

# RETURNING BORROWED GOODS

## The Motive for Establishing a Rapanui Music Archive

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### Introduction

Since the 1880s, a series of social research expeditions have sought to uncover the perceived mysteries of pre-contact Rapanui (Easter Island) archaeology and culture. This small island, located far to the east of other Polynesian island groups, continues to attract researchers, enthusiasts, tourists, and other visitors in numbers disproportionate to its size (166 square kilometres) and population (exceeding 4,000 in 2004). For the most part, their interests are directed towards Rapanui prehistory and ancient culture, but their appreciation of contemporary Rapanui is usually embellished during their stay by performances of traditional and contemporary songs and dances, many of which are available locally for purchase on CD.

Where Rapanui music research is concerned, the majority of published descriptions and field recordings available internationally have been undertaken by private commercial producers and musicians who have visited the island since the intensification of tourism in the 1970s. Their early interactions with local Rapanui musicians greatly influenced the manner in which subsequent music researchers, enthusiasts and musicians have been received on Rapanui. Recently, in conjunction with a growing social awareness of past mistreatment at the hands of colonial authorities and opportunistic outsiders, Rapanui musicians have come to view many early recording projects in a negative light. The root of this perception is the manner in which recordings were obtained by outsiders for little or no reciprocal benefit. As a consequence, new recording projects are entered into with care and consideration by Rapanui musicians, who now strongly advocate reciprocal relationships in which some sort of personal or community gain is clearly apparent.

This paper presents a case study of Rapanui music research where the question of reciprocity was central to the development of a socially responsible research method. It reports on a period of my own Rapanui fieldwork, conducted in three stages between 2002 and 2004, in which the concept, planning and establishment of a local sound archive became one of my main research responsibilities. The following report does not seek to present an argumentative appraisal of the wider implications of research ethics for ethnomusicologists or anthropologists. Such concerns are addressed widely in existing

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literature pertaining to ethnographic research methods (Foster [et al], 1979; Whyte, 1984; Ife, 1995; Barz and Cooley, 1997), and must be negotiated by researchers on an individual basis. Rather, in keeping with the mission statement of the newly established Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI), this paper provides a clear example of a tangible community outcome, achieved through the application of socially responsible research methods. The following discussion highlights some of the key concepts that led to this project-based approach to music research, and describes the logistical process by which the sound archive was established. In doing so, it demonstrates the centrality of reciprocity and community consultation to the enduring success of ethnographic research.

## Reciprocity and the Rapanui Research Context

The theme of reciprocity is a common concern underpinning SICRI research activities, as the organisation's mission statement articulates:

*Key to SICRI's activities is the principle that external researchers should develop their projects in consultation with island communities and should reciprocate such co-operation with appropriate assistance and facilitation of local cultural initiatives (www.sicri.org).*

In this context, the conceptualisations of reciprocity and facilitation encompass all manner of researcher activities ranging from consultative approaches to community concerns, to advocacy and activism.

The nature of researcher participation in small island community activities is a long-standing issue throughout Oceania, and in some cases, island authorities have established protocols for mediating the activities and influence of outsider researchers (Lawrence, 1989: 111-12; Zemp, 1996: 37-38). While the Rapanui municipal government has now instituted a formal procedure for archaeological research, a means of monitoring other social research has yet to be devised. Indeed, social researchers are often indistinguishable from other tourists, and many prominent portrayals of Rapanui performance culture (including Mazière, 1968; Hacker, 1968; Linkels, 2000; and Sierra, 2002) have been produced by private individuals without academic affiliation.

The regulation of social research is an emotive issue for many Rapanui. A history of predatory exploitation of the Rapanui people and their material culture at the hands of outsiders and colonial authorities has left behind a strong sense of inequity, which must be acknowledged and negotiated by contemporary social researchers. Even those not concerned with ethnography must still negotiate daily life in the small island community, and their presence is noted by the people around them. Visitors are universally welcomed on Rapanui, but the matter of unregulated research leaves many islanders with a sense of disempowerment, as they know that they ultimately have little control over where researchers go, what researchers do, and how research findings are presented. Such

concerns betray a degree of scepticism towards the good intentions of outsiders, which is reflective of hard lessons learned from past experience.

