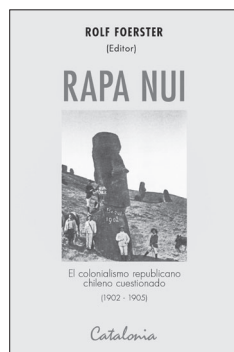


## Book Reviews



Foerster, Rolf (Ed.).  
*Rapa Nui. El colonialismo republicano chileno cuestionado (1902-1905)*

Santiago de Chile: Catalonia,  
2015. 208 pp. ISBN

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US\$25 (softcover). Available  
at [www.catalonia.cl](http://www.catalonia.cl)

Review by Cristián Moreno Pakarati, *PUC/Ahirenja Historical Studies*

Chilean anthropologist and professor of the University of Chile, Rolf Foerster, has been very prolific lately, publishing large amounts of historic documents about Easter Island that he found buried in the National Archives, newspaper and periodical archives, as well as quite a lot of valuable unpublished material from many different sources. In this book in particular, Foerster deals with a very obscure period of Rapa Nui's history: the era under the despotic rule – and whip – of the colonial foreman of the *Compañía Explotadora de la Isla de Pascua* (Easter Island Exploitation Company), Horacio Cooper.

The backbone of the book is the 140+ pages of previously unknown newspaper and magazine articles published in *El Chileno* from Santiago, and *La Union*, *El Heraldo*, and *Lo Nuevo* from Valparaíso, all of which contain very descriptive accounts of colonial brutality exercised by Cooper and his henchmen. The accounts are all based on first-hand reports and denunciations made by a young officer of the Chilean Navy, Luis Ross Mujica, who went on the *Baquedano* training ship to Easter Island in 1903, and the former employee of the Exploitation Company, Manuel Antonio Vega, who worked on the island for about five years. Foerster also added, as a last chapter, an unabridged version of Julián Ruiz' booklet *Los crímenes de la Isla de Pascua* [The crimes of Easter Island], originally published in 1904. This booklet is based mostly on Vega's account, but includes the testimonies of Chilean maid Paulina Vásquez, Chilean shepherd Rómulo Arancibia (who left descendants on the island), and the Rapanui deportee Nicolás Teao (appearing as Nicolás Timona).

In the first part of the book, Foerster gives his introduction to these sources with an analysis of the people involved in the elaboration of the accounts, the context of Chile and Easter Island at the time, and the

effects of these narratives in Chilean society. Despite the fact that this is a forgotten episode of Chilean politics in the early years of the 20th century, the consequences were quite remarkable. Not only did the testimonies of the victims and witnesses of the Company's abuses have significant coverage in the Valparaíso media, but it even went to the Chilean legislative power. Firstly, in the Parliament (Cámara de Diputados), legislators Guillermo Rivera (in 1903) and Daniel Rioseco (in 1904) gave long speeches complaining against the abusive behavior of the Company on Easter Island. This is one of the few occasions in history when Easter Island was part of a legislative discussion in the Chilean Republic (an old transcript of Rioseco's speech appears in the last part of the book). More importantly, two senators (Ballesteros and Varela) did the same in November 1904 in the Congress. The noble (?) intentions of these politicians cannot hide the amount of ignorance at the time about the situation of the distant Chilean colony.

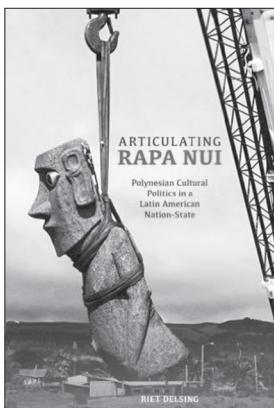
Foerster's main thesis is interesting. He suggests that the accounts included in the book are a most vivid early example of the failure of the Chilean project to colonize Easter Island. In other words, it is when the disastrous colonial attempt blew up in Chile's face. Earlier criticism in official circles to the annexation of the island started immediately in 1888 with the Toro brothers' failure in forcing the impoverished country to try something else. After the Chilean civil war, authorities set up a scheme through which a company of foreign investors would be the young republic's official enclave on the island (starting in 1895). When the accounts that now appear in this book proved how disastrous the "solution" was, turmoil was unleashed. For the Chileans who cared, the problem was not their government's absurd colonial policy, but the individuals involved. So, Horacio Cooper became a scapegoat on which to put all the blame of the Chilean failures and the brutalization of the Polynesian inhabitants of their new overseas territory. This narrow-minded view – seeing the small problem instead of the structural one – would continue for several decades (and some authors would argue that it is still going on).

