

1 Cultural Identity and Heritage

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A combination of geographic, historic and social factors allowed Chilean society to avoid the multiculturalist debate until very recently. Significant geographic isolation, high concentration of population on a few urban centres, and a steep socio-economic class system dominated by an upper group of strong European ascent favoured a hegemonic homogeneous-nation self-representation in the Chilean state construct. Indigenous population was historically overlooked amidst a dominant narrative of quasi-European white-*mestizo* nation with no “Indian problem”; an “exception” among “indigenous” and “backward” neighbour South American countries [1]. In such a context, for the Rapanui being granted Chilean citizenship in 1966 meant gaining long-denied fundamental rights, but at the same time adding to their struggle for recognition.

1.1 Worldviews

Rapanui worldview has been constantly evolving after first European contact. Unable for most of its history to purposely reach out to other nations, understanding of themselves and the others in the world was challenged and then shaped by successive waves of external contact and intervention. The Rapanui worldview was suddenly required to incorporate the foreign and their everyday concerns forcibly displaced towards the sphere of external contact. Already in 1882, visitors were surprised to find that the Islanders knew accurately currency exchange rates and displayed their curios for sale with price tags on shelves [2]. Collective experience and memory of historical contact made the Rapanui simultaneously attracted and suspicious of the foreign. In many cases, the indigenous population has been divided in their perception and attitude towards incoming outsiders. The relationship with outside authority in particular, has been the source of divisive internal conflict and distrust among the community.

Within the Rapanui people, nowadays diverse and dynamic worldviews coexist. They share a similar discourse regarding the respect for the legacy of their ancestors and the need to protect what they have inherited from them through centuries of suffering. They also share concerns for their present difficulties and their future, the relationship with the Chilean state and the destiny of the territory. However, the views and discourses on the later topics differ widely. There is not a single Rapanui way of understanding themselves and the others, and therefore multiplicity and even contradiction characterize their collective worldview.

This heterogeneity contrasts with the essentialist and homogeneous global definitions of indigenous culture that have guided most external actions regarding social and cultural needs of the Rapanui. These definitions rely heavily in a construct of an ideal type of “non-modern” indigenous people whose shared worldview, linked to their ancestral past, sets them apart from the others [3].

In this context, re-defining, expressing and preserving cultural, social and historic identity becomes a critical issue for the Rapanui. Accordingly, they construct their idea of the Rapanui nation, inspired by how they imagine their own society in the past, before European contact, and particularly in relation with the territory [3]. Territory is here understood not only as a physical reality but also as a cultural representation, an “ancestral land”. At its core, the conflict with Chile is founded on the fundamental

issue of Rapanui rights over their ancestral heritage. For the Rapanui, tradition is good not only because it's ancestral wisdom, it's *ono tupuna* (the richness of the ancestors), but also because it is not Chilean, it is Rapanui property [3]. The ancestral territory and tradition constructs are in turn intertwined with situations, stories, affections and feelings that are shared and experienced together [3].

The connection with the ancestors (the *matamuas*) allow the Rapanui to perceive themselves as the sovereigns of the territory once inhabited by them. No one else but the descendants of *Hotu Matu'a* should own the land. The Chilean State is regarded as a usurper, taking the land by way of documents and laws. The Rapanui knowledge of their ancestral past is a mixture of transmitted oral tradition, historic facts and prehistoric knowledge that has been revealed to them in the work of archaeologists and ethnographers. Their understanding of the ancestral past is dynamic as it is interpreted according to the needs of historical moments. What is ancestral is not necessarily the oldest but what appears to be the way of "doing things properly" and the "traditional/own way of doing things". In this way, ancestral territory and tradition become the basis for the sovereignty, autonomy and independence discourse.

1.2 Cultural landscape

Interviewed about the relative relevance of their cultural assets, Rapanui language, oral tradition and archaeology heritage lead the results among the Rapanui respondents [4]. However, the advantage is small as relevance is rather homogeneously distributed across the 18 options proposed. Since the 1990s, immaterial cultural heritage in Rapanui has been significantly activated because of its high economic value in the context of constantly increasing touristic demand [5]. The activation emphasizes Polynesian character in order to differentiate from continental Chile.

