Abstract and Keywords

The Quechua community of Q’eros, Peru, is known internationally for their lifestyle steeped in an “Inca” past. While many documentaries, exhibitions, theses, and articles have been published about them, their direct complaint is that they never see these works. In 2010, the ethnomusicologist Holly Wissler digitized and handed over fifty years of audiovisual archives about the Q’eros directly to their communities. This chapter discusses the collection and presentation of the archives via an “ambulatory movie theater”; the triggering of memory and discussion about past customs and deceased community members; one woman’s multiple viewings of footage of her long-deceased mother as integral process in healing; the impact of archive return directly to the community of origin, versus deposit in a public institution; and a stimulation of consciousness about the place of Q’eros in Andean history, and the uniqueness of their customs that is connected to both Inca and current identity.

Keywords: repatriation, audiovisual, archives, Andes, Q’eros, Quechua, healing, identity, Inca

My heart opened. I am happier now. It’s as if I have been reunited with my mother.

—Santusa Suqlle, Q’eros woman, 2012, upon viewing 1974 footage filmed by John Cohen of her deceased mother

Archival return, like music-making, can be about human connection, deep relationship, and remembrance among all involved, community members and researchers alike. While community archives are a wealth of useful information, it is the people who must transmit, express, live, and embody the returned material, so that the archives can take on meaning and affect lives. Archives are not alive; rather, it is in the active individual and community sharing of archives that serves to stir the memories of the elders and hearts of the youth, help them know their heritage, and even cause them to feel grateful.
and proud. This is the story of the return and public showing of fifty years of audiovisual archives to the Quechua community of Q’eros in 2010, their spontaneous reactions, and their use of the archives today.


Before the Spanish invasion of the Inca Empire in 1532, Andean, Amazonian, and coastal groups adapted to and were linked through a highly organized exchange of products from the many biodiverse regions of modern-day Peru, supporting the largest empire of ancient America.¹ The historian David Cahill explains that soon after the incursion of the Spanish conquistadors, the vast economic network of production in the vertical ecologies was eradicated quickly. He states:

This system, so ingenious in conception and practical in execution, was effectively destroyed within a few decades of conquest, by dislocation, civil war, depopulation and the ethnographic obtuseness of the new Spanish rulers and administrators. It survived in a few areas, randomly and by chance.

(Cahill 1994, 330)

He then adds in a footnote: “There is a faint echo of it today in the Q’ero community of the Paucartambo province of southern Peru.”² Cahill’s footnote highlights the unique position and renown of the Q’eros’ use of their vertical ecology today, which has a direct impact on their musical expressions.

The Q’eros’ territory spans from an altitude of 15,000 down to 6,000 feet, and it has provided the Q’eros population with nearly all of the goods they need for self-sustainability, resulting in less need for travel over long distances for trade (see map in Figure 1). A crucial factor is that their territory is located on the eastern watershed of the Andes, so their highest altitudes receive the cloud humidity that rolls in from the lower Amazon regions and supports rich grasses for their llamas and alpacas. In addition, the Q’eros did not suffer relocation into reduction communities (*reducciones de indios*, settlements for Spanish control caused by the forcible relocation of Indigenous Andean populations) created by Spanish authorities from the 1570s onward.³ This relative isolation and sustainability of the Q’eros since pre-Hispanic times has fostered the retention and continued practice of their music and other traditions, which are inextricable expressions of their space, time, and worldview. Today the Q’eros are often popularly idealized as the quintessential Andean people, an embodied “echo” of the past, situated opposite a rapidly changing present.
The Q’eros cultural and ethnic group consists of some three thousand people, formed into five communities that, since 2005, call themselves the Q’eros Nation (see maps in Figures 2 and 3). Much of my research was in the largest of the five Q’eros communities that pertains to the whole Q’eros Nation, called Hatun (big) Q’eros, with some research in the smaller Q’eros community of Hapu. The Q’eros are a transhumant society that follows the seasonal migration of their livestock between higher and lower pastures. The community of Hatun Q’eros is dispersed among four river valleys, extending from the high puna zone, for raising llamas and alpacas for meat and fleece, to the qheswa zone for varieties of tubers, and down to the yunga, or monte cloud forest zone, for corn, bamboo, and other lowland crops. It is typical for a Q’eros family to have a home in all three areas, for working the zones seasonally (see Figure 6.4).
Q’eros’ songs express their interdependent relationship to their land and animal resources, and with the mountain gods (Apu) and mother earth (Pacha Mama) that hold vital influence over all livelihood. Q’eros’ Pukllay taki are about revered animals and birds, and sacred, medicinal plants and flowers in all three zones. All songs fortify Q’eros’ identity and community ties, and the continued reciprocal relationship (ayni) between the people, their animals, and the Apus and Pacha Mama. The animal fertility songs are also the vehicle for the expression and working out of deep loss and grief among family members.

The Q’eros are popularly associated with the Incas because of their expression of pre-Hispanic lifestyle and traditions, and their proximity to the ancient Inca capital of Cusco. They are often called the “Last Ayllu [family group] of the Incas.” The Q’eros were named “cultural patrimony” in 2007 by Peru’s Ministry of Culture, the first and only “people” to receive such status in Peru, and in 2010 the Ministry of Culture named their songs cultural patrimony as well. In 2006, the Q’eros were chosen to be the representative Indigenous Andeans to meet in a public forum with the Dalai Lama on his South American tour. Because of this international renown, the Q’eros have been the subject of study and documentation by many international researchers and filmmakers over the past fifty years, and more recently are sought out internationally by people who want to learn from and participate in their spiritual knowledge as it pertains to their connections with the mountain gods and mother earth. For such national and international renown, including association with the Inca Empire, the Q’eros have had little to no access to the numerous audiovisual recordings and publications that have been internationally produced about their culture.

