

CULTURAL POLITICS AND GLOBALIZATION ON RAPA NUI¹

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SHORTLY AFTER MY ARRIVAL on Rapa Nui in early September 1996, I witnessed an unusual sight at the Mataverí airport. Not only is it unheard of to see four airplanes simultaneously on the runway, but these planes were also not the usual Boeing 767 jets of LAN Chile. One of them belonged to the Chilean Airforce, another one to the Chilean Navy, and the remaining two to NASA. In most other places of the world this scenario might indicate some kind of military trouble. Not so on Rapa Nui, where it only reminds us of the peculiar relationship the island maintains with the outside world, the fact that it is Chile's foothold in the Pacific, and of its position as a tracking station for American space research.

This situation was not a conspiracy. Each plane had its own mundane reasons for being there. NASA—closing down activities after three decades of space research—was carrying out measurements of the atmospheric quality of the Southern Pacific. The Chilean Navy airplane and a Navy boat were on the island to celebrate the anniversary of annexation day (September 9th, 1888). The FACH plane had a somewhat more unusual task. Not only did it bring the Chilean President's wife and several Ministers of State, it also had a cultural mission. During the next few days we enjoyed a concert of *ILLAPU*, one of Chile's major folk music groups; *Calenda Maya*, a group performing mediaeval music and theatre; a circus named *Los Payasos*; and a puppet show called *El equilibrio precario* (sic), all Chilean. The reason for these political and cultural manifestations was not only "annexation day" but also the official ceremony recognizing Easter Island as one of UNESCO's World Heritage sites.

These preliminary remarks introduce some of the issues I will address in this paper. On the one hand, Easter Island is rapidly integrating into the global political and cultural economy, while simultaneously its political, economic and cultural relations with, and dependency on, the Chilean nation-state are tightening. On the other hand, Rapanui are contesting these influences through a politics of articulation, and by affirming and constructing themselves more and more as a Polynesian people.²

I start my account from an historical perspective, focusing on two periods in Rapanui history, covering a time span of one hundred years. While the decade of the 1860's brought about the severing of the old cultural paradigm, the decade of the 1960's represents the end of the island's isolation through an accelerated improvement in its communication systems and infrastructure. The events which happen to be concentrated in these two decades caused far reaching and profound symbolical and material changes for Rapa Nui.

THE 1860's³

The Peruvian slave raids of December 1862 and the subsequent smallpox epidemic reduced the population of Rapa Nui from several thousands to the critical number of 111. The last

king (*ariki henua*), Kaimakoi, died in Peru in 1863 and the last heir to the "throne" of the royal *Miru* clan, Manurangi (baptized Gregorio), succumbed to the epidemic in October 1867 at the tender age of eleven. Most of the *ariki* and *maori* (the *tangata rongorongo*, amongst others), custodians of Rapa Nui's symbolic heritage, took their knowledge and expert skills to their graves in Peru.

At the same time the Catholic Church secured its symbolic domain over the island. After a first period of reconnaissance starting in 1864, French Brother Eugène Eyraud returned in 1866 with Father Hippolyte Roussel, followed a few months later by two other missionaries. The bishop of Tahiti had entrusted them to establish the Sacred Heart Mission on Rapa Nui. The year 1866 was also—and not surprisingly so under the circumstances—the last year that the *ao* went to 'Orongo. Roussel and Eyraud were present at the proclamation of the last *tangata manu* in September of that year. When Eyraud died in August 1868, all the islanders had been baptized. From then on the Rapanui were to replace their Birdman Cult by the rituals of the Catholic Church.

In that same year the French sea Captain Jean Baptiste Durtou-Bornier paid a first visit to the island, bringing with him the missionaries Zumbohm and Escolan. He was back in April 1868 to start the commercial exploitation of Rapa Nui, associating himself with the Tahitian-based mercantile house of the Scotsman John Brander. He established his headquarters at Mataverí on top of the foundation of the *hare paenga* from where the yearly ascent to 'Orongo for the *manutara* cult had taken place. While Bornier's self-proclaimed kingship was short lived—he was killed by a Rapanui in 1876—he did the groundwork for the transformation of the island into a company estate.

At the end of the decade the crew of HMS *Topaze* removed the basalt *moai*, Hoa Haka Nana Ia from the ceremonial site of 'Orongo, and took it to the British Museum. This act of symbolic vandalism forecasted the important place Easter Island was about to occupy in western archaeological and ethnological research.

During the decade of the 1860's then, the physical and cultural integrity of the Rapanui was seriously damaged, and their idiosyncrasies as a people irreversibly altered. In those same years Bornier's commercial adventures initiated the island's gradual incorporation into the global economy.

THE 1960's⁴

At the beginning of the 1960's the material conditions of daily life on Rapa Nui had hardly changed since the Chilean takeover in 1888. The island was under the rule of the Chilean Navy and islanders were not allowed to leave the town of Hanga Roa without a special permit, as had been the case under the administration of the Williamson Balfour Company—the Scottish-Tahitian sheep farm that had administered the island for 50 years (1903-1953). Islanders were not allowed to go to

the mainland. Communication with the outside world was still restricted to the yearly naval supply ship.⁵ In the early 1960's Easter Island was probably more isolated than it had been a hundred years before, when boat connections with both Tahiti and Chile occurred several times a year. The Rapanui people were also more spatially restricted on the island itself (Porteous 1981:170).

