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Grief-Singing and the Camera: The Challenges and Ethics of Documentary Production in an Indigenous Andean Community

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This article discusses the ethical challenges of producing the DVD documentary Kusisqa Waqashayku (From Grief and Joy We Sing, 2007) on the musical rituals of the indigenous Quechua community of Hatun Q’eros in the Peruvian Andes. Issues examined are the experience of and responses to video-taping intimate grief-singing in animal fertility rituals, the reception of the documentary amongst various audiences (US and Peruvian academia and general public, and the Q’eros community), and the tension of expressed jealousies within the community resulting from the documentary, with some proposed ways of approaching such situations. The ethnographer’s experience contributes to ongoing concerns about the ethics of representation in ethnographic video production.

Keywords: Quechua; Andes; Q’eros; Filmmaking; Ethnography; Indigenous documentation; Ethics; Music and Ritual; Grief singing; Fertility ritual

Introduction

This is the story of the production of the 2007 DVD documentary Kusisqa Waqashayku (From Grief and Joy We Sing) on the musical rituals of the indigenous Quechua community of Hatun Q’eros, in the Peruvian Andes, with a focus on the challenges and ethics of representation of a non-literate culture in the global medium of the digital, moving image. I recount the creation and reception of the documentary amongst various audiences (US and Peruvian academia and general public, and the

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Q’eros community), and discuss issues of filming the intimate expression of grief through song. The style of this article is therefore ethnographic and processual, posing questions and offering suggestions, rather than giving any concrete solutions. The following is an abstract of the documentary:

**Kusisqa Waqashayku (2007) (From Grief and Joy We Sing).** [http://www.qerosmusic.com](http://www.qerosmusic.com) (Holly Wissler, Producer, Director, Writer).

The Quechua community of Q’eros in the Andes of southeast Peru is renowned for its traditional music, weaving, and spiritual rituals, customs that many Andean communities no longer practice. The Q’eros’ songs, with roots in pre-Hispanic Peru, serve many purposes: to mark the passing seasons of the herder’s calendar, to release personal emotion, to propitiate the Apu (mountain deities) and Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) for animal fertility, and to celebrate during Carnival and other festivities. We witness how the Q’eros use their ritual music to express grief, through the experience of Victor and Juana Flores Salas, brother and sister who were both widowed at a tragically young age. We learn about Q’eros history from Agustín Machacca Flores and Juliana Apasa Flores of the older generation, who sing songs that are no longer a part of community life, yet are remembered by them. We see the annual cycle of Q’eros traditional musical rituals marking the seasons, and the process and challenges of an indigenous mountain people adapting to urban society. The DVD provides viewing choice in three languages: Quechua, Spanish, and English. All profit made from the final product is donated directly to the Q’eros community for work projects.

Before I began writing my PhD dissertation on Q’eros musical rituals, I found myself involved in making a 50-minute documentary about the Q’eros’ annual cycle of musical rituals from some 30 hours of my video-taped field footage. During my first year of intensive research (2005) I lived intermittently with the Q’eros people and documented their musical rituals (by way of video and sound recordings, photographs, and notes from lengthy discussions). In 2006 I participated in every musical ritual throughout the year, dressed as a Q’eros woman and singing with the women. In 2007 I participated again in most rituals, and continued to assimilate everything I had learned and experienced, seeking a deeper understanding of musical production within the context of Q’eros cosmological meaning. 2007 was also the year that Renato Cáceres (primary assistant on the documentary) and Walter Año (technical editor) (both from Cusco) and myself worked in my Cusco apartment every weeknight for about nine months, creating and editing the documentary. The documentary was completed and circulating in the US, Europe and Peru while I was still drafting my dissertation in 2008.

**Background on the Q’eros and their Music**

The Q’eros are monolingual speakers of Quechua, the primary indigenous language of the Andes and language of the Incan Empire (which was at its peak during the fifteenth century). The community of Hatun Q’eros is one of five that constitutes La
Nación Q’eros (the Q’eros Nation), which is both a legal territory and a cultural
group located about 200 km east of the large city of Cusco, the ancient capital of the
Incan Empire.4