Q’eros lifestyle and traditions are rapidly undergoing unprecedented changes, notably permanent migration out of Q’eros that is more prevalent than ever in their history, with approximately 30 of the 140 families of Hatun Q’eros having migrated to the large city of Cusco, drawn to modern amenities and in search of better education for their children. In part, outward migration is a reaction to ecological changes that cause significant lifestyle challenges, such as glacial melting and less water, which reduce the quality of high-altitude grasses, and therefore make herds less healthy. This is coupled with the fact that the population of Hatun Q’eros has tripled in the past one hundred years, and
therefore so has their animal population, which causes overgrazing and competition in the now lesser quality pasture areas.

The new interoceanic highway that connects the coasts of Peru and Brazil, completed in 2011, heralded the construction of a subsidiary road that arrived at the edge of the Hatun Q’eros community in 2013. In 2016, this new access road, which leaves zig-zag scars through once-pristine pastures, now penetrates through three of the four valleys in Hatun Q’eros and has introduced considerable lifestyle and diet change. For example, since 2010, the Q’eros choose not to cultivate their corn and other crops in their lower cloud-forest territory, and the access trails into the monte are now overgrown. Instead, with more vehicle mobility and dependence on the cash economy than ever before, they now purchase corn from nearby markets to make chicha (corn beer), the ceremonial drink that is essential to Quechua life and ritual. With these changes, I consider 2010 to be the historic end of Q’eros’ autosustainability provided by the preeminent pre-Hispanic use of Andean verticality, which is now giving way to capitalist dependence on and interaction with the cash economy. Most Q’eros are gratified and relieved to have such easy road connection with urban areas, such as Cusco, and feel relief in their work and travel loads, as well as new opportunities available to them.

The Q’eros’ changing relationship to their land and resources naturally has an impact on the songs that express this relationship. The Q’eros population in Cusco no longer sings their songs, since all songs are related to seasonal rituals of their land and animals. Sara taki, the corn harvest song, is no longer sung since their corn planting and harvest stopped in 2010. Also, there is a whole body of songs that are replete with Q’eros history and known only by the older generation. One such song is Pariwa, about high-altitude flamingos that used to live in Q’eros’ lakes, as described in a 1922 article by the large landowner of Q’eros’ territory at that time. This bird has not appeared in Q’eros for decades, perhaps due to ecological changes in habitat. The emigrated Q’eros who live in cities without their animals no longer hold animal fertility rituals that were vital for animal reproduction. Each animal type has its own ritual and ritual song dedicated to that animal: the Indigenous male/female llamas and alpacas, as well as the European-introduced cattle and sheep. This too is a whole body of songs and rituals that the emigrated youth of Q’eros are not learning; since the practice of these distinctive traditions is not being passed on to the current youngest generation of Q’eros immigrants, therefore, these songs and practices associated with these songs are endangered to this particular Q’eros demographic.

In addition, the Q’eros no longer create new songs since about the mid-twentieth century. The song creation process used to be in the hands of the alcalde, or the newly elected authority in charge of carnival that year. He would sing the landscape on his two-day return from the district capital, Paucartambo, where he had just received this cargo. Now he receives his cargo at the newly established town council (consejo menor) in Q’eros, no longer journeying by foot to Paucartambo and singing the earth’s topography, flora, and fauna en route as before. Instead, the newly elected carnival officials select a song from the existing pool of Pukllay taki (carnival songs), so that songs
from the same small song group are rotated, and that group is becoming smaller over
time due to popular choice. These significant and rapidly increasing changes in the
Q’eros communities over the past half-century naturally affect their song practice and
production, and its decline, and make the return of their archives even more poignant.

The Q’eros use their strong identity and unification to assert their own choices, such as
outward migration, discontinuance of the corn harvest, and insistence on and help with
the building of the road from the provincial municipality of Paucartambo, thus inducing
change and loss of song production. They own their choices, and I commend the older
parents who choose the hard work necessary to move from their home territory where
their livelihood is at arm’s length to then transition into having to make money for the
first time.

During my years of research, I experienced perhaps the tail end of the Q’eros’ preroad,
somewhat-isolated period. When I began my research in 2003, the interoceanic highway
had not been built, so I traveled ten hours on windy, dirt roads on top of dramatic cliff
drop-offs, and then hiked two days over two high mountain passes to arrive in Q’eros’
territory. When the filmmaker and musician John Cohen did his work in Q’eros in the
1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, he took one week to get into Q’eros. This contrasts radically
with today’s reality of some Q’eros who now live in Cusco, own their own vehicles, and
drive six hours to their home community on the weekend for soccer matches and return
on Sunday night. The matches and prize-giving ceremonies—just like school anniversaries
and many other events—are supported by solar-powered microphones and loudspeakers,
with speeches and music for all. This was not the case as recently as 2010, when to
return and show audiovisual archives of the Q’eros to the Q’eros, we needed to carry in
our own gasoline-powered generators, computers, and screen to set up what I call an
ambulatory movie theater across the Andes.

Return of Fifty Years of Audiovisual Archives to
the Q’eros

During my first four years of fieldwork in the two communities of Hatun Q’eros and Hapu
(2003–2007), one complaint expressed by community members was that they never see or
receive the materials produced by the stream of researchers and filmmakers who have
visited over the years, and that we must surely be “making a lot of money” from such
publications. In accordance with the Q’eros’ noble and direct nature, they openly
expressed this resentment to me in our numerous private and public discussions about
my documentary production of the yearly cycle of Q’eros musical rituals, Kusisqa
arose: “How will we see it?” “How much money are you making?” In response, I promised
to show them my finished documentary and committed to returning all profits and
donations made from the documentary to the community. I had no idea how I would do this, since the community had neither electricity nor equipment for viewing and listening, yet in the moment, on the spot, I knew it was a promise I had to fulfill.