But changes were coming. The Chilean Air Force Captain Roberto Parragué had made some experimental flights from the Chilean mainland to the island during the 1950's. After leaving the Airforce he piloted the first commercial flight in 1961 in his small private aircraft the Manutara 2. (The Manutara 1 ran off the improvised airstrip at Mataverí into the waters of the Pacific).⁶ In 1965 building of the airport began, and LAN Chile started regular flights in 1967.

A few years before, Alfonso Rapu, who was trained as a schoolteacher on the continent, led the islanders' discontent with Navy rule in 1964. "Complaints were made about unpaid labor, travel restrictions, confinement to Hangaroa, suppression of the Rapanui language, ineligibility to vote, and arbitrary naval decisions which could not be appealed" (Porteous 1981: 171). The result of this upheaval was that Rapu became the first elected mayor in January 1965 and Easter Island a part of the Chilean Civil Administration as a Department within the Province of Valparaíso.

In the mid 1960's an agreement with Chile enabled the United States to set up a tracking station on Easter Island for the surveillance of artificial earth satellites. Some hundred North American military men were stationed on the island between 1967 and 1971. The American presence had a strong impact on the islanders' way of life, culturally as well as economically.

Another important development in the decade of the 1960's was the improvement of Rapa Nui's infrastructure. Since 1967 houses and establishments in Mataverí and Hanga Roa were provided with a piped water supply and by the early 1970's everybody had electricity. As far as social services were concerned, a new elementary school building was erected and secular instructors appointed in the late 1960's, bringing an end to the former education by a female religious order. Medical facilities were radically improved in 1965 when the Canadian Medical Expedition to Easter Island (METEI) donated its pre-fabricated twenty-bed hospital with generators, X-ray equipment and an ambulance. Improved telephone, telegraph and postal services followed.

Another crucial phenomenon of the 1960's was the accelerated influx of Chilean mainlanders, in response to the incorporation of the island into the Chilean Civil Administration and the installation of a regular airline service. This, together with the initiation of tourism, would rapidly change the ethnic composition of Rapa Nui.⁷

In 1969, the death of Father Sebastian Englert, Rapa Nui's Catholic priest, brought an end to his more than thirty-year spiritual reign of the island, during which time he had kept the Rapanui from any contamination by, and therefore contact with, the outside world. The 1960's thus marked the end of Rapa Nui's isolation and pulled the island into modernity. Increased communication allowed for the invasion of "others", Chileans and tourists alike. The complex and irreversible Chileanization

process intensified in that period.

The two decades I have discussed here are the aperture for what the future would bring. They encompass the basic events that triggered the social, economic and cultural changes which are taking place on Rapa Nui at this very moment. Below, I will present some exploratory notions on globalization and cultural politics. These phenomena are shaped by the historical events I discussed in the previous pages.

GLOBALIZATION⁸

From among the several possible approaches to the globalization issue. I choose to illustrate the case of Easter Island through Arjun Appadurai's analysis in his essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" (1990). Appadurai proposes here that "the central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization".⁹ Within this opposition homogenization is often being equated with Americanization or "commoditization". To Appadurai, however, "it is worth noticing that for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for the Cambodians, Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic Republics" and, as we might add to this list, Chileanization for the Rapanui.

For Appadurai "simplification of forces (and fears) of homogenization can also be exploited by nation-states in relation to their own minorities, by posing global commoditization (or capitalism, or some other such external enemy) as more 'real' than the threat of its own hegemonic strategies." The tensions mentioned by Appadurai are visible in Chile's peripheries, in this case on Rapa Nui, where it is not only important to consider the rapid commoditization of the island, but also the "threat of the hegemonic strategies" by the Chilean nation-state. Although these strategies are not being named or conceived as such by the islanders, Chilean political and cultural hegemony has become a major point of conflict on the Rapanui agenda.

In order to explore the disjunctures between economy, culture and politics, Appadurai proposes to look at the relationship between five dimensions of global cultural flow, which he terms 'ethnoscapes', 'technoscapes', 'finanscapes', 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes'. He uses the suffix "scape" to indicate that these dimensions are comparable to landscapes "not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather deeply perspectival constructs inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors."

By 'ethnoscape' he means "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons", who "deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move". This is very much applicable to Easter Island, where people have been traveling extensively over the last decades. On the one hand, several hundred islanders now live abroad (see McCall 1997) and, on the other hand, the island population is becoming more and more heterogeneous: mainland Chileans, some Europeans and the ever changing stream of tourists. Lack of work on the island forces the young

and not so young to go to the continent. Many of the expatriates go back to the island, proud of their Rapanui heritage, and wealthier than before. Their traveling spirit has made the Rapanui into a cosmopolitan people, some of them speaking several languages, always ready for the next trip. There is a constant shift of islanders boarding or getting off the plane at Mataveru.

'Technoscape' refers to the global configuration of technology, and to the fact that technology, in Appadurai's words "now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries". The Pacific Ocean was certainly such a boundary for the Rapanui, at least since the Chilean annexation. However, imported mechanical technology has been applied in the recent pavement of Hanga Roa's central streets and the road to Anakena, and in the improvement of the Mataveru runway. The possible construction of a wharf or port in the near future, controversial as it may be, would certainly bring the latest construction techniques. Information technologies have also found their way to Rapa Nui over the last few years. These technological developments have influenced Rapa Nui's ethnoscape. Some construction workers of the Chilean firm BROTEC started relationships with Rapanui women; others are planning to return to Rapa Nui without such a relationship, just because the island is so "irresistible". One of Rapa Nui's cultural leaders suggests that an eventual free port would "imply that Chinese, Koreans etc., would go ashore, and we would have many more problems than we have now".⁷

'Finanscape' refers to the mysterious and rapid flow of global capital. Most financial transactions on Rapa Nui are channeled through the island's only bank, a subsidiary of the Banco del Estado, Chile's national bank. At a somewhat different level, it is rumored in Hanga Roa that, in the last decade or so, a couple of Rapanui families have become extremely wealthy—millionaires in dollars, the voices say. Money is creating economic differences amongst Rapanui families which did not exist before, and may be changing Rapa Nui's ethnoscape, incorporating the global dichotomy between haves and "have-less"¹⁰. It may also influence Easter Island's technoscape, in view of the considerable new financial capacity to acquire information - and other technologies.