The Hatun Q’eros community consists of some 120 families (approximately 900
people) dispersed in six village hamlets (anexos) spread over four river valleys.
Community sustenance is based on the vertical usage of three principal ecological
zones that comprise the territory.5 In the highest zone (puna, 4000–4800 m) the
Q’eros raise their llamas and alpacas (South American camelids). These animals
provide basic sustenance materials, such as fleece for clothes and bedding, meat (fresh
and dried), dung for cooking and fertilizer, bones for weaving-picks and farming
implements, and llama, alpaca and vicuña foetuses as prized components in ritual
offerings, to name a few. In the middle zone (qheswa, 3200–4000 m) the Q’eros
cultivate varieties of potatoes which are the mainstay of their diet. In the lowest zone
(yunga or monte, 1800–2500 m) they grow corn (for food and ceremonial aqha—
fermented corn beer), squash and peppers which complement the daily diet of
potatoes. In the monte they also harvest wood for roof beams and bamboo for
weaving utensils and flutes (Flores Ochoa and Fries 1989, 27–32).

The Q’eros predominantly live in the higher zone where they have their principal
home, since the llamas and alpacas require daily attention and care. The women and
children herd the animals while the men work the fields and crops in the middle and
lower areas. In rain, snow, hail or searing sunlight they must tend the animals, and this
intensive, daily interdependence between the people and their animals creates a quasi-
familial bond, and the animals are considered kin. In addition, most families have one
home in the qheswa and monte as well, and work has traditionally involved a constant
and laborious seasonal movement between these three production zones.

These three zones are within about a 40 km distance, and this accessibility has
minimised the need for external trade with other groups or the development of
colonies in far-reaching areas (Webster 1972, 42). The Q’eros did not suffer relocation
into planned, colonial Spanish settlements (reducciones), and their ethnicity is still
intact, such that they do not marry outside of their cultural group. This relatively
isolated and self-sufficient existence has fostered the continued practice of their
indigenous traditions, including their musical rituals.

However, today the Q’eros have easier access to and interaction with nearby urban
centres than ever before, and for ease and time-saving they often prefer to buy
products rather than manufacture them. Because of this, they are experiencing an
ever-increasing dependence on the cash economy and the need to earn money.
Examples of this are the purchase of corn rather than descending to the monte to
grow it themselves, and the purchase of manufactured sandals, clothes and dyes, to
name a few. Many have the desire to educate their children in urban centres, and
indeed whole families have moved to Ocongate, Paucartambo, and the large city of
Cusco for the sole purpose of education. The Q’eros’ continual interaction with and
migration to urban areas inevitably leads to mestizo cultural adaptation and dilution
of their own ‘Q’eros-ness’, which naturally impacts on their musical production.6 It is
the Q’eros’ autochthonous songs, and changes in them, which have most fascinated me in my research and documentation.

All Q’eros musical rituals and festivals are positioned around, and in celebration of, seasonal markers, such as the corn harvest and times of animal fertility. Because of the familial relationship and dependence on their animals for livelihood, each animal type has its own song (song for the male llamas, the female llamas, the alpacas, the bull, the cow, and so on). These songs are sung during that particular animal’s fertility ritual to the mountain deities (Apu), which are regarded as the animals’ protectors for a healthy life and abundant procreation. The songs are, in essence, prayers and poetic forms of sung discourse, and it is necessary to sing in a specific way for reciprocity, pacification and propitiation to the mountain spirits.

The songs for the indigenous animals (llamas, alpacas) are tritonic (comprised of three pitches), descending melodies sung mostly by the women, though the men sometimes sing too, with a complementary tritonic melody played by the men on the pinkuyllu, a vertical, notched flute. A family or extended group sing and play the same song at the same time, but not coordinated in unison or heterophony; rather, any person sings and plays when s/he wants, so that the sound is continuous and overlapping. A characteristic feature of Q’eros singing is a long sustained note at the end of a phrase, which allows singers to catch up and temporarily sound together as a drone. More important than singing together is that the sound is constant, and in this way there is an unbroken stream of propitiation to the Apu. The resultant musical texture is a very dense overlap of uninterrupted sound.

In addition to the animal fertility songs, the Q’eros have a body of Carnival songs (Pukllay taki), of which one is chosen each year to be the song that is first sung at Pukllay (Carnival), and then throughout the year in daily activities such as herding and weaving. These songs are also tritonic, often about sacred birds and flowers, and many are topical and replete with Q’eros history.

