‘I Hē Koe? Placing Rapa Nui

Forrest Wade Young

In just a few centuries, the people of Easter Island wiped out their forest, drove their plants and animals to extinction, and saw their complex society spiral into chaos and cannibalism. Are we about to follow their lead?

“Adaptive Failure: Easter’s End,”

Jared Diamond

I think they should make it a golf course.

United States tourist, November 2008

Derechos de los Victimas
1. Ser Atendida
2. Recibir Un Trato Digno
3. Denunciar al delito
4. Ser Informada . . . ¹

Chilean Government,
Easter Island Courthouse 2008


Rapa Nui statement, March 2008

In August 2010, approximately 1,000 of the estimated total 2,500 indigenous Rapa Nui people had peacefully occupied a number of Chilean-administered lands and institutions in the place many outsiders know as “Easter Island” (PIR 2010). Mass media representations tended to portray the occupation as principally a matter of contemporary land conflict and targeted the Rapa Nui people involved as activists and protestors who were disrupting the social order (Lee 2010; Shikina 2010). Like many mass media representations of conflict, these accounts have limited who

The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 24, Number 1, 1–30
© 2012 by University of Hawai‘i Press
can speak with authority on the issues, as well as what the proper forums, means, and roles for conflict resolution can be (Arno 2009, 91). To gain a deeper understanding of recent events, I argue, it is critical to first defer reference (Chow 2006, 11) and to analyze four competing discourses that could be used to interpret the recent and ongoing conflict on the island; each of these discourses is signified by one of the above epigraphs. I analyze the discourses by engaging them with one of the first questions my Rapa Nui teachers insisted I learn how to pose wherever I was on the island: the question “‘I hē koe?’ (Where are you?). Not only did my teachers highlight this as a fundamental question for me to ask—and answer—wherever I was in Rapa Nui, but they also often asked and answered it themselves as they engaged in island places. Answering this question was considered key in identifying and understanding Rapa Nui, as well as Chilean, places on the island. It was stressed that one could not understand the island without knowing place-names and the important history, people, cultural resources, and stories associated with each place. In other words, knowing how to pose and answer this question was seen as critical to locating and positioning oneself within Rapa Nui. By situating the August 2010 events and ongoing conflict in terms of this Rapa Nui discursive practice, one can begin to “hear” the meaning of the conflict in the context of “indigenous epistemology” (Gegeo 2001; Meyer 2001). From such a vantage, “Easter Island” appears less as a place of coherent social order than as an epistemologically and ontologically “violent cartography” (Shapiro 1997). Foucauldian critical discourse analysis (Jäger and Maier 2009) suggests that the current conflict is not simply about land, but about Rapa Nui resistance to a complex colonial subject position that has been reproduced by archaeological, state, and tourist discourse circulating on and around the island.

While to my Rapa Nui teachers an answer to the question “‘I hē koe?’ was generally clear whenever they posed it to themselves, during my initial experiences on the island, I often found myself unable to answer it. As I posed the question to myself, I felt similar to philosopher Jean Paul Sartre’s fictional character Antoine Roquentin, who suffered nausea when he attempted to identify the essential meaning of a tree (Sartre 1964, 126–135). My confusion stemmed not from a modern existential crisis but from the apparent postmodern condition of Rapa Nui. The island was traversed by many kinds of people, but principally four sorts: archaeologists, Chileans, international tourists, and Rapa Nui. Daily mediated interaction among these groups—in the context of transnational flows of
capital, knowledge, people, and technology—seemed to destabilize the meaning of anything in Rapa Nui, to fragment it from the vantage of “cosmopolitan ethnography” (Appadurai 1991, 197). To answer the question seemed to require applying an anachronistic key of modernist logic—that there is a single correct answer to any question (Harvey 1990, 27–28)—to an unlocked, significantly unstable, postmodern Rapa Nui world. What Rapa Nui considered a sacred and storied place on the island was alternatively imagined by an archaeologist as a rich archaeological site, by a tourist as a nice context for a photo, and by the Chilean government as a convenient location for a new military base. Moreover, while Rapa Nui might discuss a location in Rapa Nui as a sacred place among fellow Rapa Nui, in another situation—as tour operators, for example—they might also describe the location as an important archaeological site or as a great place for photography. Ethnographically, the Rapa Nui question seems to be answerable differently in terms of the relatively disparate discourses.4 Analysis, in part through the epigraphs above, reveals how the discourses “place” Rapa Nui differently as well as the alternative ways that meaning can be ascribed to the various things, people, histories, and events of the island.5

Archaeological Discourse

During my stay in Rapa Nui, many archaeologists visited the island for brief or extended investigations. In addition to the ongoing archeological investigations conducted by the Chilean state, I encountered a number of extended investigations by British, French, German, and US teams. Every few months, it seemed, one team would leave and another would arrive. Archaeological discourse can be encountered wherever archaeologists are located, or among tourists acquainted with the literature; moreover, it can be read in much of the tourist and academic discourse circulating on the island and circumscribing the significance of the island outside of Rapa Nui. Talk in terms of this discourse is most pronounced at the archeological museum of Father Sebastian Englert and the adjacent William Mulloy Library; archaeologists regularly hold presentations and public talks there and can often be found outside the buildings discussing their latest research plans and desires. I first experienced archaeological discourse on Rapa Nui in 2004, not as an ethnographer of contemporary Rapa Nui, but as a student of Professor Terry Hunt’s month-long University of Hawai’i archaeological field school in Rapa Nui. The epigraph from Jared Dia-
mond above is a quotation from an article by Diamond that was the first assigned reading in the field school. Having had no prior experience with Professor Hunt, I falsely assumed that he was introducing the archaeological research paradigm our field studies would explore. Diamond further elaborated the theses of the article in one of his best sellers: *Collapse* (2004). While many of the scientific merits and premises of this research continue to be strongly contested by Hunt and others (Hunt and Lipo 2009, 2011; Rainbird 2002) and defended by others (Flenley and Bahn 2007), the archaeological themes that Diamond stressed and popularized have dominated archaeological research on Rapa Nui for the last two decades. The themes of Diamond’s “Easter Island” story have also been dramatized in the Kevin Costner film *Rapa Nui* and are often expressed in various archaeological representations of “Easter Island” that regularly circulate on US television channels such as the Travel Channel and National Geographic. While there were exceptions, when I encountered archaeologists in Rapa Nui or people conversant with archeological discourse of Rapa Nui, our dialogue would usually pivot around the salience of Diamond’s story. Irrespective of the aforementioned critiques by Hunt and others, it is the prototypical archaeological perspective on Rapa Nui and the predominant theme of discourse about Rapa Nui outside of the island.

