VAAI HANGA KAINGA Giving Care to the Motherland: conflicting narratives of Rapanui

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ABSTRACT This paper retells the story of Rapanui from the perspective of the ‘insider’. Particular attention is paid to cultural mistranslations of pertinent historical documents and the ambiguous and arbitrary nature of popular Rapanui legends and histories in some published texts. The paper examines the conflicting translations of the Rapanui and Spanish versions of the Treaty and Proclamation and their long-term ramifications in terms of land rights and self-determination of the Rapanui.

People make their own history, but not of circumstances of their own choosing. (McCall, 1994, p. 11)

I am a native of Rapanui (Easter Island) which locals also call our island, Kainga, the umbilical connection to mother earth. Since early childhood I learned Rapanui at home and Spanish in school and became interested in Spanish and Rapanui interpretations and translations as a teenager. This interest in translation was further fuelled by the conversations that I experienced with my ancestors. My grandmother, who was born in the early 1900s, explained that the Chileans had shortened my last name to Hito because my full last name Hitorangi was too difficult to pronounce (see McCall, 1994). She and other elders also always told me that the ‘Treaty’ was invalid, because Rapanui was never ceded to Chile.

While working on the Warner Brothers/ Kevin Costner feature film production of Rapa Nui in 1992, I first became aware of the mistranslation of a popularly accepted published legend whereby Hanau Momoko was interpreted as ‘Long Ears’ and Hanau Eepe was translated as ‘Short Ears’ (Heyerdahl, 1958). There is a phonetic error between the words Eepe, which means ‘heavy set’, and Epe, which means ‘ear lobe’. The correct translation of Hanau Momoko is ‘tall slender people’ and Hanau Eepe is ‘broad, strong or corpulent people’ (Englert, 1970, p. 93).

My concern with such misinterpretations and mistranslations about Rapanui led me to further investigate the Treaty between Chile and Rapanui. In particular how
mistranslations can perpetuate misunderstandings that shape the current relationships between Rapanui and Chile, especially with regard to land rights, agricultural self-reliance and self-determination in light of Chilean control of Rapanui.

This paper shares material and insights about the Treaty from the perspective of Rapanui with specific attention paid to the discrepancies and disparities between oral and written documentation. Reference is made to unpublished translations of the Spanish and Rapanui versions of the Treaty, translated by people of Rapanui, to draw out the intentions of Chilean drafters and the Rapanui chiefs and to illuminate subsequent events that stemmed from its creation. The task of this project is arduous yet critical in retelling a less publicised narrative of Rapanui.

**Popular Images of Rapanui**

Rapanui is a triangular shaped island located in the Southern Hemisphere at 27° 9' south latitude and 109° 26' west longitude. The coast of Chile is 2300 kilometres away to the east, and Tahiti is some 3800 kilometres westward (Van Tilburg, 1994, p. 46). The international perception and published academic documentation of Rapanui is that it is an uninhabited island, where ‘mysterious’ archaeological artefacts and Moai, the monumental monolithic statues, have been discovered (see Routledge, 1919, p. 201; Van Tilburg, 1994, p. 21). This view of Rapanui is problematic given that Rapanui culture, language and people are still vibrant and flourishing.

In 1888 a Chilean, Captain Toro of the Chilean Navy, claimed the island as a territory of Chile in the alleged Treaty of Cessation and Proclamation (the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’). The Chilean perspective is that Chile rescued the diminished Rapanui population from its own demise. Rapanui has been viewed as an example of an island where overuse of the natural resources led to the collapse of the civilisation and the decimation of the population. The widely accepted story is that the Rapanui people cut down all the trees on the island to use them to transport the Moai.

Chile’s annexation of Rapanui as a province extended the borders of Chile far into the Pacific Ocean and established Chile as an international player. As aptly described by McCall, ‘Chile’s claims turned them into an empire with all its glory’ (McCall, 1994, p. 64).

**Examination of the Treaty**

The ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ are filed at the National Historic Archives of Chile. They were written in 1888 in script with a quill pen on a bifurcated page, which is in both Spanish and Rapanui (see Fig. 1).

In 2003, when I first saw these documents, which are badly faded and stained, making parts of them difficult to read, I was surprised to learn that my last name Hito was on the Rapanui version. Tracing back, I realised that only four generations had passed since my great-great grandfather was a member of the Council of Chiefs.

