

Issues of Land and Sovereignty

The Uneasy Relationship between Chile and Rapa Nui

On New Year's Eve 1999 a large crowd gathered at the ceremonial site of Tahai on Rapa Nui to celebrate the advent of the new millennium.¹ Rapa Nui, the small island in the South Pacific also known as Easter Island, was annexed by Chile in 1888. That same morning some Rapanui youths had damaged the Chilean National Television (TVN) equipment set up on the site to cover the celebrations. They were protesting against the violation of a sacred, ceremonial place and also demanding access to the considerable sum paid by TVN to the municipality of Rapa Nui for the rights to film the event, which was to be broadcast live, worldwide, via the BBC network. Minutes before midnight the best-known Chilean television hosts, flown in from the mainland for the occasion, distributed flower garlands among the islanders and the tourists participating in the event, so that the world could enjoy the exotic character of this most unique millennium celebration.

When fireworks lit up the spectacular site, with its famous stone statues (*moai*), and the crowd was cheering, some of us noticed that this was not the only manifestation of "Rapanuiness." A few steps away, in the dark night, a small group of Rapanui wearing traditional *mahute* (bark cloth) capes and carrying torches stood silently against the starred sky, next to a lonely moai and a Chilean flag which was blowing in the stiff breeze. The flag was purposely put beneath a Rapanui flag as a challenge to Chilean sovereignty over the island. This incident illustrates some of the political and cultural tensions in Rapa Nui. The events surrounding the millennium celebration show not only the Rapanui's insistence on asserting their collective cultural identity, but also their entanglement with the Chilean nation-state and tourism. Since the 1990s there had been a growing awareness among Rapanui of their

specific cultural identity, expressed in practices and discourses around the issues of land, language, and cultural performances, along with a striking increase in cultural exchanges with other Polynesians.

More than a century has passed since the annexation, and the Chilean nation-state has created not an environment leading to cooperation with the Rapanui people but one of resistance. In this essay I explore some of the issues at stake in this enduring conflict. After a review of the early years of Chilean colonization I show how successive Chilean laws have attempted to integrate Rapa Nui into the nation-state, and how they are an obstacle to traditional Rapanui relations with their land and territory. I conclude with an examination of the changing forms of political relationship between Chile and Rapa Nui.

My work is based on several years of anthropological research and life experience in Rapa Nui. Starting in 1996 I have conducted fieldwork on the island on various occasions ranging from a couple of weeks to ten months. Since then, my life has become intertwined with the people of Rapa Nui, with their joys and their struggles. Over the past decade I have explored Rapanui gender relations, issues of globalization, and, in the context of my dissertation research, cultural politics, Rapanui relationships with the Chilean nation-state, and their thrust toward self-determination. In these inquiries I have adopted a multisited approach (Marcus 1995; Marcus and Fischer 1986) since my main premise is that the movement of people, ideas, institutions, communication systems, and capital across the Pacific Ocean is central to the articulation of a modern Rapanui cultural identity. My voice is that of an anthropologist, inquisitive and curious about cultural processes—the subject of our trade—but also that of somebody with a personal investment in social and political change in Rapa Nui and elsewhere.

A Brief History

The annexation of Rapa Nui did not take place in a historical vacuum. It was the result of the Chilean Republic's imperialist aspirations in the late nineteenth century. After gaining independence from Spain in 1818, Chile was still consolidating its territory in the 1880s when it made two major conquests that increased its territory by a third. To the south, it militarily defeated the Mapuche people, who had struggled for three hundred years, first, against Spanish and, later, Chilean colonizers. To the north, Chile defeated Bolivia and Peru in the War of the Pacific (1879–83), and Chile annexed

substantial parts of their territories that were inhabited by the indigenous Aymara, Quechua, and Colla peoples. The major objective of this war was to gain control of the mineral riches, nitrate in particular, of the Atacama desert, part of which was located in Bolivian and Peruvian territories (Silva Galdames 1995).

But Chile's expansionist drive did not limit itself to the American continent. A growing number of foreign merchants, mainly British, used the Chilean port of Valparaíso as a way station for trade with the Pacific coast before the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. Valparaíso became the most important port on that coast, which allowed Chilean merchants to create their own trade routes across the Pacific, in India and East Asia, in search of new markets for Chile's copper and nitrates (Bushnell and Macaulay 1988, 109). Before the end of the century Chilean consulates had been opened in Shanghai, Canton, Manila, Calcutta, Sydney, and Brunei. Chilean sailors and merchants became familiar with Polynesian geography, and this led to dreams of western expansion into the Pacific (Porteous 1981). In the late 1800s several European and American nations annexed islands and archipelagos in the Pacific. In this context of imperialist fervor Chile annexed Rapa Nui.

A captain of the Chilean navy by the name of Policarpo Toro Hurtado visited Rapa Nui in 1875 and again in 1886. After his second visit he submitted a proposal for annexation to his superiors in the navy. President José Manuel Balmaceda of Chile approved of the idea, and Toro went to Tahiti in 1887 with the intention of buying the Rapanui's lands and animals, which had been seized by European–Tahitian businessmen and the Tahitian Catholic Church (*Revista de Marina* 1983, 316, 317). Toro then annexed the island in September 1888 by signing the “Agreement of Wills” (*Acuerdo de Voluntades*) with the Rapanui chiefs.

The official Spanish text of the agreement consists of two parts: the “Cession,” in which the chiefs grant sovereignty to Chile, and the “Proclamation,” in which Toro accepts the cession of sovereignty in the name of the Republic of Chile (Vergara 1939, appendices XII and XIII). In 2001 the Rapanui-language version of these documents started to circulate on the island. A translation of this version back into Spanish reveals that the Rapanui did not hand over sovereignty to the Chileans in the sense in which the concept is understood in current international law.² This disparity coincides with oral tradition, according to which *ariki* Atamu Tekena gave a bunch of grass to Toro but put a handful of soil in his own pocket, a gesture meant to express

that he was allowing the Chileans to make use of land and crops but that he was not handing over Rapanui territory.³ This enactment is performed for me over and over again whenever I ask Rapanui about their political relationship with Chile.