Rapa Nui people may discuss aspects of archaeological discourse as tour guides or in cultural resource management positions, but generally, I did not find its themes to be of central concern in daily Rapa Nui conversation. Rapa Nui generally engage with the world of the ancestors (tupuna) among themselves in the context of their own discourse. In part, few Rapa Nui people have professionally contributed to the discourse because it has been organized by external and internal qualifying rules that have tended to exclude them from explicitly contributing to the truth of the discourse (see Foucault 1981, 56). Archaeology is principally a foreigner’s discourse coded in a foreign language that few Rapa Nui people have historically learned to speak or write: English. The discourse is also managed by an international scientific academy in institutions outside of Rapa Nui that Rapa Nui people have rarely accessed. While Sergio Rapu Haoa (a Rapa Nui archaeologist with professional credentials earned in the United States) has and does participate in the discourse, and while more Rapa Nui people will likely contribute in the future, Chilean underdevelopment of Rapa Nui has not historically provided significant resources for Rapa Nui people to acquire the academic credentials necessary to qualify for ritual participation in the discourse (see Rochona-Ramirez 1992). Internal
rules of truth have also limited the role of Rapa Nui contributions to the discourse. Rapa Nui people speak, but only as informants (Teaiwa 1995, 61). Typically, Rapa Nui informant knowledge is classified as useful yet ultimately limited and biased—as something an archaeologist must reorganize in order to extricate the “real” truth (Van Tilberg 1994, 37). At the time of my research, Rapa Nui people still had limited roles in formally deciding what kind of archaeological research could occur on the island; permits for archaeological research were ultimately managed by Chilean bureaucrats in Valparaíso rather than in Rapa Nui. Though Rapa Nui people maintain that only Rapa Nui truly own and should have a right to manage the world-famous monumental statues known as moai and other elements of Rapa Nui cultural heritage (Trachtman 2001), in practice it is the Chilean government that acts as owner. Perhaps most importantly, the Chilean government has appropriated the discourse of archaeology in order to restrict Rapa Nui settlement and access to resources (Rochon-Ramirez 1996, 79–81; Fisher 2005, 244).

As analysis of place formulation would suggest (Schegloff 1971, 129), Diamond’s location of Rapa Nui reflects his own occidental position, cultural membership categories, and topics of analysis. Whatever its scientific merits, Diamond’s “Easter Island” story expresses many of the broad themes of a discourse genre known as Pacific Orientalism (Wesley-Smith 1995). As Edward Said suggested for the Orient (1994, 5), Diamond’s answer to the Rapa Nui question, though apparently geographical, is more critically discernable as imaginative. Diamond’s article identifies the island neither by one of its Polynesian names nor in terms of the hallowed indigenous voyaging story of Hotu Matu’a and Ava Rei Pua from the ancestral Polynesian world of Hiva, but rather in terms of a rarefied Dutch adventure story that led to Jacob Roggeveen naming the island “Easter Island” in 1722 (Diamond 1995, 124–125).6 Diamond’s Easter Island is situated not in relation to the nearest Polynesian islands inhabited by Rapa Nui people—Mangareva and Tahiti (islands hosting over a century of diasporic Rapa Nui communities)—but as being near the British territory Pitcairn and South America.7 Rather than a place in Polynesia among the sea of Oceanic islands (Hau’ofa 2008, 31), Diamond’s Easter Island is an isolated scrap of land in a remote region of the Pacific Ocean, the same distance from the equator as Houston, Texas (Diamond 1995, 124–125). Like the apparent science of Orientalists whose analyses emphasize fascinating tales of Sphinx and genii (Said 1995, 63), Diamond’s story is also expressed in dramaturgical terms. Easter Island is depicted as an archaeo-
logical site compared to Angkor Wat and Tikal (Diamond 1995, 124): it is formulated not as a living but as a lost civilization, populated by ecologically ignoble and irrational cannibals who spiraled into chaos because they carved too many moai. Contemporary Rapa Nui people are never even mentioned by Diamond in the entire article. Like the schematic textual attitude of Orientalists (Said 1994, 85–93), Diamond’s text is dialogical only with the interests of prior Western researchers of Easter Island. His narrative chronicles only Island history that articulates with Western concern. In typical ethnocentric occidental fashion, he places Rapa Nui in the “savage slot” (Trouillot 1991), as he fantasizes ways to reform the imagined Western project away from ecological collapse. Easter Island hence becomes like dirt to an archaeologist: an artifact of coding schemes, highlighting, and institutionalized “professional vision” (Goodwin 1994, 608–614). Perhaps, then, such discourse does not so much place Rapa Nui as much as it constructs it as a sign of “differance” (Derrida 1973), disseminated within a complex discursive field of international archaeological research projects.

Hunt’s field school quickly disabused me of the scientific veracity of Diamond’s narrative; perhaps over time, his work will result in an alternative research paradigm that does not simply place Rapa Nui in a savage prehistoric slot in order to reform the Western project. Since returning to the United States, however, I have found that Diamond’s story haunts me incessantly. The most common questions I encounter when I mention that I have lived for a year and a half in Rapa Nui are archaeological and focus on Diamond. People regularly ask me how my research clarified the processes of ecological collapse that he proposed. When I respond that I study not the archaeology but contemporary issues of the indigenous Rapa Nui people, I typically encounter the follow-up, dumbfounded question, “There are native people there?” Archaeological prehistoric placement of Easter Island remains powerful indeed in the Western-mediated imagination, but it tends to erase the place of living Rapa Nui people on the island. Hence, archaeological discourse of Easter Island fails to place the August 2010 events in terms of a coherent discursive ground (Goodwin and Duranti 1997, 4–12).

Tourist Discourse

Though some tourists may know the indigenous name of the island, generally they come to a place they think of as “Easter Island” or “Isle de
Paque” or “Isla de Pascua,” and so on. International tourist discourse is mostly expressed in Spanish, French, German, English, or Japanese. While tourists are likely to learn about Rapa Nui from some Rapa Nui tour guides, their ideas about the island are principally dialogical with tour guidebooks that have titles like *Chile* and *Easter Island* and are addressed to tourists or archaeologists. The discourse of the guidebooks is primarily focused on the archaeological sites of Easter Island. The truth of the discourse, though sometimes contested by Rapa Nui guides and more often simply ignored, is managed and published primarily by international travel agencies and foreign presses, not by Rapa Nui.

The second epigraph at the beginning of this article was uttered in a conversation between two US tourists at a café in the main town of Rapa Nui, Hanga Roa. In the proposition that “they should make it a golf course,” the “it” referred to was the island itself: the speaker thought the entire island would make a good golf course. She expressed excitement at the prospect of large-scale hotels scattered about the course as well as celebrity golf tournaments, and she beamed at the thought of moai as obstacles. She relished an imagined future of resorts abutting the coast, as in Hawai‘i, where she could take in a few holes after enjoying the spa and a pedicure. In contrast, on another day at the café, I overheard another pair of US tourists commenting on how fantastic it was that the Chilean government was able to preserve the island as a state park with minimal impact by hotel development. Although somewhat antithetical to one another, both perspectives exhibit a common feature: complete disregard for the possibility that the island had a purpose and significance besides tourism. Though no doubt both pairs of tourists had encountered local Rapa Nui by this point along their tour, neither explicitly considered that Rapa Nui people might prefer to develop the island in alternative ways and might object to those currently operating. Neither entertained the possibility that the principle significance of the island for the Rapa Nui was that it was the home of their grandchildren and future grandchildren, and where their remains would be buried among their ancestors.

