

I do not mourn the *koro* and *nua* that are no more whom I have known; I am grateful that they took the time to talk to me and especially during my last fieldwork, to invite me into their homes as friends and colleagues. During my first two fieldwork periods, I had been accompanied by my wife and children. In 2001 and 2002, they all had other projects, so I took a room in the house that I had known well before; that of Urbano Hey, who had visited me (and his son) twice in Sydney before his death in 1995.

People who lovingly preserve what they know about their culture and traditions, who discuss these elements of their own personal and group identity and who are interested in communicating such information are known usually as intellectuals.

It has been my good fortune to have met and worked with a number of Rapanui intellectuals, many of whom I hope to see and work with again in future years. There always will

be respected *koro* and *nua* on Easter Island for us people of Hiva who become interested in Te Pito o Te Henua, which can be translated both as the navel and the end of the Earth, an irony not lost on the vivacious and intelligent people who live there, who call themselves Rapanui.

FOOTNOTE

¹ Their visit is the subject of a new, excellent documentary, *L'homme de Pâques*, by Thomas Lavachery, the latter's grandson.

REFERENCES

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COMING OF AGE ON RAPA NUI: ON DOING ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELD WORK AMONG THE RAPANUI YOUTH

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I have heard that novice anthropologists often enter the field thinking they know it all and then soon discover that they don't. I thought I knew nothing – and never discovered I had been wrong in that. In February 2002 I arrived to do my Ph.D. fieldwork on the Rapanui youth under the supervision of Grant McCall. As no one had studied the Rapanui youth so far, I had plenty of possible topics concerning the 761 islanders aged between 15 and 29 (national census, 2002), but I was personally most interested in the simple question: What is it like to be young in such a small, faraway and yet quite famous place?

Unfortunately, I felt completely unsuited for any ethnographic research at all. How could such a timid person ever get to know anyone? And how would teenagers react to having a twenty-eight year old wannabe hanging around? I was lucky to have McCall and fellow Ph.D. student Riet Delsing there for advice, but I felt like a fake compared to them. How could I ever become an anthropologist?

Anthropologists, contrary to the archaeologists coming to the island, should naturally speak more with the people than stones, so it is practical to have a common language and to like small talk. But as a wise Rapanui woman commented "Your Spanish is shit, and if you're not open like us we will shut the window so you'll only be able to touch the transparent glass".

I had arrived with a course in basic Spanish (hoping that this would force me to learn Rapanui quickly), and I have always been hopelessly shy. McCall took his role as supervisor seriously (to the extent that he can keep a serious face) and advised me to start interviewing right away as my year would soon be over. But I kept postponing it, as I was afraid of making mistakes.

And at the same time, a tourist asked me "So what do the locals think about you coming here to steal their knowledge only to promote your own career?" This is an important critique, but it is normally avoided with some use of common sense, or what my supervisor calls the "golden rule": "*Don't do to your informants what you wouldn't like them to do to you*". But I wasn't prepared for accusations and found myself seriously thinking of leaving before starting.

However as weeks passed by and I got used to my mistakes, I amazingly started to get to know people. I was volunteering in a student archaeology group, training with the dance group Kari Kari, and living with a caring Rapanui family. But I was still just as shy and constantly stressed by the fear of making cultural blunders – which I did all the time.

One of the first things my new little sister taught me: "It is very impolite to step over somebody's feet". She couldn't give me any explanation, but gave me plenty of disappointed looks as I kept on stepping and stumbling and never seemed to get this into my head. She and other youths also wanted to know exactly what I wanted to know about them, and of course they knew my topic a lot better than I. All too often they gave me a mildly surprised look saying: "*And you have been to the university?*"

But they took good care of their novice anthropologist and got used to making their explanations idiot-proof. Of course, anthropologists are often compared to children in their host cultures, as they seem to know nothing and ask about everything. And part of my Rapanui education was learning that only a stupid child keeps asking questions all the time, so I tried to make the most of my observational skills. So even if I was invited to go camping for several days I would learn to answer "yes" or "no" without asking where or when. Living in

the moment and never taking anything for granted were probably the most important lessons to learn.

But finally, many of you are probably more interested in what I learned about my research topic? What are my conclusions concerning the Rapanui youth? Several months after finishing my fieldwork I'm getting good at not stepping over people's feet, but I still find it difficult to make conclusions I'm happy that I have another two years to write up my thesis. As another critique says, anthropology is only writing down what everyone already knows. I admit fearing that at least my informants might think that all I say is old news. But that would also be good news also, meaning that I didn't get it all wrong. And it might be new to somebody else, so let me share a few chaotic thoughts.

My first impression was that the Rapanui youth looked rather like youth elsewhere in interests and appearance, but are very proud of their island – and not afraid to show it. Teenagers voluntarily performing folk dances is not common where I'm from, and having grown up in the geographical periphery of the world myself I always wanted to leave and see the world.

At least one could imagine that as adult Rapanui are known for their island patriotism, the youth would try to be different, as a kind of teenage revolt – but no. The Rapanui youth would always say that their island is Paradise and that they wouldn't change it for anything in the world. This Paradise is described as a safe place without traffic lights, where everyone is family and one can live well without money – unlike the Chilean continent. Of course there is never any place like home, but even though most admit getting bored of island life at times and that they wouldn't mind seeing the world too, they say they wouldn't leave for longer periods.

So to discover that I wouldn't learn much Rapanui language from the young people was therefore a little surprise. Most understand it, recite it and sing it very well, but they

don't speak it – apart from expressions and single words. As you might know, the Rapanui language is becoming more and more important as an 'ethnicity marker' and since 1999 the school has a special education program that has improved the percentage of Rapanui-speaking children.

But the age group that I am studying almost seem to be a 'lost generation' in this aspect. As children, most of them were taught to speak Spanish in order to avoid discrimination in Chilean society. Additionally they are too old to participate in the new Rapanui immersion program. If this program succeeds and this older 'lost generation' doesn't learn to speak Rapanui, the future might be that a traditional authority-generation will speak less of the indigenous language than the younger generations. However, most of these 'non-speakers' say they want to learn, and a few have learned it on their own despite the lack of courses. But most complain that they easily lose motivation because the elders only laugh at their mistakes instead of helping them. Some elders recognize this, but say the young are not really interested.

So my beloved Rapanui youth left me a little puzzled. It might be only natural that it is difficult for young adults to learn another language in their spare time when one can survive without it, and there are so many other things to do before getting old. Maybe singing and dancing are easier and more pleasant ways to express their Rapanui identity. Maybe speaking the language is not so important for feeling Rapanui in this generation. Or perhaps they will learn it when they get older.

But this is where I will concentrate my research, as the novice is hopefully coming of age.

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Island cultures have long been recognized as possessing characteristics and histories that distinguish them from non-insular societies, although the definition of insularity is itself open to debate. A recent spate of publications from a variety of different regions has served to highlight the importance of islands for archaeologists, biogeographers, linguists, biological anthropologists, etc., yet few studies have approached island archaeology from a global or comparative perspective. The objective of this conference is to bring together researchers actively engaged in the study of islands and island societies throughout the world to define common ground, to compare approaches, perspectives and the results of recent research, and to promote the investigation of the archaeology of the world's islands. Anticipated major themes include: island landscapes, human ecology and environmental change, island languages and archaeology, maritime trade and exchange, seafaring, colonization, identity and insularity, and island demography and population history. Those interested in offering a paper are asked to send a title and abstract to:

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