

ARTICLE

Mikhuspa Ukyaspa Ima Tinkuyku: Food and Drinks as Mediators of Encounters in Andean Festivals

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Abstract

Mikhuspa ukyaspa ima tinkuyku is Quechua for “eating and drinking, we encounter one another.” Food and drinks have historically been important mediators in the development and renewal of relationships of reciprocity in the Andean region. This article demonstrates how contemporary Andean people continue to use food and drinks to mediate encounters where knowledge transmission and community building take place. In particular, the article explains how members of a dance troupe in Cusco, Peru, use food and drinks to integrate its new members into the dance troupe, teach them the traditions of the group, and explore and (re)define their relationships of reciprocity. By sharing food and drinks, dancers connect their Quechua heritage with their lived experiences to explore and (re)shape their own identities. The article employs a research methodology that centers local epistemology, particularly the Quechua concept of *tinkuy*, defined as an encounter of different elements that creates something new.

Keywords: food and drinks; reciprocity; performance; Andes; Tinkuy

Resumen

Mikhuspa ukyaspa ima tinkuyku puede traducirse del Quechua al español como “comiendo y bebiendo, nos encontramos les unos a los otros”. Históricamente en los Andes, la comida y la bebida han sido importantes mediadores en el desarrollo y renovación de relaciones de reciprocidad. Este ensayo demuestra cómo hoy en día los ciudadanos de los Andes continúan utilizando comida y bebidas para mediar encuentros en los cuales se transmite información y se (re)crean comunidades. En particular, este texto explica cómo los miembros de una danza en Cusco, Perú, usan la comida y la bebida para integrar a sus nuevos miembros, enseñándoles las costumbres del grupo, y explorando y (re)definiendo sus relaciones de reciprocidad. Compartiendo comida y bebidas, los danzantes conectan su herencia Quechua con sus experiencias de vida, para explorar y (re)crear sus propias identidades. El artículo utiliza una metodología que se enfoca en los saberes locales de los danzantes, en particular en el concepto Quechua de *tinkuy*, el cual puede ser definido como un encuentro de distintos elementos para crear un elemento nuevo.

Palabras clave: comida y bebidas; reciprocidad; performance; Andes; Tinkuy

It is July 19, 2018. The Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen is already over, but somewhere a *q'uncha* (a type of adobe stove common in the Andes) is still working, filling out the air with the pungent scent of kindled firewood. It is around noon, and while most people in

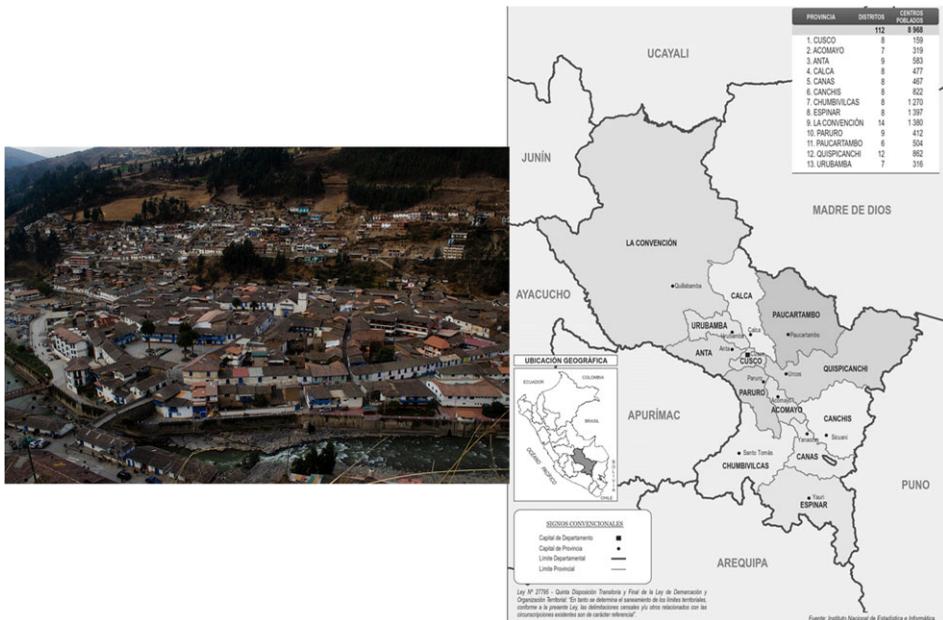


Figure 1. The town of Paucartambo. Photo by the author. 2021. Map source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática.

Paucartambo are resting after four days of singing, dancing, drinking, eating, and celebrating; a group of four men are tirelessly cooking lunch (Figure 1).¹ Their task is not easy: they must feed about fifty people using only the scraps of all the ingredients that were used to prepare food during the four days of the festivity. The cooks are the newest members of the Qhapaq Qolla, one of the nineteen *danzas* (dance troupes) that perform yearly in the festivity.² They have gathered in the dance troupe's *cargo wasi* (the name given to a troupe's headquarters) to fulfill their first official task as Qhapaq Qolla: to cook and serve food to the rest of the troupe.

While during the festivity, kitchens are the realm of women—traditionally, making food is a female role in the Andes—today only the new dancers are allowed in. They must do all the cooking by themselves. Today cooking is a masculine endeavor. As the cooks run around carrying firewood, pots, water, seasonings, and other ingredients, the other dancers start slowly arriving to the *cargo wasi*. There, the senior dancers sit together in groups and, sharing sodas and beers, comment on the developments of the recently ended festivity. From time to time, a group of dancers directs their attention to the new members of the troupe and either teases them about their cooking skills or makes a passing comment about what they expect from the meal. When all the dancers have gathered at the *cargo wasi*, the last lunch of the Qhapaq Qolla during the festivity begins.

¹ Paucartambo is the town in the southern Peruvian Andes where the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen* takes place in. Paucartambo is in Peru's Cusco region, about 105 kilometers (sixty-five miles) northeast of the city of Cusco, the region's capital. The district of Paucartambo, where the town is located, is the capital of the province of the same name. The town stands at an altitude of approximately 2,900 meters (9,500 feet) above sea level. The Paucartambo province sits at the border between the Andean mountain range and the Amazon rainforest. According to the 2017 Peruvian census, the urban population of the district of Paucartambo—which roughly corresponds to the population of the town—is 3,990. Seventy percent of the population of the district speak Quechua; 0.11 per cent speak Aymara (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática 2017, 25).

