

*Umaña Tupuna*

Dear Stronach Family:

December was an incredibly gratifying month. The preparatory work I did in November took flight and I was able to transform the friendships I developed with oral historians into interesting video narratives that will constitute an invaluable archive of ethnographic material for the younger generations to use. Antonia and I have worked so far with nineteen Rapanui oral historians. Our intention has been to provide as many perspectives about important contemporary issues in Easter Island, which means that we have tried to broaden the subject population for our project from elders to other generations, as well as to recruit women to supplement the high number of men that are already participating in the project. I am now back in Santiago for winter holiday, after having spent the fall/early winter making videos and interacting with Rapanui people in Easter Island. The following part of the project will focus on producing the material gathered. I will return to Easter Island early spring in order to share the material with schoolchildren and other community members.

As promised, I have uploaded an unlisted video of the work I have done so far to YouTube. You can access the video [here](#). Please note that the video is still in progress. Because I am not sure if I will finally be using the music in the video, I have not yet asked for permission to reproduce it. Therefore, please do not circulate the video. In fact, the video is unlisted on YouTube, such that only people with the link can access it. The video currently functions as a “teaser.” Teasers, unlike trailers, are made in the earlier stages of producing a video; as such, they do not have a clear story line. This teaser specifically introduces some of the people we have worked with, while not spoiling what the entire video will be about. I have not had time to include all of the people in question. We have used the teaser mostly to show it to potential oral historians who are interested in participating in the project and who want to know more about what the project is about.

Unfortunately, the teaser is in Spanish. Because my priority at this point is to summarize and edit the videos we made, I have not had time to add English subtitles to the teaser. Eventually, the teaser and the final product of the project will be in Spanish and Rapanui, with English subtitles. In order to help those of you who do not understand Spanish and more generally to give a background to the teaser, in the following I provide a brief summary of the teaser. The teaser starts with Zorobabel Fati, the elder who unfortunately passed away while we were in Easter Island. Zorobabel tells us that his father, a highly respected man in the community, once told him that when he goes to the “countryside” with his uncle, he has to listen to the stories his uncle tells him. Zorobabel reveals that as a child he did not appreciate the knowledge of his father and uncle; retrospectively, he realizes how important his father’s advice was. The theme of the fragility of orally transmitted knowledge is central to *Umaña Tupuna*: the goal, precisely, is to encourage the younger generations to feel this fragility and to relate it to the political themes the remainder of the teaser displays. These political themes, indeed, have a common thread in that they all index dangers that Rapanui elders feel target the continuation of Rapanui traditions.

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The next person shown in the teaser is Niso Tuki, considered one of the most knowledgeable men alive regarding Rapanui tradition. Niso utters the wise words: “if we want to talk about culture, we must talk about more than one thing.” This statement serves as a leeway for the introduction of several of the “things” of culture that we have been covering, each with its political theme attached. At this stage of the teaser, the images shown are those of modern petroglyphs and the politics of patrimony, and ritual spaces and the politics of tourism. The plan is to eventually include images that suggest the entirety of themes that the project will cover. Following these images, the teaser introduces each of the oral historians that have participated so far. Each oral historian is shown in the context in which we met him or her. Not all oral historians are shown in the current version of the teaser.

Near the end of our time in Easter Island, one of the best moments we had occurred when we were fortunate to have the opportunity to film a video with Yoyo Tuki, an up and coming Rapanui singer and songwriter. In exchange of filming a video of his music for him, Yoyo has given us permission to use his music in the video. Yoyo’s music has a style and tone that fits perfectly with the idea of the project. His lyrics are powerful, often recounting painful stories that his ancestors endured in the colonial past. Moreover, the younger generations in particular follow Yoyo’s music, which mixes traditional Rapanui forms with modern forms. We woke up before sunrise and drove with Yoyo to Ahu Tongariki, where we filmed him sing a song narrating the abduction of Rapanui people in 1862 by Peruvian blackbirders. I plan to use footage from the song in the introduction to the produced video: not only will the music and images of Yoyo captivate the schoolchildren with whom I plan to work, but also the lyrics of that song in particular creatively represent the themes that the video will cover.

Yoyo also directly shared some of his views in video after we were done filming the song. In the short, filmed conversation we had, Yoyo insisted that the Rapanui today are “a miracle.” The difference in Yoyo’s perspective as a young person vis-à-vis the perspective of the older generations with whom we had been working until then amazed both Antonia and I. Whereas the older generations often use a discourse of loss and nostalgia, Yoyo told us that we have think about the positive side of Rapanui culture today: although problems abound, the basic fact is that they are very much alive. Yoyo was adamant about us including the voice of younger people in our project, for it is important for schoolchildren not to assume that everything related to “culture” is a problem. The main focus when I return to the island in March will be to share the produced material with schoolchildren and to discuss what we can learn from the problems represented. However, I plan to undertake filmed conversations and excursions with the younger generations in the time I have off from workshops with schoolchildren. I will then be able to incorporate this material in the final version of the video.

I will be spending the next period working in Santiago with Antonia on the material. The work I will do these months will allow me to be able to conduct a much stronger communal intervention in March than I would otherwise. Over my stay in Easter Island throughout the fall, I was able to talk to schoolteachers several times. Their impression is that there is much work to be done with schoolchildren. However, most of them believe that because in Rapanui culture “education” is an outdoors, embodied, dynamic practice, the classroom setting makes it difficult to catch students’ attention. By making a high-quality video, including music with which they can identify and

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illustrations the enliven the topics touched in filmed excursions, I hope I will be able to bring the classroom setting closer to what it would be if children in Rapa Nui were educated using the non-Western standards that Rapanui people, if they had more power over the education of their children, would choose to use. The idea is for the final version of the video, which will be distributed to all of the participants in the project and to several institutions in Easter Island, to include filmed extracts of the workshops I conduct with schoolchildren. Hopefully, this side of the final video will leave the present and future audience of the video with a positive aftertaste of where Rapanui culture is going.

For the next letter, you should expect to see samples of my summaries of the videos made on the island. Also, you should expect more information regarding the format of the final product of the project. I will pursue constructing an elaborate online platform. Finally, I will be including a link to another video corresponding to a summary of one of the excursions we made on the island with an oral historian.

I hope you enjoyed the video shown in this letter!

As always, thank you very much for all your support.

Pablo