The Early Years of Chilean Colonization

Misunderstandings about the separateness of land and territory were present from the very beginning of Chilean colonization. After the annexation in 1888, Toro's brother, Pedro Pablo, stayed in Rapa Nui for four years as an "agent of colonization" (Toro 1892) and wrote an interesting report about his experiences. Besides his observations about Chilean versus Rapanui political authority, Chilean "civilization" versus Rapanui Polynesian culture, and the Chilean legal system versus Rapanui customary law, he made the first assessment of Rapanui landownership seen through the eyes of a Chilean who had firsthand knowledge of the situation. "Private and permanent ownership does not really exist in the countryside," he said. "Each individual cultivates and sows a plot of land, which he abandons after the harvest to take another one later on" (Toro 1892, 205). Toro had no understanding of the Polynesian system of land tenure, which allowed for collective use of clan lands, and he may not have been aware of the existing clan system.

Most interesting are his recommendations to the Chilean government, which give a striking vision of how the island and its people should become integrated into the Chilean nation-state. His suggestions are a stunning example of capitalist discourse on the advantages of private property. First, he suggested that the island be submitted to Chilean jurisdiction by creating a subdelegation annexed to the Department of Valparaíso. Second, he proposed to constitute indigenous private property rights by equally dividing the land in plots, "sufficient to satisfy the necessities of each family" to maintain itself independently. The *canacas* (natives) should be obliged to fence off their respective properties. The creation of private property would stimulate work, production, and exchange. It would create healthy competition since each *indígena* (indigenous person) would see himself as exclusive owner of his property and "more or less rich," according to his own efforts, economic ability, and dedication. Toro supposed that in the beginning the *canacas* would resist these innovations concerning the private property of land, but that such resistance would never be serious, and the *canacas* would slowly but surely become convinced of the advantages of the new system (Toro

1892, 212). Toro also thought it would not be difficult to substitute the legal authority of the whites for the traditional authority of the indigenous chiefs, among whom the subdelegate could assign his subordinates. It is remarkable how prescient Toro's vision would prove to be, as today the Western concept of individual private property has invaded, slowly but surely, Rapanui customary forms of communal land tenure and the notion of *kainga*,⁴ or ancestral lands, is losing ground among many Rapanui.

After the initial years of colonization Chile lost interest in the island, possibly because of the country's bloody civil war in 1891 and the realization that it was not the tropical paradise Toro had imagined it to be.⁵ The Chilean government first rented out the island to a French–Chilean businessman based in Valparaíso who in 1903 passed on the lease to Williamson Balfour and Company, a Scottish trading company with headquarters for South and North America in Valparaíso. The *Compañía* (as it is still referred to today) converted most of the island into a sheep farm for the export of wool, and its representatives became the virtual rulers of the island for the next fifty years, until 1953. The Chilean government was present in the form of its navy, which sent a ship once yearly and stayed in contact with the representative of the *Compañía*. However, during this long period the Rapanui were not treated as Chilean citizens. Chile's legal system was put into practice by the navy only in the most rudimentary way, while its administrative and institutional structures were virtually absent.

At the end of the nineteenth century some Rapanui were beginning to lose their intimate contact with and deep connection to the *kainga*, where they had been living according to tribal affiliations and customary practices in which the land was intrinsically inalienable. Legend says that the island was partitioned into two territorial confederacies, the *Ko Tu'u Aro Kote Mata Nui*, the major clans which occupied the northern and western part of the island, and the *Ko Tu'u Hotu Iti Mata Iti*, the minor clans which lived in the southeastern part (Routledge 1919; Métraux 1940; McCall 1976). Each confederation was divided into patrilineal clans, or *mata*. The six western *mata* wielded religious and political power and emphasized fishing, while the four eastern *mata* were mainly agriculturalists. These specific economic activities made them dependent on one another.

At least two factors were involved in the process of alienation that took place in the late nineteenth century. Owing to slave raids and the introduction of previously unknown diseases only slightly more than one hundred Rapanui had survived by the time of the Chilean takeover, out of a popu-

lation of two thousand in the early 1860s. This suggests that some of the original clan lands must already have been depopulated toward the end of the century. A second factor is that the Church and the early Chilean colonizers gathered the Rapanui in a single settlement, Hanga Roa, for purposes of evangelization and colonial control. The early colonizers also prohibited the islanders from using their original clan lands for planting and raising animals.

Early documents presented by Rapanui to the Chilean government show that several islanders complained about the fact that their lands and animals were taken away. These lists of protests started the process of alienation from tribal lands. The very act of listing in itself brought about a distancing from earlier ways of relating to the land as name, age, and property were recorded.⁶ Certain lands were claimed by several individuals, sometimes people with different surnames, suggesting that the land had belonged to specific clans. In those years this new way of asserting a relationship with the land may have gone unnoticed, but in hindsight the individualization on paper seems to be a first step toward privatization. Although the listing of land and animals shows Rapanui resistance against abuses of the *Compañía*, it also introduced the idea of individual property.

The Chilean Republic Consolidates Its Hold on the Island

A few years after the annexation it became standard practice that island disputes were arbitrated by naval officers during their yearly visits (Porteous 1981, 50). While the *Compañía* was mainly interested in the profits of the wool business, the navy's objective was to carry out the project of the Chilean nation-state. Territorial rights and landownership remained the major issues. Beginning in 1917 the navy started to distribute plots to be used for agricultural purposes (Vergara 1939, 81). The Rapanui had to convince navy personnel that they needed land for specific purposes. In a publication of 1926 entitled *Memorias, Balances, Inventarios y Registro de Propiedades*, the navy lists all the plots assigned to Rapanui up to that year. Afterward it became standard practice to give five hectares to young married couples. These cessions would be confirmed by the commanders of the navy ships during their visits to the island. Each land title was accompanied by a drawing indicating the size and location of the plot. The navy compiled another document in 1962, the *Libro de registros de propiedades llevado por la Armada de Chile, Isla de Pascua*. Like all navy records, these publications are no longer available on the island but copies were made, and recently the Ministerio de Bienes

Nacionales got hold of one.⁷ If it had not been for copies made by individuals, this historical information would be lost, as was the case with the treaty documents. The tone and content of the land titles indicate that the navy acted as a colonial agent, applying strict military rules that had to be observed by the islanders. The reiteration of the navy's deeds in successive registers shows that it was quite keen on keeping things in order. By the 1960s, 525 provisional land titles had been extended (Andueza Guzmán 2005), and the area of Hanga Roa, where the Rapanui live in family groups according to traditional clan distributions, grew over the years from one thousand to three thousand hectares.