'Mediascape' refers "both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, film production studios, etc.) and to the images of the world created by these media". This is perhaps the dimension of the global cultural flow that is most visible on Rapa Nui in the decade of the 1990's. Kevin Costner's film crew was present for most of 1993, pouring a considerable amount of cash flow and American culture into the Rapanui community. The final product, *Rapanui*, was distributed at a global level. The Chilean national television station TVN started direct transmissions via satellite to the island in March 1996. TVN also started shooting a soap opera on the island in November 1997. The Chilean telephone carrier Entel installed a direct dialing system and public telephone booths last February, connecting Rapa Nui instantaneously with the outside world. The construction of the Spaniard Kitin Muñoz's reed boat, *Mata Rangī* (Eyes of Paradise) and his recently failed attempt to cross the waters of the Pacific, caused a lot of media coverage of the island and a year-long change in

its ethnoscape by the presence of the Aymara Indians of Lake Titicaca in 1996. The "Moai de la Paz" ended up, after a long journey through the Pacific, in the center of Paris a few months ago, where it was installed in the presence of the Chilean and French presidents.¹¹ The coverage of all these events has put the island into the center of attention of the Chilean news media in an unprecedented way.

'Ideoscapes' are "often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it". On Easter Island there is controversy between the Rapanui who adopt the Western (the Chilean nation-state's) "Enlightenment world-view, which consists of a concatenation of ideas, terms and images, including 'freedom,' 'welfare,' 'rights,' 'sovereignty,' 'representation' and the master-term 'democracy.'"

On the other hand, some Rapanui emphasize their connection with Polynesia, participating in art festivals and congresses of the Southern Pacific, where local demands are being expressed and the keywords are: 'community,' 'land,' 'cultural difference' and 'autonomy' (see Zanotta Machado 1990:73). The clashes between—and mixing of—these political and cultural discourses are apparent and palpable on Easter Island. Several of my Rapanui interviewees emphasized the need for a cultural and administrative autonomy. However, this issue was not addressed by the mostly-Rapanui candidates during the October 1996 municipal elections, clearly a Chilean affair.¹²

Generally speaking, the cultural and political actors seem to inscribe themselves either in the Chilean Western and neo-liberal discourse or in a somehow upcoming Rapanui discourse, where land, language and autonomy issues are central.

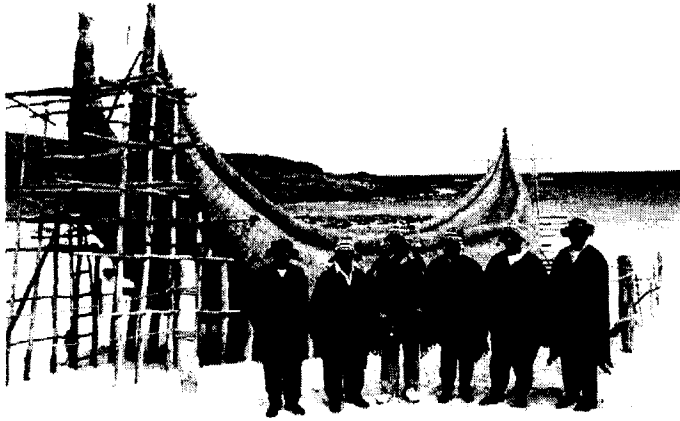
This rudimentary application of Appadurai's model of ethnoscaping, technoscaping, finanscaping, mediascaping and ideascaping, and their disjunctive relationship, allows for an interesting insight into the way Rapanui are coping with their integration into the global political and cultural economy and, more palpably so, with the accelerated process of Chileanization that the island has been undergoing in the last decade. In the next section I will discuss the two phenomena that have drawn Rapa Nui into the globalizing process over the last decades: Chileanization and tourism.

CHANNELS OF GLOBALIZATION

Chileanization

In my understanding, the biggest theme in the globalization issue for the 1990's is the accelerated process of Chileanization. It is my contention that several aspects of the interaction between the above described dimensions of global cultural flow are controlled by the Chilean government in an act of internal colonialism, more so than by the Rapanui themselves. This is to say that island policies are often being decided in Santiago, sometimes in collaboration with Rapanui governmental and municipal officials who share the Enlightenment world-view. A good example of this is the recent agreement with UNESCO on the World Heritage park, in which the Rapanui had no say, so they say.

The Chileanization of Rapa Nui is a contradictory issue, since modernization is being channeled through the Chilean



Six Aymara Indians line up in front of the ill-fated *Mata Rangi*. The occasion was the visit of the King and Queen of Spain. The *Mata Rangi* sunk some 150 nautical miles from the island

state and is embraced by many Rapanui. The interest of the central government has grown tremendously after a century of abandonment and maltreatment. Between 1990 and 1996 considerable government investments made possible the pavement of the streets of Hanga Roa and the road to Anakena, several improvements of the Mataveru airport, as we saw before, and the enlargement of the landing facilities at Hanga Piko. These investments coincide with the fact that Chile joined the APEC (the Asian and Pacific Economic Council) in 1994. In this context the island has now, more than ever, a considerable strategic value for Chile in the Pacific Basin.