In later planning stages, I decided that the logistical feat of showing my documentary in Q’eros merited the presentation and return of as many audiovisual materials about their communities that I could locate, to all demographics of the Q’eros region—the men, women, children, and elders. This documentation pertains to them, and they have the right not only to see it, but to own their own copies. I had garnered many close relationships in Q’eros over the years, and my care for these people as individuals and community—in other words, respect for their request and rights—was the primary motivation for archival return. Research ethics and my belief that research products should be returned to them were also a strong motivation, but in retrospect, it was my love for the people and their open door to me that propelled me forward. I wanted to rectify their complaints about never having seen or heard any of the material about them that they know is out there in the world, much of which I had access to and owned myself. I then began collecting as much archival material as I could and planning a mass showing of it all. In comparison to past researchers in Q’eros, I had the advantage of living in Peru year-round, and could collect archives and orchestrate a return, unlike the many international researchers who return to their home countries soon after completing fieldwork, and become involved in job and family obligations that do not allow the time for such an undertaking in the country of research.

In September 2010, I led an expedition—funded mostly by private donations from supportive friends, and partially by the Andres del Castillo museum in Lima—which was a moving cinema across the high Andes. The expedition totaled thirteen days, with showings in eight different locations in numerous valleys across the Q’eros Nation. We traversed six mountain passes, each over 15,000 feet above sea level, with a support team of ten people and twenty horses that carried generators, gasoline, projectors, laptop computers, electric cables, cameras, tents, and food, along with a large, bulky screen hoisted over the shoulder and carried by my compadre Jacinto Huamán. With this entourage (see Figure 5), we walked about a half-day to reach the next location, and then after lunch took a few hours to set up the generator, cables, screen, projector, and speakers, according to the rudimentary circumstances of the stone and dirt-floor building designated for that night’s showing. In dark homes and community buildings packed with some forty or fifty people sitting on the floor and standing against walls, we projected photos and video documentaries that spanned fifty-five years of Q’eros life. The showings began at about 7:00 pm and finished at around midnight.
I showed the archive collection in chronological order, beginning with the oldest photos, which were two highly stylized Cusco studio photographs of a Q’eros man from approximately 1910 (date unsure). Most of the photos were from the now-legendary Cusco University expedition in 1955, when an interdisciplinary team of professors and students, headed by the anthropologist Oscar Núñez del Prado, traveled to Hatun Q’eros as the first “outsiders” to enter the then-isolated community with a research intent. I collected photos from the three surviving members of that expedition, Mario Escobar Moscoso (geographer), Luis Barreda Murillo (archeologist, who died on May 22, 2009), and Demetrio Túpac Yupanqui (journalist for La Prensa newspaper, Lima, which sponsored the original expedition). The US musician and filmmaker John Cohen’s three documentaries about Q’eros’ music and textiles followed the opening photograph showing session: Q’eros, the Shape of Survival (1979, with footage from 1976); Peru Weaving: A Continuous Warp (1980, with footage from 1976); and Carnival in Q’eros (1990, with footage from 1989). Cohen, a friend, mentor, and colleague, had been to Q’eros multiple times beginning in 1955; his last two visits with me were in 2005 and 2015. I played some of Cohen’s older song recordings, one in particular about bayeta (typical Andean woven cloth used to make skirts, shirts, tunics, pants), which was recorded in 1964, has not been sung for decades, and is unknown by the younger generation. I closed every evening with the Quechua version of my 2008 documentary about Q’eros musical rituals, entitled Kusisqa Waqashayku (“From Grief and Joy We Sing”). Including the 1910 photos, the showings, then, spanned nearly a century of archival material about Q’eros.

I purposely made my documentary trilingual in Quechua, Spanish, and English, for various audiences in Q’eros, Peru, and the United States. It was particularly important to me, and the Q’eros, that they have their own version accessible in their mother tongue of runasimi, an editing option that was available to me in 2007 via DVD multilingual design, and not available to Cohen in the earlier days of expensive filmmaking. Even though Cohen’s films had narration in English, it did not seem to matter; it was truly the visual that reached the hearts of many, and often in profound ways. I was struck by how the audiovisual medium instantly reached and had an on-the-spot emotional impact on Q’eros people of all ages. The immediacy of the projected image and sound caused spontaneous and continuous boisterous reaction. Every night’s viewing was raucous with commentary, laughter, and vocal expression, so that often even the Quechua narration...
and dialogue of my film was not audible over nonstop response and commentary (see Figure 6).

At the end of each showing at every location I handed over to the community leader, in formal public presentation before all viewers, an archive package of DVDs containing the above-mentioned documentaries, song recordings, and photographs, along with two books: *Hidden Textiles of Peru: Q’ero Textiles* (Cohen and Rowe, 2002, in English) and *Q’eros, el último ayllu inca* (Flores Ochoa and Núñez del Prado, editors, 2005, in Spanish). I also contributed hard-copy photo albums of communal rituals from my own work from 2005 to 2009. I knew at the time that the literal handover of archives was merely a moral and affective gesture, and that due to lack of electricity and equipment, most would not be able to make use of the returned documentaries, except for the books—they loved to finger through them and marvel at the photographs. Five short years later, they would have more viewing access with the onset of technology in Q’eros. Today, most of the Q’eros annexes (family groups in contiguous valleys) have shifted from no electricity to solar-panel-generated electricity. A few of the schools—particularly the new, and only, secondary school in the annex of Qocha Moqo—are able to view the documentaries on laptop computers. Even so, at the time of archive handover I felt that the gesture of return was well received, often with formal silence during the bestowal and rounds of applause afterward. For many, it was like viewing “home movies” that they never knew existed and just the viewing alone had inestimable value.