The Chilean government's position was that these provisional titles allowed the beneficiaries to use the plots of land for agricultural purposes, but the Chilean state reserved ownership to the land. This is ironic, to say the least, if one considers that this interpretation is a reversal of what the Rapanui offered to Chile at the moment of annexation. At that time ariki Atamu Tekena assigned the usufruct of Rapanui lands to the Chilean state but by putting a handful of soil in his pocket explicitly expressed the wish to remain in charge of the kainga. Interestingly, the Rapanui considered the provisional titles as property titles, an interpretation the state did not object to in future legal determinations about land use in Rapa Nui.⁸ This is an excellent example of how the Rapanui have been able to circumvent Chilean legal decisions and interpret them according to their cultural needs.

The Inscription of 1933

In the 1930s Rapa Nui was still a British sheep farm, run as if it were a ship by its administrators and the Chilean navy authorities. By then the foreign authorities had replaced Rapanui traditional leaders, stripped them of their lands, and turned them into farmhands.⁹ However, an important change was made in 1933. Tired of the cat-and-mouse game being played over Rapanui lands by the Compañía and the Chilean state, the government took action. A high-level government commission headed by a Chilean bishop determined that private landownership did not exist on the island according to Chilean law, and in November 1933 the government registered the entire island as Chilean public land (*tierra fiscal*). It declared itself "owner of Easter Island, also called Rapa Nui," with an area of 15,796 hectares. The document says that Chile acquired the island through occupation by virtue of article 590 of the Civil Code (Vergara 1939, appendix XLI). This article states that "all the land situated within the territorial limits that lacks another owner is

state property” (Vergara 1939, appendix XLIV). The commission’s arguments were correct in that the early transactions and sales to the Compañía had not been registered in the proper government office (Rochna-Ramírez 1996, 40), and when the government renewed the lease with the Compañía for another twenty years in 1936, it referred to the whole island except for the land occupied by “the natives, the lepers and the naval authority.”¹⁰

In the inscription of 1933 the Chilean state ignored once again the very existence of the Rapanui as a people with ancestral rights to their land and territory. This time Chile stated that it had acquired the island through occupation, not, as it had asserted in 1888, through cession. This claim was not mentioned again in later discussions about the Chilean state’s political relationship with the island, possibly because it would have put Chile in a bad light on the international legal stage.¹¹ The Rapanui were not informed about the inscription of their entire territory as public land and became aware of this act more than thirty years later.¹²

In hindsight, the inscription has benefited the Rapanui because neither foreigners nor non-Rapanui Chileans are allowed to own land on the island. This unintended consequence has become a major tool in the hands of contemporary Rapanui to make a case for collective private landownership. Contrary to what has happened in other Polynesian island states, such as Hawai‘i, where non-Hawaiian Americans and foreigners can own land, the blunder by the Chilean state in 1933 allowed Rapanui to secure their lands, albeit under the tutelage of that very state.

Chilean Integrationist Policies and the Privatization of Rapanui Lands

The Easter Law (Ley Pascua) and the Pinochet Law (Ley Pinochet)

Several decades passed before two Chilean laws dealing with Rapanui landholding were enacted. In Law number 16.441, the so-called Ley Pascua of 1966, the Rapanui were recognized for the first time as full-fledged Chilean citizens. It authorized the president of the Republic to grant individual property titles (*títulos de dominio*) to Chilean nationals in urban territories belonging to the state (*territorios fiscales urbanos*), and stipulated that most rural lands belonging to the state (*tierras fiscales rurales*) could be given in concession to Chilean government institutions. The Ley Pascua is significant in that it represents the first time private landownership in Rapa

Nui was introduced through a Chilean law. In the name of equality, this right was extended not only to Rapanui, but also to non-Rapanui Chilean citizens. However, these dispositions did not have a major effect on the island. The titles to individual ownership referred only to the urban area of Hanga Roa, where virtually all Rapanui lived. The vast majority did not bother to get land titles for places where they and their families had been living for several decades. No titles were given to Chileans living on the island on the basis of the Ley Pascua (Barrientos 1998, 6). For several years to come, remarkably, Rapanui islanders continued living their lives in their Hanga Roa homesteads without significant changes as far as land tenure was concerned.

A much bigger step toward individual private landownership was taken in 1979, when the Chilean military dictator Augusto Pinochet issued a decree with the force of law (DL-2885) that became known as the Ley Pinochet.¹³ General Pinochet showed a special interest in Rapa Nui, in accordance with his geopolitical views and nationalist goals for Chile, which included the homogenization and integration of the Chilean population into the nation-state. Consequently, the Rapanui were not referred to as a people. The decree gave the president the authority to extend free titles in urban and rural public areas (*terrenos fiscales*) to Chileans born on the island whose father or mother also had been born there. These titles could also be given to Chileans not born on the island if one of their parents had been born there, had lived there for at least five years, and exercised a profession or permanent activity on the island. In practice this meant that Pinochet was giving land titles to Rapanui, although in theory non-Rapanui who were born on the island could own Rapanui land. Once again, no reference was made to the fact that the law was applicable only to the roughly three thousand hectares (out of a total of sixteen thousand) comprising Hanga Roa and its vicinities, to which the Rapanui had been reduced in the late 1800s. This law decree had a much more invasive effect than the Ley Pascua since its intention was to oblige the Rapanui to take land titles. The law was reinforced by an offer of subsidized government housing, which could be obtained only if land titles were accepted and inscribed.

The Ley Pinochet met with massive resistance from the Rapanui, who felt that individual land distribution was being forced upon them. Their reaction was to form, in 1980, a Consejo de Ancianos (Council of Elders).¹⁴ The council's opposition to the Ley Pinochet was based mainly on the argument that the Chilean state did not have the authority to give titles to Rapanui land. As one Rapanui clearly put it, "Why do we have to accept a title of

something that is already mine? It is as if somebody wants to give me the shirt I am wearing” (*Revista Análisis*, February 1988). Nevertheless, Rapanui started to inscribe their properties and acquire private property titles during the 1980s; by 1990 the number who had done so totaled 359 (Gómez 2004). The law decree stipulated that if people could prove they had been living on or using a piece of land for more than ten years, they would have the right to a land title. The validation of land occupancy (*poseedor regular*) became a very popular way for the Rapanui to accept land titles. The recognition of a relationship between land and people appealed to Rapanui cultural idiosyncrasy (see Andueza 2005). Living on or using a plot of land for agricultural purposes (or both) for a considerable amount of time reinforced these connections. Thus some Rapanui responded to Chilean laws, although not altogether for the reasons intended by the legislator, whose purpose was to instill the concept of individual private property in Rapanui cultural practice and turn them into regular Chileans for whom private ownership is a basic cultural paradigm.