Not all Rapanui however agree with Chilean integrationist politics, and tensions on the island are growing. An eloquent example of this phenomenon is the Rapanui flag with the *reimiro* symbol, a tent, and signs put up on the grounds of



Standing next to the *Mata Rangi* are Kitin Muñoz, the Queen and King of Spain, and Chilean President and Mrs Frei, plus Aymara Indians and a Rapanui wearing body paint (far left).

the Catholic Church in Hanga Roa, all of which have been there for more than two years now. One of the signs reads: "The people of Rapa Nui request the return of their lands seized by the Chilean state". Although opinions on the issue are divided within the community, the fact is that neither the

Catholic Church, nor the Municipality, nor the Ministry of the Interior have removed the signs. So anti-Chilean feelings do exist in Hanga Roa, and the issue of Rapanui relations with Chilean mainlanders and with the Chilean Government and State is a hot one. An analysis of the earlier mentioned radio interviews with candidates to the municipal government, shows that more than 30% of the questions formulated by the listeners were related to these issues.

One could say that Chile is counteracting these potentially dangerous differences by systematically "museumizing" Rapa Nui, through national and international 'mediascapes'. The purpose of such a strategy would be to "domesticate difference", seducing "small groups with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of global or cosmopolitan stage" (Appadurai). The approbation and support of Muñoz's *Mata Rangi* project by the Chilean authorities and the media



Czech President Vaclav Havel realized a childhood dream when he visited Rapa Nui in November 1966. Here he is shown with members of a Rapanui dance group.

coverage of the recent visits of the Spanish Monarchs, Czech president Vaclav Havel, and other celebrities, as well as the installation of the Moai de la Paz on one of Paris's central squares, may be seen in this light.

In the coming years the islanders will shape their relationship with Chileans and the Chilean administrations, depending on a conjunction of various factors. The accelerated increase in migration of mainlanders and mixed marriages will certainly be an important factor, and the increasing contact of Rapanui with their Polynesian neighbors another one. A change in Rapa Nui's administrative status may become an important point on the islanders' agenda.

Tourism

One of the major phenomena that has triggered the process of global cultural flow on Rapa Nui is the development of the tourist industry. In the growing literature on tourism, "the world's largest industry" is being described not only as an eco-

conomic, but also as a cultural phenomenon. Robert Wood argues that the relationship between tourism, state policies and ethnicity can be seen as a broader process of globalization (Wood 1997:2). Margaret Jolly proposes, in a similar vein, that tourism as a phenomenon brings together cultural policies and economic development (Jolly 1994:132). Christopher Tilley goes a step further in his article about tourism on Vanuatu, saying that the islanders are self-consciously constructing images of themselves relating to their ancestral ways, but at the same time commodifying them for tourists. In doing so, they are rebuilding a sense of locality and, although this does not at the moment represent a form of oppositional discourse to the Vanuatu state, seeds for future opposing discourses have been planted (Tilley 1997: 84,85).

It is important to look at tourism on Rapa Nui taking into consideration the relationships between tourism, state policies, economic development and ethnicity. For the time being I will only sketch the general state of affairs. According to data of SERNATUR, the Chilean National Tourist Service, the amount of tourists spending a minimum of one night on the island has doubled between 1990 and 1996 (from 4,961 to 10,568). The amount of Chilean tourists in this same period has increased almost five times (from 502 in 1990 to 2,418 in 1996). The infrastructure needed for tourism has grown accordingly. In 1996, SERNATUR registered 665 beds, distributed over 10 hotels and 27 boarding-houses. Only one of these establishments, the Hotel Hanga Roa, belongs to a Chilean hotel-chain. The rest are owned by Rapanui. There are also now several restaurants, three discothèques and a bar.

Many islanders are benefiting economically from tourism in one way or the other. They work in hotels, boarding-houses, restaurants and as tour guides; they rent their jeeps, motorbikes, motorboats and horses at good prices; they have increased their sales of crafts, fish, fruits and vegetables; and small commerce has grown as well. As I said before, some Rapanui have become wealthy in the process, especially the owners of hotels and travel agencies.

The yearly celebration of the Tapati Rapa Nui is the major event for tourists in that traditional cultural manifestations are performed and reinvented. Tapati is organized around a beauty queen contest between two (or three) candidates, and based on the support of several families, corresponding to traditional clan affiliations. Various competitions are organized between groups and individuals, such as body painting, singing and dancing, sculpting, outrigger canoeing, body surfing, deep sea fishing, etc. The most spectacular and dangerous is undoubtedly the *haka pei*, a contest in which the participants slide down a steep hill on the trunks of banana trees. Tapati can be seen as an example of the marketing of Rapanui culture, an ever changing spectacle of ancestral and reinvented

cultural manifestations.¹³

When asking about the possible negative ecological impact of tourism on this fragile island—as has been demonstrated on other Pacific Islands—see e.g. Boutilier 1981), there seems to be little consciousness nor concern amongst Rapanui government officials and businessmen. The opinions on the tourist issue are divided, however. Although most people agree that it is the only viable alternative for the economic development of the island, some of the mainland heads of government agencies warn against the negative effects. One of them says that “everybody has benefited to a certain extent, but (tourism) has also caused enormous inequalities between Rapanui families”. Another argues that “we still live in the age of deprivation here. This is to say: the more money in my pocket the better. Nobody bothers to say that (tourism) has a limit.” One of Rapa Nui’s cultural leaders is of the opinion that “tourism leaves money, but to groups that are already organized, not to all the people”. He and others think that it is as important to develop and modernize agriculture and fishing in order to be self-sufficient as an island and provide work for the



A contestant in the triathlon competition held during Tapati 1997, prepares to paddle his bundle of reeds across the lake at Rano Raraku.