One side of the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ was written in coherent Spanish and the other written in phonetic, transliterated, Rapanui. Taking into account the difficulty in reading and translating these documents, it appears that the intentions
The Spanish and Rapanui versions are completely different. The Spanish documents are a testimony of the intentions of the government of Chile to annex Rapanui. However, the Rapanui versions do not reflect the same intention at all. The English translations of the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ of the Spanish and Rapanui versions are the result of long deliberations amongst Rapanui, myself included. The following excerpts are translations of the different versions of the Treaty of Cessation (Hito et al., 2003a):

**Translation of ‘Treaty of Cessation’**

1. **Spanish to English Translation**

   The undersigners
   Chiefs of Easter Island
   We declare cessation
   forever and without reservation
   to the government of the Republic of Chile
   the sovereignty in whole of cited island
   At the same time we reserve our treaty of Chiefs
   which we are vested
   to use presently

   Rapanui Septiembre 9de/988
   Cienllones, Elias S. Conteef,
   Johan Brande, Jorge E Frederik.

2. **Rapanui to English Translation of ‘Give Care to the Motherland’ (Also Known as ‘Treaty of Cessation’)**

   Giving care to the Motherland
   together the representatives of Motherland
   The navel of the world (incoherent phrase)
   the knowledge is in our mind
   No Motherland in our conversation it is informed
   to give this Motherland to the hands people from Chile
   and that your abundance this Motherland the navel of the world to the hands of
   the people of Chile as friends
   people with hands on progress for Motherland bring the protection
   (incoherent phrase) Rapanui.
   October is the month of the foreigners 1888

The Spanish version is clear and unambiguous. It states that the Chiefs ‘declare cessation forever and without reservation to the government of Chile, the sovereignty of the whole island’. As evidenced by the ‘X’ signatures of the chiefs on the ‘Treaty’, the Rapanui chiefs in 1888 could not read or write Spanish nor understand the Roman alphabet. Therefore, the Chilean scribe, A.A. Salomon, who did not speak Rapanui, did his best to write Rapanui phonetically using the Roman alphabet. Many of the Rapanui words are not even coherent or consistent with sounds in the Rapanui idiom. Some words are just a jumble of letters.
This attempt caused many of the words and phrases to be incomprehensible and indecipherable; therefore I only evaluate the words that can be clearly discerned to
derive the intention of the chiefs. The words which can be clearly translated mean ‘Give care to the motherland’, ‘Together’, ‘Navel of the World’, ‘Knowledge is in our mind’, ‘Friends’, ‘Progress’, ‘Bring the protection’ and ‘Give us prosperity for our motherland’. None of the words indicate or can be translated to mean surrender of the island (Hito et al., 2003b). For example, the word Kainga in many Polynesian
cultures translates to mean ‘motherland’. In Rapanui the ‘motherland’ signifies an umbilical connection to the land, which cannot be transferred or ceded. In fact, there is no word for ‘cessation’ in Rapanui, therefore it is questionable whether the Chiefs even understood the concept as illustrated in the following translations of the ‘Proclamation’ (Hito et al., 2003c):

**Translation of the ‘Proclamation’**

1. **Spanish to English Translation**

   Policarpo Toro H. Captain of the navy of Chile commander of the cruiser Angamos presently in this we declare to accept ratification, the copy of our government of the cessation in full without reservation of the sovereignty of Easter Island, cessation that has been done by the Chiefs of the island for the government of the Republic of Chile. Rapanui Septiembre 9 de/88 Policarpo Toro H.

2. **Rapanui to English Translation of the ‘Informative Conversation’ (Also Known as the ‘Proclamation’)**

   (incoherent word) Policarpo Toro (fragmented words) Ship of the people of Chile (incoherent phrase) on the wood (incoherent section) the name of the ship that captain Toro brought to Rapanui which they took the king Atamu Tekena as the representative of the Chiefs to proclaim that Motherland the navel of the world (fragmented and incomprehensible section) in your hands, give us prosperity for our Motherland the navel of the world in the conversation within this paper that makes known in conversation of the people of Chile. Chile makes good, makes way for progress in the conversation (fragmented incomprehensible words) Rapanui leave on the month October the month of the foreigners 1888. AA Salomon traducto, interprete

**Oral History**

Oral history is as reliable or unreliable as other research sources. It depends on the information, some stories have the ring of credibility … because it is logical. Critics could question the authority of the interviewee. When in doubt, employ the journalist’s practice of seeking at least two witnesses before asserting a statement of fact—if indeed, a second hand witness is still alive. (Ritchie, 1995, p. 94)

The various inconsistencies of the written ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ are especially interesting in light of the oral history of Rapanui, which describes the making of the ‘Treaty and the Proclamation’. The oral tradition in Rapanui is a very strong aspect of passing from generation to generation the history and culture of the Rapanui people. Every year there is a competition as to which elders can recall and recite the most histories.