The Indigenous Law (*Ley Indígena*)

The situation changed again after Chile’s return to democracy in 1990. The indigenous cause was high on the agenda of Patricio Aylwin, the first democratically elected president after the dictatorship. In 1993 a special law was issued, the so-called *Ley Indígena* (No. 19,253), which established norms of protection, promotion, and development of Chile’s indigenous population. In contrast to the *Ley Pinochet*, which aimed at absorbing indigenous people into the Chilean population, this law recognized the existence of indigenous people and their differences. The *Ley Indígena* recognized that land was the lifeblood of indigenous cultures. Some Rapanui suggested that rather than include Rapa Nui in the *Ley Indígena*, the *Ley Pascua* of 1966, which was specific to the Rapanui, be amended to reflect the new situation, but this initiative went nowhere. These Rapanui argued that the differences between Rapa Nui’s Polynesian population and American indigenous peoples on the mainland are too great to include them both in a single law.¹⁵ The *Ley Indígena*, like previous laws, maintained the concept of individual private property, although it states explicitly for the first time that only people of Rapanui descent can own land in Rapa Nui and that the land cannot be transferred to non-Rapanui. The National Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI) was formed to implement the *Ley Indígena* in each of the places where indigenous people live.

In hindsight, it can be suggested that the *Ley Indígena*, although designed to benefit the Rapanui as a people, has had several negative consequences in Rapa Nui. First, it divided the Rapanui community, a division that still exists today. The Council of Elders split on the issue of land distribution. The council's leader and some other council members who had been fervently opposed to the *Ley Pinochet* became strong supporters of the *Ley Indígena*. Members of the dissident group, who opposed private land titles, maintained that it was not the right of the Chilean government to impose land distribution in Rapa Nui.

This situation was mainly caused by a complicated interaction between Rapanui leaders and Chilean party politics. In general, Rapanui identify with neither Chilean party politics nor the political and ideological paradigms on which they are based, since they have no historical and cultural relevance in Rapa Nui. Nevertheless, leaders of the Council of Elders had strongly supported Aylwin, the candidate of the Center-Left government coalition, and felt committed to the *Ley Indígena*. The result was that the dissident group of the council lined up with the opposition to the newly elected Democratic government, which consists of an ideological, extreme Right—erstwhile defenders of the dictatorship—and a more moderate neoliberal, big business-oriented central Right.

The *Ley Indígena* also created, solely for Rapa Nui, a Development Commission (CODEIPA), whose membership would be made up partly of Rapanui and partly of mainlanders. It consists of the Rapanui governor, the Rapanui mayor, the head of the Council of Elders, five members elected by the Rapanui community, and six representatives of various Chilean ministries that operate on the island, five of whom are continental Chileans. This composition guarantees a Rapanui majority in the CODEIPA. It was to be in charge of, among other things, land distribution through one of the Chilean ministries (Bienes Nacionales). The split in the Council of Elders created a problem because the ultimate leader of the council would be one of the commission's members. With two individuals claiming the leadership of the Council of Elders, the Development Commission could not be put into operation until 1998, when elections were held in the Council and the original leader won by a narrow margin.¹⁶

An even more serious effect of the *Ley Indígena* was the distribution of fifteen hundred hectares of government-owned land to the Rapanui.¹⁷ The ministry in charge assigned these lands in plots of five hectares rather haphazardly, often not respecting the tribal affiliations of the applicants, which

created problems between and discontent among Rapanui. Two hundred fifty-nine individual land titles were handed out in 2001. Today, some twelve hundred Rapanui are waiting for a second redistribution. Many who earlier resisted land titles have now registered. Although most Rapanui still do not agree with the system in their discourse, they submit to it in practice. However, the government is in the process of adjusting the criteria for distribution, as there is not enough land available, so the plots will be smaller this time around. The process has been delayed, and in 2006 the CODEIPA was still revising the records of each applicant, which has created a lot of discontent and mistrust in the community.¹⁸ Also, a new relationship with the Chilean government is in the making (see below), and this may reverse the landholding situation altogether.

Another negative effect of the land delivery is that Rapanui have started to trade their plots of land for motorcycles, used cars, and other material goods of their liking, which has allowed some Rapanui to accumulate land. This has stimulated the development of a real estate market, albeit between Rapanui, in the past couple of years, unheard of before. This circumstance implies a further erosion of the concept of *kainga*, since it separates the Rapanui further from their traditional clan lands and disintegrates their traditional social organization. The *Ley Indígena* allows for individual private property but to the detriment of collective private property.

Loopholes in the law have also permitted outsiders to invest in the island, a phenomenon that requires close supervision on part of the Rapanui. An emblematic case, the first of its kind, was the construction and inauguration in early 2008 of a five-star hotel by the exclusive Chilean hotel chain Explora. The Explora hotels belong to the Chilean Pedro Ibañez, a wealthy businessman and entrepreneur. After consulting for several years with various Rapanui families, Explora officials convinced a successful Rapanui businessman, Mike Rapu, to acquire land from his family and obtain a second plot from another Rapanui—a total of 9.6 hectares—to execute this project. With the help of various lawyers the *Ley Indígena* was bypassed. When I asked Rapu why he went ahead with this project, he repeatedly stressed the trust the owner of the Explora hotels had put in him and the mistrust other Rapanui had inspired (interview Mike Rapu Pate, 2006). It is interesting that personal relations seem to have played a major factor in such a significant financial operation. Explora has set a precedent and opened the door to future foreign investments.

On the other hand, thanks to the *Ley Indígena*, permission to build a

casino in Rapa Nui was denied on legal grounds in September 2006, namely, because that the Chilean casino law and the Ley Indígena are mutually incompatible (*El Mercurio*, 9 September 2006). This decision put an end to a heated yearlong debate in Rapa Nui and on the mainland about the advantages and disadvantages of having a casino on the island. The casino law requires a fifteen-year permit to operate, while according to the Ley Indígena indigenous lands can be rented out for a maximum period of only five years. Even though these five-year periods are renewable in the Ley Indígena, the casino law does not allow for this figure. Both CONADI and CODEIPA were against the casino, as was a large part of the Rapanui community. Rapanui University students residing on the mainland organized various protests during 2006 in Santiago and Valparaíso, protests in which I participated. The Council of Elders and the mayor of Rapa Nui were in favor of the casino. Their argument was that the project would bring cash to the island. The casino project, which involved an investment of fourteen million dollars, was a joint venture of a Chilean investor and a Rapanui businessman.

