary. At that point, Coquena asked the jostling crowd to calm down, to be respectful, and to wait for their turn.



Figure 5 – The arrival of Pachamama at the public event on 1<sup>st</sup> August. Photo by Tobias Boos.

Thereafter, a series of rituals followed which are also part of the Andean ritual calendar, but normally performed at other times of the year, and were introduced when the new communal *corpachada* was set up more than 20 years ago. The first of these was the *rutichico*, where children (in their early years of life) receive their first haircut from their godfather/godmother or other rel-

atives, who also offer a present or money to the child. Coquena explained the significance of this custom to the audience.

Coquena then presented the arrival of the *tropero* (shepherd) with his herd of sheep, and a young boy assistant in a gaucho costume. The two of them performed a short play reciting typical conversations between these roles. After the play, the shepherd and his assistant invited the tourists to *chimpear*, that is, to tie colourful woollen threads to the animals' fleeces, after which both did the *corpachada* ritual. At this point, the time had come for Coquena to invite the villagers to perform the *corpachada*, and then, afterwards, the visitors from nearby villages and towns and, finally, all tourists and other attendees (see Figure 6). Next to the mouth of Pachamama, where the ritual offering took place, two women standing behind a table offered to tie the leftwards spun threads mentioned earlier to the left wrists of those who wanted this; many participants, especially tourists, eagerly took up this offer.



Figure 6 – A tourist, wearing a poncho, is performing the *corpachada* at the public event on 1<sup>st</sup> August. On the right and left visitors are taking pictures. Photo by Tobias Boos.

At around midday, after the series of rituals and *corpachada* had ended, people started buying food at the informal points of sale set up along the margins of the square. They ate on the spot or took the food with them to eat at home. In the meantime, local *copleros* (copla singers) performed on the stage,

followed again by the Andean band who performed a short concert (see Figure 7), whose last song, entitled *Pachamama*, was accompanied by the dancing of boys and girls from the Pachamama dance school; as this all happened, the mouth of Pachamama was covered over to bury the offerings. At the end of the ceremony, some of the authorities took pictures with the figures of Coquena and Pachamama as the village square slowly emptied out. Many local people gathered at home for a traditional family meal of baked lamb, while most of the tourists returned to their hostels in the village or homes in the valley.



Figure 7 – The Andean band Hilos del Viento is performing a song on the stage at the public event on 1<sup>st</sup> August. In the foreground, on the left side, the Pachamama is watching the stage, and on the right, we see the feather crown of a dancer. Photo by Daniela Salvucci.

The stage was immediately dismantled and carried from the square to the SUM, where the second part of the festival was set to start in the afternoon. At the same time, a small market had been set up in the courtyard of the SUM with stands selling regular consumergoods, such as cloth, sports shoes, pots, and thermos flasks. This was in preparation for the ludic part of the festival

which would continue late into the night here, many of the local inhabitants, but only a few tourists, gathered at the SUM to play Bingo and watch the dance and music performances, which were similar to the shows and games the day before.

## Mapping the Changing Ritual-Festival: Temporal and Spatial Dynamics

We now propose a mapping of the spatial and temporal dynamics of the different corpachadas on 31<sup>st</sup> July and 1<sup>st</sup> August in Laguna Blanca in order to develop a better understanding of how these rituals have changed in terms of the processes of festivalisation, politicisation, and touristification. To do this, we take account first of the structure of the whole event, then of the continuum of activities during the main event on 1<sup>st</sup> August, and last of the multiplication of ritual offerings in the private and the public spheres.

As discussed above, the event in its entirety can be divided into the eve (31<sup>st</sup> July) and main ritual (1<sup>st</sup> August), recalling a double structure that scholars consider to be typical of Andean rituals and festivals (see Rivera Andía 2014). In the case of Laguna Blanca, the eve does not just mark the start of the event, but also replicates on a smaller scale the alternation between the “ritual” and “ludic” parts of the main event; hence the same structural dynamic appears to play out on both days. Thus, on 31<sup>st</sup> July and 1<sup>st</sup> August formal ceremonies take place near the apacheta: on the eve, this happens first at the apacheta in the village square and subsequently at the apacheta in the SUM courtyard; whereas on 1<sup>st</sup> August it happens only at the apacheta at the main village square. Then, on both days the formal ceremonies are followed by ludic or festive events involving games, music, and dancing that take place at the SUM.