The oral history of the making of this ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ is the basis of the Council of Elders and the Rapanui Parliament today and is a grass-roots organi
Ariki Atamu Tekena was the acting king when the Chilean Navy arrived on the island (his name, written as ‘Atamu Ari’ is the first of the chiefs that is listed on the ‘Treaty’). Ariki Atamu Tekena held in his left hand a fist full of grass, looked at the eyes of Captain Toro, the Chilean naval captain, and told him that the grass was for his cows and sheep to graze on Rapanui. However, in his right hand he held a fist full of soil, and again looked into Captain Toro’s eyes and said he’d keep the soil as proof that the land and the island belong to the Rapanui people. He then pocketed the soil, signifying the inherent right of the Rapanui people to their island and land without reservation. It is said that this took place simultaneously with the signing of the ‘Treaty’. (Hotu, 1988; Atamu Pakomio, 1979; Rapu, 1990)

The oral history I have presented surrounding the making of the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ has been repeated by many elders without deviation. I first heard it from my grandmother, Veronica Atamu Pakomio, in 1979. She lived from 1912 to 1990. This history is repeated by other elders that are alive today, including Alberto Hotu who is President of the Council of Elders and on the SASIPA (Sociedad Agrícola y Servicio Isla de Pascua) Board of Directors, and Sergio Rapu, a Rapanui archaeologist trained at the University of Wyoming who was appointed by the Chilean President to be the first Rapanui governor of the island in the early 1980s.

The oral history about what transpired implies that the intention of the Rapanui chiefs was to retain sovereignty of Rapanui while allowing the Chileans to use the lands of Rapanui for their enterprise of grazing and breeding animals. In exchange for this use of the land, the Rapanui chiefs understood that the Chileans would take care, bring prosperity and protect the Rapanui land and its people. It did not constitute the cessation of their sovereignty or of the island.

**Rapanui History Prior to 1722**

In order to gain a perspective of the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ and its consequences a brief understanding of Rapanui prior to European contact and post-European contact will be useful.

Prior to 1722 when the first Europeans ‘discovered’ Rapanui, the Rapanui civilisation had evolved through at least two distinct periods. Archaeologist William Mulloy who conducted restoration fieldwork from 1968 to 1975 found that radiocarbon dating suggests that the settlement of Rapanui began around AD 690 (Mulloy, 1995, p. 90). After the original settlers arrived from eastern Polynesia the Rapanui civilisation was organised around interrelated kinship of approximately 12
clans, the carving and transporting of over 1000 Moai and the development of the written language, Rongorongo (Englert, 1970). At the height of the culture’s technological activity a shift in weather had threatened to destroy the lives of the nearly 10,000 islanders by causing drought, flood and famine. Even in the face of fearful conditions the Rapanui adapted themselves and replaced the traditional carving of the Moai with the annual Orongo, the Birdman Competition (McCall, 1994, pp. 46–47). The annual ceremony of the birdman competition is carried out at the village of Orongo. Brave warriors representing the various clans descend down a steep slope and plunge into the sea to swim nearly 2 miles to a small islet called Motu Nui where they wait for the first egg to be laid by a sooty tern. The one who finds this first egg must swim with it through the heavy seas and pounding waves to the foot of the cliff and then scale a difficult nearly vertical cliff. When this warrior reaches Orongo the egg is presented to the Chief and is consequently designated the next Tangata Manu (birdman).