Between 1862 and 1877, a combination of factors including involuntary transportation and enslavement, increased mortality from introduced disease, and missionary-sponsored migration to Tahiti, resulted in the decrease of the Rapanui population from approximately 4,000 to little more than 100 people (Fischer, 2001: 82; Maude, 1981). Nevertheless, this small community preserved songs and chants that form the basis of the island's music traditions. Rapanui became a Chilean colony in 1888, but administrative arrangements with a private farming company led to the entire island population becoming the captive workforce for a sheering ranch in 1896, and this situation continued into the first half of the 20th century. Despite a significant loss of social and cultural autonomy, a great variety of traditional music practices were preserved, later to be documented by Alfred Métraux (1940), Eugenio Pereira Salas (1945), and Jorge Urrutia Blondel (1958). Carlotta Hacker, a member of the 1964 Canadian medical research expedition to Rapanui, observed the continuing prominence of music in Rapanui daily life: "Rapa Nui [sic] has its own night noises. There is always music, just a throb of it in the distance. There are voices and laughter rising above the pounding surf" (1968: 181). Dedicated studies of traditional Rapanui music were undertaken in the 1960s by Chilean musicologist Ramón Campbell (1971; 1988) and folklorist Margot Loyola (1988).

Where sound recordings are concerned, most commercially available Rapanui music has been recorded and disseminated by independent producers and 'world music' enthusiasts. As demonstrated in the high profile examples of musical appropriation critiqued by Louise Meintjes (1990) and Stephen Feld (1996), the 'world music' market is a strong international commercial force. Like many other traditional cultures, the music of isolated Rapanui became an object of commercial desire in the late 20th century.

In the 1970s, when passenger flights to Rapanui were only recently established, visitors who sought to record Rapanui musicians were usually well received, gaining their collaboration with little difficulty. At this time, many Rapanui musicians did not have a sophisticated idea of what to expect from a recording project, and gave willingly of their time, expertise, and intellectual property. On few occasions was this generosity reciprocated by commercial producers. Of the numerous Rapanui music recordings produced between 1974 and 1999<sup>11</sup>, only one producer has sought to return a portion of the sales profit directly to the musicians involved.

In too many cases, visitors have promised to return copies of their field recordings and then failed to do so. In one example, a prominent Rapanui musician only became aware that his voice featured on a commercial recording produced in Tahiti when he saw the CD for sale in a souvenir shop on his own island. This particular recording was accompanied by liner notes proclaiming that the greatness of Polynesian culture was "To Meet And To

Share [sic]" (Le Calvez, 1999a). The producer clearly failed to adhere to this principle in his own sharing of information with the Rapanui musicians he recorded.

In the 1990s, a series of collaborations between Rapanui musicians and international film and television projects (including Warner's 1994 Hollywood blockbuster *Rapa Nui*) imparted many Rapanui musicians with a greater awareness of the international recording industry. As a consequence, contemporary performance ensembles have learned to produce their own recordings and have developed working relationships with independent Chilean record producers. Furthermore, they are aware that sound recordings have the potential to turn into valuable commodities, and can therefore be wary of outsiders with blatantly commercial intentions.

My own engagement with Rapanui music began with a series of negotiations over permission to undertake field recordings. As a new arrival on Rapanui, I was an unknown character, yet my relatively sophisticated recording equipment differentiated me from other tourists. I arrived on Rapanui with the intention of conducting comprehensive music ethnography, in the ethnomusicological tradition of participant observation, complete with extensive field recordings. I was confident of finding helpful research collaborators who would facilitate my entry into Rapanui music culture, just as described by established ethnomusicologists whose writings influenced my early planning (Rice, 1994; Feld, 1990; Keil, 1979).