Moreover, the eve seems to function as a welcoming event for the next day, as it provides the opportunity for the apacheta in the main village to be prepared. The importance of this step was explained to us at different times by our interlocutors, since the local people believe they must ask Pachamama for permission so that the main ritual on 1<sup>st</sup> August can occur. Since only the local authorities and tourists who were familiar with the location and festival were in attendance on the eve, this stage of the event had a more intimate

feeling to the main event, where there were many other local and regional authorities among the participants, such as provincial deputies and even the governor, who briefly came in the afternoon to greet and then left, as well as tourists from further afield. On both days, the presence of authorities and tourists concentrated mainly in the ceremonial and ritual part of the event. The ritual of 1<sup>st</sup> August can be subdivided into institutional and educational parts: the first being where the authorities give their speeches and the national and regional institutions play the main role, and the second involving presenting and explaining local and Andean rites and customs. Local people, including from other nearby villages and towns, also participated, particularly in the ludic part of the festival.

The festivalisation of the ritual seems to be more beneficial for local people than tourists. The after party is especially noteworthy, as it seems to strengthen the social bonds between the local community members at least as much as the ritual does. During the ceremony, in fact, and especially during the festive activities at the SUM, people from the village, but also from the area of Laguna Blanca, as well as those people who migrated to the towns in the valley, including those who still have family relations, friends, and even personal troops of animals in the village, gathered together, and socialised, enhancing their sense of belonging to the area of Laguna Blanca.

Regarding the main event of the *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August, we observed several interconnected activities and multiple ritual offerings that took place throughout the day in entangled social spaces and temporalities. There was, in fact, a continuum, rather than a dichotomy, between the private *corpachada* and the public one, which, through the multiplication of offerings, connected the domestic-familial offering with the domestic-touristic one, and also with the collective-touristic ceremony. It was as if the public event was gradually scaled up from the intimacy of the family towards the open social gathering of the main event.

The offering that the owners of the local hostels performed at home with their guests, at around 8 am, was a reduced *corpachada* which retained its two main aspects: the tying of *lloques* around the tourists' wrists as protective items, and the offering of goods to Pachamama. In this way, local people included their guests in the actual ritual itself, rather than just a performative version of it put on for the sake of tourists. Indeed, they performed the

ritual in a private and familial setting, while instructing them on the ritual's significance and how to participate; therefore, the tourists were in some way "educated" about local customs or "cosmopraxis" (de Munter, 2016). It seems that there were no contradictions or antagonism among the different ritual situations, as the same people, especially local people, participated in more than one ritual offering on 1<sup>st</sup> August: as family members and hosts at a household level, and as community members and hosts at a village level. In the same way in which they included their guests in the *corpachada* performed at home, they also included political authorities and tourists in the communal and public ritual offering, in this way facilitating the politicisation of the ritual.

To show in more detail the ways in which the ritual has been politicised, the public *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August can be subdivided into two main parts: first, a more institutional part; and, second, a more ritual, educational and spectacular one. As Delfino (2020, p. 228) has already suggested, the "change of scale" of the ritual from the familiar to the collective public level has promoted a process of political appropriation of the event from local and regional governmental authorities; as can be seen through the inclusion of anthems, raising of flags, and political speeches in the first formal part of the ceremony. Nevertheless, as Delfino (2020) highlights, this change of ritual scale has also supported a process of empowerment of the indigenous leadership, and even of a female indigenous leadership, as the centrality of the *cacique's* role in the ceremony – as described in our ethnographic account – indicates.

Nonetheless, this process of politicisation of the ritual has, we argue, not only strengthened the consolidation of community ties and the dynamic of political ethnogenesis, as suggested by Delfino (2020), but also generated a ritual political arena in which internal conflicts can be played out and new political alliances expressed. During the offering to the Pachamama at the *apacheta* on both days the *caciques* of Laguna Blanca and Peñas Negras implicitly contested the project of installing a gold mine in the area by offering water, which comes from the mountains where the mine is supposed to be established, to Pachamama and highlighted specifically the water's vital importance for life. Presumably in this practice and parts of their speeches, they referred in a subtle way to the threats of the planned mining activities on the safety of the local aquifers, water streams, and water supply.