² While academics have often used the term *cuadrillas* to refer to dance troupes like the Qhapaq Qolla, Qhapaq Qolla dancers nowadays privilege the term *danza*.



Figure 2. A Qhapaq Qolla dancer performing in the festivity. Photo by the author. 2017.

After the meal, Qhapaq Qolla dancers who are considered *antiguos*—those who have danced for at least four years—gather in a private room within the *cargo wasi* to conduct a meeting in which they evaluate their performance during the festivity. Dancers call this meeting the *t'aqwinakuy*. The Qhapaq Qolla who are not *antiguos* cannot attend. The newest members of the troupe also cannot participate in the *t'aqwinakuy*. Their job as their peers conduct the meeting is to wash the dishes and clean up the kitchen.

Why do the Qhapaq Qolla (Figure 2), an all-male dance troupe, make their newest members cook and serve food as their first official task as dancers? Moreover, how does this lunch relate to the *t'aqwinakuy*, the event that takes place immediately after the meal? This article answers those questions by explaining the vital role sharing food and drinks plays for the Qhapaq Qolla. The Qhapaq Qolla make their newest members cook and serve food for everyone else in the troupe to teach the novice dancers of the importance of the labor of everyone who works for/with the troupe during the festivity. The event also teaches novice dancers about the importance of seniority in the Qhapaq Qolla. This knowledge is shared through the establishing and collapsing of three dichotomies: gender, class, and generational.

Although Qhapaq Qolla dancers do not identify as Indigenous, they acknowledge their Quechua heritage and shape their practices and traditions on the basis of notions derived from the Quechua language, which they are fluent in. The lunch demonstrates how food and drinks are vital tools for Andean citizens of Quechua descent to mediate transformational encounters that allow for the negotiation and (re)newal of relationships of reciprocity, and the exchange of ideas and knowledge.³ As the title of this article says, eating and drinking the Qhapaq Qolla encounter and transform each other.

Me, *Tinkuy*, and the Qhapaq Qolla

Before delving into the analysis of how food and drinks allow the Qhapaq Qolla to (re)new their relationships of reciprocity, I must discuss my personal history with the Qhapaq

³ I use the phrase “of Quechua descent” to describe Andean citizens who, despite having strong ties to their Quechua heritage, avoid defining themselves in relation to Indigeneity. The phrase aims to recognize these peoples’ heritages without forcing an identity onto them.



Figure 3. The image of the Virgen del Carmen out in procession during the festivity. Photo by the author. 2016.

Qolla and my positionality, as they undoubtedly shape my ideas about the traditions of the troupe. I am Peruvian and was born in Lima. My mother is originally from the Cusco region, where Paucartambo is located, but she is from a town considered Amazonian rather than Andean.⁴ Thus, *paucartambinos* and *paucartambinas* do not consider either my mom or me Andean. Even when I tell them my mom is from Quincemil, they see that as anecdotal and not an indication that I have strong *cusqueño* ties.

In 2012, I visited Paucartambo and participated in the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen* for the first time (Figure 3). As soon as I arrived, I was drawn to the *Qhapaq Qolla*. In 2016, I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in Native American studies and focus my dissertation research on the dance troupe. I wanted to study how local understandings of ethnicity and gender in the Andes intersect in identity development processes, and I believed the *Qhapaq Qolla*, who embody a representation of the “ideal” Andean Indigenous male, could help me better understand the complexities of those processes. I started working with the dance troupe in 2017.⁵ Dancers were interested in getting their traditions and performances recorded, and they agreed to partner with me to codevelop a research project that focused on the troupe.

Since I started working in Paucartambo, I have considered myself an outsider to the town and its traditions. I see myself as a guest in the community, and my recognition of that status guides my study. Over time I have managed to gain the trust and respect of the dance troupe to the point that many dancers say that I am a part of the *Qhapaq Qolla*, but I understand that my academic work, while done for/with the dancers and the larger Paucartambo community, creates special responsibilities, as it is shared with people outside of the community. Thus, since I began working with the *Qhapaq Qolla*, I have made it my priority to become as informed as possible of their protocols regarding the sharing of

⁴ While the English spelling of the Andean city is *Cuzco*, locals spell it with an *s*.

⁵ Between 2017 and 2019, and in 2022, I traveled to Paucartambo during the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen* to conduct field research. During those trips, I was able to learn about and participate in the activities of the dance troupe; record their performances; spend time with dancers, former dancers, and other locals who work for/with the dance troupe; and interview some of them. My research project was reviewed and approved by the University of California Davis Institutional Review Board (ID: 1587045-1).

information. I make sure to always ask the troupe if I can talk about the activities they invite me to participate in. Moreover, I always discuss my ideas with the dancers, to incorporate their feedback into my work. My ultimate goal is to collaboratively record and explain the practices and traditions of the troupe.

The analytical framework of this article reflects my process of engagement with the Qhapaq Qolla dance troupe. It was developed on the basis of conversations I had with dancers during my research trips.⁶ In those conversations, dancers have used the Quechua concept of *tinkuy* to describe encounters that take place during the festivity.⁷ Dancers generally use *tinkuy* to refer to meetings or encounters. Dictionaries commonly translate *tinkuy* as “to meet someone” (Cusihuamán 1976, 146; Hornberger S. and Hornberger 2013, 113). But conceptually, *tinkuy* encapsulates a lot more than just the mere notion of an encounter. The anthropologist Catherine J. Allen (2002, 176), in her ethnography of the Andean community of Sonqo—located in the province of Paucartambo—describes *tinkuys* as “ritual encounter[s]” or “ritual dance-battles” that use and liberate strong energies. In her book, Allen records the use of *tinkuys* to define community boundaries. According to the anthropologist, the Sonqo community needs *tinkuys* “to define itself, for the encounter affirms the community’s separateness” as they integrate with other communities (Allen 2002, 177). *Tinkuys* provide spaces to negotiate and (re)create coexisting relationships of similarity and difference. In *tinkuy*, “one experiences an opponent’s similarity to oneself as well as his or her difference. If there were no basic similarity between the combatants, they could not join in battle; but if there were no differences between them, they would not have a reason to fight” (177). *Tinkuy* is not only used to refer to encounters between humans. Allen points out that Sonqo community members also use the word to refer to the “mixture of ingredients in cooking or the preparation of medicine” (177). The anthropologist argues that, in general, *tinkuy* “signifies a mixture of different elements that brings something new into existence” (178). Inspired by the dancers’ use of *tinkuy* to explain aspects of the festivity, I decided to analyze their practices using the concept as a key analytic. This way, I intend to conduct research collaboratively with the troupe, as my own thinking is shaped by how the Qhapaq Qolla articulate and theorize their own practice. Nevertheless, the arguments I present here are my own, and any responsibility for mistakes or shortcomings is only mine.