Language

Contemporary Rapanui language is a mixture of the original language spoken by the islanders before European contact and other Polynesian languages, with larger influence coming from Tahitian. The use of the language was heavily discouraged by the Chilean authorities until the 1990s. It was explicitly prohibited in the public schools of the Island to extirpate its use. Legal protection for indigenous culture and language came about with the indigenous law of 1993 [6]. According to the law, the state has the duty to promote the indigenous cultures as constituents of the heritage of the Chilean nation.

Nowadays, around 60% of the indigenous population can speak Rapanui [7]. The fraction varies according to the ethnicity of the parents: 85% of the indigenous population whose parents were both Rapanui speaks the language, whereas less than 50% of the population whose parents were of mixed ethnicity does. More than 50% of Rapanui speakers concentrates in the age group between 40 and 64-years old. Another 35% is found on the 20 to 39-years old group, and only 10% corresponds to minors. The language of the elders differs from the current practice of the new generations of Rapanui, who use it less frequently and in different context. The older language has strong metaphoric semantics that are less present in the newer form that is taught on the island [4]. The Lorenzo Baeza Vega School organizes the yearly day of the language, the *Mahana o te Re'o*, to celebrate Rapanui language. The language is highly valued socially and is revered by the community as a whole, regardless of the individual language knowledge level.

Knowledge-wisdoms and practices

The Rapanui culture celebrates and treasures oral tradition. The collective memory of recent historic events is also looked after, incorporating and transmitting them from one generation to the other. Likewise, a territorial dimension associated to the belonging to a particular clan forms part of orally transmitted knowledge, including the toponymy of the land and its relation to the ancient history. In the Rapanui culture sacred places, objects, cycles or specific persons are sometimes *tapu*: subject to prohibition, in order to protect them. The ancient cult of a single creator god, Make-Make, which persisted even during the Birdman-Cult phase, facilitated the conversion of the indigenous population to the Catholic creed in the late 19th century under the spiritual and social leadership of the missionaries. Although nowadays the community displays an active catholic religious life, there is also widespread believe on protecting and guiding spirits, called *Varúa*.

In the Rapanui worldview a person has a power or energy called *Mana*. Not everyone has the same amount of *mana*, and it is particularly required for leadership. Elders (*koros* and *nuas*) are prestigious people, highly regarded by the community for their wisdom and experience. There are also people that are admired for their unique life philosophy, like the *yorgos*, traditional country people living out of the land.

Ancestral medicine, sexuality and life cycles

According to the available ethnographies, disease received little attention in ancient times. There was a lack of ethnopharmacologic elements, mostly due to the poor variety of vascular plant species on the island. In historic times, as successive waves of new infectious diseases spread across the population, all forms of disease are progressively regarded as a consequence of the presence of outsiders. Currently, the local population classifies diseases as “foreign” or “local”, ad “ancient” or “new”. According to these categories, the community either seeks remedy on its own medicine or demands “reparation” from the national health system provided by the state. The notion that introduced diseases should find cure in introduced medicine gave birth to a new natural medicine in which some introduced plants are used for their medicinal effects on the introduced disease. The use of plants is combined with the practice of massages, the use of vapour, and baths infused with different plants or sea water. Even if introduced recently in the local culture, these practices are collectively denominated “remedio pascuense” (Easterner remedy), to praise their Rapanui identity and contrast them with the foreign medicine provided by the hospital.

Until about the first half of the 20th century, arranged marriages were common practice. Love was understood as an emotional link that would evolve after marriage [4]. The match of the couple is still a concern for the families. For instance, close kinship is avoided as much as possible in couples where both are of Rapanui origin. Sexual activity is not necessarily restricted to the sphere of the formal couple. Individual freedom in gender relations is legitimized by the observation of costumes of the ancient pre-Christian culture. In former times, a pregnant woman was considered sacred. She was object of social protection and consideration because of her changing physical and psychological condition. In the Rapanui culture the *Po* of a new born is revealed to the parents and interpreted by the grandparents. The *Po* consists of knowledge of the new born personality and future strengths.

Performing arts and music

Music and dance combine ancient expressions and contemporary creations, including Polynesian and local dances. Other performing arts include theatre, music and dance staging and *kai-kai*, which consists of forming figures with threads using the fingers and mouth while gesturing, dancing and performing recitations (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 Isabel Pakarati Tepano teaching kai kai (from: National Service of Cultural Heritage, Chile: http://www.dibam.cl/614/w3-article-87504.html?_noredirect=1)

Culinary culture

Rapanui kitchen comprises both specific cooking techniques and local ingredients. In a *umu* the food is slowly cooked in a hole in the ground above hot stones. A *tunu ahí* consists of barbecuing (mostly fish) on top of hot stones. Local ingredients include sweet potato, taro (a tuber), ñoca (tapioca), *uhi* (yam, *dioscorea alata*), fish, and plantain. Some of them, however, are not in common use and risk disappearing from the diet [4].