When it comes to the contents of the book, this is a difficult read; not due to any failures on Foerster's writing style, but because of the sheer horror in some of the testimonies. At times it almost sounds like "atrocities propaganda", which is quite possible, considering the fact that these are all newspaper reports from the beginning of the 20th century. It is likely that there is a degree of exaggeration in some of the claims, a card deliberately played by the Rapanui (and pro-Rapanui Chileans) to get attention. I say this because it is hard to believe that the islanders would just passively accept corporal punishment and even death without attempting

any kind of defense. Even so, these testimonies show some of the most brutal kind of slavery happening in a 20th century Chilean territory. Being that Chile refused to acknowledge responsibility for what was going on, a battle of interests ensued, with part of the media turning the already wicked Cooper into a horned devil and the cause of all evil. The other part of the media and the Exploitation Company reacted by showing the testimonies were not believable, discrediting informants, cleansing Cooper's public image in a ridiculous way, and showing Navy reports that were unfavorable to the Rapanui people.

The aftermath is well known. The pariah-like political status of the Rapanui didn't change one bit, even after the *Baquedano* was sent to the island to investigate these issues. But at least Cooper was replaced by the more reasonable Henry Percival Edmunds.

This is a very interesting book and it showcases a great deal of research prowess by Foerster. It will no doubt help to fill some of the holes in our knowledge about recent Easter Island history. The book might be a little tough for the uninitiated and some previous knowledge about Rapa Nui's history in the last two centuries is recommended. For historians and Rapanuiphiles alike, it is a rich fountain of previously unknown documents.



Delsing, Riet.  
*Articulating Rapa Nui. Polynesian Cultural Politics in a Latin American Nation-State*

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. 312 pages. ISBN 978-0824851682. US\$59 (hardcover).

Review by Diego Muñoz, *Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Océanie, (UMR 7308), EHESS-AMU*

Riet Delsing, a Dutch anthropologist who is a resident of Chile, offers us *Articulating Rapa Nui. Polynesian Cultural Politics in a Latin American Nation-State*, which is a published version of her doctoral dissertation research. The work is lauded by Steven Roger Fischer (2010).

Thanks to her extensive fieldwork (since 1996), Delsing is a privileged witness of social changes on Rapa Nui. In her analyses, Rapanui history is analyzed

with concepts of *cultural studies* (Appadurai, Dussel, Hall) and *post-structuralism* theory (Foucault). Her argument is that Rapanui society has employed *cultural difference* as a political tool to construct spheres of self-determination and resistance to Chilean colonialism.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is defined by Delsing as a *diachronic analysis*. There, she describes the colonial procedures within which Rapa Nui was gradually incorporated into the Chilean State. The second part is a *synchronic analysis* of some phenomena that express *cultural difference* as the Rapanui people defend (and create) their *tradition*.

*Articulating Rapa Nui* begins with an ethnographic introduction about the contemporary insular present and continues with the known history of first contacts, the blackbirding or labor trade, evangelization, and ranching projects on Rapa Nui. Chapter 1, entitled *Chilean Colonization and Rapanui Resilience* is a good synthesis of known history: annexation (1888), rental of the territory to a private company (1895), Angata's uprising (1914) and the State registry of lands (1933). Included are the most relevant events as Rapa Nui becomes a "national territory".

Chapter 2, *Integration into the Nation State and the Beginning of a Rapanui Identity Discourse*, commences with the well-known revolt of young teacher Alfonso Rapu in 1964. With support from the works of other authors (Reid 1965; Porteous 1981) and her own interviews, Delsing describes the context in which the *Ley Pascua* (1966) was created. The merit of this chapter is Delsing's evaluation of the effects of this law in the political and daily life on the island. What is interesting at this point is the discourse mobilized by Rapu: the Rapanui people must have Chilean citizenship and have the same rights. Delsing suggests to us that the *cultural differences* were *covered over* in a project of integration.

The last sections of this chapter and Chapter 3 are, in my opinion, the substantial contributions of this book. For the first time, the reader knows in detail the local events during the military dictatorship of Pinochet (1973-1989) and the return to democracy (1990). The creation of an *Elders' Council* and the defense of the collective property of lands characterize this period.

In Chapter 3, *The Road to Self-determination*, the author presents us with a paradigm shift for the State and the Rapanui people themselves. During the 1990s, the *Ley Indígena* (1993) was promulgated. The islanders became an ethnic group (not recognized as indigenous people!) of the country. The Rapanui peoples' reaction was the defense of a Polynesian cultural identity facing assimilation as a Chilean ethnic group. The chapter finishes with a description of Chilean indigenous politics on the island, national politics of decentralization, and the consequences of