The use of the Quechua word *tinkuy* to refer to encounters should not be confused with the popular Andean dance called Tinku. The dance is featured in several Andean festivities, like the Festividad de la Virgen de la Candelaria in Puno, Peru; and the Carnaval de Oruro in Bolivia. Nevertheless, Tinku is not performed in the Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen, and the Qhapaq Qolla dance is neither based on nor directly inspired by the Tinku dance. The Qhapaq Qolla represent llama herders and traders who in the past traveled to Paucartambo from the Qollao region south of Cusco, close to the border between Peru and Bolivia. They did the trip annually to trade goods, which they carried on llamas. *Qhapaq* is Quechua for “wealthy” and “elegant,” and *Qolla* refers to the residents of the Qollao region. While the Qhapaq Qolla use the term *choreography* to refer to their performances in the festivity, the dance does not have a traditional dance choreography. Although the performances include singing and dancing, and have sets of rules and protocols dancers must follow, they also allow ample space for improvisation. When the Qhapaq Qolla

⁶ My conversations with dancers took place in Spanish. While I have an intermediate knowledge of Quechua, dancers recognize me as a Spanish speaker. Nevertheless, they often use Quechua concepts to explain aspects of their performances and traditions. When speaking among themselves outside of their performances, Qhapaq Qolla dancers communicate in a blend of Spanish and Quechua, switching constantly from one language to the other and often using Quechua words with Spanish grammar, and vice versa.

⁷ When talking about the Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen, a dancer once told me: “The festivity is a space for *tinkuy*.” When I asked him what he meant, he explained that the Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen is a space for different participants to encounter one another.

traverse around town, dancers move in parallel lines. Nevertheless, they have the freedom to move away from their line and to interact with and play small pranks on onlookers. When the Qhapaq Qolla move around town, they do a spinning motion with their hands, pretending to be spinning wool. Moreover, they move their feet in rapid succession, imitating the walk of llamas. Another way the Qhapaq Qolla imitate the movement of llamas is in the way they turn around, turning their neck first and then the rest of their body. Qhapaq Qolla dancers describe the Qhapaq Qolla character as a half human, half llama herder and trader.

I build on Allen's scholarship to show how relationships of reciprocity are formed and negotiated during *tinkuy* processes. When the Qhapaq Qolla talk about the *tinkuys* they engage in during the festivity, they refer to their encounters with all participants of the festivity, both human and more than human. These encounters are vital for the success of the celebration. Through the establishment and negotiation of relationships of reciprocity, Qhapaq Qolla dancers (re)new their communal ties to Paucartambo, the Virgen del Carmen, and their dance mates. The encounters the Qhapaq Qolla engage in also generate spaces that allow for the reciprocal exchange of ideas, fostering the negotiation and transformation of identities and community ties.

My work for/with the Qhapaq Qolla illuminates the specific way Qhapaq Qolla dancers conceptualize *tinkuy*. Allen (2002, 267) mentions that Sonqo community members understand *tinkuy* as a "mixture whose ingredients lose their separate identities in a new whole." For the Qhapaq Qolla, though, *tinkuys* do not disintegrate the distinct identities of the elements that encounter. Moreover, they do not dismantle any hierarchies between those elements. Instead, the new whole is formed by the negotiated relationships of reciprocity of the elements, a relationship in which each one has a specific role to serve. In this new whole, strong and fluid communal ties are formed through the enactment of the individual roles of each participant to the encounter. The knowledge that is generated through the negotiation and enactment of these roles leads to the transformation of the participants.

During the festivity, the Qhapaq Qolla use food and drinks to mediate the encounters they engage in. *Tinkuy* processes need a space for the encountering elements to negotiate and level their similarities and differences so they can develop generative relationships of reciprocity. By analyzing the role of sharing food and drinks in the lunch prepared by the new Qhapaq Qolla and in the *t'aqwinakuy*, I illuminate the inner workings of *tinkuys*. During the event, Qhapaq Qolla dancers share food and drinks to develop spaces where they can encounter one another. In those spaces, dancers engage in meaningful conversations in which they express their points of view, share their ideas and desires, and transmit vital knowledge to ensure their successful participation in the festivity.

My introduction of *tinkuy* as the central analytic concept of this study is also inspired by scholarship in Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS). The study of performance practices has been an important venue for scholars of the Andes to research the development of identities in the region (Cánepa Koch 1998; Authier 2009; Mendoza 2000, 2008; Poole 1990; Tucker 2013).⁸ As academics have argued, music, dance, and festivals have historically been key sites for Andean peoples to explore and challenge their identities. Nevertheless, while an important focus of Andean performance studies has been

⁸ I focus on events that outsiders usually consider performances, like the choreographies dancers perform during the festivity, and activities that they do not, like the meal that takes place the day after the celebration ends, because dancers do not make a clear distinction between them. Qhapaq Qolla dancers are always expected to shape their behavior based on the Qolla character, even during their daily lives. Thus, it is not possible to fully separate "performance" from "everyday life," as they are both constantly influencing each other. Thus, I follow Richard Schechner's (2001, 160–61) definition of performance: "Something 'is' performance when, according to the conventions, common usages, or traditions of a specific culture at a given historical moment, an action or event is said to be performance."

the practices of peoples with strong ties to their Indigenous heritages, scholars have generally not favored research methodologies that center local ways of knowing and being. Scholars of Native American and Indigenous studies advocate for the privileging of local epistemologies when working for/with peoples of Indigenous descent (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Smith 2012; Wilson 2008). Thus, I analyze the practices of the Qhapaq Qolla through a local concept that dancers utilize. This approach allows me to better understand how the Quechua heritage of the dancers influences their identities, communal relationships, and responsibilities.