Rapanui community.

But who are the tourists visiting Rapa Nui in ever larger numbers? Although most people visit the island in early February, to attend or to participate in the Tapati, the main attraction is the “lost and mysterious” culture that created the giant statues. The sheer distance and the high costs to stay on the island make a visit to Rapa Nui expensive. So the kind of tourist that visits Rapa Nui is often the older and moneyed North American or European, with a childhood dream, stimulated by the travel stories of the Norwegian Thor Heyerdahl. The exotic seems to be at the basis of the construction of Rapa Nui as an object of desire for many tourists (see Bruner 1996). The increasing number of Chilean tourists may also correspond to an act of appropriation: a visit to the exotic island that, after all, is Chilean territory.

Tourism on Rapa Nui is thus entangled with several social, economic and cultural issues, and is contested by various actors in different ways, depending on their social, cultural and economic position. When studying processes of globalization on Easter Island, tourism is one of the major phenomena to be considered.

Both Chileanization and tourism are decisive factors in the construction of a specific Rapanui identity. The tensions resulting from these processes are opening up space for the creation of a Rapanui identity, rejecting and accepting Chileans and the Chilean nation-state, accepting and rejecting tourism, renewing and initiating contacts with Polynesian and other Pacific Islands. In the following section I will give a brief survey of some of the issues that are related to current Rapanui identity politics, such as land, language, and cultural

performances. Although my discussion will only map the terrain, it will hopefully indicate some challenging directions for further research.

CULTURAL POLITICS¹⁴

In my discussion on 'ideoscapes' I mentioned the difference between the Western worldview and the current Polynesian emphasis on the concepts of 'community', 'land', 'cultural difference' and 'autonomy'. I would like to address the identity issue on Easter Island by taking up an argument put forth by Linnekin and Poyer in the introduction of their co-edited book on *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific*. They suggest that "Oceanic and Western views are characterized by fundamentally different theories about the determination of identity. In brief, we venture to propose an Oceanic theory of cultural identity that privileges environment, behavior and situational flexibility, over descent, innate characteristics and unchanging boundaries" (Linnekin and Poyer 1990: 6). The latter, more static, concepts are part of the Western 'ethnicity' paradigm, in which race, genetics and traditional culture are central. In Oceania "shared identity comes from sharing food, water, land, spirits, knowledge, work and social activities." (ibid.:8)

Linnekin (1990:169) also suggests that cultural identity is not given, fixed, or immutable, but dynamically ascribed in the present. And, as Alan Howard (1990:261) states, "It may well be, in fact, that "culture" under conditions of rapid change is better conceived as an assemblage of propositions, many of which may be contradictory to one another, than as a neatly packaged coherent system."

One could propose that the identity issue for Rapa Nui can be analyzed in terms of such an Oceanic worldview, but also in terms of a dynamic process, because the once-isolated Rapanui are being exposed to multiple world views, which they appropriate according to their own specific needs. I will start my discussion by looking at the issue of Rapanui surnames from this double perspective.

Surnames as Markers of Identity

As mentioned, 90% of the registered births in the early 1960's were Rapanui, this is to say that both parents had Rapanui surnames. At this point in history approximately 27 surnames are recognized as such. Some are proper names changed into surnames, or European surnames (see McCall 1986; Hotus 1988). This, together with the fact that over the last century quite a few other foreigners and Chileans left their offspring on the island seems to me an indication of an inclusive and flexible concept of familial affiliation, in the Polynesian tradition.¹⁵

According to the same source, the number of Rapanui births had gone down from 90% in 1962 to 35% in 1992. If we

use the 'ethnicity' concept, the prediction would be that within a couple of decades very few "real" Rapanui will be left. Interestingly the Rapanui themselves seem to be using that same concept now, narrowing down the boundaries of their families in Western fashion. For example, while they recognize as Rapanui the descendants of the Englishman Percy Edmunds, administrator of the Williamson Balfour Company in the beginning of this century, they have closed down this possibility for contemporary Chileans and foreigners alike.

It is interesting to see how a recent Chilean legal disposition allows for interchanging surnames in case of a Rapanui mother and an outsider father, in order to preserve Rapanui surnames. Formerly, Rapanui would easily incorporate these foreign surnames; several—especially young people—are now resorting to this new legal possibility.¹⁶

This can be seen as an example of how elements of the 'ethnicity' concept are being incorporated into Rapanui cultural strategies. Linnekin (1990:173) suggests: "The concepts of race and ethnicity were used by colonialists against Pacific Islanders, and perhaps it is only fitting that indigenous peoples now use the same tools to reaffirm their rights." Concern about the "authenticity" of Rapanui surnames could be seen in this light. Surnames are also closely related to the issue of land.



Festive members of a wedding party in front of the island church are in contrast to the belligerent signs protesting Chile's land policies.

Land¹⁷

One of the major factors determining identity in Polynesia is land. Alan Howard (1990:267) notes: "The intense emotions generated over land rights, and their symbolic centrality in the political struggles of the Aborigines, Hawaiians, and Maori, also reflect this close association of place with identity in Oceanic societies."