Rapanui History Post 1722

In 1722 the first European to anchor at Rapanui was a Dutch Admiral, Roggeveen (Routledge, 1919, pp. 201–202). It is interesting to note that more than one group of explorers put a claim on it and renamed it Rapanui. In fact the island has many names as pointed out by Englert (1970):

The official Spanish name for the island is Isla de Pascua or Easter Island. Other names include San Carlos, David’s Island, Teapy, and Whyhu. The Rapanui people also call it Te Pito Te Henua which means, the Navel of the World, Vaihu or KahuKahu o Hera and Kainga. (p. 30)

In 1770 Spanish ships under Felipe Gonzalez took possession of the island in the name of Carlos III of Spain and renamed it San Carlos. They wrote their own ‘Treaty’ and secured the signatures of several of the local leaders in Rongorongo (Dos Passos, 1971, p. 32). The islanders had no notion of what they were being asked to do, though they demonstrated intricate calligraphic skills by writing their signatures in characters similar to those of the local Rongorongo script, irregular wooden tablets consisting of hundreds of different signs complex in detail (Englert, 1970, p. 30). Noteworthy is that no Spanish colonisation was ever carried out.

Peruvian slave raids from around 1859 to 1864 abducted several hundred Rapanui, including the Ariki (individual of high rank) and nearly all of the high chiefs. They also brought with them the previously unknown gift of smallpox, which decimated the population of approximately 1600. By 1877 the recorded population was only 111 (see Mulloy, 1995, p. 92).

In 1864 Franciscan missionaries, in partnership with a Tahitian Mercantile House, claimed Rapanui as a colony. During this period many Rapanui were removed from their ancestral lands, which were dispersed around the island and forced to live at the camp of Hangaroa, which was to become the only town.

Based on the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ the Chilean government took formal possession in 1888. However, in 1897 French merchant Enrique Merlet purchased
from the Tahitian Mercantile House and the Franciscans a lease of the entire island, with the exception of Hangaroa (Routledge, 1919, pp. 208–209). Merlet established the Easter Island Exploitation Company which used the entire island as a sheep ranch from 1903 to 1955 (Arnold, 2000, p. 42).

When Merlet first came to Rapanui he contemptuously tossed his cigarette into islander crops, setting them alight. Burning of the fields continued during the entire tenure of the sheep ranching to regenerate the grass (McCall, 1994, pp. 145–146). This practice still continues today, even though sheep are no longer raised on the island.

During Merlet’s administration the indigenous people were forced off their lands, their houses and crops burned, their livestock stolen and slaughtered, their women and children raped and many archaeological sites disregarded and destroyed (Teave Hey, 2003, p. 3). Katherine Routledge, in her 1919 diary The Mystery of Easter Island, reproduced a letter to Merlet’s manager saying: ‘Who gave the earth to Merlet because it is a big robbery. They took this possession of ours and they gave nothing for the earth, money or goods or anything else. They were never given to them’ (Routledge, 1919, p. 42).

Finally in 1953, after 58 years and continuous complaints, the Easter Island Exploitation Company was dissolved and the island was placed under the guardianship of the Chilean Navy until civil administration was set up in 1966.

Population Growth

Despite these many abuses the Rapanui population continued to grow and a will to survive gradually regenerated. In 1886 the population was 155, by 1900 it had reached 213, by 1934, 456. In 1995 there were 1619 islanders. Since 1877 there has been an annual increase of nearly 5%. If the trend continues there will be over 2200 islanders in another 10 years and in 30 years the numbers could approach 6000. Immigration from continental Chile, which is already beginning, will also augment this increase significantly (Mulloy, 1995, p. 93).

Although the Rapanui people have managed to survive and the population has increased, dependency on Chile is no longer a viable option. The high rate of unemployment has turned the people back to their land and sea for subsistence existence. Chile’s financial allocation for Rapanui, approximately US$11 million per annum (see Rodriguez, 2003, pp. 5–6), is in great part aimed to support their own presence on the island. Only a nominal amount is actually used for the needs of education, social welfare and public health.

Dependence on Chile

Prior to the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ and the presence of Merlet’s Easter Island Exploitation Company, the log of Admiral Roggeveen reports that ‘all the country was under cultivation’ (Routledge, 1919, pp. 200–201). Even when the Rapanui were forced into Hangaroa they continued to cultivate their crops.

However, in 1973, when Pinochet took control of Chile by a military coup d’e’ tat, the Chilean State took Rapanui property, assets, farm vehicles, fishing boats, cattle,
horses and other livestock without consent or explanation. McCall (1994) concurs, ‘Because of an inability to continue agricultural production people were forced to purchase their food from Chile which was flown in on the weekly airline flights’ (p. 133).

Interestingly, the Chilean government controls limited access to the island by only allowing LanChile, the official airline of Chile to land in Rapanui a few times a week. Worth noting is that Rapanui has a remarkable airport because it is home to an emergency shuttle landing strip and monitoring station for NASA. Thus this airport launched the island into the international tourist business, bringing a steady but relatively small influx of visitors to see the archaeological treasures.