The *qhari* cook

Preparation and sharing of food have a central role in the first activity new Qhapaq Qolla dancers participate in. This activity takes place the day after they have been accepted into the troupe. The event clearly shows how food mediates spaces in which Qhapaq Qolla dancers share knowledge that allows for the exploration and (re)shaping of identities. The night of July 18, individuals interested in joining the Qhapaq Qolla have the opportunity to demonstrate that they have what it takes to become members of the troupe. Trials are held in public, and anyone interested in becoming a Qhapaq Qolla can apply. Openings vary every year—over the past few years, they have usually ranged from two to four. Competition is always intense: the number of applicants in the past few years has ranged between fifteen and twenty. In the trials, applicants are asked to present themselves in Quechua, as fluency in the language is part of the requirements to become a member of the troupe. They are also evaluated on their knowledge of the traditions of the troupe and their strength of character. After all prospects have gone through the trial process, members of the troupe who are *antiguos* decide who will be accepted into the group. When the names of the new members of the troupe have been announced, the new dancers have to bring back two boxes of beers, each containing twelve 650-milliliter bottles.⁹ Afterward, the dance troupe, guests, and visitors move to the main square of Paucartambo, where they celebrate the ending of the festivity. There, the beers brought by the new dancers are shared between the Qhapaq Qolla and their guests.

The lunch that is the focus of this article takes place the day after trials. Despite staying up until very late at night celebrating the ending of the festivity, the new dancers have to wake up early the day after to cook for the rest of the troupe (Figure 4).¹⁰ In 2018, the novice dancers managed to cook *lomo saltado con arroz*. *Lomo saltado* is a traditional Peruvian dish consisting of marinated strips of beef steak, accompanied with chopped tomatoes, onions, Peruvian yellow pepper, and cilantro. The dish traditionally has a strong influence from Chinese cuisine: one of the ingredients used to marinate the beef is soy sauce. That gives the meat a savory taste, which blends with the hot taste of the *ají amarillo* sauce, another key ingredient in the marination process. The cooks that year did not use either soy sauce or *ají amarillo* sauce, which clearly demonstrates the limitations they had to work with. Despite all the missing ingredients, though, the other dancers still called the dish *lomo saltado* and approved of its taste. Moreover, some even teased the cooks, jokingly encouraging them to focus on cooking instead of dancing. While the senior dancers ate, the new dancers went around offering to add some *salsa de rocoto* to the *lomo saltado*. This sauce, made from *rocoto* (a red pepper commonly used in Andean cooking), onions, and cilantro, has a fresh but sour taste, as it is seasoned with salt and lime juice. It is also very hot, which is why some dancers refrained from getting some. But even when they refused it, they

⁹ In 2022, new dancers each brought three boxes of beer, but all the previous years I have watched the trials, they brought two.

¹⁰ While it is common for friends of the dance troupe to show up during the lunch, only dancers are formally invited to participate. Nevertheless, when friends attend, they are also given a plate of food.



Figure 4. New Qhapaq Qolla dancers cooking lunch. Photo by the author. 2018.

jokingly dared their dance mates to have some. When the senior dancers finished eating, the cooks picked up the plates and brought them back to the kitchen.

The lunch establishes a distinction between the new dancers vis-à-vis the rest of the troupe. On the one hand are the cooks and servers (the new members of the troupe), and on the other are the ones being served (the rest of the Qhapaq Qolla). When analyzing this event through the lens of *tinkuy*, though, the lunch's ultimate goal is not to cement a static hierarchy among dancers but to initiate the induction process of the new dancers and allow them to explore their identities as new members of the Qhapaq Qolla. Although the lunch is not the first encounter between the veteran Qhapaq Qolla and the new members of the troupe, as they have already encountered one another during trials, it is the first time they all encounter one another as Qhapaq Qolla. Thus, the lunch initiates a process of negotiation to introduce these new dancers into the troupe. The event allows the Qhapaq Qolla to teach new dancers the importance of the labor of everyone who works for/with the troupe. Moreover, the lunch teaches dancers the importance of seniority within the troupe. To achieve its goals, the event introduces and successively dismantles three sets of dichotomies: gender, class, and generational.

Cooking and serving food in the Andes have an important gender component. As scholars of the Andean region have pointed out, Andean societies have a dualistic understanding of the cosmos that predates the Spanish invasion of the region (Allen 2002; Classen 1993; Harris 1986; Platt 1986; Silverblatt 1987). For these societies, the cosmos is divided into sets of opposites that, when brought together, complement each other. Pairs are recognized as comprising a male and a female element. This understanding of the cosmos is reproduced in social organization. The relationship of a human couple, for example, is conceptualized in terms of opposition and complementarity. Allen (2002, 54) points out that in Sonqo, “the household, as a functioning productive unit, is built around this fusion of two different but interdependent kinds of human beings, females and males, with their separate but complementary spheres of knowledge, interest, and ability.” Researchers have recognized a strong gendered division of labor in the Andes (Allen 2002; Corr 2002; Weismantel 1988). This gendered division of labor is flexible, though. In Sonqo, for example, both men and women weave and engage in agricultural tasks (Allen 2002, 59). Nevertheless, even when working on similar activities, they conceptualize them as distinct (Allen 2002, 59).



Figure 5. Female cooks working in the Qhapaq Qolla *cargo wasi*. Photo by the author. 2018.

The *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen* is financed through a sponsorship system led by *carguyus*.¹¹ During the festivity, the *carguyuq* of the Qhapaq Qolla hires a team of cooks to provide food for visitors and guests.¹² The teams of cooks who work for the Qhapaq Qolla comprise almost exclusively women. Although it is not impossible to see a man helping the women cook—particularly during the busiest hours of the day—the kitchen is a female realm (Figure 5). When a man wanders into the kitchen, he is compelled to quickly communicate what he needs so someone can help him and he can leave the space. Cooks tend to change from year to year, as it is the *carguyuq* who chooses whom to hire. Usually, the *carguyuq* hires a head of cooks, and that woman then hires a team of women to work with throughout the festivity. Cooks do not need to be related to anyone in the dance troupe or even to the *carguyuq*; the main driving force behind the decision of whom to hire is cooking skills. After the festivity, locals will often discuss how well the dishes were prepared, particularly the *merienda paucartambina*, a staple of Paucartambo cuisine. The *merienda paucartambina* consists of roasted guinea pig, beef, *kapchi* (a stew of potatoes and fava beans), vegetables, a *rocoto* stuffed with ground beef, a tortilla, and rice. While the taste of the *merienda* is very rich—it blends the taste of several kinds of meat, vegetables, and dairy—the serving is so big that often people who are not from Paucartambo have a hard time finishing the plate.