Probably the principal difference between Rapa Nui and other Pacific Islands is that in 1933 virtually the whole island became the property of the Chilean state, except for the grounds of the Catholic Church and the Hotel Hanga Roa.¹⁸ Approximately 40% of this land belongs to CONAF (*Corporación Nacional Forestal*) and another 40% to SASIPA (*Sociedad Agrícola y Servicios Ltda.*), both government agencies. The other 20% are the urban and rural plots outside Hanga Roa, occupied by the islanders.

On the one hand this situation has prevented the land from being sold to private people, as has happened in Hawai'i, Tahiti and other places in the Pacific. On the other hand, it has created an unresolved problem between Rapa Nui and the Chilean state. The problem has been aggravated since the creation of the *Ley Indígena* in 1993. In view of the fact that the growing population needs more land, an *interim* solution has been found. Rapanui, although they cannot be owners of government land, can apply for a so-called *título de dominio*, which allows them to use the land and pass it on to their offspring. For that purpose, 1500 hectares have been freed from

the SASIPA and CONAF estates over the last couple of years.

But a new problem arose. The *Ley Indígena* created a special commission for Easter Island, the *Comisión de Desarrollo de Isla de Pascua*, which would address the land issue, development projects, and the conservation of the archeological heritage. This Commission will consist of representatives of the Chilean government, the Mayor, and members of the Rapanui community, one of which must be president of the *Consejo de Ancianos*. Until mid 1997 the commission had not been constituted, due to the fact that there are now two *Consejos de Ancianos*, the second one created around the same time the *Ley Indígena* came into existence. Two Councils means two presidents. As long as this Commission problem is not resolved, the 1500 hectares cannot be assigned, nor any other decisions made on the land, or on other issues within the competence of the Commission.

The *Ley Indígena* created another problem as well.¹⁹ In one of its articles it establishes that anyone who practices "the customs or the religion of an ethnic group in a regular way, or who's spouse is indigenous" will be considered as indigenous. (*Ley Indígena* 1995:4) This can be interpreted as giving such a person the right to Rapanui land. Representatives of the Rapanui community have rejected the article. Here again the ethnicity concept seems to prevail. Over the last years the issue has been treated on several occasions in the Chilean Congress, but only recently the law was changed.

This conflict shows once again the intersections between former and present 'ideascapes'. As Alan Howard says, places in the Pacific used to have character by virtue of their histories, and people who were raised in a place, or assimilated to a group occupying it, acquired its character and came to form part of that community. This is no longer the case on Rapa Nui. Integration into the Chilean nation-state, with its inherent neo-colonial policies, has increased ethnic awareness and a concern with Rapanui identity. The predictable increase in population and the growing immigration of Chilean mainlanders will make land a scarce resource. By setting boundaries, and making their own decisions about who can and who cannot occupy their land, Rapanui are shaping the future of their island community.

Language

Besides land, language is the other major marker of cultural identity, but the current situation of the Rapanui language should be a matter of great concern. It has been documented that the number of elementary school children whose mother tongue or predominant language is Rapanui, has decreased from 77% in 1977 to 25% in 1989 (Weber and Thiesen de Weber 1990:120).

There are several reasons why fewer children speak Rapanui. One is the increase in mixed marriages and resident mainlanders. Another is that two or three decades ago Rapanui parents discouraged their children from speaking Rapanui so that they might get ahead in Chilean society. In that same period it was even forbidden to speak Rapanui on the school grounds (Weber and Thiesen de Weber 1990: 122). So there is a whole generation that doesn't speak the language well.

Another reason is that, in Rapanui fashion, it is extremely difficult to coordinate policies to prevent the decrease in Rapa-

nui speakers. Even so, everybody I spoke to is concerned about the issue, even the mainlanders. One of the mainland officials working in a government agency and married to a Rapanui says: "I think it would be a disaster if the language disappears. Imagine, if you go today with any 20 year old to the coast, see how many names of places he can give you. Between here and Poike he will give you five names, but if you go with an old man he will give you 200 names. And it is like that with everything: the crops, the phases of the moon, the names of the clouds, the winds, the plants. It is such a rich language. The only thing I want is that it will not disappear, but I think it is very difficult to save it." Most islanders would probably identify, to a certain extent, with the emotions expressed in this statement.

Several people are working on the language issue. Two North American linguists, Robert and Nancy Weber, have been on the island since 1977. They are associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics and work in a program together with the Catholic University of Valparaíso. Their main emphasis has been the development of educational material for the elementary school. Currently they are translating parts of Scripture into Rapanui, advised by some of the Rapanui elders.²⁰

In 1991 a "Department of Rapanui Culture and Language" was created in the school. The department is composed of the Rapanui teachers who work in the school, and their aim is language maintenance among the schoolchildren. One of these teachers emphasizes how difficult it has been to create interest in the language issue, in and outside the school alike. She also notes that the community does not perceive the importance of growing up bilingual. An aggregated problem is that today's parents belong to the generation that was prohibited from speaking Rapanui. She thinks that "it will be easier now, with the younger parents. After all, they did not experience the problem of not knowing enough Spanish to communicate, when they were studying or travelling on the continent." Some teachers are also acquainted with immersion educational techniques, which are being practiced quite successfully in other parts of Polynesia such as amongst the Maori. In New Zealand parents can choose for their children to receive either a Maori or an English education, starting at the level of Kindergarten and continuing till University level.

Another more recent effort for language preservation comes from one of Rapa Nui's cultural and political leaders. He has been working over the last few years with the Spanish linguist Jesús Conte, on an academic Rapanui Grammar and Dictionary. One of the purposes is to create the Rapanui Academy of Language.