**“Where Dead People Walk”**

The evening showings were often quite touching and personal, as many Q’eros excitedly recognized living and deceased family members. Many had never seen a moving image before, much less images of their deceased relatives projected on a large screen with good sound. My comadre Juliana Apasa Flores commented that the movies were “wañuq purishanku”—“Where dead people walk.” People pointed animatedly to the screen, commenting on a weaving design or article of clothing they no longer weave or wear. There were many beautiful, spontaneous outbursts, for example during a scene from
Cohen’s 1979 film *The Shape of Survival* when a man and a young boy walked together with their llamas and alpacas. The older man standing beside me exclaimed, “There goes my uncle!” Then he gasped, pointed to the little boy walking next to him, and said, “that is me!” He was grinning from ear to ear.

A great boon was that many people in the 1955 photographs were identified. None of the photos I had collected from the surviving members of the 1955 Cusco University expedition were labeled. The elders reacted in boisterous identification and exuberance, as each subsequent photo would appear. Our spontaneous, continuous conversation was exhilarating. I would ask, “who is this?” and someone would inevitably respond with the person’s name and familial relationship, sometimes lovingly adding a little anecdote. Gina Maldonado, my Quechua tutor and principal assistant in song-text transcription during my dissertation fieldwork, and I rapidly took notes, documenting identification in the moment of discovery. The excitement, and even joy was palpable and we could hardly keep up with our notations. For example, an important identification was a 1963 photo of two of the three Q’eros leaders who made the historic journey to Lima on a plane—a momentous event in those days—to meet with President Belaúnde (see Figure 7). When the photograph came on the screen, the president of one of the annexes blurted out, “That is my father!” Alpípio Quispe had identified his father, Turibio Quispe, who died in 1996. On this visit to the large capital city, his father and two others began the legal transactions of the community’s land purchase from the Peruvian government, which had been sold to the government by the *hacendado*, or large landowner. The resulting 1964 purchase was the first, and only, case in all Peru of an Andean community who fully owned their land title before the agrarian reform of 1969.25 These two men are therefore heroes of Q’eros recent history and were now being remembered by subsequent generations, and made known to the younger generation, as they viewed the photo on the screen.

My 2008 documentary begins with an interview with Vicente Apasa Huamán, the third member of the group who flew to Lima in 1963 with the now-identified Turibio Quispe and Prudencio Apasa in the 1963 photo. In this interview, Vicente talks about the abuses of his people under the *hacendado*. He relays the infamous story, which was also published by the folklorist Efraín Morote Best of the 1955 Cusco

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*Figure 7* Turibio Quispe and Prudencio Apasa in Lima, 1963. Photograph courtesy Demetrio Tupac Yupanqui.
University expedition, about the horrendous day—a fateful Wednesday—when many Q’eros men were forcibly lined up and their single, long braid, a marker of Indigenous identity, was hacked off. It was my discovery of an older song that is now rarely sung, called “Sortija,” that led me to interviews with Vicente. “Sortija” is about the early twentieth century when the landowner forced the Q’eros to make long trips to a high pass near the Bolivian border to trade their agricultural goods for silver from the Bolivian mines. Vicente’s daughter, my comadre Juliana, who first sang the song for me and commented that the films are “where dead people walk,” introduced me to her father. Vicente then provided a wealth of history about the hacienda days. He was lucid until he died in 2007, at the time my documentary was being edited. In this way, I linked my documentary showing at the end of the evening and the interview with Vicente, the third member of this triumvirate who flew to Lima to purchase the land from the Peruvian president, with the other two heroes in the 1963 photo that was shown at the start of the evening. The evening thus came full circle, through photos and moving images, of the past fifty years of Q’eros history (see Figure 6.8).

Flores sing their grief about the recent deaths of their spouses through improvised text in the fertility song for the female llamas and alpacas. I spent time analyzing this oddity with my Cusco friends first, but it was Gina Maldonado, my Quechua tutor originally from a Quechua community, who gave an insider’s interpretation. Gina believed that the laughter was an expression of identification with their contemporaries on the screen. This was later confirmed when I asked the Q’eros directly, and they responded, simply, “we laugh because we are happy to see ourselves; we are enjoying.” Indeed, the laughter was not that of nervousness of disconcertedness, nor of ridicule; rather, it was an expression of pure joy and fascination. I sensed that their constant and contagious laughter has a different meaning and perception than I am used to and conditioned to in my own social world. Indeed, many times I have been startled and at first offended by the unabashed laughter from my comadres in Q’eros when I sing with them, dressed as a Q’eros woman, in carnival and animal fertility ritual. I have come to know that their laughter is not a laughing at—but a delighting in and sharing with. The Q’eros seemed to react more with
observation, awe, nostalgia, and commentary during Cohen’s prior documentaries that showed an earlier Q’eros with people who are no longer alive, and customs that have changed. This contrasted with the identification and joy at viewing my current documentary, expressed through laughter as they viewed themselves and present life on the screen.

Healing Grief through Documentary Viewing

One family benefited from fifty-five years of documentation, as John Cohen and I had worked inadvertently with this same family. I only discovered this well into my own fieldwork, during discussions with John and study of his photos and films. John first photographed Raymundo Quispe Chura in 1956 as a six-year-old boy, and up through the production of his film *Carnival in Q’eros* (1990) (see Figure 9). Raymundo was one of the first Q’eros I began to work with in 2003, yet when I met him, I did not know of his previous work with John. In preparation for John’s return to Q’eros with me in 2005 after a sixteen-year absence, I asked Raymundo if he remembered John photographing and filming him from the 1950s–’80s, and he said that he did not. Yet, after I projected John’s movies and left copies, thereby making his name known throughout the Q’eros region, I heard Raymundo say proudly that he remembered and had worked with John for a long time. Perhaps seeing the photos and the footage triggered his memory, combined with the power of suggestion, which helped Raymundo to suddenly remember the now well-known John Cohen. In any case, the introduction and presentation of old Q’eros images never before seen had a changing impact on Raymundo’s perspective and memory.