While undoubtedly not all tourists are as insensitive as these two pairs (and some are even less sensitive), I think in general their comments highlight a basic feature of international tourist discourse. Easter Island, within this discourse, is reproduced as something for tourists to consume. As tourists discussed the island, they typically assessed it by considering ways that their consumption of it could improve: more elaborate hotels, more entertainment, better rental cars, more beaches, and its potential for
golf. Tourists place Easter Island in a new kind of historical theme park (Handler and Gable 1997): a prehistoric amusement park of moai rides.

International tourist discourse predominates across the central town of the island, Haŋa Roa; within the primary tourist sites on the island—Orono, Rano Rarauku, Ahu Tahai, Ahu Toŋariki, and Anakena beach; in the museum and library; and, of course, at the airport. From the perspective of tourists having coffee at a café on the main street of Haŋa Roa, Rapa Nui does indeed appear to be somewhat of a thing to consume. The main street is lined on each side principally with souvenir shops, tour agencies, and restaurants catering to tourists. Billboards advertise Rapa Nui cultural dance shows exhibiting Rapa Nui dancers in provocative traditional dress. Rental cars awaiting customers line the street curbs. The Feria, a local fish and produce farmer’s market, doubles as an artisanal market that sells souvenirs. Tourists, enthralled with the handcrafted jewelry and sculptures modeling the world-famous moai, hardly take notice of Rapa Nui purchasing their local food and conversing in Rapa Nui within the same building. Also typically ignored by the tourists making a beeline to the souvenirs is the local café, also nestled within the Feria, where Rapa Nui gather for small talk and conversations predominately in Rapa Nui language. Beyond the Feria, on the main street, the multifarious languages of the tourists compete with Chilean Spanish across the sidewalks and within the stores, restaurants, and tour agencies, as primarily Chilean cab drivers dominate the street. Rapa Nui language and the Rapa Nui people, if seen or heard at all by the tourists, fade into the background as tourists anxiously shop for simulacra of prehistoric Easter Island culture. To the extent that tourists consider Rapa Nui people merely “indigenous entertainment” (King 2008, 66), they are unlikely to place the seriousness of the August 2010 events.

Chilean Discourse

The sample of legal rules posted inside the courthouse of Rapa Nui and featured in the third epigraph above is illustrative of one genre of official Chilean discourse in Rapa Nui. Such discourse, coded in Spanish, represents Rapa Nui not as a lost civilization to excavate or tour but simply as Chile. At an official level, this sense of Rapa Nui is grounded ultimately in terms of the Chilean annexation of Rapa Nui in 1888, yet more particularly in terms of a more recent law organizing the island, that is, Ley 16441. This law established Rapa Nui as part of the civil district of Val-
paraíso, Chile; prior to Ley 16441, the island was administered as a military territory according to naval rules established by Ley 3220 (Rochona-Ramirez 1996, 43). The passage of Ley 16441 in 1966, under Chilean President Eduardo Frei Montalva, ended a complex era of imperial domination and transnational corporate exploitation of Rapa Nui that began shortly after Chilean annexation of Rapa Nui in 1888. According to Ley 16441, Rapa Nui is to be locally administered by a governor appointed by the Chilean president (as opposed to one appointed by the military, as had been the case before this law); a locally elected mayor; and a six-member municipal council. There is also another genre of official Chilean discourse, however, founded on another law: Ley 19253. This law, passed in 1994, legally established Rapa Nui people as one of the six federally recognized indigenous peoples of Chile. Both legal discourses place Rapa Nui within Chile in terms of the Spanish name “Isla de Pascua”; however, each locates Rapa Nui differently. Ley 16441 locates Rapa Nui within a district of Chile; Ley 19253 locates Rapa Nui within the indigenous spaces of Chile. To distinguish the two in this article, I will refer to the discourse coordinated by Ley 16441 as Valparaíso discourse and that associated with Ley 19253 as Pascuense discourse. Pascuense discourse formulates Rapa Nui as a kind of special bicultural Polynesian place—a space of an ethnic group with special rights compared to other Chileans. Valparaíso discourse formulates Rapa Nui as simply another Chilean place, a space to be administered just like any other Chilean district. While the two discourses interact throughout the island, some places seem organized more by one than the other. Though the offices of the governor and mayor and various social institutions like the public school were established by Ley 16441, much of the daily life I observed in those places was what I would call Pascuense. This was manifest in language usage, daily practices, and architecture. The bicultural Pascuense discourse of these places contrasts with such places as the courthouse and the office of land titles as well as with the offices and conduct of the Chilean military and police stationed in Rapa Nui. Those institutions not only were silent on Rapa Nui as a Polynesian place; they often seemed to operate antagonistically to Rapa Nui as a special indigenous place. Official Chilean discourse in Rapa Nui was thus unstable, ambiguous; depending on the context, it shifted between these two broadly distinct genres of discourse, Valparaíso and Pascuense.

At the office of the governor, a memorial statue of King Riro symbolically marks the place as at least partially an indigenous place. King Riro, the last king of Rapa Nui, was murdered in 1898 en route to speak to
the Chilean president in protest about Enrique Merlet’s transforming Rapa Nui into a sheep ranch (McCall 1995, 2). Arriving on the island with armed guards, Merlet took down the Rapa Nui flag accompanying the Chilean flag during and after the annexation ceremony; had Rapa Nui people build a wall around the town of Hanga Roa; imprisoned Rapa Nui people within the walls; and refused to acknowledge any political authority of King Riro on the island (McCall 1997, 116). Merlet’s walls literally imprisoned Rapa Nui within Hanga Roa until resistance led to the formation of Ley 16441 and civil rights for Rapa Nui people within Chile in the 1960s. Comparatively, the placement of the king’s memorial is reminiscent of the memorial to the Tahitian leader Pouvanaa Oopa that stands in front of one of the government buildings in Papeete, Tahiti. King Riro, like Pouvanaa, was an important leader of indigenous resistance; however, his memorial does not provide a narrative to elaborate this fact. While “French” Polynesia has its own colonial problems, the memorial to Pouvanaa expresses considerably more respectful detail than that of King Riro. The memorial to Pouvanaa details his biography and political significance in both Tahitian and French, whereas the plaque for King Riro simply notes, and only in Spanish, that he was the last king recognized by the Chilean Navy: “La Armada de Chile en Reconocimiento al Ultimo Rey Rapa Nui Simeon Riro Kainga. Hanga Roa, 06 de Mayo del 2006.” The memorial to King Riro is thus constituted in terms of the “national memory” of the Chilean military (White 2004, 293–294); the memorial ironically remembers, while officially silencing (Trouillot 1995, 48), the actual importance of King Riro to Rapa Nui people.