In the language issue one can observe once again a breach between a discourse that sees language as an unchangeable system, within a purist tradition, and a discourse that sees language as a dynamic system, in which new elements can be incorporated at any time.

From the side of the government, CONADI (*Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena*) and the Chilean Ministry of Education are in the process of introducing bilingual education in the school. This corresponds to a bilingual cultural program of the *Ley Indígena* (article 28). This program is still being tested on a national level. One of the mainlanders working with

CONADI says: "There are two issues that make differences explode (on Rapa Nui), land and language, and these are the most important issues. I am almost coming to the conclusion that if the differences are not overcome, it will mean the end of the Rapanui as a people. These two issues have a lot of impact on other aspects of life: the political life, family life, social life." Although this may sound somewhat alarmist, it seems to me that the implicit concern should be taken to heart by the Rapanui community.

Cultural Revival

Over the last couple of decades several expressions of cultural revival have been articulated on Rapa Nui. One of the first ones was the creation of the yearly summer celebration, the Tapati Rapa Nui, in 1969. In 1974 the Huke family created the performance group Tu'u Hotu Iti (Huke 1995). Rodrigo Paoa and others formed in 1990 the corporation Kahu Kahu O'hera. Almost simultaneously the project of the Moai de la Paz was conceived by the cultural group Kia Hio of Miguel Tuki Atan and others (see Monconduit 1993). Aside from these more formal groups, several smaller dance and performance groups exist.

Although space limitations do not allow a detailed analysis of these cultural manifestations, I would like to discuss a few issues which seem to bear on my arguments. One of them is the difference in perceptions about the "authenticity" of these manifestations between Rapanui and mainlanders. The other one refers to the wider Polynesian context. First of all we have to remember that very few pre-contact cultural manifestations were transmitted after the decade of the 1860's. The reenactments done by the formal and less formal performance groups I mentioned, necessarily correspond to creation and borrowing. Continental and Rapanui discourses seem to diverge and disagree on the validity of these manifestations and strategies of cultural revival.

The mainland director of one of the governmental institutions says: "I think that Rapanui culture, as culture in the classical anthropological concept, does not exist. This is to say, what I think that exists—in the last three or four generations—is a reinterpretation of certain rites, certain traditions that were lost, and will never exist again. This is to say that I don't believe in the story that the Rapanui people of today are descendants of the people that made the *moai*. They may be descendants in terms of genetics, blood and genotype, but they don't belong to the same cultural continuity. All this was lost in the last century and died. The identity of the Rapanui people has been maintained around the language. I think that language is the pillar, in this sense, but not so other cultural aspects. Tattooing was lost, the *rongorongo* script was lost, all that was lost. On the other hand, the language survived."

A mainland high official of another government institution notes: "Some Rapanui took refuge in this cultural thing

that has almost nothing of Rapanui, very little, not to say nothing. Everything, songs, instruments, costumes, tattooing, everything has been lost. All these groups have nothing of Rapanui. Look at the engravings of the dances and songs of the 1920's and 30's, not to say before that. They don't have anything to do with the *sau sau*, etc., neither the costumes, nor the music, nor the dances, nothing, nothing. So what they are trying to defend is a Rapanui culture from the second half of the 20th century". While the first interview seems to make a somewhat nostalgic appeal to traditional culture, the second one

rejects current cultural manifestations for not being "authentically" Rapanui.

Looking at the issue from a broader perspective, I would agree with Linnekin (1990:152) that tradition is the contemporary interpretation of the past, rather than something passively received. She also sustains that artifacts and customs need not be indigenous to be identified as traditional. "Whether one finds such borrowings objectionable depends on one's paradigm of cultural identity" (ibid.:160). In this sense, the mainland interviewees seem to inscribe themselves in the 'ethnicity' paradigm, with its static idea of what tradition is and should be.

Rapanui, especially the younger ones, feel that questions about the authenticity of their cultural manifestations are superfluous. They maintain that, of course, they belong to the Rapanui cultural tradition.

I endorse Linnekin's argument that "without firsthand knowledge or resident experts, people may attempt to construct an approximation or look to a cognate culture for appropriate models. The fact that this version does not correspond precisely to previous custom does not undermine its *significance or its power as symbol of collective identity*." (Linnekin 1990:161, my emphasis). In this context I would like to refer to Carlos Huke's Ahu Vaka project. By the construction of his *ahu* in Anakena he intends to provide a landing place for the Polynesian double-hulled canoes that have been traveling all over the Polynesian triangle. The last meeting took place in 1995 in Ra'iatea, where boats from Hawai'i, Tahiti, New Zealand and Cook Islands gathered, in the tradition of the Hawaiian canoe *Hokule'a*, that has been navigating in the Pacific since 1976 (see Finney 1994). Although his is literally a one-man project, it corresponds to a desire for the inclusion of Rapa Nui in a Polynesian collective identity.

Rapanui have also been participating in art festivals and congresses of the Southern Pacific over the last couple of decades, emphasizing in this way their Polynesian heritage and cultural difference from mainland Chile. Recurrent visits of New Zealand Maori and other Polynesians have to be seen as well in the light of this reestablishment of broken links.

SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

The Rapanui people have come a long way since the devastating decade of the 1860's, prior to the Chilean occupation,



The author (left) and Christopher Steven-son admire the traditional Rapanui tattoo designs on islander Alberto Ika.

and the decade of the 1960's, when the island started to establish a firm contact with the outside world. The seeds of profound alterations in the Rapanui cultural paradigm, including globalization and identity issues, were sown more than a century ago.