Raymundo Quispe Chura’s niece, Santusa Suqllle Quispe, was the single individual who I believe was most profoundly moved and changed by viewing old family images—in this case, John Cohen’s 1979 film *Peruvian Weaving*, with footage shot in 1976. In the same photo from 1956, we see Raymundo Quispe Chura with his older sisters, Nicolasa, sitting on the right. Nicolasa, who had died over thirty years ago, was featured as primary weaver in the film. An especially lengthy scene shows Nicolasa weaving an intricate design seated on the ground, with her eight-year-old daughter, Santusa, sitting on the left. This moment of filming had an indelible impact on Santusa, who has been struggling with grief ever since her older sister’s death. By viewing pictures and clips from the 1970s, Santusa was able to relive and grieve for her sister in a new way, feeling a sense of closure and healing that she had never experienced before.

Figure 9 Raymundo, Nicolasa, and Andrea Quispe Chura, 1956. Photograph courtesy John Cohen.
closely at her side. When this scene suddenly appeared on the screen, Santusa, now in her mid-forties, covered her face in shock as she saw her mother, who died when she was twelve, projected in a large, “live” image before her. I watched as Santusa froze with her hand on her face, tears rolling down, continuing to take in the full scene. When the film ended, I walked over and sat next to her, took her hand, and asked her how she was. She responded, simply and directly as the Q’eros tend to do, llakisqa, kusisqa—sad and happy. The next day she watched the same documentary again at another location, and I observed that she was calm, with a tranquil smile, now knowing and expecting that she would see her mother on the large screen.

In October 2012—that is, two years after this mass showing—I invited Santusa over to my home to watch the 1976 footage of her mother again (see Figure 10). I gave Santusa her personal copy of this particular film since she is one of the many in the Q’eros diaspora who live in Cusco, and therefore she has access to television and a DVD player. She was riveted, viewing the scene once again in the privacy of my living room. She requested that we watch it numerous times, during which she reflected on her childhood out loud, remembering other family members and recounting her mother’s life. Santa’s joy was evident, as if she had worked through deep sentiment: “My mother is talking, as if she were alive in this moment; my heart opened. I am happier now. It’s as if I have been reunited with my mother. It brought me happiness” (personal communication October 12, 2012; translation from Quechua by author).

She recalled her experience of two years earlier, seeing her mother for the first time with her fellow community members in the mass viewings in Q’eros:

Now in your home is the first time I could really see my mother. The other times there were lots of people around and I couldn’t really see. There was a lot of distraction, and people didn’t take me into consideration. They didn’t seem to think that seeing my mother might be important for me, so I felt excluded.

(personal communication October 12, 2012; translation from Quechua by author)

Santusa added that she felt sadness that there was no discussion or processing after the viewing in Q’eros, and this added to her feelings of exclusion. She helped me see the complexity and problematic aspects of staging mass viewings in her description of these two painful experiences when she saw the footage for the first time: first, the grief and
shock of seeing her mother, who had died over thirty years earlier when she was a little
girl, and second, feeling that her fellow community members did not recognize or
acknowledge the impact this had on her, resulting in more hurt and feeling alone. A group
discussion afterward might have helped ameliorate difficult emotions, thoughts, and
reactions, and create more of a sense of sharing—not only in Santusa’s case but also
perhaps in others as well. Public discussion in Q’eros holds its own complexities and
breaches of intimacy. While the people live communally, it is my experience that they are
very private about personal matters. At the very least, it would have been more sensitive
of me to inform Santusa ahead of time, privately, that we would view many sequences
with her mother. However, the fact that I had hours of material and limited time in each
viewing location, combined with my logistical and social responsibilities, and not knowing
until the last minute who would show up, put a constraint on holding discussion and
processing with many people, like Santusa, who would have seen a deceased family
member on the screen. In this way, the showings were very raw, candid, real, and
emotional.

It was evident to me that Santusa healed the grief of her childhood loss through
continued viewings of her deceased mother on the screen. I witnessed her move from
shock and tears in 2010 to feeling uplifted and grateful, and that she had an “open
heart,” two years later. When she left my home in 2012, she was beaming. She stated,
“This experience has been like hamp’iy (medicine) for me. I am protected by my mother
now, by her wisdom, for all her knowledge about weaving.” The last thing she said as she
left with her personal DVD copy was, “my daughter will be very happy to see her
grandmother.”

Francisco Apasa Flores, an important community member who was the first president of
the newly formed Q’eros Nation (Nación Q’eros) in 2005, also commented, like Santusa,
that he felt “happy and sad” when he saw his deceased father, Mariano Apasa, a well-
known ritual specialist, negotiate the “alpaca deal” in exchange for Cohen’s filming his
1990 film Carnival in Q’eros. He expressed animatedly that the people “laughed with joy
to see our customs all big on the screen.” He pointed out the loss of some traditions
(clothing, songs) that he witnessed in the older films, which prompted his opinion:
“twenty years from now I don’t want to see our traditions lost like we saw in the movies
last night. I hope we are still making our own clothes and practicing our customs. These
movies are a great help, they are ayni.”