During my time there I found that many of the places organized explicitly by the Chilean government did not make any effort to represent the place in bicultural Pascuense terms. In these places the discursive practice of the government simply organized the island as a Chilean place. Like the Chilean police and military, whose uniforms identify them not in terms of Rapa Nui or even Isla de Pascua but simply as representatives of Chile, the discourse of the courthouse in Rapa Nui was unequivocally Valparaíso. I was informed that a Rapa Nui judge was available to hear the court proceedings; however, after six months of regularly observing court cases and proceedings, I never witnessed a case over which he presided. Instead, the judge in the cases I observed was Chilean, as were the two attorneys who counseled plaintiffs and defendants. The majority of courtroom users during this period were Rapa Nui. Though Ley 19253 stipulates that Rapa Nui people have a legal right to a translator and to speak strictly in Rapa
Nui, I never heard the judge or council ask Rapa Nui in court if they would like to exercise this right or if they would like to have a concept or issue clarified in Rapa Nui language. One might expect the interior of the courtroom to have some Rapa Nui carvings or sculpture, given the presence of such items at the Pascuense-style offices of the governor and mayor and the school; however, there was no sign of anything Rapa Nui within the courtroom. There was a Chilean flag and a set of anonymous wooden pews and tables. Presumably, the courthouse in Rapa Nui is like any other courthouse in a small Chilean community. At the seat of justice in Rapa Nui, Rapa Nui people appear as defendants, but Rapa Nui culture, language, and people are conspicuously absent from the processes of adjudication. Similarly, the Office of National Goods that administers the individual land titles that register Rapa Nui properties also lacked a bicultural aesthetic. Though a Rapa Nui man staffed the waiting room, the three lead administrators were all Chilean. As in the case of the judge and attorneys, none of these officials could speak Rapa Nui. The office of land registration—like the courthouse a place of social and political power—lacked an explicitly empowered Rapa Nui seat.

While Valparaíso discourse in Rapa Nui is expressed most explicitly in government institutions around Haña Roa and Mataveri (the site of the airport and the location of the Chilean military and police), the discourse is also expressed in the general social landscape of the island. In the countryside outside of Haña Roa, the sense of Rapa Nui as a Chilean place is manifest in a profound absence. The entire island countryside is circumscribed by ancestral temples (ahu) punctuated by the iconic moai sculptures. Each Rapa Nui extended family (hua’ai) traces descent to particular temple areas—areas their families used to call home before Merlet imprisoned the people to make room for sheep. During the sheep-ranching era of capitalist exploitive colonialism, in contrast to the contemporary settler colonialism on the island (Young 2001, 17), the repressive power of the state prevented Rapa Nui from living in the countryside. First missionaries and capitalists and ultimately the Chilean government settled, incarcerated, and administered Rapa Nui in Haña Roa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to stabilize wool production for the global political economy. Chilean political power in Rapa Nui today organizes and produces the countryside primarily as a national park and state farm to serve state, tourist, and archaeological interests. Since the removal of the prison walls, Rapa Nui have incessantly struggled to regain title to the entirety of the island; however, Chile has thus far only been willing to
extend Rapa Nui settlement principally around Haŋa Roa, while it claims title to the island and the majority of its lands (Rochona-Ramirez 1996, 65–85). Chilean officials have regularly “bulldozed” Rapa Nui attempts to settle outside of government-sanctioned areas (Fisher 2005, 251), and Rapa Nui people have been incarcerated for those attempts. Hence, while the heritage of the countryside bristles with meaning, to read it as strictly a Rapa Nui place would be to forget that Rapa Nui people have generally been excluded from this space for over a hundred years by Chilean laws and policies. Official Chilean discourse, despite some Pascuense articulations, generally severs Rapa Nui people from their genealogical place; state discourse places Rapa Nui in a penal space that they resist.

Rapa Nui Discourse

Some sense of how the question “‘I hē koe?’ is posed and answered in Rapa Nui discourse can begin to be illuminated by attending to the fourth epigraph above, which is a fragment of a longer discussion at one of the places I visited near the town and is worth quoting further:


(Pure Nahe is the name of this place. We have traversed to Pure Nahe to compassionately greet the great man of the place: Papiano. He is eighty years old. Fifty-eight people resided here and died here. These elders speak here to this day. He has been here—to this day—fifty-eight years; imprisoned here by the Chilean government. This is the home of the lepers. Women and men were imprisoned here. They were not sick. They were injected with medicine [that contained leprosy]. Why? To exterminate the people. To this day, Papiano is the last one alive. They have built a school for the children to cover the evil history here, the evil of the Chilean government to this great man of Rapa Nui.)

The conversation consisted of Papiano’s reflections on Pure Nahe and some narration of the meeting articulated by another elder who helped
facilitate the conversation. No Chileans were present during our conversation. Papiano spoke to me in his home in Pure Nahe, a home that is now next to the remains of the leprosy colony developed by the Chilean government via the Easter Island Exploitation Company; it is the only residence remaining among the relics. While I conversed directly with Papiano in Rapa Nui language, his words were sometimes restated by the other elder to make them clearer to me (because of a partially collapsed jaw, his voice resounds in a tone that is difficult to hear precisely) and to save Papiano the pain of having to repeat his words as I wrote them down. Papiano’s jaw as well as his entire body had been ravaged by Hansen’s disease; he lacked fingered hands, could not walk unassisted, and speaking was painful for him. Like much of Rapa Nui discourse, the discussion was articulated in Rapa Nui language among elder Rapa Nui within a Rapa Nui home. While it can be coded in the various languages spoken among Rapa Nui, such as Spanish, German, French, and English, I noted that the discourse was most commonly coded in Rapa Nui language. It was expressed regularly wherever adult Rapa Nui gathered, for example, in residential areas, the aforementioned Feria market, town meetings, outside and inside the Catholic Church, and Rapa Nui cultural festivals. Within the residential area I came to call home, Rapa Nui was the predominant, unmarked discourse of a kinship form of life. Rapa Nui language, as I experienced it and detail elsewhere (Young 2011), was principally a language that mature and elder Rapa Nui used to communicate among one another and tried to teach to children, rather than a language they primarily used to address Chileans officials in political forums (Makihara 2007).

Importantly, the narrative record of my visit with Papiano opens by implicitly answering the question, “I hē koe?” The conversation begins with the narrator’s explicit naming of the place, and then it proceeds with a discussion of the particular person associated with the place and the important story there. I was brought to Pure Nahe for the same reason many other Rapa Nui people visit Pure Nahe and other Rapa Nui places, namely, to learn the story of that place—a common pastime among Rapa Nui. Papiano was considered the important elder to speak to in order to learn about Pure Nahe: it was his place. In contrast to archaeological and tourist discourse, Rapa Nui discourse is not focused on prehistoric sites of “Easter Island.” While stories of ancestral places are important to Rapa Nui people, stories of historic places are of equal, and in some cases, greater importance. During my tenure in Rapa Nui, I heard various stories about Pure Nahe, the origins of Hansen’s disease in Rapa Nui,
and the treatment of Rapa Nui people at Pure Nahe. While not all Rapa Nui agreed, many elder Rapa Nui felt, like Papiano, that Pure Nahe was part of a broader genocidal plan on Chile’s part. The goal was to remove Rapa Nui people from the island to produce more profit for the Easter Island Exploitation Company and to improve Chilean opportunities to use the island as a military outpost. This makes more sense given the general sentiment among Western settlers worldwide that indigenous peoples would eventually become extinct as well as the fact that fewer than 300 Rapa Nui were alive during the initial construction of the leper colony in 1917 (Makihara 1999, 335). Though stories of Pure Nahe sometimes conflicted, they shared an indignant “structure of feeling” that Rapa Nui people had been abused there and that some had been infected after being admitted (see Williams 1977, 132). In asserting that Rapa Nui victims of Hansen’s disease were imprisoned at Pure Nahe, Papiano was speaking literally. Pure Nahe was a hellish place. One could observe buildings with barred windows where Papiano and the elder indicated that Rapa Nui people had been kept. They also pointed out the steel chair to which Rapa Nui people had been bound as teeth, limbs, and fingers and toes that had been ravaged by Hansen’s disease were removed. As I photographed the buildings and the chair, I had little trouble imagining their screams. Papiano did not scream that day; of course he probably couldn’t scream given that his jaw barely allowed him to speak. But I am sure that he had screamed when his own appendages were pulled from his body as he sat on that chair. The cultural memory of Pure Nahe that he related to me that day was in a sense one loud silent scream: a Munchian scream that continues to haunt me long after my departure from the island.11