As mentioned earlier, the Qhapaq Qolla is an all-male dance troupe. The dance troupe comprises about fifty men and one male llama. For the dancers in the troupe, the Qhapaq Qolla character is a conduit through which their Quechua heritage informs the

¹¹ The *carguyuq* is the name sponsors of the festivity receive. Every dance troupe has *carguyuq* (literally, “the one with the burden”). Anyone interested in being *carguyuq* can do so; there are no restrictions. In the years I have worked for/with the Qhapaq Qolla, none of the *carguyus* in the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen* has been a member of the dance troupe, and only one has been a dancer’s family member. The *carguyuq* position is held for one year. Afterward, it is passed on to the next volunteer. Being a *carguyuq* grants one power and prestige. When a former *carguyuq* shows up at the Qhapaq Qolla *cargo wasi*, they are served with deference.

¹² I distinguish visitors from guests because, while the Qhapaq Qolla invite relatives and friends to accompany them during the festivity, they also provide food and drinks to anyone else who visits their *cargo wasi* during mealtimes. They pridefully say that their *cargo wasi* is “la casa del pueblo,” or everyone’s house, and thus that they are obligated to serve everyone who visits.

development of their own identities. In her study of the Qhapaq Qolla dance troupe of San Jerónimo—a group deeply influenced by the Qollas of Paucartambo—the anthropologist Zoila Mendoza (2000, 165) argues that the Qolla character “impersonate[s] the ‘genuine’ indigenous people and the autochthonous culture.”¹³ For the dancers in Paucartambo, the character is at the same time an extension of and a role model for their own selves. The Qhapaq Qolla character is, among other things, able to walk across the Andean mountain range for hours on end, willing to display his emotions in public without shame or remorse, able to drink alcohol for long periods of time without losing control of his actions, and not scared of engaging in open confrontations to settle differences. Thus, dancers are expected to be able to do the same. Dancers describe the Qhapaq Qolla as *qhari*, a Quechua word that means “male” and is related to notions of bravery (Valderrama Fernández and Escalante Gutiérrez 1992, 252). The Qhapaq Qolla expects everyone in the group to always behave as *qhari*, even when not performing. When someone fails to do so, he may face discipline.¹⁴ Dancers base their understanding of *qhari* on ideas they consider “autochthonous”—a term dancers use to refer to Indigeneity—and they employ that understanding to shape their own behavior to conduct themselves as *qhari* during and beyond their performances.

Because cooking is considered a female role in the traditional gendered division of labor in the Andes, during the preparation of the lunch the new dancers are being made to embody a role that is not traditionally theirs. Nevertheless, the requirement to embody a female role is not ultimately meant to place new dancers in a subservient position vis-à-vis the rest of the men in the troupe. On the contrary, it provides a space for the former to learn about the power and prestige associated with providing food. Since pre-Hispanic times, cooking has been understood in the Andes not as an activity women do for men, but as their contribution to the well-being of the household and the community (Gero 1992; Silverblatt 1987). Thus, cooking is an activity that actively empowers women. As the anthropologist Rachel Corr (2002, 8) points out, “The woman who decides the portions for each guest has a significant role . . . [W]omen use this role to empower themselves by denying a person’s social status, acknowledging social relationships, and communicating their feelings by manipulating Andean social expectations of food exchange.”

Food and drinks have played a vital role in the Andes since before the Spanish invasion of the region. The sensory historian Constance Classen (1993, 173) points out that “food and drink were integral to many Inca rituals, not only as part of the postritual celebrations, but within the ritual themselves.” Eating and drinking were used to establish and renew relationships of reciprocity between humans. They also mediated relationships between the living and the dead, and between humans and nonhumans (Classen 1993; Krögel 2011). In general, food and drinks have been vital in Andean societies to maintain balance in the cosmos, establishing and renewing relationships of reciprocity among its different elements (Gose 2019; Salas Carreño 2016).

The Qhapaq Qolla do not take the labor and effort of their cooks for granted. Even though cooks are not listed as members of the dance troupe in the official regulations of the Qhapaq Qolla and often change from year to year, dancers see them as part of the group. In every interview I have done with Qhapaq Qolla dancers, they have praised the cooks’ labor and dedication. One member of the Qhapaq Qolla told me: “Without the cooks we would not be able to do anything . . . Without food there would be no Qhapaq Qolla.”

¹³ While I capitalize the word “Indigenous,” I respected the capitalization choices of the original authors in my quotes.

¹⁴ Discipline in the dance troupe is decided and carried out by the *caporal*. It often takes the form of lashings on the buttocks. A more severe form of discipline is banning a dancer from performing. Depending on the severity of the offense, a dancer can be suspended for several years. The most severe form of discipline is the expulsion from the troupe.

The labor of the cooks is particularly valued during the troupe's annual pilgrimage to the Santuario del Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i—the other big event Qhapaq Qolla dancers participate in.¹⁵ The pilgrimage takes four days and involves walking up and down a mountain. The cooks do most of the walk with the dancers so they can have food ready for them throughout the whole pilgrimage. Without this effort from the women, the Qhapaq Qolla would not be able to sustain themselves. Both during the pilgrimage and the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen*, dancers express their appreciation for the cooks by bringing them out of the kitchen the last night of the celebrations so they can join the farewell party.

The dance troupe's internal organization also reflects the recognition of the feminine within the dance troupe. The second in command in the dance troupe is the *imilla*, the only female character in the Qhapaq Qolla.¹⁶ Performed by a man, the *imilla* grants power and responsibility to the dancer who embodies the character.¹⁷ The *imilla* is chosen directly by the *caporal* and serves as his confidant and adviser. The dancer who embodies the *imilla* does not have to already be a member of the troupe; the *caporal* has the freedom to bring in whomever he wants. Embodying the role of the female cooks teaches the new dancers the value and prestige of the feminine within the Qhapaq Qolla. Moreover, new dancers learn that, while cooking is not an activity traditionally performed by men, the gendered division of labor is flexible. The llama herders and traders whom the Qhapaq Qolla character is based on often traveled without women, so they had to cook for themselves. Cooking does not make the Qhapaq Qolla less *qhari*. On the contrary, being able to cook is a skill expected of the Qhapaq Qolla. Thus, it is part of the attributes that makes him *qhari*. Masculinity in the case of the Qhapaq Qolla does not equal an absence of femininity. Instead, it is defined by the presence and constant negotiation between the two.