Ayni is an ancient concept that governs Andean societies, based on reciprocity among
community members and the continual offering to the spirit powers of the earth in return
for individual and community welfare. During the peak of my fieldwork in Q’eros (2005–
2007), I was constantly negotiating the ayni I needed to give the community in exchange
for documentation, participation, and just plain being there. Often these negotiations
were lengthy, tedious, and tension-filled because the Q’eros are very careful in their
negotiations about who and how an “outsider” can be in the community, particularly
during festival times. In my first years in Q’eros I never fully knew if I would be granted
permission for documentation and participation until it happened, but this dynamic
shifted as I began to sing with the Q’eros women in every ritual throughout the year, wearing Q’eros clothing. At first many were skeptical, even disapproving of my documentary production, assuming I was profiting greatly from the proceeds; however, the fact that in 2010 I returned the profits and donations ($4,500) from my documentary sales, which they used to build their town council building, cemented our already well-bonded relationship. In community assembly during the handover of the documentary profits, many commented, “no one has ever done this before.” I began to experience a completely opposite reaction to the idea of documentary production during this archive return when suddenly many, like Francisco Apasa Flores, expressed “you made a documentary with certain people in the community. It is time now to make another one, with us.” Suddenly many requested that we make many more documentaries, as if it were easy to do! I reflected on the years of struggle I endured in justifying one documentary, and on how something that was once a delicate, walking-on-eggshells endeavor had suddenly become the popular request. The Q’eros had experienced archival viewing directly and were now the owners with their own copies. The value of this immediate seeing and hearing of their history had taken hold, and they were suddenly requesting that more of the same be made.

Francisco continued his expression of what the viewings had provoked in him:

We don’t see these customs in any other place. We have a lot of strength, and a lot of poverty too. Our life is like that of the Incas. The Incas left their children, and we are here, we have been the people of Q’eros since ancient times. The Spanish arrived to brainwash and kill, we heard about this, but we served like soldiers. The ancient altomisayoqs [high ritual specialists] spoke well with the Apus [mountain gods]. The killers arrived and the Apus said you are not going to kill the Q’eros.

(personal communication, September 10, 2010; Quechua translation by author with Gina Maldonado)

When the Q’eros Nation was formed in 2005 as an act of Q’eros solidarity and identity, and Francisco was elected as the first president, the Nation voted to include the five communities that still practice Q’eros customs, such as clothing, ritual practice, and singing songs. These five communities intentionally excluded three Q’eros-origin communities who have assimilated into mestizo, or misti, culture by the outward signs such as wearing Western clothing and speaking Spanish. Francisco stated, “We decided not to include them because they are no longer Q’eros.”

This singular political and social act of excluding specific Q’eros communities who no longer practice their customs shows the importance of external signs of Q’eros culture to the people of the Q’eros Nation—signs that are prevalent in Cohen’s and my documentaries. In this regard, the return of the archives took on a meaning of a larger historical scope that went beyond the remembrance of family members, healing deep wounds, and the important political roles community heroes played in the securing of their land title. As Francisco articulates, the archives stimulated a consciousness about the place of Q’eros in Andean history, and brought to light the specialness of their
customs and identity that is connected to both Inca and current-day identity. This was possible because the Q’eros are, and have been, aware of their specialness, and many emphasize this unique identity in their interactions with foreign travelers, often as a means toward capital gain. Many of the children were jolted into awareness about their inherited traditions amid the emotional and spontaneous reactions of their elders. The youth heard heated discussions and reactions about customs they no longer practice, thus sparking an awareness of the real possibility of loss. At that singular point in time, the presentations sent waves through the community about the importance of their people, specific individuals, and community-wide customs, so that there was a palpable cognizance of, and pride in, what it means to be uniquely Q’eros. The viewing of the archives played a role in not forgetting.

Conclusion and Current Archive Use in Q’eros

I am an advocate for the potency that the return of the archives to the Q’eros communities has generated on the grassroots and the most intimate levels, such as the example of one woman reconciling with the thirty years of pain felt over the death of her mother. I believe there was an inherent power in the viewing and return of the archives directly to the people and community of origin, versus deposit in an outside institution. The arduous return of the archives literally to their own homes and into their own hands was a gesture of great esteem about who they are, and they were not asked to awkwardly fit into the system of the “other”—the urban, Spanish-speaking world that has dominated Andean culture for centuries, by viewing the archives outside of their own community. This allowed the Q’eros to laugh and comment boisterously, identify elders out loud, heal old wounds, and share and feel the value of the documentation among generations on their own turf, and to ask for more of the same.

Communal viewing and listening to the materials in their birthplace created a community connection and exuberant remembrance that resonated emotionally among all. Many Q’eros implicitly expressed profound satisfaction that past documentation was being shown, and was returned firsthand, to the community that had collaborated in the documentation to begin with. Gina Maldonado, who was already familiar with Q’eros culture and many of the people present at the showings as a result of our work together, summarized:

It was the first time they could see themselves, hear themselves. There was much laughter, dialogue, and commentary about the scenes. Voluntarily they said, “I want to be interviewed. Are you going to make more documentaries?” They felt valued and respected to be convened in their own language, in the doors of their own homes, called to come to “the movies.” The ones who convoked were known people to them, and that is why it was not just another mockery. Late at night,
when the presentation was over, they did not want to leave. They were very awake, wanting to see more.

(personal communication, August 20, 2016)

As Gina suggests, the act of taking the movies directly to them and inviting them to the event in their language, often by door-to-door announcement, is much different than, say the many presentations of and about Q’eros culture that are staged by the Ministry of Culture in Cusco, which many Q’eros are invited to attend. The same could be said of the premiere of my documentary in Cusco at the public institution ICPNA (Peruvian-North American Institute). In these cases, presentations are staged for the general Cusco public, in Spanish, with some Q’eros in attendance and quite often participating through the awkward staging of singing songs; but the Q’eros are always the minority. They must adjust to an urban system that is not their own. Indeed, presenting the archives in their own homes showed that they were valued, esteemed, and comfortable, and they could react, respond, and converse out loud. None of the Q’eros who attended the Cusco premiere of my documentary felt free to laugh and respond during the showing as they did in Q’eros; rather, like the urban majority, they sat quietly.