It is no wonder the Chilean government would like to silence cultural memory of this place by building on top of it. Pure Nahe, however, is only one of many places that Rapa Nui people remember as sites of horrific treatment and persecution by the Chilean government. Rapa Nui elders speaking to me about the town of Haŋa Roa in general often emphasized that Rapa Nui were all imprisoned and abused within Haŋa Roa for decades without sufficient food and water. One elder recalled Rapa Nui surviving on seaweed because they were often denied access to fish as well as to the meat of animals managed by the Easter Island Exploitation Company. He considered Haŋa Roa to this day a prison, though the walls have been removed and though Rapa Nui now democratically participate in Chilean political systems on Rapa Nui and in Chile. He was not alone in this conception; many elders I spoke with remember the walls and con-
tinue to consider Haŋa Roa a prison. Another elder, with a concern similar to Papiano’s about the placement of the new school, was alarmed at the development of the town disco, Toroko. According to him, many Rapa Nui starved to death at this place while being held at gunpoint during the exploitation of Rapa Nui by the wool company. Such cultural memories no doubt ground reflections like those of the following narrative:

Ki he te roa o te Tire ‘i ruŋa o te mātou kāiŋa? Me’e ra’e. Ho’e tautini va’u hanere va’u ahuru ma va’u i toke ai e te Tire i te kuhane o te Rapa Nui tā’atoa. Ko rohirohi ‘ana te taŋata tā’atoa o te hau nei o Pito o Te Henua i te reoreo o te hau nei he Tire. Toke te mana’u; toke te mana o te tupuna ata ki āgarina. Etahi nō mana’u o te taure‘are’a, o te korohu’a, o te ru’au, o te  naï vi’e peinei e. Ka e’a te Tire mai ruŋa i te rāua motu. Ka hakare te rāua kāiŋa ki te mana’u. Peinei e. Mai te  naï pokī Tire—he toketoke—ki te  naï vi’e Tire—he toketoke—ki te taŋata Tire—he toketoke. ‘Ina ‘a katahi me’e tano i va’ai mai e te Tire ki te henua nei. Ka ho’e hanere piti ahuru matahiti ki āgarina, ‘ina ‘a he me’e nehenehe ra’e i hakatikea mai e te hau nei he Tire. He tu’u mai, he toke tahí i te henua o te Rapa Nui. Ka e’a koe, tu’u taŋata, tu’u rakerake, tu’u reva. Ka hoki ki tu’u kāiŋa ko Tire.

(How long has Chile resided upon our land? That is the first thing. Since 1888, the spirit of all Rapa Nui has been stolen by Chile. All of the people of the government of Pito o Te Henua [Rapa Nui] are exhausted by the lies of this Chilean government. Our mind is stolen. The spiritual power of the ancestors is stolen to this day. There is one thought of the youth, of the men, the elders, and the women. Chile: get out from upon their land! Leave their land and their mind alone. The Chilean children are thieves. The women are thieves. The Chilean men are thieves. Not one righteous thing has been given by Chile to this land. One hundred twenty years to this day, not one beautiful thing has been shown by this Chilean government. They arrived here; they stole all the land of the Rapa Nui. Leave! Your people, your evil, your flag. Return to your land: Chile.)

As with Papiano’s reflections, this one was articulated in the context of informal discussion among Rapa Nui elders at a Rapa Nui home. Conversation concerned a recent march of Rapa Nui through the town of Haŋa Roa that had concluded at the governor’s office with a demonstration and denouncement of Chilean government policies. The statement was articulated by one of the elders in response to an informal question of mine in which I asked the group what the march was about. While Pascuense Chilean discourse broadly tries to blur the boundaries between Rapa Nui and Chilean discourse, it is important to note that this speaker explicitly
“compartmentalizes” Chile in the narrative by using particular locatives and possessive pronouns (see Stella 2007, 168). Implicitly engaging with the question “I hē koe?,” the narrator identifies the island not by the Chilean name “Isla de Pascua” but by the indigenous name “Te Pito o te Henua.” Te Pito o te Henua is located in relation to Chile but within a linguistic frame signifying domination. Chile (Tire) is represented as “upon” (‘i ruŋa) “our land” (te mātou kāiŋa). Especially noteworthy is the use of the exclusive possessive pronoun “te mātou” in this narrative, addressed in part to me and in part to other Rapa Nui people discussing the protest. In Rapa Nui language, this exclusive possessive pronoun contrasts with the first person plural inclusive possessive pronoun “te ūtou”—a distinction not grammatically expressed in English. Here, use of the exclusive rather than the inclusive form of the possessive pronoun disassociates Chile and me from the land of Rapa Nui. The other elders involved in the discussion are included in the situated meaning of “our” (te mātou), whereas Chileans—children, women, and men—and I are not. The elder expresses intense resentment of perceived Chilean abuse of Rapa Nui people; not even women and children are spared scorn and condemnation. Officials and common Chileans are formulated as liars and thieves who have stolen Rapa Nui mind, land, and spirit for over a hundred years. The government and people are portrayed as disempowering the indigenous people, as “taking” (toke) the mana of their tupuna “to this day” (ki aŋarina). The narrative concludes with further oppositions of Rapa Nui and Chile: Te Pito o te Henua is reformulated as “the island of Rapa Nui” (te henua o te Rapa Nui). The place Rapa Nui people are located within is a place the narrator wants Chilean children, women, and men to leave. Chileans are encouraged to return to a different land: “your land” (tu‘u kāiŋa), that is, Tire. Rapa Nui land and identity, as articulated by the narrator, are thus clearly not the blurred form that the state imagines with its use of Pascuense discourse.