The songs for the European-introduced animals (cows and sheep) are pentatonic, also sung by the women and played by the men on qanchis sipas, two bound rows of seven reed tubes. Only the nearer ‘male’ row of the qanchis sipas are played, while the silent ‘female’ row is there to symbolically support the male counterpart, representative of the Q’eros concept of yanantin, or complementary duality. These songs are also performed in continuous overlap.

One of the most notable musical changes I discovered is that many of the Pukllay taki are no longer sung, nor known, by the younger generations since the historical song texts are no longer pertinent to them. In addition, the youth consider the longer melodies of these older songs to be more ‘difficult’ (sasa). Fortunately I have been able to record about one dozen of these songs which are known only to the elders. Three of these dying songs are in the documentary: ‘Awanakus’, about their weaving; ‘Sortija’, about their past trade of agricultural goods for products made of silver from the Bolivian mines; and ‘Sara Taki’, about the corn harvest. Also, a section of the film is dedicated to the unique Q’eros panpipes used in the cow and sheep fertility rituals, which very few Q’eros play any more; or if they do, they only play the ‘male’ sounding
row of pipes and no longer hold the silent ‘female’ row, as seen in the panpipe-playing in the documentary.

**Q’eros Renown and Outside Documentation**

The Q’eros are regarded by many outsiders as the ‘last Incas’, a renown that began with the first academic expedition into Q’eros (1955), which consisted of a multi-disciplinary research team from Cusco University (UNSAAC—Universidad Nacional de San Antonio Abad del Cusco) (Flores Ochoa and Nuñez del Prado 2005). The fame of this expedition, and resulting reports in both academic articles and editorials in Lima’s *La Prensa* daily newspaper, brought the uniqueness of this cultural group and their Andean lifestyle to general public attention on the national level. The press reports tended to sensationalise the people as a ‘living museum from the Inca era’,11 which created a mystical, Incan aura around Q’eros culture that attracted foreign researchers, and more recently tourists and seekers of spirituality.

The Q’eros, along with many other Andean communities, share the origin myth that connects them to Inkari, the mythical Inca king who founded the Incan Empire. Yet, the Q’eros’ version of the myth often differentiates, indicating that they were the ones who were endowed with spiritual knowledge, while the Incas were bestowed with the political power (Nuñez del Prado 2005 [1958], 201–2). Indeed, they are known and have an international following for their special skill in making ceremonial offerings to the mountain spirits, and are regularly sought by outsiders (urban Peruvians and foreign tourists) for this skill, which today has become a prime source of cash earnings for them.

The Q’eros’ reputation as a people who still live a traditional Andean, possibly Incan, way of life has continued to attract international researchers, photographers and film crews who have made many products (published photographs, dissertations, books and films) about them (in languages other than Quechua), which the Q’eros would never see or benefit from. I believe I have been able to share my research and video documentation more than past researchers, partly due to shorter travel time than ever before between Q’eros and Cusco, and continuous contact during all stages of my research. The modern hands-on technology of video-making permitted me to show recently shot raw footage on the television screen in my Cusco apartment to a constant stream of Q’eros visitors. Because of this, and the fact that all post-production of ‘Kusisqa Waqashayku’ was carried out in my Cusco apartment, many Q’eros were able to see and participate in the editing process of the documentary. For example, Isaac Flores Machacca, main informant in the documentary and knowledgeable Q’eros elder, reviewed every word of narration, and often provided subtle nuances and outright corrections to my script.

The seed idea for making the documentary was not generated by me, but by my Q’eros *compadre* Agustín Machacca Flores (pictured in Figure 1). While watching filmmaker and musician John Cohen’s first film about the Q’eros, *The Shape of Survival* (1979), Agustín was intensely moved by seeing his deceased relatives and
community members, as well as past customs they no longer practise. When we finished viewing the documentary, Agustín turned to me and with great intention said, ‘comadre, you have been taking lots of videos; can we make something like this for my children and grandchildren to see, just like I am seeing my grandfathers in Wiracocha John’s movies?’