The Qhapaq Qolla servant

The second dichotomy established and subverted as the new Qhapaq Qolla dancers cook and serve lunch for their peers is that of class. Serving food makes the new members of the dance troupe embody the role of servants, historically associated in Peru with the lower classes and the peasantry. During colonial times, a system of haciendas was instituted in the country. *Hacendados* controlled local political power and implemented a labor system that consisted in allowing peasants to work hacienda lands in usufruct, in exchange for their labor (Flores Galindo 1994, 226). In the Andes, peasants were primarily Quechua speakers with little to no formal education. *Hacendados* used violence and coercion to dominate and exploit them (Cánepa Koch 1998, 72). The exploitation of peasants in the haciendas remained common until long after the independence of Peru in the early nineteenth century (Mariátegui 2011, 108). The philosopher and journalist José Carlos Mariátegui (2011, 108) reports that about a hundred years after Peru became a republic, “in the province of Paucartambo the property owner grants the use of his land to a group

¹⁵ The pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i is the largest one in the Andes. Up to one hundred thousand pilgrims travel yearly to an image of Jesus Christ painted on a rock at the foot of a glacier at about 4,800 meters (16,000 feet) above sea level.

¹⁶ While *imilla* is Aymara for “young woman,” for the Qhapaq Qolla, the character is the adult wife of the *caporal*. In an interview, the dancer who currently embodies the *imilla* mentioned that she is the mother of all the Qollas and has an authority over them: “The *caporal* is the father, the *imilla* is the mother, and the rest are the sons The *imilla* has authority, she governs over the Qollas.” The authority of the *imilla* is limited only by the power of the *caporal*.

¹⁷ The *imilla* does not behave like the male Qhapaq Qolla during the troupe's performances. Nevertheless, the dancer who embodies the *imilla* is expected to behave like any other member of the troupe in any other situation. For more information about the performance of the *imilla* and the negotiation of gender ideals in Qhapaq Qolla performances, see Tello Barreda 2020.

of Indigenous peoples with the condition that they do all the required work for the cultivation of the estate lands that have been reserved for the owner The tenants, or ‘yanaconas’ as they are known in the province, also are obliged to transport the landowner’s crops to this city with their own beasts without payment, and to serve as *pongos* [providers of domestic service] on the same estate, or more commonly in Cuzco where the owners prefer to live.”

Considering the historical ethnic and class components of servitude in the Andes, it may be inferred that the senior Qhapaq Qolla look to elevate themselves by forcing new dancers to embody the role of servants. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the previous section, being able to decide the size of the portions served in a meal grants cooks and servers with power in Andean communities. Moreover, the Qhapaq Qolla recognize the labor of everyone who works for/with them during the festivity. One such person is the *llama kamayuq* (Quechua for “the one who provides the llama”). As mentioned earlier, one of the members of the dance troupe is an adult male llama. The llama is especially trained to be able to dance with the Qhapaq Qolla—as it needs to be comfortable around people—and is replaced only when it passes away. The owner of the llama is the *llama kamayuq*. He serves the dance troupe by lending them his llama without charge and by taking care of it throughout the year. While the *llama kamayuq* owns a house in Paucartambo, he also owns property and spends lots of time in the *comunidad campesina* (peasant community) of Espinguni, located in the highlands of Paucartambo. The *llama kamayuq* dresses up in the style of the *gente del campo* (people of the countryside), the term people from Paucartambo use for folks who live in rural places and work in agricultural and/or pastoral labor.

The memories of the abuses perpetrated by the *hacendados* are still fresh in the minds of Qhapaq Qolla dancers, who have a very negative view of the history of the hacienda system. Often when people are perceived as too bossy, they are chastised for behaving like *hacendados* or for treating others as “their indios” (their Indians). When the Qhapaq Qolla encounter people that serve them, they treat them with the utmost respect and look for ways to show how grateful they are for their labor. When the *llama kamayuq* arrives to the *cargo wasi* during the festivity, he is greeted warmly by the dancers and is treated to a box of beers, which he can share with whomever he wants. Moreover, when the Qhapaq Qolla visit Espinguni for an event in which they celebrate their llama, they bring a series of gifts for the *llama kamayuq* and the rest of people who take care of the animal. This gift, called *sumaq sunqu* (Quechua for “sweet heart”), consists of groceries that are hard to find in rural communities and toys for children.

The way the *llama kamayuq* is greeted when he arrives to the *cargo wasi* demonstrates the importance of sharing alcoholic beverages to (re)new relationships of reciprocity. When the Qhapaq Qolla offer beer to the *llama kamayuq*, they are showing him that he is a member of the Qhapaq Qolla community and that they are very grateful for the labor he does for the dance troupe. The sharing of alcoholic beverages to establish and (re)new relationships of reciprocity is not limited to humans, though. The first morning of the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen*, before the crack of dawn, a group of four Qollas called the *llameros* (Spanish for “llama herders”) drives up to Espinguni to retrieve the llama that dances with the troupe. When the human Qollas meet with the llama, they distribute bottles of beer among themselves and start drinking. After everyone has finished their beer, they force-feed one to the llama (Figure 6). When the animal has finished drinking, one of the dancers drinks the residue from the bottle. The Qhapaq Qolla maintain that the llama is not a pet but a fellow dancer. By sharing a beer with the animal, the *llameros* (re) new their relationship of reciprocity and interdependence with the nonhuman dancer.

The Qhapaq Qolla have the utmost respect for the labor of the people who work for/with them, and they show their appreciation through several means, including the privileged one of sharing food and drinks. Thus, the choice of making new dancers cook and serve food—a vital activity that empowers whomever is performing the task and



Figure 6. Qhapaq Qolla dancers giving beer to the dance troupe's llama. Photo by the author. 2017.

serves an important role in the festivity—is meant to teach new dancers the importance of the labor of the people who work for/with the troupe. Servants are vital to the success of the festivity. While they are not in the spotlight during the celebration, they are as integral to it as the dancers themselves.