The Ley Indígena has thus been manipulated and has had unpredictable consequences for the Rapanui community and Chilean lawmakers alike. The Rapanui have certainly not benefited from the rules and regulations imposed by a nation-state that insists on sovereignty over a territory which it has abused historically.

From Colonialism to Self-Determination?

These discrepancies in the interpretation and use of existing law and the interplay between the Chilean state's intentions and Rapanui discourse and practice can also be seen in the various stages of political status the Chilean state has imposed on the Rapanui people and their territory.

Three distinct moments can be distinguished in Chile's political relationship with Rapa Nui. The first is the Annexation of 1888, when Chile asserted sovereignty over the island. As discussed earlier, the Republic of Chile then quickly lost interest in its insular possession, and the island was turned into a sheep farm. Arguably, during those first years of colonization the Rapanui were barely aware of the presence of a nation-state exercising sovereignty over the island. Chile's judicial and administrative systems were imposed in the most rudimentary way. The situation changed somewhat in 1917, when Chile declared Rapa Nui to be a subdelegation (*Subdelegación Marítima*) of

the Naval Department (Gobernación Marítima) of the port of Valparaíso. Navy officials were then officially named as representatives of the Chilean government in Rapa Nui, and the connection with the central government was channeled through its Ministry of Defense. This situation lasted for five decades. During those years the Rapanui endured physical and psychological abuses by representatives of the *Compañía* and navy officials and had no constitutional rights whatsoever. Nevertheless, their cultural practices, especially their language and social organization, remained largely intact.

La Ley Pascua

This state of affairs changed drastically in 1966 with the passage of the *Ley Pascua*. A young Rapanui schoolteacher, one of the first Rapanui educated on the mainland, staged a rebellion in 1964.¹⁹ Partly as a result of this revolt the *Ley Pascua* was approved by the National Congress in 1966. The law put an end to navy rule and created the Department of Easter Island as part of the province of Valparaíso, with its own municipality and public services (Makihara 1999, 101). The most important consequence of the *Ley Pascua* is that the Rapanui were finally recognized as Chilean citizens and were given the right to vote.

After the law was passed, three hundred newcomers, mostly Chilean functionaries and their families, arrived on the island to set up the new administrative system in representation of Chilean ministries and other institutions. Chilean workers were brought in from the continent for the construction of the airport, as well as some 60 American army personnel who came to set up a base for surveillance of artificial earth satellites in compliance with an agreement between the Chilean and U.S. Air Force. By 1968 the outsiders added up to a total of 665 people, as compared with a Rapanui population of 1,200, with the result that there were more foreign and continental adults than Rapanui adults on the island (Cristino et al., 1984). One can only imagine the impact this arrival of nonislanders had on Rapanui's lifestyle and world. Besides the influx of people, there was an influx of goods and services. Electricity and piped water lines were installed, and roads were built. Trucks and jeeps were imported. The improvement in communications realized by the building of the airport and the subsequent air traffic opened the island up to the world in an unprecedented way. The concentration of services and government buildings in Hanga Roa made it the only inhabited center on the island, a fact which loosened the ties between the Rapanui

and their ancestral lands even more. None of this was adequately planned nor anticipated in the Ley Pascua. The Chilean legislators failed to comprehend and predict the impact Chilean laws and institutions would have on the daily life of the Rapanui. On the other hand, the Chileans who were assigned to the island did not have enough cultural sensitivity to perceive these possible alterations of Rapanui culture and social organization. The Ley Pascua fomented westernization in a way the Rapanui are still coping with today, and it did not provide tools to safeguard cultural difference and enhance self-determination.

La Comisión de Verdad Histórica y Nuevo Trato para los Pueblos Indígenas (Commission on Historic Truth and New Relationship with Indigenous Peoples)

Today, almost fifty years after passage of the Ley Pascua, another change in political status for Rapa Nui is in the making. The protests by Rapanui in the 1980s over land and territory strengthened their awareness of cultural difference, while in Chile in those same years the first protests against the military regime led to the recovery of democracy in 1990, after seventeen years of dictatorship. Indigenous rights and demands appeared on the national agenda through the creation of the Ley Indígena in 1993, which informed Chilean civil society about indigenous issues and demands. This process culminated in 2001 in the creation of a government entity known as the Commission on Historic Truth and New Relationship with Indigenous Peoples (La Comisión de Verdad Histórica y Nuevo Trato para los Pueblos Indígenas). Then-president of Chile Ricardo Lagos charged the commission with studying the historic relationship between Chile's indigenous peoples and the Chilean state and suggesting recommendations for new state policies (*una política de estado*).

The truth commission put out its final report in 2003, and its recommendations for Rapa Nui included the ratification of the "Agreement of Wills" of 1888 by the National Congress, the creation of a statute of autonomy, the recognition of the exclusive right of the Rapanui to landownership on the island, and the promotion and financing of development programs in Rapa Nui (*Informe de la Comisión*). These recommendations were formulated by the Rapanui authorities who were recognized as such by the Chilean government: the mayor, the head of the Council of Elders, and the governor, in his capacity as head of the Rapanui Development Commission.

Another set of recommendations had been formulated in workshops that took place on the island in 2002. The organizers of these workshops had been elected and appointed in a meeting with representatives of the Chilean government who visited the island in February 2002 to create the Rapanui chapter of the truth commission. These organizers were later reconfirmed in a meeting with the Rapanui community. Nevertheless, their final report was not taken into consideration and was replaced by a text presented by the authorities recognized by the Chilean government.

El Parlamento Rapanui

Meanwhile, in 2001 a group of Rapanui created the Rapanui Parliament, several of whose members formerly belonged to the second Council of Elders, which virtually dissolved after it lost the elections of 1998. Their main demand was that the Chilean state return Rapanui territory and that land distribution should be based on ancestral principles. They also declared autonomy in their act of constitution and demanded a government of their own (*Constitución Parlamentaria*, 2001). The document does not specify what exactly is meant by *autonomy*, but this was the first time a Rapanui organization had made claims to self-government during the Chilean epoch.

Although the group is not considered to be a serious interlocutor by the Chilean government and represents only a minority of the Rapanui community, it has earned recognition abroad by networking informally in Polynesia and the Pacific. Lately they have also represented Rapa Nui in international organizations in New York and Geneva, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the United Nations Working Group for Indigenous Populations, and the Indigenous Peoples Pacific Caucus, where it has revealed its complaints and demands to the Chilean state. In June 2006 some members of the Rapanui Parliament traveled from Rapa Nui to join other Rapanui living in Europe and the United States to participate in a meeting of the nongovernmental International Forum of Indigenous Peoples (FIPAUI), held in Pau, France. From there they went to Geneva to participate in UN meetings held parallel to and in conjunction with the important meeting of the recently created United Nations Human Rights Council in July 2006. In both instances Rapanui were participating in international arenas as indigenous people with specific rights to land, territory, and self government, thus circumventing a nation-state they consider to be in violation of their rights as a people.