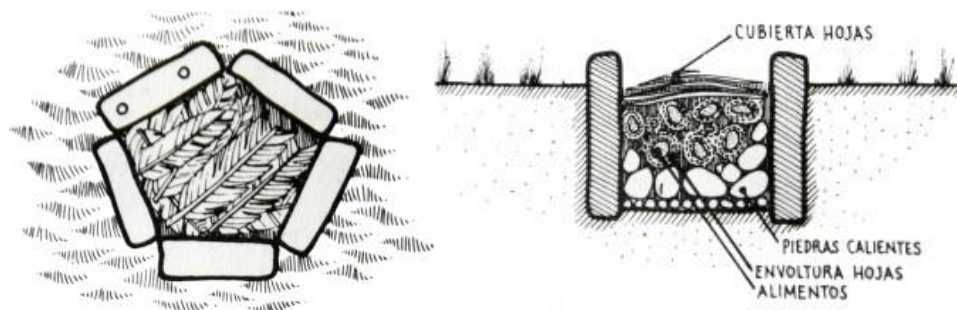


Figure 7.1 Plan and cross-section view of an *umu* for cooking of food in community gatherings (source: <http://www.moevarua.com/umu/>).

Festivities, celebrations and commemorative acts

Since the 1970s, the Tapati Rapanui, a traditional music and dance performing festival, is held every year during the first two weeks of February. Local and foreign ensembles perform for the local and tourist public. The emphasis is on Polynesian culture.

The religious celebration for the “day of all diseased” (*día de todos los muertos*) takes place every November 1st at the local cemetery. The second week of November, the *Ka Tangi Te Ako* festival takes place to celebrate the Polynesian music and dance among the local community. There are also community hosted events of generic nature where food is usually prepared and shared, called *Umu*. These community events are perceived as a sign of *umanga*: collaborative work, solidarity and reciprocity. They foster the gathering and exchange between different families, generations and genders.

Sports

Several sport activities are considered part of the tradition: Polynesian canoe races, *tute moa* (race following a wild chicken), *haka pei* (sliding on a banana trunk from the *Pu'i* hill), among others. They are mostly performed for the Tapati Rapanui festival or at international events. Their practice is combined with other sports such as football, basketball and physical strength demonstrations such as the *hoko* warrior dance. In addition to foment a culture of care for the physical condition of the body sport is considered a form of cultural exchange.



Figure 7.2 *Haka Pei* (source: www.elcorreodelmoai.com)

Arts, crafts and architecture

Symbolic body painting, *Takona*, is worn for special occasions, mostly festivities and public performances. It is done using mineral pigments obtain at specific places on the island. Tattoos are done using an ancient instrument called *uhi*, with natural dyes prepared locally. Its symbolism is mostly associated with clan belonging and self-expression. Both these plastic forms strongly relate with performing arts.