Gina continued:

There was honesty on both parts: the researcher who “kept her word” and the Q’eros who could be honest in their opinions due to today’s advanced mediums of communication making it possible for younger generations to see works realized in the past. These presentations showed respect towards the Quechua people, the Andean, the agriculturalist, the weavers, and pastoralists, men and women alike.

Hannah Rae Porst, director of the nongovernmental organization Willka Yachay, which sponsors the only high school in the entire Q’eros Nation (located in Qocha Moqo, the central-most valley of Hatun Q’eros), stated:

Cohen’s and Wissler’s films allow the Q’eros people to become more aware of the beauty and depth of their culture and to understand and appreciate the historical context of their lives. Since 2012, students in Qochamoqo have watched John Cohen’s and Holly Wissler’s documentaries several times during the year. Teachers often play the films on a projector as part of their curriculum and, more informally, students have gathered to watch the films on laptops after school. They’ll huddle around a small screen together and revel in seeing their forebears and glimpses of their community’s past. One of the most important missions of Willka Yachay’s Colegio Etnico is to enable our students to revitalize their community’s cultural identity. Our students, their teachers and village elders are in the process of creating a museum. Cohen’s and Wissler’s films will be curated and always available for community members and future generations to watch and understand their past so they can build their future.
Porst’s work with the Colegio Etnico, ethnic high school, is now able to make these archives available to students, and anyone, right there in Q’eros, as valued tools used in support of identity revitalization. The primary goal of the Colegio Etnico is to focus on traditional knowledge, invite elders to guide learning, and not adhere to the national government public school curricula, which often includes materials that are simply not applicable to Q’eros’ life. Decisions are made by consensus, so that the control of the archives is community managed. However, this school exists in only one annex of Q’eros and only serves a small portion of the population, nevertheless, it is a start toward Q’eros-run archive control. This small, community-run archive in a local school contrasts with the possibility of a Spanish-language institution in an urban center that would require effort for the Q’eros to travel to and negotiate. The mere existence of and access to the documentation esteems who the Q’eros are, sends that message to them, and values the Q’eros in a larger context as Andean agriculturalists, weavers, and pastoralists, as Gina stated.

John Cohen, now in his mid-eighties, and I have experienced a wonderful journey that started with my asking him, years ago, “tell me about Q’eros,” evolving into mutual sharing of ideas and interpretations, to some poignant, educating disagreements, to John now asking me, “so, tell me what is going on in Q’eros today.” He has stated that my in-depth work has helped him to understand his own work more fully, and his set the bedrock for mine. We both fell in love with Q’eros, the people and how they live, and have had our lives changed as a result. In 2015, John discussed the meaning for him, as researcher and friend of the Q’eros, to have had his three documentaries and one book returned to them:

They recognized relatives, family, and friends who had died long ago. Their response caused me to breathe a deep sigh . . . for it fulfilled an impossible promise I had made to myself, (and to them), of returning my vision of Q’eros to their community.

Throughout this long fifty-year endeavor, an unfulfilled disturbing question has grown within me. From the start in 1956, I was always asking myself how could my work help them, to ease them from poverty, to improve their lives, to give them something back. But nothing got back to Q’eros.

Repatriating cultural goods has become a hot political and cultural issue. Reawakening feelings, family and rituals through music and films gets closer to the heart of the matter. I have always considered myself as an artist first, and this new exchange with the Q’eros is gratifying beyond words.

(personal communication, August 13, 2014)
While the Q’eros are experiencing modernization probably faster and more violently than ever before in their history, they still practice many of their traditions, so they rejoiced in both their past and present. While viewing, they learned about their past, within a flourishing, yet changing, present. Pride was palpable, and perhaps they feel there is nothing at stake if they no longer sing the old songs, or weave the older designs, because they do sing and weave the current ones. This contrasts strikingly with my return of song archives to the near-extinct Amazonian Wachiperi group, also in 2010, who indeed no longer sing their songs and have lost the context; nearly everything about their practiced traditions is on the verge of extinction, including their language. The Q’eros archives were enjoyed as a continuance of, and homage to, their living expressions of culture, while the Wachiperi felt a loss and urgency, and the need to do something about it. The contrast in reaction between experiencing the archives through viewing and listening with the Q’eros and the Wachiperi was pronounced: the celebration and enjoyment of changing tradition, versus the pain and loss of listening to a dead one.

The Q’eros do not usually sit around and talk about, revel in, or celebrate their culture, past and present. The archival showings and return were a great jolt of communally shared consciousness about their Q’eros-ness, boisterously articulated, connecting family and community with palpable pride and celebration. On a grassroots level, even the momentary experience of this is worth the archival return.

References


Notes:

(1) The ethnohistorian John Murra provided groundbreaking research on the cultivation of and far-reaching web of trade in these multiple ecosystems, which he seminally termed “vertical ecology” (Murra 1972, 1980).

(2) The orthography of Q’ero and Q’eros is both interchangeable and debatable. For a complete discussion, see Wissler (2009a, 8–10).
The purpose of the colonial Spanish Empire was to gather native populations into centers called “Indian reductions” in order to Christianize, tax, and govern them more effectively.

I specify ethnicity because even today the Q’eros marry within their own ethnic group. While this is changing slowly, intermarriage is still rare.

Q’eros was once an entire geographic region composed of eight Q’eros cultural communities, with their corresponding ayllu groups, today called annexes. The eight communities are: Kiku, Hapu, Totorani, Marcachea, Hatun Q’eros, Pucara, Q’allacancha, and Qachupata. Hatun Q’eros is the largest of all these communities, consisting of approximately 24 percent of the total Q’eros population of approximately 3,000. The Q’eros Nation (La Nación Q’eros), an association formed in 2005 by the Q’eros in response to current political forces, consists of five of these communities banding together in a single statement of identity and solidarity (see maps in Figures 1 and 2).