Chilean colonialism in Rapa Nui is an important theme in the narrative and in Rapa Nui discourse generally, but it is comparatively silent in the other discourses. Archaeological researchers and tourists are likely to learn some of the perspectives of Rapa Nui discourse on “prehistoric” Rapa Nui but are less likely to engage with its more historical and political dimensions. One team of archaeologists I spoke with on the island, for example, was only deeply interested in contemporary politics to the extent that it obstructed their access to archaeological sites. Another team emphasized that Rapa Nui politics should not “stand in the way” of scientific inves-
tigation. While official Chilean discourse sometimes recognizes that there was colonialism in Rapa Nui in the past, it foregrounds Ley 16441 and 19253 as evidence that Rapa Nui is postcolonial. The elder speaking in this reflection clearly does not conceive Rapa Nui as postcolonial. Like longtime ethnographer and historian of Rapa Nui Grant McCall (1995), the narrator clearly finds the history and contemporary treatment of Rapa Nui people by the Chilean government colonial and fundamentally derelict. The narrator is adamant that Chile has not provided a single positive thing for Rapa Nui; importantly, the reproach is broadly consistent with the historical record.12 Not all Rapa Nui would agree with the narrator that all Chileans should take their flag and their evil, return to Chile, and leave Rapa Nui politically independent. However, during my residence on the island I encountered no Rapa Nui who were satisfied with the status quo. Rapa Nui have actively sought change and decolonization in one form or another for many years: reform within the current framework, autonomous political status within Chile, and independence (Di Castri 2003; Fisher 2005, 260–264; Gonshor 2007; Rochona-Ramirez 1996, 80–82).

KO KU‘IKU‘I ‘Ā?

Like the world-famous postmodern Gehry House of Santa Monica, California, the island of Rapa Nui and its people, cultural heritage, and discourse are, in an abstract sense, “wrapped” (Jameson 1991, 109). Rapa Nui is like the original Gehry House, yet its wrapper is more complex than the relatively uniform industrial one that architect Frank Gehry imposed on the original house in Santa Monica. Rapa Nui is wrapped in an ungainly historical montage of archaeological, Chilean, and tourist discourse. To the outsider cosmopolitan ethnographer, the Rapa Nui “house” is just one dimension of a deterritorialized global ethnoscape (Appadurai 1991, 192); indeed, one cannot ever really see the Rapa Nui house in isolation from the outside, anymore than one can see the original Gehry house. From such a vantage point, one is perhaps inclined to ask how hybrid lives flow within the complex of transnational cultures that wrap the Rapa Nui house (see Appadurai 1991, 209) as well as how this flow has enabled Rapa Nui people, archaeologists, Chileans, and tourists to imagine a wider set of possible lives than before (Appadurai 1991, 197). Centered within the textual space of the academy, the cosmopolitan ethnographer does not foreground the structural displacements, domination, inequality, racism, and social horrors that constitute and are articu-
lated within such global ethnoscapes (Appadurai 1991, 198), but rather searches for bourgeois meaning in the “fertile ground of deterritorialization in which money, commodities, and persons unendingly chase each other around the world, and group imaginations find their fractured and fragmented counterpart” (Appadurai 1991, 194). Epistemologically centered in the idea that Rapa Nui is a global ethnoscape, Rapa Nui–imagined lives become just one fragment of ethnographic bedrock to consider (Appadurai 1991, 199). To understand Rapa Nui as a deterritorialized transnational world, one simply situates their voices within the matrix of other voices imagining the world—placing their voices beside those of archaeologists, Chileans, and tourists.

To understand Rapa Nui first and foremost as a global ethnoscape would purportedly be to see Rapa Nui more realistically and to resist epistemic grounding in a particular way of life (Appadurai 1991, 200). However, the cosmopolitan ethnographer, like the feminist anthropologist (Moreton-Robinson 2000, 149), is socially positioned and speaks from a seat of discursive power. Like Diamond’s “Easter Island” story, to locate Rapa Nui within a global ethnoscape is just to represent Rapa Nui in terms of another place formulation, one that reflects particular cultural membership categories, topics of analysis, and location in the world (Schegloff 1971)—or, in terms of post-structural theory, a subject position (Foucault 1983). Rather than occupying the philosophical space of “a view from nowhere” (Nagel 1986), Arjun Appadurai created a subject position that can be placed everywhere, a “master-narrative” to insert and manage local spaces in terms of cosmopolitan interests (Lyotard 1999). Rapa Nui elders sometimes lament, “Ko ku‘iku‘i ‘ā te pu‘oko”; translated broadly, this says the head (pu‘oko) is full of problems—in other words, the person is confused. I heard this expression said of Rapa Nui youth, of Rapa Nui officially working within Chilean political and social institutions on the island, and of alcoholic Rapa Nui roaming the streets estranged from their extended families (hua’ai). While I never tried to discuss Appadurai’s notion of global ethnoscapes with these elders, I suspect that they would find some contextual explanation for “Ko ku‘iku‘i ‘ā te pu‘oko” in Appadurai’s concept. The people characterized in this way are, in a sense, trying to find meaning in their lives by chasing the money, people, and technology of the deterritorialized transnational world. These Rapa Nui elders did not typically celebrate such people but derided them as disconnected from Rapa Nui ways of life. Such elders would contest that “Ko ku‘iku‘i ‘ā te pu‘oko” and hence that a global ethnoscape story
is the most important narrative to tell in Rapa Nui. For them, as for many indigenous peoples today (Champagne 2007, 364; Smith 2002, 39), the more critical story of Rapa Nui is the one focused on Rapa Nui people and centered in and engaged with their indigenous forms of life. Epistemologically centered in Rapa Nui discourse, Rapa Nui is not first and foremost a global ethnoscape; it is the place of Rapa Nui people.

While this article has, on the surface, initially followed the precepts of cosmopolitan ethnography and placed Rapa Nui within a global ethnoscape, it is not clear that “entextualizing” Rapa Nui within this discourse genre is the most ethnographically, morally, and politically responsible way to place Rapa Nui (see Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73). Diamond’s “Easter Island” story, whatever its archaeological failings, poorly wraps the Rapa Nui house. The archaeological tale does not even acknowledge the existence of a contemporary Rapa Nui house. Its archaeological imagination is not fixed on the lived space of Rapa Nui people but is instead grounded in a textual attitude that is wrapped up in the significance of a lost civilization for reforming the Western project. Tourist discourse is also a poor wrapping; like archaeology it does not so much place Rapa Nui as it does imagine it within the constructs of occidental geography. However, the prehistoric significance of Easter Island for tourists is articulated less in terms of the research interests of global archaeology than as a way to address the consumer desires of “Mickey Mouse history” (Wallace 1996). “Easter Island” for the tourist is not so much a research site for evaluating and reforming the Western project as it is a playground of historical entertainment akin to Disneyland’s classic ride, It’s a Small World. Chilean discourse in one way or another simply places Rapa Nui within a Chilean “imagined community” (Anderson 1991)—a community that would like to forget places like Pure Nahe and Rapa Nui leaders like King Riro, and to silence narratives of elders like the one above. Rapa Nui not only have trouble imagining themselves as Chilean, but, as the narrative of colonial protest herein attests, they are also often quite hostile to the idea. Whether they hope for an autonomous future for Rapa Nui within Chile or for an independent Rapa Nui, Rapa Nui people generally resist the current Chilean wrapper on their house.