Further, on 1<sup>st</sup> August the cacique of Laguna Blanca proclaimed in front of the audience that the people of Laguna Blanca would resist “to the death” and to the “last consequences,” which could be understood as a warning for those authorities who have been negotiating the mining project. Indeed, none of the speeches alluded explicitly to political conflicts or to the mining project, but knowing the context, these practices and assertions can be interpreted as comments on current political quarrels. The public event, thus, has enhanced the political alliance among those indigenous communities that have opposed the project the strongest (Laguna Blanca and Peñas Negras), whereas the representatives of the other indigenous communities of the area of Laguna Blanca, who have been less critical toward the project, were not present at the event. During the public *corpachada*, moreover, the potential conflict between the local indigenous communities and the local political administration was addressed and put into the ritual political arena.

The second part of the *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August featured various rituals. Besides those considered typical for the day – such as the *corpachada* and tying of *lloques* to the wrists – there were also other rituals, including: the *rupachico*, the arrival of the *tropero* and his flock and the arrival of two personified mythical figures, *Coquena* and *Pachamama*, to the accompaniment of dancers and traditional music. By changing the scale of the ritual offering to the communal and public level, the ritual activities have become “spectacularised” in a way that could be interpreted as a cosmopolitical practice, due to its enabling of new alliances between the festive community and the tourists – the latter of whom were being educated in Andean customs and worldviews. Nevertheless, festival tourism and ritual touristification remains an ambiguous and contradictory process, including insensitive and even disrespectful attitudes from some visitors, exemplified by the aggressiveness of some tourists in taking photographs.

As Delfino (2020) stresses, the founders of the modern *corpachada* had originally aimed to use the ritual to educate the area’s youth about local cosmopraxis. In this sense, it can be seen as a form of didactic heritage-making, which includes multiple levels of ritual activity as well as the incorporation of local mythological elements, including personified mythical beings. This approach, one based on ritual creativity, is connected to the fact that local people usually perform, and have been performing, rituals at a familial or

neighbourly level, in a relatively independent way; without liturgic control from part of external ritual authorities, even within the syncretic frame of local Catholicism. This ritual autonomy has thus encouraged variation and creativity at both the family and community levels. Finally, the didactic aim of the ritual-spectacle is not only directed at local youngsters but also the visitors, to whom the local cosmopraxis is explained through processes of ritual enactment.

The process of touristification of the ritual offering, we suggest, is not only connected to a general improvement of tourism in the village of Laguna Blanca, as seen from the new hostels and family restaurants that have opened over the past few years (see Figure 2). Our conversations with local people and the authorities' political speeches suggest that tourism is perceived by many inhabitants as a possible alternative to the mining project as a way of promoting sustainable economic and social development. The public *corpachada* on 1<sup>st</sup> August, therefore, could be understood as a cosmopolitical arena where it becomes possible to experiment with political tactics intended to form and strengthen alliances among indigenous communities and even tourists, such that could be able to resist unwelcome external pressures such as the mining project.

## Conclusion: Changing Rituals as a Cosmopolitical Arena

We suggest that the recent and current trends in the Laguna Blanca area towards ritual multiplication and creativity, as well as the harnessing of rituals for political purposes, have contributed to the opening up of a new space for political discussion, negotiation, and even conflict. Rituals, therefore, work not only as an "intensification device" for social cohesion and community building, or rebuilding, within the framework of the political process of ethnicisation, or ethnogenesis; they also work as a new political arena for taking positions, questioning official power, forming new alliances, and expressing dissent within the community, among communities, and between local communities and the provincial and national governments. This arena also involves so-called "more-than-human" beings (Tsing, 2013), or "becomings" (Ingold, 2016; De Munter, 2022), in the local ecological and sociocultural relations; the most prominent examples here being Pachamama and Coquena.

In the Laguna Blanca area, a cosmopolitics-like alliance has been established between local people and social archaeologists working in the area (Delfino & Rodriguez, 1991) through the Integral Museum and the Interdisciplinary High Mountain Institute. Despite its success, in the past few years this alliance has been called into question due to conflicts that arose within and among the local indigenous communities around the new governmental mining project, which has been strongly opposed by the social archaeologists due to the damage it will inflict on the local ecology and sociocultural environment.

Additionally, over the last decade a new possible, but also intrinsically controversial, alliance between the local population and tourists has developed. By including tourists in their ritual offerings and thus sharing the local cosmopraxis with them, local people seem to be searching for alliances against the new mining project and extractivist economic model it represents; all within the backdrop of the ecological, social, and political crises that seem to be playing out across the world. Despite the ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in the processes of politicisation, festivalisation and touristification, our case study shows how the changing of a ritual can help to open up a cosmopolitical arena where participants can grapple with the issues and conflicts facing their communities, and experiment with new possible alliances to address or remedy those dynamics.

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