The novice and the senior Qhapaq Qolla

The final dichotomy established during the lunch is a generational one. As mentioned, the act of cooking and serving food creates a distinction between novice and veteran dancers. This distinction is very important for the Qhapaq Qolla: veteran dancers serve the role of maintaining and passing on knowledge about the traditions of the dance troupe. Currently, there are only a handful of dancers who are over fifty years old. The Qhapaq Qolla always say that their dance is for youngsters, given how physically demanding it is—it involves, among other things, running, jumping, and engaging in lashing battles called *yawar unu*.¹⁸ Nevertheless, while older dancers may struggle with the physicality of the dance, they are the ones who better know the traditions of the Qhapaq Qolla, both the ones performed in public and the ones maintained in private. The rest of the dance troupe highly values the veterans' insight. Less experienced dancers look up to veteran ones and try to learn from them the history and traditions of the dance troupe. Without the experience and knowledge of the more senior dancers, some of the traditions of the troupe may go dormant. And that is a big worry among the Qhapaq Qolla. A common conversation when dancers get together is the current state of the dance troupe.

Undoubtedly, seniority grants a Qhapaq Qolla prestige. When the troupe members discuss any important matter, they actively seek the input of the more senior dancers and listen carefully when one of them voices his opinions. Moreover, many times the *caporal* of the dance troupe, despite having complete power to make decisions, seeks the advice of senior dancers. Although the responsibility for any decision falls on him, he leans on the experience of the senior dancers to ensure the well-being of the troupe. It is telling that for

¹⁸ For more information on the festivity and the dance troupes, their choreographies, and traditions, see Cánepa Koch (1998); Authier (2008, 2009); Villasante Ortiz (1989).

the 2022 *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen*, the *caporal* appointed the two most senior dancers as captains, so he could lean on them during the festivity.¹⁹

Cooking for more senior dancers reinforces in the new members of the troupe the importance of honoring experience. Food and drinks also allow the Qhapaq Qolla to teach the new members of the troupe about their internal system of hierarchies. Nevertheless, considering that the lunch allows the troupe to eat together one last time in the context of the festivity, the activity also highlights the importance of the labor of the novice dancers. Without them and their labor, the Qhapaq Qolla would not be gathered that afternoon.

The activity also introduces the newer dancers to the task of being the providers of food and drinks. That will be part of their responsibilities the following year as Qhapaq Qolla, as they will be tasked with making sure their guests and visitors have access to meals and refreshments. Cooking and serving food during the lunch allow the new dancers to learn about their future roles as members of the troupe. The activities also provide them with a space to rethink and challenge their identities and expectations about what it means to be a Qhapaq Qolla. As members of the troupe, they will engage in relationships of reciprocity with, among others, cooks, servers, fellow dancers, guests, and visitors. Moreover, because their identity as Qhapaq Qolla permeates their daily lives—given that, for Qhapaq Qolla dancers, the character is both an extension of their own selves and a role model—experiences like this one push new dancers to explore and reshape their own identities and community responsibilities.

Eating and drinking we level each other

The *t'aqwinakuy*, an event that takes place every year right after the meal prepared by the new dancers, demonstrates the negotiation and leveling processes that take place during *tinkuys*. Moreover, it showcases how a *qhari* is expected to behave. The *t'aqwinakuy* is a meeting at which members of the troupe who are *antiguos* reflect, comment on, and critique their participation in the festivity. This meeting is private: anyone who does not meet the requirements to participate in the *t'aqwinakuy* cannot enter the room where the meeting is taking place.²⁰ Qhapaq Qolla dancers use the *t'aqwinakuy* to iron out discrepancies that may have arisen during the festivity and to renew their relationships of reciprocity. This is the time for troupe members to openly voice their critiques and solve their disagreements. If dancers do not bring an issue up during the *t'aqwinakuy*, they will lose the opportunity to discuss it altogether. A *qhari* is brave enough to confront his peers in front of the rest of the troupe and defend his position passionately. The *t'aqwinakuy* meeting prevents dancers from gossiping or talking behind their peers' backs, which are understood as actions a *qhari* would never engage in. Everything that is discussed during the *t'aqwinakuy* remains private—dancers are not allowed to disclose what happened in the meeting. The *t'aqwinakuy* does not have a set duration; it will not end until discrepancies have been ironed out and the troupe is ready to move on. The event formally ends the festivity for the Qhapaq Qolla. When it is over, dancers can start looking forward to what comes next for the troupe.

T'aqwi is a Quechua verb that translates to “dig down, search out, conduct a search” (Hornberger S. and Hornberger 2013, 119). The suffix *-naku* turns the verb into a reciprocal action. Thus, *t'aqwinakuy* can be translated as digging each other down, searching each other out, or just scrutinizing each other. *T'aqwi*, in its most literal sense, is an action

¹⁹ That year, the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen* was making a return after having been canceled for two straight years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

²⁰ I have never personally attended the *t'aqwinakuy*. The three times I have accompanied the Qhapaq Qolla during the event, I stayed with the dancers who, given their lack of seniority, could not participate. All the information I have about the meeting comes from dancers who are allowed to participate.

conducted to the land. The Spanish definition Hornberger S. and Hornberger (2013, 119) provide is “*escabar la tierra con profundidad, Hacer hueco en la tierra, sacando la tierra,*” which translates to “Dig down deep into the land, make a hole in the ground, taking out the soil.”

The use of the verb *t’aqwiy* to name an event meant to resolve conflict and renew relationships of reciprocity links the activity to other processes that also take their names from Quechua words that relate to the land. In his discussion of the concept of *yanantin*, the anthropologist Tristan Platt (1986, 250–252) mentions the Quechua noun *pampa* in relation to processes that “make flat” and “pair up” elements. *Pampa* means “Plain, Flat area, Floor, Ground” (Hornberger S. and Hornberger 2013, 69). As mentioned, traditional Andean societies order the cosmos as gendered sets of opposites that, when brought together, complement each other. *Yanantin* is the name for a pair of elements that complement each other. Platt (1986, 245) points out that elements that naturally come in pairs—like the hands or eyes in a body—are recognized as *yanantin*. Elements that are not naturally symmetrical can also be *yanantin*. For example, a couple comprising a man and a woman is *yanantin* (Allen 2002; Classen 1993; Platt 1986). Because elements that are not symmetrical lack congruence as a perfect pair, to become *yanantin*, “their union must be forged, their disparities countered” (Platt 1986, 252). Platt (1986, 250–251) links this process to notions of making flat, paring, and sharing boundaries.