Yet more than simply being poor wrappers, within island “political ecology” (Paulson, Gezon, and Watts 2005, 17), these discourses also appear to place Rapa Nui in a subservient subject position. From inside the Rapa Nui house there is less surreal montage (Clifford 1988) than there is tension and conflict between the Rapa Nui house and its foreign
wrappers. To background these tensions and conflicts within the contemporary deterritorialized world, as cosmopolitan ethnography encourages (Appadurai 1991, 198), is to aestheticize and silence the serious problems of the postmodern condition for Rapa Nui people as well as for the majority of the world’s peoples (Harvey 1990, 337). Against their will, Rapa Nui were incarcerated in the small space of Haŋa Roa and severed from their ancestral lands and temples so that a multinational corporation could develop the island into a sheep ranch for the global wool market and so that state officials could imagine Chile as a world power and “lord of the Pacific” (Vergara 1939, 82–83). Although the multinational corporation was subsequently officially removed from the island in 1953, and the walls imprisoning the Rapa Nui people were collapsed following Rapa Nui resistance in 1963, the state has legalized the Chilean imagined community in Rapa Nui through its land tenure system, policies, and institutions (compare Kelly and Kaplan 2001, 200). Chilean institutions limited Rapa Nui political power on the island and restricted settlement principally to areas within and just outside of Haŋa Roa as the island was developed into a national park, state farm, and military base.

Though Rapa Nui people have fought and continue to fight for the return of their entire island and political autonomy as well as for independence in local, national, and international arenas (Gonschor 2007), the state has generally been seen as reforming rather than radically restructuring Chilean governance of the island. It has never returned the island to the Rapa Nui people as initially promised in the early 1990s but has simply redistributed a few additional parcels of land within the modified “Titulo Domino” land tenure system, which was first established by state decree 2885 and was strongly contested by the Rapa Nui people (Rochona-Ramirez 1996, 65–85). The new land policies have only created places for Rapa Nui to overcome overpopulation problems in Haŋa Roa, while keeping the majority of the island reserved as a national park for tourists, archaeological sites for research, and select locations for Chilean militarization. Rapa Nui are no longer strictly confined to Haŋa Roa by the repressive power of nineteenth and early twentieth century state and capitalist imperialism; they are also trammeled by the “discursive imperialism” of archaeology, tourism, and state bureaucracy that is circulating in Rapa Nui (Smith 2002, 21–23). The discourses “articulate” and constitute a Foucauldian “dispositif” or apparatus that empowers the new sheep—archaeologists, soldiers, and tourists—to freely roam the island, as Rapa Nui are subjected to living essentially within their old
penitentiary (Fairclough 2009, 170; Agamben 2009; Deleuze 1989; Foucault 1980).

Like Hawaiians (see Silva 2004), Rapa Nui have never passively accepted colonial subjectivity but instead have a history of resistance. The events of August 2010 are part of a century of human struggles against Chilean colonialism that began with King Atamu Tekena’s qualification of the terms of annexation and King Riro’s attempt to challenge the sudden end of those terms at the close of the nineteenth century. Rapa Nui resistance continued in the early twentieth century against imprisonment by corporate sheep ranchers in collusion with the Chilean state (Porteous 1981, 66–68); in the overthrow of military rule in the 1960s; and through numerous occupations and confrontations in both the 1980s and 1990s (Rochona-Ramirez 1996; Fisher 2005, 238–248).

As noted by the elder’s reflection above, Rapa Nui people resist the Chilean government in part because “They arrived here, they stole all the land of the Rapa Nui” (He tu’u mai, he toke tahi i te henua o te Rapa Nui). Yet the elder also states that the problems are not simply about land but also about the colonization of Rapa Nui minds and spirit. The elder stresses the Chile has “stolen their mind and spiritual power” (Toke te mana’u; toke te mana). Rapa Nui resist Chile not only to regain their island land but also to restore their mind and spirituality as a people. The voices of Papiano and the elder quoted here, as well as those of many Rapa Nui, place themselves within the historical and present material and discursive prisons that Chile has managed and enforced on their island—prisons that they have incessantly struggled against and that they hope one day to place Rapa Nui progeny outside. At the initial time of writing, Chilean special forces had removed the Rapa Nui people involved in the occupations at gunpoint from the Chilean institutions “upon” (‘i ruŋa) Rapa Nui (PIR 2010). After Rapa Nui reoccupied buildings and lands in October and November, the Chilean military and police ultimately fired rubber bullets and teargassed Rapa Nui men, women, and children in December (New York Times 2010). While all occupations ended in February 2011 as Chile threatened further force, Rapa Nui continue to publicly march against the colonial Chilean government (Rapa Nui Press 2011). The Rapa Nui people are engaged in a Foucauldian prison revolt against a complex colonial subject position that has been imposed on them within their “sacred geography,” as archaeologists, Chilenas, and tourists amuse themselves within the apparatus of “Easter Island” (Foucault 1995, 30; Deloria 2003, 121).
Contemporary newspapers and other publications on and off the island of Rapa Nui increasingly use the name “Rapa Nui” to refer to the culture, language, and people as well as the island. Spelling the name as two words is consistent with other Polynesian languages, where “nui” is typically represented as a distinct word. The shift from using a different spelling—“Rapanui”—for the people, language, and culture of the island also avoids implying a separation between these and the island itself.

Notes

1 Translation: Victims have rights: 1. To be addressed. 2. To be treated fairly. 3. To report the crime. 4. To be informed . . .

2 This is a fragment of a longer narrative that is restated and translated on page 12. The letter “ŋ” is pronounced like the “ng” in the English word “singing.”

3 While I was completing my 2007–2008 fieldwork in Rapa Nui, an archival study of the discourse of “Easter Island” was published (Haun 2008). Rather than engage another outsider’s text, which is grounded neither in indigenous discourse nor in extensive experience living with Rapa Nui people, I have focused on the results of my own investigations. While there is some overlap in our findings, our research derives from different methods and units of analysis. As my study was completed independently of her research and in terms of a different research framework, our texts should be usefully complementary.

4 A fifth discourse, the discourse of “global ethnoscapes” (Appadurai 1991), is not so much an island discourse as an academic way in which the island might be located; it is considered in the conclusion of this article.

5 I am proposing that these discourses are roughly distinguishable in terms of the fuzzy logic of practice (Bourdieu 1977, 123), rather than precisely distinguishable in Cartesian terms. A more complex account of my use of the term “discourse” is articulated in my doctoral dissertation (Young 2011).

6 Roggeveen, though often represented as merely an explorer, was actually the Dutch captain of three ships seeking to exploit the resources of the undiscovered continent Terra Australis Incognita on behalf of the Dutch West India Trading Company and the United Provinces—one of the main centers of the world political economy at the time (Ezyaguirre 2006, 10; Braudel 1992, 79). He named the island Paasch Eyland, translated “Easter Island,” because he arrived at the island on Easter Sunday. On landing, the Dutch became fearful as the welcoming Rapa Nui people tried to touch their clothing and metal weapons. Consequently, they fired approximately sixty rounds at the unarmed Rapa Nui who had come to meet them at the shore with goods to exchange; twelve Rapa Nui are known to have been murdered (McCall 1994, 32). The name “Easter Island” itself is thus
embedded in violent cartography; it is linked to capitalist expansion, and like any story of capital, it “comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (Marx 1990, 926).