In the process of explaining my non-commercial recording intentions to sceptical Rapanui musicians, I found that the shadows of past music 'researchers' (not all of whom behaved in a manner demonstrative of academic rigour) were more prevalent than I had expected. The influence of past interactions between Rapanui musicians and outsiders led me to reconsider my research method. To this end, I sought to justify my collection of field recordings by indicating (to the contributors and others) that my collection would ultimately remain on Rapanui as a public resource for all islanders. This negotiation of commitment, responsibility and access resulted in the creation of a community-based sound archive, the Depósito de Música Rapanui (Rapanui Music Deposit, or DMR), which was established on Rapanui in December 2004.

## Socially Responsible Music Research

My entry into Rapanui music research as a PhD student was fuelled with an existing knowledge of theories relating to the role of the researcher in ethnomusicology. Like many other contemporary ethnomusicologists, I began my research with an appreciation of Steve Feld's efforts in including and validating local reactions to his writings about Kaluli music in the second edition of *Sound and Sentiment* (1990). Furthermore, I drew guidance from the reflective accounts of fieldwork presented in Gregory Barz and Timothy Cooley's *Shadows in the Field* (1997) – a text that specifically addresses the role of the researcher in fieldwork.

Research literature relating to Oceania as a region and anthropology in general provided additional emphasis on social responsibility, and contributions in these fields have a long history. In 1975, Epeli Hau'ofa called for greater participation from local researchers in Pacific island anthropology. In 1983, Mervyn McLean implored that the researcher's ethical responsibility was twofold: pertaining as much to the community being researched as the academy. In 1996, the *Yearbook for Traditional Music* dedicated an entire volume to the ethics of ethnomusicological research and recording.

Such observations are continuously reinforced in anthropological literature. As John Perry more recently remarked: "The era in which a fieldworker simply decamped from a steamer, pitched a tent near 'the natives' and unproblematically got on with filling notebooks is finished and, indeed, may never really have existed" (2002: 5). This archetype, which James Clifford called the "myth of fieldwork" (1983: 198), reveals its shortcomings in the inability to encompass a local perspective. As a solution to precisely this problem, Yoshihiko Tokumaru (1977) provided an early indication of the value of gaining feedback from fieldwork experiences. He termed this process 'fieldback', and insisted that it was a necessary part of the ethnographic research process.

The Department of Contemporary Music Studies (DCMS) at Macquarie University provided me with supervisors who maintained a commitment to reciprocal relationships with research collaborators, and engendered this in my own fieldwork. DCMS chair Philip Hayward has repeatedly called for music researchers to go beyond mere participation in a music culture and undertake cultural facilitation by sharing musical knowledge and access to academic and professional networks, assisting with local productions, with music education initiatives, or any other matter that may arise in the fieldwork process. As Hayward argues, "...you get better, more detailed and more multiple input when your enterprise is being assisted (rather than merely tolerated) by a community" (2004).

I envisioned that my collaboration-facilitation process would entail some standard (and widely practiced) acts of reciprocity. These included making fieldwork recordings available to the musicians who contributed them, contributing personally to the various kinds of jobs that surround music making and festival preparation, and making sure that all research collaborators were aware of my research aims and objectives as prescribed by the Macquarie University Human Ethics Committee. In practice, I found that this was only the starting point for a range of other initiatives, including the establishment of the DMR, various attempts at seeking out past recordings, and a cultural exchange in which an indigenous Rapanui musician travelled to Sydney for basic training in digital audio editing.

## Negotiating Researcher Responsibility

While Hau'ofa (1975), McLean (1983) and others have called for researchers to demonstrate a better commitment to local concerns in Pacific island research, the manner

in which this is to be achieved is rarely explained. In other fields, however, accountability and reciprocity are conceptualised at a grassroots level. In Australian community development literature, Yoland Wadsworth presented a straightforward model for socially responsible research some time ago. Wadsworth (1997) advocates a 'social action' research method in which the researcher aims to provide tangible and specific outcomes to the community being researched. This approach resonates strongly with Hayward's call for researchers see themselves as 'Culturally Engaged Researchers and Facilitators' (or CERFs), and also with the mission statement of the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (as stated earlier).