A Quechua verb that refers to a process of leveling is *pampachay*. Although *pampachay* literally means “to flatten the soil,” it is also used to refer to the leveling of relationships. In her discussion of the pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the Señor de Qoyllur Rit’i, Mendoza (2017, 130) points out that *pampachay* has been translated “since the sixteenth century as *perdonar* or *perdón* (‘to forgive’ or ‘forgiveness’).” The pilgrims Mendoza worked with walk from their hometown to the sanctuary—a journey that takes three days—to achieve *pampachay*. Despite the connection between the term *pampachay* and Christian notions of sin, forgiveness, and cleansing, the process of *pampachay* is not achieved through Christian means. Instead, it is done through activities that combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic sensory experiences. Pilgrims achieve *pampachay* “through movement while climbing uphill, carrying big rocks on the back and receiving lashes, all with the appropriate music and utterances” (Mendoza 2017, 142).

The process to form *yanantins* can be defined as *tinkuy*. When two elements encounter each other to bring a new pair into existence, they undergo a leveling process that liberates strong energies. When the leveling process is concluded, the elements become integrated into a relationship of reciprocity. Because there is a need for simultaneous relationships of similarity and difference among the elements that unite in *tinkuy*, there needs to be a moment in the *tinkuy* process that examines and highlights those relationships. I argue that the *t’aqwinakuy* is one of those moments. To renew their relations of reciprocity after their participation in the festivity, the Qhapaq Qolla need to engage in an encounter where they explore and level their own relationships of similarity and difference.

During the *t’aqwinakuy*, dancers highlight their differences through their criticisms of the peers’ behaviors.²¹ Then, they work together to counter those disparities, and renew their relationships and their commitment with the dance troupe. During the *t’aqwinakuy*, discussions often get heated as dancers challenge each other. This liberation of strong

²¹ Although accompanying the dance troupe over the years during the *Festividad de la Virgen del Carmen* has allowed me to develop a good idea about what is discussed in the *t’aqwinakuy*, I do not give specific examples of the topics I think are debated. I consider disclosing that kind of private information about the dance troupe and its members a betrayal of the trust the Qhapaq Qolla have in my work. However, dancing styles and skills are not privileged topics of discussion. Generally, discussions are focused on the behavior of the dancers, not only during their public performances in the town but also during all the time they are wearing the Qhapaq Qolla outfit.

energy is a characteristic of *tinkuys* (Allen 2002, 176). The meeting ends when the disagreements have been leveled, a renewal that signals to the recreation of the dance troupe, allowing the Qhapaq Qolla to move on from that year's festivity.

The sharing of food and drinks plays a vital role during the *t'aqwinakuy*. The lunch that the dancers share right before the meeting highlights their relationships of similarity in the face of an event that will focus on their relationships of difference. Sharing food reminds dancers that they are all members of a community and that the discussions they will have during the meeting are necessary for the survival of the dance troupe. Drinks also play an important role in the *t'aqwinakuy*, as dancers drink beer during the meeting. The beers mediate this encounter where relationships of difference are explored, allowing dancers to share drinks as they criticize one another.

The lunch that takes place right before the *t'aqwinakuy*, on top of being part of the *tinkuy* process just discussed, also highlights a different set of concurrent relationships of similarity and difference, this time between senior and novice dancers. Eating together reinforces the sense of community among dancers, highlighting a relationship of similarity. But considering that the new dancers are made to cook for the rest of the troupe, the lunch also highlights the relationship of difference between the cooks and the rest of the dancers. This lunch is the first of many events that will introduce the new dancers into the troupe. The *tinkuy* process that takes place during the lunch is the first of many that will level the differences between dancers, until the novice Qhapaq Qolla have been fully integrated into the group. The establishment and successive collapsing of dichotomies during the lunch is part of the larger process of induction of the new Qhapaq Qolla. When the novice dancers have been successfully introduced into the dance troupe, the group itself will have become something new, as it will have incorporated new individuals, with their own energies, life experiences, and personalities.

Final thoughts

In this article, I have discussed the role of food and drinks in processes of community building and the transmission of knowledge among the Qhapaq Qolla of Paucartambo. Practices involving food and drinks mediate social relationships and contribute to the development and renewal of relationships of reciprocity. New members of the dance troupe are introduced to the Qhapaq Qolla in an event that centers on the sharing of food and drinks. This event allows them to learn about the roles that cooks and servers play during the festivity and the importance of seniority in the troupe. During the lunch, new dancers are made to embody three different roles: the female cooks, the servers, and the novice Qhapaq Qolla. Through the establishment and collapsing of three dichotomies—gender, class, and generational—the new dancers are shown the importance of the labor of different people who work for/with the troupe. Moreover, they learn about the intricacies of the hierarchy system within the troupe.

This article has also focused on how similarities and differences among elements are negotiated during *tinkuy* processes. In *tinkuys*, there is a need to highlight the coexisting relationships of similarity and difference among the elements that will unite. When the similarities and differences have been made visible, the leveling process between the elements starts, leading to the creation of something new. In the context of the Qhapaq Qolla, the events that take place the day after the festivity ends shows the inner workings of *tinkuy* processes. During the *t'aqwinakuy*, senior members of the troupe explore their relationships of difference to iron out the disagreements that may have arisen during the festivity. The meal that takes place immediately before that event allows dancers to explore their relationships of similarity as they eat together. In both events, food and drinks mediate the exploration of those coexisting relationships of similarity and difference.

The *t'aqwinakuy* also illuminates the inner workings of an Andean cultural protocol to manage and resolve differences. Utilizing *tinkuy* as an analytic to study the event, I have shown that the *t'aqwinakuy* allows the Qhapaq Qolla to solve their differences through a generative process aimed at renewing relationships of reciprocity. This protocol prevents the widespread use of violence when solving conflicts. The *t'aqwinakuy* challenges common stereotypes held by the Peruvian social, political, and academic elites about violence in the Andes. Those elites often characterize Andean peoples as either very submissive or as extremely violent. Understanding how, when, and why Andean peoples choose to highlight and/or deemphasize their differences in order to (re)affirm their relationships of reciprocity problematize those stereotypes. In particular, showing that encounters that liberate strong energies—sometimes in the form of physical strength—follow specific protocols derived from Quechua epistemology challenge racist ideas about the violent nature of Andean peoples. I hope my work inspires further studies of Andean performance that privilege local epistemologies, not only to better understand those performative practices but also to learn more about how Indigenous knowledges shape the identities, worldviews, and lived experiences of Andean peoples.

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