7 The development of the Rapa Nui diaspora is also embedded in bloody capitalist expansion. Between 1862 and 1877, the Rapa Nui population was reduced through slave trading, foreign diseases, and forced migration from approximately 4,000 people (Maude 1981, 20) to a mere 110 people. In 1871, 350 of the 525 estimated total Rapa Nui people that had survived slavery and diseases were forced to migrate to French Polynesia to serve entrepreneurial and missionary interests: 200 were shipped to Tahiti and 150 were sent to Ma‘areva (Porteous 1981, 120). In 1877, the island was profitably producing wool for the global market under the guidance of the French Polynesian partnership of Dutrou-Bornier and John Brander; however, this development had left the Rapa Nui population reduced to an all-time low of 110 people (McCall 1994, 64).

8 Hunt and Carl Lipo represent Rapa Nui people as a living, not “vanished” people on the island (2009, 40–41). Contrary to Diamond, they do not believe that the archaeological record suggests self-induced “ecocide”; rather, after a decade of field research, Hunt and Lipo maintain that “the real story here is one of human ingenuity and success that lasted more than 500 years on one of the world’s most remote human outposts” (2009, 41). Social collapse, they believe, is only demonstrated following interaction with Westerners: “the victims of cultural and physical extermination have been turned into the perpetrators of their own demise” (Hunt and Lipo 2009, 39).

9 Between annexation in 1888 and the establishment of Ley 16441 in 1966, Rapa Nui political power varied in relationship to the different forms of governance imposed on the island. There is significant evidence of a kind of sharing of power at the time of annexation. For example, Chilean histories note that state officials honored the Rapa Nui “King” (Ariki Nui) Atamu Tekena’s demand that Chile hoist its flag below the Rapa Nui flag (de Estella 1920, 140–142), and “there was no attempt to tell Atamu Tekena that he was no longer king . . . Indeed, the Spanish version of the documents makes it clear that the chiefs signing keep their titles and benefits” (McCall 1997, 114). The role of Rapa Nui people in governance changed as Chile, without consulting Rapa Nui, leased the island to sheep ranching companies following a failed settlement effort. Rapa Nui people lost the kingship as well as any significant role in governance on the island as Chile leased the island to Enrique Merlet in 1895 and later to the Easter Island Exploitation Company, a subsidiary of the British-based transnational corporation Williamson and Balfour, from 1903 to 1953 (Fisher 2005, 157). It was only in 1966, following thirteen years of military rule, that Rapa Nui people again asserted some degree of formal participatory political power on the island.

10 Miki Makihara’s sense of a limited use of Rapa Nui language appears, in part, to be derived from an interest in “disciplining” language use into a standard-
ized syncretic form. Given the variability between speakers of different extended families in Rapa Nui, a normative model is empirically problematic; it is also politically ill advised: to reduce the heteroglossia found in any language to a standardized form is to engage in a long-derided state practice (Bakhtin 2002, 264–271).

11 The Scream is the title of a series of famous impressionist paintings and prints created by Norwegian artist Edvard Munch between 1893 and 1910.

12 After the political changes that were established in 1964 through the resistance of Rapa Nui people, the government can certainly be associated with some of the general improvements to the infrastructure and overall living conditions on the island. However, historical analysis reveals that major aspects of infrastructure on the island have often been a result of non-Chilean development and funding. Airstrips, generators, heritage restoration, hospitals, libraries, museums, and roads have been funded by Canada, the Easter Island Foundation, France, Japan, the United States, the World Monument Fund, and the World Health Organization (Fisher 2005, 200–236).

References

Agamben, Giorgio

Anderson, Benedict

Appadurai, Arjun

Arno, Andrew

Bakhtin, M M

Bauman, R, and C L Briggs

Bourdieu, Pierre
Braudel, Ferdinand

Champagne, Duane

Chow, Rey

Clifford, James

de Estella, Bienvenido
1920 *Los Misterios de la Isla de Pascua*. Santiago, Chile: Cervantes.

Deleuze, Gilles

Deloria, Vine, Jr

Derrida, Jacques

Diamond, Jared

Di Castri, Francesco

Eyzaguirre, Eduardo Ruiz-Tagle, editor

Fairclough, Norman

Fisher, Steven Rodger

Flenley, John, and Paul Bahn
Foucault, Michel

Gegeo, David Welchman

Gonschor, Lorenz

Goodwin, Charles

Handler, Richard, and Eric Gable

Harvey, David

Haun, Beverley
2008 *Inventing “Easter Island.”* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Hau'ofa, Epeli
2008 *We are the Ocean: Selected Works*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Hunt, Terry L, and Carl P Lipo
Jäger, Siegfried, and Florentine Maier


Jameson, Fredric


Kelly, John D, and Martha Kaplan


King, Thomas


Lee, Adrianne

2010 Rapa Nui, Chilean Officials Seek Resolution to Land Conflict. Santiago Times, 4 August.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois


Makihara, Miki


Marx, Karl


Maude, H E


McCall, Grant


Meyer, Manulani Aluli

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen

Nagel, Thomas

New York Times
2010 Easter Island Tense as Police, Rapa Nui Regroup. 4 December.

*PIR, Pacific Island Report*
2010 Chilean Troops Rout Protestors in Rapa Nui. 17 August.

Paulson, Susan, Lisa L Gezon, and Michael Watts

Porteous, J Douglas

Rainbird, Paul

Rapa Nui Press

Rochona-Ramirez, Susana

1996 *La Propiedad de la Tierra en la Isla de Pascua*. Santiago, Chile: La Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indigena.

Said, Edward

Sartre, Jean-Paul

Schegloff, Emanuel A
Shapiro, Michael

Shikina, Rob
2010 Unrest Increases on Rapa Nui. Honolulu Star-Advertiser, 13 August.

Silva, Noenoe

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai

Stella, Regis Tove
2007 Imagining the Other: The Representation of the Papua New Guinean Subject. Pacific Islands Monograph Series 20. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies and University of Hawai‘i Press.

Teaiwa, Teresia

Trachtman, Paul

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph

Van Tilburg, Jo Anne

Vergara, Victor M

Wallace, Mike

Wesley-Smith, Terence
White, Geoffrey M  

Williams, Raymond  

Young, Forrest Wade  

Young, Robert J C  

**Abstract**

In August 2010, conflict between indigenous Rapa Nui people and the Chilean state in “Easter Island” escalated as Rapa Nui occupied institutions and lands claimed by the Chilean state. This article introduces competing discourses by which the events of August 2010, as well as subsequent conflicts, might be assessed: archaeological, tourist, Chilean, indigenous, and cosmopolitan ethnography. Ethnographic analysis illuminates the point that the nonindigenous discourses fail to coherently “place” the significance of Rapa Nui people in Easter Island and hence cannot coherently ground the sense of Rapa Nui resistance. By contextualizing the events within indigenous epistemology, the events are shown to be continuous with over a century of rational Rapa Nui resistance to Chilean colonialism on the island. The article thus provides a discursive ground for interpreting recent and ongoing conflict in Rapa Nui in terms of Rapa Nui discursive practice.

**KEYWORDS:** Easter Island, Rapa Nui, indigenous epistemology, colonialism, resistance