I was deeply moved by Agustín’s request, and I thought ‘he is right’. My extensive videotaping of their unique songs, rituals and daily life should not just be for the end-goal of obtaining my PhD and the dissemination of new Andean musical knowledge to academia; rather, it should be made available directly to the Q’eros. The oral and visual format of the moving image had already proved to be an accessible resource to them by the hours watched on my television screen, as opposed to a dissertation (and later book) that they probably would/could not read. Therefore, I knew that the documentary must be in Quechua, and later I decided to make it available to a wider audience, with viewing choices also in Spanish (for Peru) and English (for audiences abroad). In this way, my hope was that the documentary would engender respect for the rich indigenous culture that many Peruvians are unaware even exists in their own country, and encourage respect for indigenous cultures in general.
Currently the only viewing possibility of the DVD in the community of Hatun Q’eros itself is at the government school. Recently, a satellite dish, solar power panels, and computers with internet access were set up in the school by Proyecto Huascaránc (2006), a nationwide government project that has installed satellite dishes and computers in many rural communities for purposes of education and communication. Though these computers are rarely used in the actual school curricula, it is possible to view DVDs on them, so the resource is there. It seems, however, that this school is likely to be closed down in the near future due to new schools that are either in operation or under construction in the higher altitudes closer to where the people live. In future years, the cultural landscape of Q’eros is also set to change, with a road due to be built that will eventually link the Hatun Q’eros community to the electricity grid, which will allow for the introduction of televisions and other desired amenities. For the time being the Q’eros’ most common access to DVD viewing is in the urban areas they frequent.

**Grief-Singing and the Camera**

The documentary follows the yearly cycle of Q’eros musical rituals, with contextual information and perspectives on change provided in interviews with Q’eros representatives. A secondary focus of the documentary is the sung expression of grief and loss during animal fertility rituals. This focus raised issues of ethical challenges and considerations, both in filming the grief-singing sessions, and the decision to include some of this footage in the final production.

I had my first, and what turned out to be the most intense, encounter with expression of grief through song in early 2005, when I had just begun my extended research in Q’eros. I was invited to witness the Phallchay ritual with Isaac Flores Machacca and his family. Phallchay is an annual ritual taking place at the peak of the rainy season (February or March) that centres on the female llamas and alpacas, and propitiation to the animals’ protective mountain spirits for their health and abundance (see Figure 2).

All families of the community individually gather their herds in the family’s **mullucancha** (sacred corral) on Phallchay morning, in order to sing the fertility song (‘Pantilla T’ika’) for the animals. The verses of this song are indicative of their close bond with the animals and reverence for the animals’ protective mountain spirits. Two examples are ‘Come, my beloved Mother, let’s rest’ (in reference to the female llamas and alpacas) and ‘My beloved Apu Waman Lipa, erect mountain’ (Waman Lipa is the largest and most important mountain god in Q’eros).

Isaac, with his son Víctor and daughter Juana, had also gathered the family herd to begin the ritual singing and scattering of the red gentian (**phalcha**) flowers on the animals (a metaphor for the animals’ ‘flowering’ and procreation). Víctor was, and has remained, one of my key music informants, since he both plays and articulates well the meaning of Q’eros autochthonous music, and is also adept at playing and singing popular Andean music heard on the radio and in music videos, a new trend...
of the Q’eros youth. He is a bridge between the old and the young, which he demonstrates in the documentary by playing and talking about the varying musical styles.

However, the ritual for the family that year took place in an atmosphere of crisis and tragedy. Víctor, then only 19 years old, had just buried his young wife who died only one week before. Their little son was now living with his wife’s mother one valley over, since men do not raise children on their own. Víctor, therefore, was suddenly bereft of both wife and child, and in extreme distress.

Incredibly, Víctor’s sister, Juana, had also been widowed only three weeks prior to her own brother’s loss. I was dumbstruck by such dramatic bereavement simultaneously experienced by two siblings. The sudden death of two young adults spoke forcefully of the harsh, subsistence life in Q’eros, where illness and death are a more frequent part of daily life than I am accustomed to—deaths that in the urban world with modern health care probably would have been prevented.

All ritual actions, which included singing the fertility song and playing the pinkuyllu flute, were enveloped in profound grief; yet, through intermittent weeping, they continued the ritual. First Isaac sang the three-note, descending melody of ‘Pantilla T’ika’ on his own, and Víctor played the complementary three-note melody.
on his pinkuylu. Juana eventually began to sing in her strong, assertive voice that I have come to recognise and love.