Today the Rapanui rely even more heavily upon their meagre wages from a limited tourist trade to make a living, creating a spiral of dependence in which many persons are caught (McCall, 1994, p. 133). Basic staples such as milk, bread, eggs and even vegetables are imported from Chile and sold at exorbitant rates in the local markets. Economic forces therefore have created a strong movement to reclaim their ancestral lands to re-cultivate the rich volcanic soil, the agricultural traditions and self-reliance. The Chilean government has continued to resist this movement by not allowing the Rapanui to use their ancestral lands for agriculture. However, as in all other parts of the world, if its people are to achieve the dignity of good and full lives, the island must eventually become self-supporting (Mulloy, 1995, p. 94).

**Land Rights**

In light of this movement for reclamation, land rights are of the highest priority. During its administration, the Chilean government has at various times issued decrees and laws with regard to land rights and titles that have impacted the Rapanui’s ability to maintain their lands. In 1933 the Chilean government issued a decree of law, Article 590 of the Civil Code, stipulating that any land without a registered owner within the territorial borders of Chile belonged to the State. Prior to this there was no land registry on Rapanui because Merlet’s company controlled the island and the people until 1953. There was no way for the Rapanui people to register their ancestral lands outside of Hangaroa.

In 1979 the Chilean government decreed a new law, Number 2885, which empowered the Chilean president to deliver title and deeds to legitimise the State Inscription of Land of 1933. This gave the State the ability to take title to ancestral lands. The Rapanui still could not register their lands outside Hangaroa because Merlet’s assets and land had been folded into two governmental agencies, CORFO, a national business corporation and CONAF, the National Corporation of Forestry. On 6 November 1986, Juan Chavez filed a lawsuit, Clause 512, against the Chilean State. Mr Chavez advocated that the previous usurpation of Rapanui land back to 1895 was illegal. He won a successful verdict in a Chilean court.

In 1989 the Rapa Nui Ancient Council, which consists of Rapanui elders, filed a lawsuit against the State of Chile charging land usurpation. Due to this lawsuit, in 1993, the government of Chile created Indigenous Laws. These laws were to
establish norms regarding the protection and the development of indigenous people and create the National Corporation for Indigenous Development. The Indigenous Law incorporated Decree 2885, and the Inscription of 1933, indeed, carrying on the gradual and systematic land usurpation in favour of the Chilean government (Corporacion Nacional de Desarrollo Indigena, 1993).

Today there is a moratorium on registering property for 5 years in Rapanui. This means that Rapanui cannot register land either in Hangaroa or outside Hangaroa. In the meantime, more Chileans are moving to the island and attempting to circumvent the Indigenous Laws to obtain land. Under the stewardship of CONAF the archaeological sites of Rapanui are supposed to be protected. However, on 16 July 2001 at 5:00 a.m. (while it was still dark), the homes of three families and adjacent archaeological sites were destroyed by bulldozers in the presence of Chilean government officials under tight security of armed police forces.

**Rapanui Parliament**

In light of past inequities, recent events such as the 16 July raid and the general sentiment in Chile since Pinochet’s demise, the Rapanui Parliament is pursuing avenues to recapture Rapanui rights to their lands and to improve the quality of life on the island. The Rapanui Parliament is the current incarnation of the Rapanui Ancient Council. The principal function of this body is to serve as an active political base for the Rapanui community, where local decisions concerning their welfare, cultural integrity and economic development can be made, implemented and put into action by Rapanui people.

Currently there are several Chilean political parties that have a presence on the island. In the past these party lines have divided the Rapanui, yet today these opposing factions have begun working together to mobilise the native constituency to create a Rapanui consensus.

Just a few months ago, the Vice Counsel of Chile in New York showed me an article from a major Chilean newspaper, *El Diario la Tercera*, published on 7 July 2003 stating that the government of Chile is considering the study of at least two proposals regarding changes in the administration of the Rapanui. One proposal, made by the Chilean government, is characterised by an elected President who would have Executive Powers with regard to education, tourism, health and housing. This proposal would change the current situation in which the Governor is an appointee of the President of Chile. The other proposal would be an elected Council of Representatives who would also control education, tourism, health, housing and the ability to be self-supported. In both proposals foreign relations, defence, justice and interior relations would remain under the government of Chile (Rodriguez, 2003, pp. 5–6).