Over the last decades however—and especially during the 1990's—globalizing forces have been accelerating economic and communicational changes with unprecedented speed. Part of the Rapanui community is responding to this process by marking their own cultural identity, emphasizing land, language, cultural revival and community values. Others are more eager to integrate into the Chilean nation-state. In many of the current disputes within the community there exists a breach between a possible indigenous Rapanui discourse, and the discourse of some of the mainland government officials, along with Rapanui who are businessmen or work for the Chilean administration. A similar difference exists between the islanders who are, or are not, involved in politics or commerce. The increasing presence of mainland Chileans on the island will influence these discourses.

In the mainland-Western discourse one can observe a certain degree of rationalization. This rationalization applies to economic and socio-cultural issues alike. Policies and projects should be functional and growth-oriented. The Rapanui discourse, on the other hand, is community-oriented. It emphasizes that any actions should benefit the majority of the Rapanui community. If this is not possible decisions may be delayed *ad infinitum*.

It is crucial for the Rapanui people—as families and as individuals—to forge a creative balance between the different social and subject positions they are bound to occupy within their changing island society. A major challenge will be how to revive and strengthen their Polynesian heritage in spite of cultural commodification and tourism. An emphasis on the politics of land, language, community and cultural difference will be central in this predicament. Awareness of the fact that globalizing processes are being filtered through and mediated by the strategies of Chile as a nation-state seems to me of vital importance.

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NOTES

- ¹ This paper was written in the context of a research project on globalization issues and gender relations on Easter Island. Field research was conducted between September 1996 and February 1997. The research was made possible by grant N° 1960146 of the Chilean financing agency FONDECYT (*Fondo para el Desarrollo de la Investigación Científica y Tecnológica*). Co-researchers in the project were Chilean anthropologist Ana Maria Arredondo, resident on the island, the Chilean anthropologist Eliana Largo. I would like to thank the Rapanui and other residents on the island who generously gave their time to listen patiently to my questions. I also wish to thank the islander families and individuals who regaled me with their hospitality, friendship and support during my stay on the island.
- ² Rapanui refer to themselves as Polynesians, not as Pacific Islanders or Oceanic people, a suggestion made by Hau'ofa (1994), hinting at a future cultural and possibly political unity of the people of the Pacific. I agree with the political importance of these concepts, but Hau'ofa's also says that "the terms Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia ... are already part of the cultural consciousness of the peoples of Oceania" (Hau'ofa 1993:16).
- ³ Sources: Katherine Routledge (1917); Katherine Routledge (1919); Alfred Métraux (1940); Jesús Conte (1994).
- ⁴ Most of the data in this section are taken from Douglas Porteous chapter on "Modernization since 1965", in his book *The Modernization of Easter Island* (1981).
- ⁵ Porteous says that in the mid-1960's up to 70 requests were made per year to sail with the annual ship. Of these only a score received permission. Reasons for refusals included lack of space, lack of jobs or relatives in Chile, and fear of transmitting leprosy to the mainland (Porteous 1981: 170).
- ⁶ This information about Roberto Parragué comes from a recently (1997) produced and televised video on his life and pioneering flights to Easter Island.
- ⁷ The records of the Municipality of Easter Island show the following. In 1962, 90% of the registered births were Rapanui (both parents had Rapanui surnames). In 1972, 64% of the births were Rapanui, in 1982, 53%, and in 1992, 43%.
- ⁸ See e.g. Appadurai 1986; Featherstone 1990; WOTRO 1993.
- ⁹ Unless indicated otherwise, the quotations in this section on globalization are from Appadurai (1990).
- ¹⁰ On this same issue Alan Howard suggests that, although Oceanic societies are poor by world standards, economically-based class differences have not been great (Howard 1990: 270).
- ¹¹ See Monconduit, D., R. Agussan, and J. L. Lesbros (1993) *Ile de Pâques. A la Rencontre du Mana*, for the cultural project of the Moai de la Paz. The project later developed into a contested movement on the island.
- ¹² It is curious to see how the Rapanui "participate" in Chilean politics. Some candidates seem to run for whatever party gives them shelter, without considering the content of its political ideology. During the last two municipal elections, for instance, one of the principal candidates ran for three different parties, representing the whole Chilean political spectrum, to earn his place in the municipal government. This is an example of how some Rapanui social actors use the Chilean political system to secure a position of importance for local politics.
- ¹³ Further analysis of the performances during the Tapati is needed, but most likely some of them have been invented and are constantly being reinvented for a tourist audience (compare Bruner 1996).
- ¹⁴ The data for this section were collected during our period in the field. Situations that have changed since August 1997 are not reflected in this paper.
- ¹⁵ Compare this with Hawai'i, where households also easily incorporated new members through adoption, marriage and land tenancy (Linnekin 1990:156).
- ¹⁶ Compare this situation with the discussion in Hawai'i on the categories of being 'Hawaiian', 'part-Hawaiian', 'native Hawaiian' (Linnekin 1990: 153-154).
- ¹⁷ See the recent study by Susana Rochna-Ramírez (1996) on the Rapanui land issue.
- ¹⁸ I obtained this information from the director of one of the Chilean government agencies.
- ¹⁹ Besides the Rapanui, the *Ley Indígena* considers as "indigenous" the Aymara, Cechua and Colla of northern Chile, the ethnic communities of the Atacama desert, the Mapuche of the southern Lake District and the Alacalufe and Yamana in the extreme south.
- ²⁰ For decades one of the main emphases of the Summer Institute of Linguistics has been the translation of Scripture into several indigenous languages.

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