Special Status for Rapa Nui: A Special Territory with a Special Statute

For several years Rapanui authorities, the mayor in particular, insisted on the need for a *política de estado* of the Chilean government toward Rapa Nui.²⁰ At the same time the work of the truth commission was proceeding, Rapanui authorities, together with Chilean public personalities, including ex-president Aylwin, started to elaborate a proposal for a Special Statute for the Administration of Easter Island. It took almost three years to formulate and was completed in August 2005. The proposal includes a reform of the Chilean Constitution in order to create Special Territories in Easter Island and the Archipelago of Juan Fernández. These territories would have a certain degree of administrative autonomy but would depend directly on the central government (*Propuesta 2005*, 5–6).

In the meantime, the government solicited suggestions from the Rapanui community as to what should be included in the proposal, which led to passionate discussions on the island. In May 2006, a year before the final approval of the special territory status, the local office of CONADI organized a seminar that lasted several days and gathered some seven hundred Rapanui to discuss a government proposal similar to the one developed by the public personalities that basically maintains the existing administrative structure. The difference between the two proposals was that the governor of Rapa Nui would no longer depend on the Fifth Region (Valparaíso) but directly on the central government through its Ministry of the Interior.

From the seminar held in Rapa Nui several discussion groups resulted, and two main Rapanui proposals emerged by September 2006. One was very similar to the government's proposal and was intended to increase the possibilities of being taken into account by the Chilean government. Nonetheless, this group of Rapanui insisted that there should be a local government at the top consisting of six elected Rapa Nui members, alongside the governor (or high commissioner), appointed by the Chilean president, and a representative of the Council of Elders. The other, more radical proposal insisted on the reinstatement of the Kingdom of Rapa Nui, headed by an ariki and administered by a Council of Elders chosen by the Rapanui families, with the participation of one representative of the Chilean government. In the discussions of these two proposals the importance of the traditional Rapanui social organization based on the thirty-six families was central, as was the issue of land and territory (*kainga*). Even the more moderate proposal recommended that new property titles not be extended until the previously

completed distribution of fifteen hundred hectares had been properly analyzed. Both proposals also insisted that any future land distribution should be carried out according to the territorial divisions of each clan.²¹

To assist the Rapanui in these discussions and in their request, the Chilean government appointed an international consultant, who visited the island in December 2006 and made recommendations for the content of the special statute. He emphasized in his resulting report that Chile's political Constitution determines that the heads of regions and provincial governors have the exclusive trust of the president of the Republic and thus cannot be elected by popular vote (Gómez 2006).²² Unless structural changes occur in the highly centralized model of the Chilean state, it will be difficult for the Rapanui to get political autonomy. From the perspective of the state, the only thing they can aspire to, for the time being, is administrative autonomy.

Rapanui have complained about the fact that they do not have the appropriate analytical tools to discuss the Chilean proposal for the special statute and that the appointment of a consultant came very late in the process. The discussion groups worked for several months in 2006 on a daily basis without fully grasping the true significance of the centralized character of the Chilean state. They also grappled with the difficult legal language in which the proposal is couched and would sometimes switch from Spanish to Rapanui in order to better understand the meaning of specific parts of the proposal.

Toward the end of 2006, the Chilean government organized some workshops on the special statute. They did so with public functionaries on the island as well as with Rapanui students on the mainland. On both occasions no copies of the government's document were made available to the participants beforehand. When a student in Santiago asked why the group had not received this relevant documentation so they could have studied it before the meeting, the Rapanui governor, Carolina Hotus, who was present at the workshop, answered that she did not want to confuse them (personal information). This lack of proper orientation seems indicative of the relations the Chilean government maintains with the Rapanui.

During a visit by President Michelle Bachelet of Chile to the island in November 2006, on her way back home from the yearly meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation held in Vietnam, she promised more autonomy for Rapa Nui, but she did not differentiate between administrative and political autonomy and thus concealed the important difference between the two. These are just a few examples of how the Chilean government

is still not sending clear signals to the Rapanui people concerning issues of such vital importance for their political future. There may be more than one reason for this, but I suggest that mistrust of the Rapanui people's capacity to understand Western ways of thinking is one of them. By the same token, however, Chileans still have to acquire a real understanding of Rapanui cultural ways.

In January 2007 a second seminar between the Rapanui discussion groups and Chilean government officials from the Ministry of the Interior took place. It resulted in a proposal that most Rapanui present at the meeting agreed upon (*Propuesta unificada de Estatuto Especial de Administración de Rapa Nui*). The main points of this proposal are the following: the governor of Rapa Nui, appointed by the Chilean president, would form part of a Council (*Koro Nui*) consisting of six elected members; as far as landholding goes, individual private landownership would be recognized only for those individuals who already have secured property titles to date. In the rest of the island collective landownership would be applied according to "the traditional use and customs that existed on the island before 9 September of 1888"; all public land being used for government purposes would be handed over to a Rapanui corporation.²³ The proposal about collective landownership is an implicit critique of all Chilean legislation to date and a major manifestation of Rapanui cultural resilience against all odds.

After a yearlong process of discussions, one might think that this would have been the final consensus proposal on the part of the Rapanui. But it was not. Mayor Petero Edmunds blocked the proposal by sending a letter to the Ministry of the Interior in February 2007 in which he argued that the signers of the draft proposal were not representative of the Rapanui people and as a matter of fact were opposing the government of *La Concertación*—the ruling government coalition—and that he and the head of the Council of Elders, the Rapanui's legitimate representatives, had not been invited to participate in the discussions.²⁴ He also stated that the proposal contradicts the Chilean Constitution and the principle of a unitarian state. Further, he expressed opposition to the proposed expropriation of the land for the Hotel Hanga Roa, defended the rights of Chilean inhabitants on the island, and stated that the majority of Rapanui do not wish to be separated from Chile. He also emphasized that all the preparatory work for the special statute had already been done by the Grupo de Personalidades, of which he himself formed part.