By only looking at these two proposals and not allowing the Rapanui Parliament to take part in the proposed administrative autonomy, the Chilean government has predetermined that the outcome will continue the current ‘dependent colonisation of Rapanui’ where the question of sovereignty is not evaluated or discussed.
Conclusion

Rapanui, like many other islands of the South Pacific, has seen its sovereignty appropriated by treaties, cessation and land title appropriations as evidenced by the relationships between Hawai‘i and the USA, and the Maori of Aotearoa (New Zealand) and the UK. The difference today between these other nations and Rapanui is that Rapanui has no autonomy. Whereas Aotearoa is an independent sovereign nation and Hawai‘i is a sovereign state, Rapanui is only a small province in the 5th Region of Chile. The 5th Region includes the second largest city in Chile, Valparaiso.

Even though the Rapanui have had the right of vote since the 1990s when democracy was re instituted in Chile, their vote has little or no effect in shaping their government since it is only a small minority that could never sway any election. The concerns of Rapanui are naturally different from those on mainland Chile over 2300 miles away. However, these concerns are not addressed, as Rapanui’s only locally elected officials are the Mayor and Trustees. Under this system Rapanui is treated more as a town than a distinct society.

To understand the situation on the island fully it is important to emphasise the unbalanced relationship between Rapanui and Chilean cultures. The level of advanced engineering evidenced in the buildings, transporting and erecting of the Moai still amazes and baffles archaeologists around the world. Rongorongo, the written language, with its complex alphabet has yet to be deciphered. The Rapanui people have repeatedly shown that they are pragmatic, adaptive and enduring. Therefore, they find the highly developed and accepted governmental bureaucracy of Chile ‘tramite’ (demeaning governmental bureaucracy) or to be unproductive, inadequate and frustrating. My first-hand experience with this is that it wastes endless time and offers no concrete results. This ‘tramite’ has a direct obstructionist effect on society as it prevents many Rapanui from questioning their current situation because they don’t have the time to spend when they are struggling to survive. It promotes social stagnation by creating bureaucratic barriers and keeps the Rapanui people on a subsistence level.

The root issues with regard to land rights and self-determination are direct descendants of misunderstandings created by the mistranslations and differing intentions of the makers and sponsors of the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ in 1888. Upon drafting the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ the Chileans may have tried to explain that they intended total cessation of the island. However, the Rapanui chiefs who could not understand the Spanish and words certainly had no understanding of the concept of cessation, this was indeed outside of their scope of reality. It seems incomprehensible that a people who live on an island 2300 miles from any other land, virtually in absolute isolation could consider and understand the idea of giving up their island to foreigners. As seen in the Rapanui transliterated version of the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’, it seems clear that the chiefs believed they were welcoming the Chileans to use their motherland as friends, to bring progress and prosperity to the island. Furthermore, in the Rapanui oral history Ariki Atanu Tekena actually acted out what the Rapanui people believed they were agreeing to.
Slight variations of the spelling of a word can mean significantly different things, for example ‘indeed’ or ‘in deed’, the first synonymous with ‘of course’ and ‘certainty’, whereas ‘in deed’ means ‘in conveyance’. Therein lives the problem. The word Rapanui not only signifies the island, but also the people and the language. The Rapanui chiefs in 1888 and the present-day Rapanui share the same attachment to their island and motherland. The island and the land were and continue to be inseparable from their identity. Even the Chilean government understands this relationship as it has written in the Indigenous Laws:

The state recognizes that the Indigenous are descendants of human groups which existed in pre-Colombian times which conserve inherent ethnic and cultural manifestations being for them the land is a principal fundament of their existence and culture. (Ministerio de Planificacion y Cooperacion, 1993, p. 9)

To help improve the relationship between Chile and Rapanui in this new millennium a dialogue regarding the association needs to be opened up. It is time to clear up all misunderstandings and set the course of this remote island back on its path of destiny.

These recent translations of the ‘Treaty and Proclamation’ have put into question whether Rapanui was ever actually ceded to the Chileans in 1888. If it is found that there was no meeting of the minds, then the inherent land rights of the Rapanui must be restored and a new system of governance contemplated and enacted. The issues of usurped land and the rights of the Rapanui people to assert their self-reliance and self-determination need to be adjudicated by an international forum.

References


**Note on Contributor**

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