The morning unfolded into a powerful outpouring of grief through song. Isaac, Victor and Juana sang the fixed melody of ‘Pantilla T’ika’ and freely improvised text about their loss and feelings. I was surprised at how articulate they were about details of their bereavement. Juana and Victor sang their spouses’ names and verses such as ‘How is it that you are not here?’, ‘Why did you abandon me?’, ‘I have children who need to eat and drink’ and ‘He left me alone at the foot of Chochuqena’ (the nearby Apu where Juana lived with her husband’s family).¹³

There was a seamless flow between dialogue and song, and improvised words seemed to emerge effortlessly and naturally, fitting neatly into the designated rhythmic space of the short verses. Sometimes they sang what they had just been speaking about. It was as if the song was there hovering, to be dipped into as wanted or needed. Music was the constant thread that allowed Isaac, Juana and Victor an unfolding of shared pain and deep sadness, a processing of grief through song.¹⁴

I asked myself, ‘Is this some kind of magnificent, gut-wrenching anomaly I have just been privy to, or do other Q’eros families do this?’ This question became seminal

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**Figure 3** Juana Flores Salas on the left with her two young children and younger sister, and Victor Flores Salas on the right. This photo was taken the day after the grief-singing session (photograph by Holly Wissler, February 2005).
to my research. I videotaped about an hour of this grief-singing with Isaac, Víctor and Juana in their home. I had asked their permission, but was still nervous about what in my culture would be an invasion of privacy. I was thus hyper-aware of their response to my taping and the fact that I held a camera not more than six feet from them, focusing even on close-ups of their pained faces. And yet I saw and felt how they seemed to be quite comfortable. More than that, I sensed that they seemed to feel honoured by my intense interest. I did not sense any inhibition or self-consciousness on their part; rather, the spontaneity of their singing and weeping continued to flow.

On two occasions my taping was specifically acknowledged: the first time was when Víctor raised his hand and pointed to the camera and then over to Juana, silently indicating that I should move my camera to focus on her now, since she was the one currently singing; and the second time when Isaac changed his singing from ‘Pantilla T’īka’ to ‘Thurpa’ (Carnival song for that year). Víctor stopped crying and reported to me ‘this is “Thurpa” now’. I was amazed that amidst his weeping he was helping me do my job, both in taping and identifying the songs, which let me know that my working presence was welcomed and a part of the whole situation. Also, I think the fact that I too was crying, both about their grief and my own regarding my recently deceased parents that had been triggered by feeling their loss, added to the organic connection of all aspects, since I was directly and personally involved rather than coolly observing.

The family’s ease with a gringa newcomer in their family, and a filming one at that, helped me to perceive a difference between my culture and theirs with regard to the concept of privacy and expression of grief. I felt something communal and spontaneously musical about expressing loss in a way I had never experienced in my culture; that this ritual space—with family and animals, through singing, with witness—was the space for grieving. Since these ritual complexes are about the perpetuation of life, they are therefore also about the vital antithesis—death—and remembrance of loss naturally surfaces. The articulation of such strong emotion for the Q’eros is naturally expressed in communal family ritual, and not on one’s own, since they live a communal life where relationship with the collective takes priority over individual utterances. Over the next two years in Q’eros I witnessed many instances of the same contextual expression of loss, and later discovered that John Cohen too had captured similar incidences in his earlier films.15

**Editing Choices, Negotiations and Impact**

When it came time to begin editing the documentary, Víctor requested that his singing and crying about the death of his wife must be in the final version. I could tell by the earnest manner of his request that this aspect of his multi-faceted music-making was important to him. While they were not insistent like Víctor, Isaac and Juana consented to the inclusion of this footage. In addition to Víctor’s request, I felt its inclusion would help personalise the Q’eros instead of showing them in a distant,
objectified and simply informational way. I was interested in showing real people with real concerns, and any viewer would be able to identify with family loss. In this way, the Q’eros’ grieving would serve as a bridge to the hearts of people from other cultures who would be viewing an otherwise unfamiliar way of life. Those ‘other cultures’ begin with people in Cusco who are a mere 200 km away geographically, yet distant in custom and belief, and extend to my compatriots in the United States, in their fast-paced, highly technological lives.

I have been challenged, both in academic settings and among friends, about the choice to include the intimacy of grieving in such a publicly viewed format. I have noticed that the intimate scenes of grieving often cause discomfort, since culturally we tend to grieve privately and not communally. The inclusion of the grief-singing highlights both the boundaries (personal discomfort) and opportunities (cross-cultural identification) that can arise when one culture observes another very different one through the medium of the moving image.