In July 2007, Law no. 20.193 reformed the political Constitution of Chile,

allowing the category of Special Territory to Rapa Nui and the Archipelago Juan Fernández, whose government and administration has to be determined by a special statute established by a *Ley orgánica constitucional* (constitutional organic law). Not until May of 2008 was a new proposal for a special statute finally presented to Congress, without any further input or approval from the Rapanui community in open meetings. The newly elected representative of CONADI, Rafael (Rinko) Tuki, who participated in the workshops on the topic in 2006 and whose signature appears on the draft proposal of January 2007, does not agree with the content (personal information).

One can distinguish at least three points of view in present-day Rapanui politics in the context of the discussions around Special Territory Status. One group of Rapanui proposes to try to convince the Chilean state to incorporate Rapanui wishes for self-government, especially in relation to collective landownership, but is willing to compromise as to the ultimate political authority over the island. Implicitly, these Rapanui accept de facto Chilean sovereignty over Rapanui territory. A small group, mainly belonging to the Rapanui Parliament, insists that the Agreement of Wills of 1888 was illegal and wants to proceed from that point, in the full knowledge that the Chilean state will not respond to this request. It is not quite clear what the political agenda of the current official leaders of Rapa Nui is. Although they have waged a historical struggle for Rapanui rights, they now insist on the rights of the Chilean nation-state over Rapa Nui.

Conclusion

I have shown here that the relationship between Chile and Rapa Nui is marked by Chile's insistent claim of sovereignty over Rapanui territory. Successive laws and decrees have put a strong emphasis on the privatization of land, in order to replace ideas of collective private landownership. The separation of the Rapanui from their ancestral lands (kainga) and the relentless insistence on the benefits of small-scale private landownership have eroded Rapanui customary law, as was predicted by Pedro Pablo Toro more than a century ago.

Chile's actions on the island are determined by the shifting concerns of successive governments and by the persisting concept of a unitarian state. Since the late 1960s—coinciding with the integration of Rapa Nui into the

national administrative system—Chile has gone through various political stages, including the first freely elected Socialist government in Latin America and a brutal dictatorship. Such laws as the Easter Law of 1966, the Pinochet Law Decree of 1979, and the Indigenous Law of 1993 clearly reflect the political philosophy of these respective governments. Nevertheless, Chilean legislators of all political colors have insisted on the importance of individual private landownership, the trademark of Western civilization.

These legal interventions, based on a political system alien to the Rapanui worldview, have caused cultural misunderstandings that are little understood and need to be clarified by both Rapanui and Chileans. I argue that during the twentieth century Chilean lawmakers failed to conceptualize the important differences between individual and collective private landownership, while only the latter makes cultural sense for many Rapanui. I also contend that over the past several years Chilean politicians have been covering up the important difference between administrative and political autonomy, under the circumstance that self-determination is so important if the Rapanui are to achieve their cultural goals.

It can also be suggested that the Chilean state's interventions in Rapa Nui have created divisions between Rapanui during the period under consideration in this essay. Because of Rapa Nui's colonial dependence on Chile, Rapanui leaders are virtually obliged to work within both systems and participate in the intricate institutional and political structure that Chile has imposed on Rapa Nui. Although they are considered by Chilean politicians as their main liaison with Rapa Nui, these leaders are often out of touch with their people. The consequence has been a lack of strong leadership over the past several years, causing disinterest in common cultural goals among a considerable part of the Rapanui community. It has also caused internal power struggles between Rapanui that are difficult to assess and overcome. Cooptation of indigenous leaders is a well-known colonial strategy, and one can see it at work in Rapa Nui.

Chilean legislation has met with Rapanui resistance over the past decades, as we saw in the general rejection of the different laws, all aimed at the privatization of Rapanui land. Several Rapanui now insist on reviving this connection with the land and their traditional social organization, which are so intimately connected. At the same time, some Rapanui have started to articulate their cultural difference as a Polynesian people and to organize accordingly. These Rapanui are pointing out the cultural blunders committed in every single piece of Chilean legislation and are asking for political

self-determination, even if within the Chilean nation-state. Only a profound change of the Chilean Constitution would allow this to happen.

Whatever the decisions made by Chilean governments, the Rapanui will continue on the path toward self-determination, supported by other Pacific peoples and the international community. At the same time, Chilean civil society will, one hopes, guide its political leaders in the direction of a participatory democracy, in which cultural difference becomes an asset instead of a threat to sovereignty. These two processes of social and political change, in Rapa Nui as well as in Chile, have a certain degree of urgency.

Notes

1. In accordance with common practice in the literature I use the terms *Rapa Nui* when referring to the island and *Rapanui* when referring to the people, the language, etc.

2. This translation problem can be compared with a similar one surrounding the Treaty of Waitangi, accorded between the Maori of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the British Crown (see Fenton and Moon 2002).

3. In the early days the *ariki-mau* was the head of the *Miru* clan, the paramount chief and undisputed leader of the island. In the later period the island was no longer united, and the leaders of the clans challenged each other in a yearly contest. After the dissemination of the Rapanui population at the end of the nineteenth century and the breakdown of the clan system, there was only one *ariki*, whom the Rapanui called *kin*, after the English term *king*. I have heard contemporary Rapanui argue that it is not clear if the term *ariki* means “chief” or “king.”

4. The concept of *kainga* has more than one meaning. I use it here as a territorial unit, constituting the estate of a clan or descent group (see Métraux 1971; Kirch 2000, 272)

5. President José Manuel Balmaceda (1886–91) committed suicide in 1891, at the end of the civil war, which lasted for seven months and caused between five and ten thousand Chilean deaths (Loveman 2001, 159; Subercaseaux, 1997, 16). The Chilean cultural historian Bernardo Subercaseaux argues that the war took place at the crossroads of Chile’s passage to a “social, economic and political modernity” and that the year 1891 “has been conceived as a kind of metaphor of the modern country” (1997, 34–36). Chile, says Subercaseaux, forged itself as a modern nation-state in the reconstruction period after the war, in which a new political and ideological landscape formed and new social, cultural, and political actors appeared. This difficult process of striving for internal national cohesion may have distracted attention from Chile’s adventure in the Pacific.

6. E.g., Daniel María Teave, thirty-six years of age, owner of the lands between

Hotu 'Iti and Hanga Te'e; Timoteo Pate, thirty-six years of age, owner of part of Poike; Simeon Riroroko, twenty-one years of age, owner of Anakena, etc. (*El Consejo* 1988, 297).

7. This information comes from an interview I conducted in 2002 with Naval Governor Patricio Carrasco, who told me that no navy records on the island exist before 1990.