For detail of the Q’eros, and Andean, pastoral transhumant societies, see Webster (1972, 1980, 1981, 1983).

The Incas were the ethnic group located in the Cusco valley region that gained power and expanded widely in the 15th century to incorporate many Indigenous groups and form the largest empire in the history of the Americas, until the Spanish invasion in 1532. There is evidence of Inca presence in Q’eros territory. See Luis Barreda Murillo (2005 [c. 1955]).

For in-depth discussion of how the Q’eros and their Inca identity and use by the Q’eros in identity negotiation, see Wissler (2009, 35–41).

The Q’eros have primary schools through the sixth grade, and only one high school available to them, founded by the nongovernment organization Willka Yachay (www.willkayachay.org).

The Chilean Flamingo/flamenco chileno (Phoenicopterus chilensis).

A 1922 article by the current large landowner (hacendado) of Q’eros territory at that time, Luis Yábar Palacio, describes the fauna and provides detailed descriptions of rituals and festivals in Q’eros during his time as hacendado (see Yábar Palacio 1922).

I have deduced this from interviews with many Q’eros elders and analysis of John Cohen’s recordings of Q’eros songs, dating from 1964, which only include the songs still sung today that are now part of the standard song stock (with the exception of one). There is a 1958 description by the Cusco folklorist Efraín Morote Best of the process of creation of new songs, so it is sometime mid-twentieth century when this process stopped, and gave way to a cycling of existing songs. See Efraín Morote Best (2005 [1958]).
The town council, which registers births, deaths, marriages, and deals with legal documents of the community, was established in 1998.

In my work I recorded seven active *Pukllay taki*, and eight *Ñawpa taki*, or songs from before that are no longer sung.

See Wissler (2009b). This article serves as prelude and background context to the 2010 return of my documentary, and other archives, to the Q’eros.

See a three-minute YouTube excerpt of this return, titled “Return of Archives, Q’eros, Wissler” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGQLo87NYhk.

As part of prelogistical planning, I took one week in June 2010 to literally walk through the whole trip and stay overnight at all presentation sites in order to officially announce the dates and purpose of the showings. Radio contact between Cusco and Q’eros was unreliable, and the community way of announcing any official presentation is to talk, in person, to the community beforehand. Nowadays there is (unreliable) satellite telephone and Internet for communication.

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The team consisted of: Oscar Nuñez del Prado, social anthropologist and expedition leader; Mario Escobar Moscoso, geographer; Efrain Morote Best, folklorist; Josafa Roel Pinead, ethnomusicologist; Manuel Chávez Ballón, archeologist; Luis Barreda Murillo, assistant archeologist; Demetrio Roca, assistant folklorist; Malcom Burke, photographer; Demetrio Túpac Yupanqui, journalist, *La Prensa*. (See Flores Ochoa and Nuñez del Prado (2005). This publication commemorates the fifty-year anniversary of this expedition, with articles covering a fifty-year span, beginning with articles from this expedition and my article about two Q’eros’ festivals and modernization as the most recent.).

For information about John Cohen’s music, films, and photography, see: http://www.johncohenworks.com/home.html.

This song is track 34 of the CD *Mountain Music of Peru*. 1991 [1964]. Smithsonian/Folkways CD SF 40020. Reissued in 1991 with additional material.

*Runasimi*, or “mouth of the people,” is the name the Indigenous Andean people, or *runa*, use for Quechua. The term “Quechua” is a Spanish word, derived from the name of the ecological zone, *qheswa*, where the *runa* grow multiple varieties of potatoes.

Of the over one thousand field photos I took, I made a selection from the communal ritual of Carnival and other community meetings to return via photo albums that community members could easily access and enjoy. Many of the photos I took in the field were of private rituals and leisure time, for particular families who would not like these
disclosed publicly. Private life is guarded and normally not shared, so it would not have been appropriate for me to include private photos in the public archives.

(25) Peru’s agrarian reform was instigated in 1969 by General Juan Velasco’s military government to essentially expropriate big estates from the large landowners and hand them over to the peasant population who lived on and worked these lands, as well as to nationalize foreign enterprises. The leftist ideology was progressive, yet ended essentially in economic disaster.

(26) See Efraín Morote Best (2005 [1958]).

(27) See Wissler 2009b for description of filming and editing this particular grief-singing scene.

(28) Some of the ayni I gave to the community included: medicine for extermination of the external parasites of the llama and alpaca herds; the organization and building of a much-needed permanent bridge to connect the potato and corn zones; securing funds and collaboration to build a primary school, to name a few.

(29) Mestizo is a charged and difficult term to define. Mistí is the term the Q’eros, and many Quechua speakers, call mestizos. Originally, in early colonial Peru, the term was based on racial background, and a mestizo in postconquest years was literally the offspring of a Spanish man or Spanish born in colonial Peru (criollo) with an Indigenous woman, so that the blood was “mixed.” Nowadays the term is more of a cultural reference. A mestizo is an Andean person who has incorporated influences such as education in Spanish, Catholicism, speaks Spanish as well as Quechua, and wears factory clothes (pants, shoes, jackets), to name a few examples. So a Q’eros person can change from runa (person) to mistí, by change of lifestyle.

(30) To their credit, the Q’eros use their identity of a connection to an “Inca past” in interactions with tourists, particularly tourists seeking spiritual interactions and guidance, to sell textiles and spiritual offerings. For a full discussion of the history and use of Q’eros/Inca identity, see Wissler (2009a, 35–41).

(31) See Wissler (2015) for description of archive return to the Wachiperi Amazonian group.

Holly Wissler

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