The showing of the documentary thus far (in the US and Cusco academic and public venues) has stimulated extensive questioning and dialogue. The issues discussed range from impressions about the material in the documentary to thoughts about globalisation, change, and ‘our part in that’, as well as the ethics of cross-cultural interactions. So, as well as informing about indigenous Andean language and culture, the documentary often provokes the viewer to look inward at his/her own culture and ethics. Such discussions can be transformative for some people and hopefully encourage cross-cultural understanding, respect and appreciation.

A specific example of the promotion of cultural respect is the recent inclusion of the documentary in Cusco’s Bilingual Intercultural Education programme (EIB), in some primary and secondary schools in small communities just southeast of Cusco (Ocongate region). The intention of the EIB is to promote Quechua language (which is believed by many, including Quechua linguists, to be endangered) and culture. Indeed, a 15-year-old girl from Ollantaytambo, a mestizo community and popular tourist destination near Cusco, was inspired to comment after viewing the documentary that ‘we should not lose our Andean traditions’, and also ‘that we should not discriminate against people like the Q’eros who live and work in the campo (countryside)’. The Q’eros, then, are able to serve as Quechua culture representatives through the accessible format of the moving image.

While the documentary has been well received in many environments, the most controversial reactions I have encountered have been with the Q’eros themselves. I constantly struggled (and struggle) with the delicate balance between my intentions of necessary documentation in a time of fast change and loss of tradition, and the heartache of some jealousies created in Q’eros by my filming, as well as the Q’eros’ focus on monetary profit from the documentary. For example, in the question and answer session following the Cusco premiere (15 August 2008), one young Q’eros man expressed his anger, declaring that foreigners do not follow through with their promises of monetary benefit for the Q’eros community from publications about
them. He challenged me as to how the community would first see the DVD and then receive the funds from copies sold. I responded by offering an idea previously discussed with the production crew about loading a generator and projector on horseback, and carrying it to Q’eros for the purpose of projecting the documentary on a large wall for the entire community to see. I also reminded him about viewing possibilities on the school computers. I then listed all other donations/projects I had agreed to and accomplished with the community over the past three years, in exchange for my being allowed to film, record, conduct research and simply be there. I asked him to have faith that I will deliver on this one too, and that I had already discussed this issue with the Q’eros authorities. While it was uncomfortable to be challenged in front of an audience of some 400 people, in hindsight I am grateful for his forthright honesty, and the opportunity to begin discussion about such a delicate issue then and there, out loud and communally, with people from Q’eros, Cusco and abroad.

Later the same night, at the cocktail reception, some of my primary informants in the documentary were accused by a few fellow community members of ‘making a lot of money’. While these accusations may be assertions to enforce the status quo of communal equality and reciprocity, I believe capitalistic competition with its resultant jealousies was at play. To expand, I am often at the receiving end of clandestine competition among community members when some Q’eros eagerly ask to sell their weavings and spiritual offerings to my tour groups in Cusco and then instruct me not to tell or invite anyone else. The Q’eros’ increased dependence on the cash economy inevitably erodes the ideal model of Andean equality and reciprocity. In a broader perspective, the Q’eros, like many Andeans, have been historically marginalised by colonial, hacendado (large landowner) and national systems for centuries, so it is understandable that their modern rebuttal would be ‘what do we gain from this video that is being enjoyed by outsiders?’ In this case, it is their cultural property and they are absolutely right in defending it. The Q’eros have a strong sense of communal ownership and the uniqueness of their traditional customs, which is demonstrated during Pukllay (Carnival) when the authorities in charge of the celebration demand a hefty fee from the few visitors who may show up, which is then handed over to community funds. Likewise, any foreigner who works in Q’eros is required to reciprocate to the community in some fashion (in money or in kind), so in this regard I am not alone.

In an effort to ameliorate jealousies and to discuss ways the documentary can serve them, I prepared and delivered a signed statement for the community’s directive committee (president, vice president and secretary) to present at the next monthly assembly meeting to all male heads of family who make consensus decisions for the community. The statement first explained the benefit of musical documentation in the context of rapidly changing traditions, followed by my promise that all proceeds from DVD sales will be given to the community, and a suggestion that they begin discussion of a communal project in which to invest this revenue. I added that I hoped the community would be grateful to the main informants in the
documentary, who have represented the Q’eros culture so well to others, and whose work will generate this unexpected income for the whole community, with the aim of deflecting jealousies specifically aimed at them. I was subsequently informed that the assembly was satisfied with the declaration of proceeds promised, which could start a significant project such as a much-needed bridge or seeds for a pre-school, both desired projects we had previously discussed. In reality, this is just a continuation of the way I have already been conducting research in Q’eros: another promise in return for my work and research with them, on terms we all agree on.