8. On several occasions Chilean governments have preferred not to officially intervene in Rapanui concepts of land tenure, presumably because these did not interfere in Chilean mainland politics. On the other hand, most Rapanui do not readily make the connection between sovereignty and territory. Only very recently have some Rapanui started to openly question the Chilean claim that the island is Chilean territory.

9. Since the annexation the Rapanui had elected ariki in place who were in constant disagreement with the Chilean sheep farmers. The situation had become unsustainable by 1902, when the commander of the yearly navy ship *General Baquedano* named Juan Tepano, a Rapanui, as “chief or *cacique* with the task of vigilance and representative of the islanders for the *subdelegado marítimo* [port captain]” (Document of the Ministry of National Defense). This was a strategic colonial decision, since the navy needed a buffer between the company and the Rapanui. As a youth Tepano had served in the Chilean army during the War of the Pacific and had been acculturated, so to speak. It was the first time the Chileans intervened in Rapanui leadership decisions. The commander also ordained that Tepano was to be subordinate to the company representative and *subdelegado*, and he took five of the resistance leaders to Chile (*Ministerio de Marina. Oficios de la Dirección General de la Armada*, 1902).

10. This information is extracted from a document of 1936 of the Chilean Ministry of Defense. It refers to “13,747 hectares” out of 15,796.

11. Contemporary international law distinguishes four ways of exercising sovereignty over territories, namely, by occupation, prescription, conquest, or cession (Wallace 1997, 92–100). *Occupation* refers to the situation in which a state establishes title to a territory which is *terra nullius*, this is, owned by no one or inhabited by savages. The argument for occupation is difficult to sustain in Rapa Nui because it was a stratified and organized Polynesian society at the time of the Chilean takeover. After all, it was the ariki who signed the treaty with the Chileans. *Prescription* refers to the situation in which sovereignty can be invoked by claimants who discovered and occupied a territory and who want to consolidate their claim. A state can validate an initially doubtful title, provided that the display of authority is public, peaceful, and continuous. Prescription thus involves a de facto exercise of sovereignty (Wallace 1997, 97). This situation is also referred to as occupation *cum animo domini*. The Chilean state argues that it exercised public, peaceful, and continuous authority over the island. However, contemporary international law establishes that “another claimant or a dispossessed sovereign can bar the establishment of title by prescription” (Wallace 1997, 97). This is a possibility to be explored by contemporary Rapanui.

Sovereignty through *conquest* refers to the acquisition of enemy territory by military force in wartime. This is clearly not the case for Rapa Nui. *Cession* is the transfer of sovereignty by one sovereign to another. This is the argument for Chilean sovereignty over Rapa Nui most frequently used today, by Chileans and Rapanui alike. However, the recent translation of the Rapanui version of the cession and proclamation documents unsettles this argument, as it shows that, according to this translation of the Rapanui version of the treaty, the Rapanui chiefs did not cede their territory to the Chilean state. I argue that the only way for Chile to claim sovereignty today is through prescription, but that the Rapanui can object to this by means of diplomatic protests in the appropriate international forums (Wallace 1997, 97).

12. Another act, carried out without the consultation of the Rapanui, was the creation of the Rapanui National Park and its nomination as a National Historic Monument in 1935 (Makihara 1999, 86).

13. This decree corresponded to a more general policy of privatization of agricultural lands, mostly belonging to indigenous people on the mainland, mainly the Mapuche. In 1979 Pinochet issued a decree (DL 2.536) that did away with Mapuche communal landownership. This was followed by another one in 1980 (DL 3.516) allowing for the division of land into small plots of half a hectare, thereby violating Mapuche cultural principles. These decrees formed part of a profound legal transformation carried out between 1978 and 1981 that reformulated all former dispositions about property rights over natural resources. The purpose of these reforms was the implementation of an economic model focused on exportation (Toledo 2005, 5).

14. This council was still headed by its first leader, Alberto Hotus, in 2007 and still exists today. It is composed of representatives of the thirty-six Rapanui families that trace their ancestry to the original tribes. Its purpose is to defend both the Rapanui's right to their land, territory, and culture and other Rapanui interests (see *El Consejo de Jefes de Rapa Nui . . .*, 1988).

15. Personal communication, Alfonso Rapu.

16. The head of the council has created a system of patronage over the years. Alongside his central role in the council, he has held several important government posts and has built a power base on the island and on the mainland that is hard to match and difficult to contest. His consistent support on the mainland can be explained by the fact that he has been loyal to the Center-Left government coalition in power since the return to democracy in 1990. Especially through his role as national advisor of CONADI, he has been able to influence the intricate Rapanui family network by handing out favors in exchange for votes.

17. This gesture corresponded again partly to a Chilean election campaign.

18. This information comes from interviews I conducted in 2001 with Alvaro Durán (lawyer for CONADI) and Alvaro Lafuente and Rodrigo Sepúlveda (functionaries of the Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales), and, in 2006, with Luis Guillermo Alvarez (also a functionary in Bienes Nacionales).

19. A Chilean association by the name of Friends of Easter Island had arranged through the Ministry of Education for eleven scholarships to be awarded to students to study on the mainland, since no secondary education existed on the island. One of the students, Alfonso Rapu Haoa, was only thirteen, the youngest of the group. He returned to the island eight years later with a teaching degree in hand. He says that in Santiago he was “always very concerned about the great poverty and abandonment that my people suffered, my family, my brothers and sisters, and I started to think about how to take them out of that world, get them out of the darkness and put them in the light, so they would be able to walk” (interview, 17 May 2002).

20. The concept of *política de estado* became part of the Chilean political vocabulary at the beginning of the 2000s. The mayor probably adopted the term from Chile.

21. This information was gathered during my visit to the island in August–December 2006, during which I participated regularly in the meetings of one of the discussion groups.

22. In meetings between Gómez and Rapanui that participated in the discussion groups, he said that nation-states have made indigenous peoples invisible, that there is no mutual understanding between the Chilean state and Rapanui as yet, and that it is important to pay attention to the kind of language employed in conversations between the two parties. He also emphasized the power of organizing.

23. The proposal also contains recommendations for a special budget, the creation of a special body for the defense and protection of Rapanui culture and cultural patrimony, and, crucially, for the regulation of immigration to the island. Uncontrolled immigration is one of the main complaints the Rapanui have. Although I firmly agree with the importance of this issue, I do not address it in this essay.

24. By not participating in any of the workshops or other, more general meetings organized with the Rapanui community in 2006, the mayor and the head of the Council of Elders, Alberto Hotus, marginalized themselves.