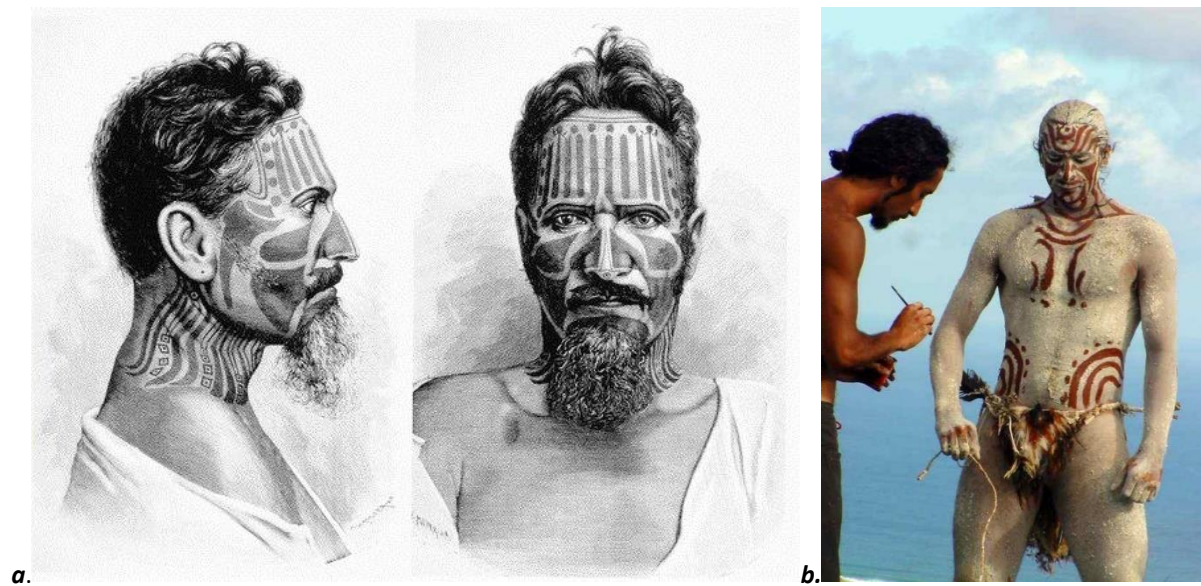


Figure 7.3 a. Juan Tepano wearing Takona, sketched by Swedish ethnographer Hjalmar Stolpe in 1884. b. Application of Takona for contemporary Tapati celebrations (phot by Ranora Raku, 2001).

Photography and pictorial arts have a powerful connection with the collective memory and affections of the indigenous population. Sculpture and carving takes place on locally available materials such as coral, stone and wood of diverse species. Many of the objects produced enter in the frantic touristic souvenir market but some circulate on a specialized and curated art-gallery circuit.

Some architectural forms have been identified as commonly occurring in current constructions such as the *pae-pae* and the *taupea*. The *taupea*, as an interphase between the interior and exterior of an inhabited place, as a threshold, has an important place in the Rapanui social life supporting collective gatherings as well as contemplative solitude. The *pae-pae* is also a place in the interior-exterior interphase of a building, but of an ephemeral nature, a place where work tools, forgotten or found things are stationed temporarily.

Territory

Territory is strongly linked to memory but also to the notions of *Varúas*, *Mana* and *Tapu*. Places have healing roles and are also regarded as a spaces for honouring and remembering its former dwellers. Places are the scene where the *mata* (genealogy) and the *kainga* (land womb) of a clan is revealed. Some places have deeper connotations, such as places with petroglyphs, caves, *ahu-moai* and *manavai*, the Rano Kau crater and its slopes, the country side, the village of Hanga Roa, the places and remains formerly used by the CEDIP in Vaitea, the Poike volcano, the cemetery and the coast. The Rapanui manifest a deep emotional connection with the structures and remains that are located in the land were their specific clans used to dwell, and particularly with the *ahu*, because of their ancient role as ritual and ceremonial burial sites.

1.3 Archaeological Heritage

Heritage comprises a large and dense collection of statuary, built structures, landmarks, paintings and petroglyphs, domestic and ritual objects and other remains scattered across the entire island and

stored in the local museum. Close to 1,000 *moai* are present on the island, at least 394 in the Rano Raraku quarry, 231 clearly associated with *Ahu* and a large number on the roads leaving from Rano Raraku. Including *Ahu*, 313 monumental structures of similar scale have been identified. An extensive collection of the ancient craft production remains, although scattered in museums and private holdings around the world. Wood and stone sculptures occupy a particularly significant place among these collections. The most valued wood was the Toromiro, because of its hardness and deep colour. Wood objects include crosiers, anthropomorphic figures, religious symbols and tablets carved with hieroglyphs.

Table 1.2 Archaeological Heritage

Type	Number
Houses	3,244
Stoves (<i>Umu</i>)	2,536
Agricultural structures (<i>Manavai</i>)	1,450
Hen houses (<i>Hare Moa</i>)	1,233
Caves and sheds (<i>Ana - Karava</i>)	1,379
Stone alignments	793
Pens	46
Rock art	673
Ceremonial structures	611
Statues (<i>Moai</i>)	866
Topknots (<i>Pukao</i>)	98
Towers (<i>Tupa</i>)	62
Water wells	127
Water reservoirs (<i>Taheta</i>)	640
Quarries and lithic workshops	94
Demarcation artefacts	397
Various	798
Uncatalogued	1,302
Total	16,336

Source: [8]

1.4 References

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