While these continual deals are a matter of course for the rights of research and recording, and are ethically correct and necessary, they do prove to be tiring and a source of personal distress. I used the word ‘heartache’ because, as often happens with researchers in fieldwork, these are a people I have come to love and respect deeply. It has been impossible for me to be the ‘objective researcher’ due to the rich friendships I have formed, the many godchildren I have acquired, the many nights singing with them in ritual, their loving, laughing way and presence in the moment, and all that they have taught me about respecting the earth and mutual reciprocity as a way of life. This internal balancing of the rich and deeply satisfying exchanges of personal connections combined with the stress of the long sessions of coming to an agreement about what my next gift should be is one of my biggest fieldwork challenges.

Many ethnomusicologists have expressed similar struggles regarding their impact in the field and the balance of fieldwork ethics amidst heartfelt involvement with their informants/close friends, as expressed in the now classic edited volume *Shadows in the Field* (Barz and Cooley 2008[1997]), and a special issue of the *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* ‘Fieldwork Impact’ (Cooley 2003). Analogous to my case, in *Shadows in the Field* Anthony Seeger discusses the collaborative production of a music CD with the Amazonian Suyá Indians in Mato Grosso, Brazil, and securing profits from CD sales for the Suyá community (Seeger 2008). Likewise, the ethics of representation in ethnographic film and video production has been a topic for decades now.18 For personal release, I often bemoan and laugh about the challenges of working specifically in Q’eros with mentor and friend John Cohen, who so eloquently and colourfully described his challenges of filming in Q’eros two decades ago, to the point of having stones thrown at him (Cohen 1986).

**Concluding Remarks**

Having expressed all of the above, I still feel that *Kusisqa Waqashayku* has been able to strike a balance that comes close to satisfying everyone involved: an accurate and intimate presentation of waning musical traditions in an aesthetically pleasing production that is accessible to the Q’eros, with monetary profit returning to them, which has allowed me to maintain good relations with both individuals and the community. I believe that the documentary will be appreciated and even valued by the future generations of Q’eros, something that I have already seen with John Cohen’s films, as decades have now passed and Agustín, along with many other
Q’eros, simply marvel at, comment on and are excited by seeing their past customs and people who are no longer alive. Agustín clearly understands the preservative nature and potential of the moving image, demonstrated in his excited comment after his first viewing of the documentary: ‘Now when I die, I will continue to live!’

My hope is that the documentary will be useful to future generations of Q’eros in light of the rapid changes experienced by many of the youth in their adoption of a mestizo lifestyle, which includes the sense of shame they feel around their indigenous traditions in the context of urban culture. Of course, it is up to them what they do with it. The younger Q’eros who view the documentary and hear the selected Q’eros’ representatives as they discuss their customs will perhaps be encouraged to feel respect and pride for their cultural identity, and even be inspired to continue (or revive, as the case may be) their authentically Q’eros music. Indeed, I consciously chose the following interview excerpt with Agustín to be the closing message in the documentary, hoping that future generations would take to heart the lingering words of ‘Grandfather Agustín’:

To my children I will say: Do not be ashamed.
Talk about our community, about our songs, our dances, and the music of Q’eros.
(Kusisqa Waqashayku, 50:53)

Notes

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to Peter Frost (Cusco, Peru) for his diligence and insight in reading and commenting on this article.

[2] My original field footage is housed in the audiovisual archives of the Instituto de Etnomusicología de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Lima). The footage is available for anyone to view (in the institution) and use, with my permission. Should the Q’eros so wish, they have access to this material.

[3] The editing process consisted of the following: I wrote a general script and then selected nine hours of field footage from the original 30 or so that I had shot. This was the process of ‘logging’ and then ‘capturing’ in the editing program the nine hours that I felt represented the script. We edited a rough cut of one hour and 40 minutes, and then pared the documentary down to its current 53 minutes. Because the documentary was made from pre-shot field footage (as opposed to shooting footage to a pre-planned script), it is largely ethnographic in nature.

[4] The term ‘Q’eros’ refers to both the cultural group and one community of the five that compromise La Nación Q’eros. While the community is legally called ‘Hatun Q’eros’, the Q’eros people simply refer to the community as ‘Q’eros’. Likewise throughout this article, I use the vernacular name for the community, ‘Q’eros’. Many researchers have published ‘Q’ero’ without the ‘s’. The people of the community more commonly say ‘Q’eros’, which is the basis of my decision to employ that usage.


[6] Mestizo is a charged and difficult term to define. Originally, in colonial Peru, the term was based on racial background, and a mestizo in early post-conquest years was literally the offspring of a Spanish man or Spanish born in the New World (criollo) with an indigenous
woman, so that the blood was ‘mixed’. Nowadays the term is more of a cultural reference. A *mestizo* is a person (urban or rural) who has incorporated influences such as formal education, Catholicism, speaks Spanish as well as Quechua, wears factory clothes (pants, shoes, jackets), to name a few examples. Many of the *mestizo* attributes (such as education, electricity, health posts, Spanish language) are considered desirable by the Q’eros, as has been the case throughout indigenous Andean cultural adaptation. For more about Q’eros musical adaptation and modernisation see Wissler, 2005.


[8] The vocal technique of the sustained tone has a specific purpose that is related to Q’eros cosmological belief and maintenance of a relationship with the mountain gods. See Wissler, 2009, forthcoming dissertation.


[10] *Pukllay* (‘play’ in Quechua) in the Andes traditionally referred to a time of courtship among the youth, so *Pukllay taki* are ‘play songs’. The *Pukllay* celebration in many Andean communities, with its *Pukllay taki* and days of merry-making, is now linked to the pre-lent period of Carnival on the Catholic liturgical calendar. Many of the song topics are heard in other Peruvian and Bolivian Andean communities, yet the specifics of the songs (melody, sound production, structure, and so on) are recognisably Q’eros, just as other Andean communities have their own recognisable style.


[12] Wiracocha is an old term for both an Inca elite and a God-like figure, and today is used to denote utmost respect.

[13] The song form of ‘*Pantilla T’ika’* is verse-refrain-verse. The refrain, *Pantilla t’ikay wamanki* or *Pantilla phallchay wamanki* translates as ‘My lovely pink flower, *wamanki* [hawk/falcon]’ or ‘Scatter the little pink flower, *wamanki*’. The layers of metaphore refer to: animal procreation, the beloved female llamas and alpacas, animal and human lineage, the sacred birds who are messengers of the *Apu* and the *Apu* itself. The verses are the points of personal improvisation, and the refrain, which expresses the essence of Q’eros life-sustenance and cosmology, is immutable.

[14] Many scholars have published about sung forms of grief amongst indigenous cultures (Feld 1982, 1995; Urban 1988; Briggs 1992). Unlike these sung forms of grief, however, the Q’eros’ grief-singing is not a distinct and separate song form. Wept improvisation is either momentarily or extensively expressed through spoken conversation or improvised song text in existing fertility songs, and sometimes the sung improvisation of sadness is not expressed at all during an entire ritual.


[16] My various donations for permission to work in Q’eros have been: medicines for treating the external parasites of the community’s llama and alpaca herds; liaison with a US-based charitable foundation and the Municipality of Paucartambo (Q’eros district capital) to help build a bridge that connects the middle zone area with the *monte*; and school supplies, to name a few. The very first request by the Q’eros for my entrance into the community was an accordian to accompany their newly adopted dance (*Qhapaq Qolla*) at the regional pilgrimage festival of *Qoyllur Rit’i* (see Wissler 2005).

[17] DVD purchases are made through ‘The Mountain Fund’, a non-profit organisation based in Albuquerque, New Mexico, dedicated to aid projects in Peru and Nepal. In this way, purchases made in the US are tax-deductible donations that go to the Q’eros community.
I had raised all funds for post-production costs from friends, family and Wilderness Travel office and clients on my tours in Peru who had met some Q’eros in person. Therefore, I had no reimbursement costs and am able to dedicate all sales to Q’eros.


[19] This has historically been the case in the meeting between the indigenous Andean (runa) and urban mestizo populations. Runa have been marginalised from the social and political spheres of the middle and upper classes, which often manifests in their feeling a sense of shame.

References


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**Filmography**