Wadsworth identifies four conceptual parties to any research project: "Those who it is for; those who it is ultimately for; those who are the researchers; and those who are the researched" (1997: 17). She indicates that the same person or group of people may occupy any or all of these positions. In most music ethnography, it is assumed that the research is for other musicologists, and ultimately for the academic community at large. However, to take this stance removes the research collaborators from a key part of the research process, relegating them simply to the fourth category of 'those being researched'. In doing so, they cease to be true collaborators because they are excluded from the benefits of the research. Such exclusion can take numerous forms. It may be seen in the failure of researchers to translate or summarise the research findings in a locally understood language. It may also take the form of jargon or specialist writing that only a fellow academic may fully understand, or in the simple reluctance of a researcher to share research findings with collaborators for fear of rejection, criticism, or even plagiarism.

Therefore, the most significant aspect of Wadsworth's 'conceptual parties' model is the facility with which research collaborators can be conceptually transferred from mere participants to beneficiaries in the research process. Not only does this approach acknowledge the changeable relationship between 'researchers' and 'researched', it also recognises that the research findings will ultimately matter more to the local community than the academic community. Both of these matters are especially significant in the small island context, where small community size erases any notion of researcher objectivity, and where local musicians are likely to occupy multiple posts and positions in the community.

As an initial step in approaching social accountability in my own research, I redefined my method according to Wadsworth's conceptual parties and situated the Rapanui music community as members of the first two categories she describes: as end users and ultimate beneficiaries of the research product. Secondly, I invited research collaborators to suggest ways in which I might be able to demonstrate my accountability. Some asked for large sums of money or university scholarships, which I was powerless to provide and therefore politely declined. A key aspect of this process was stating clearly the scope and limitations of what I was able to offer.

One collaborator asked for funding to undertake a cultural exchange with my university, which was ultimately achieved through a Chilean government grant. With the support of the Chilean indigenous funding body CONADI (Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena [National Corporation of Indigenous Development]), the Pacific And Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC), and the DCMS, Rapanui musician Tote Tepano was able to travel to Sydney in mid 2004 to digitise a large portion of his private collection of Rapanui music. This collection was later added to the DMR.

A significant number of Rapanui musicians declared that they would like to see past recordings of Rapanui music returned to the local community, if only in duplicate form. I approached this concern in two ways: firstly, by seeking out recordings archived in other places, and secondly, by finding a means of repatriating these recordings to a secure and stable environment on Rapanui.

### Envisioning a Community Music Archive

The idea of establishing a sound archive had been considered by numerous Rapanui musicians in recent years, and some (unsuccessful) attempts have been made in the past to secure funding for this purpose. The library (Biblioteca William Mulloy, or BWM) of the Rapanui museum, Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastian Englert (MAPSE), had already purchased database software for audio in 2001, but lacked sufficient staff expertise to establish a sound archive independently. The aforementioned Rapanui musician, Tote Tepano, was also in the process of establishing his own private sound archive, though without access to suitable storage facilities, his cassettes were in danger of perishing in the island's subtropical heat and humidity.

While the DMR received in-principle support from many sectors of the Rapanui community, my facilitation of an agreement between Tote Tepano and the curators of the BWM was a key part of the success of the DMR initiative. On the one hand, the BWM offered secure and stable housing for a music collection in a new library facility (constructed in 2003). On the other hand, Tepano possessed a large collection of recordings in need of suitable housing. Towards the middle of 2003, during my second period of fieldwork on Rapanui, these parties agreed to work together towards the establishment of the DMR.

The new BWM facility offered many convenient services for a music archive. Firstly, the library had a climate controlled storage room, where tape recordings could be stored away from corrosive elements in the island's natural environment. Secondly, the BWM administered a non-lending collection, so recordings (on CD media) could be inserted into this collection without risk of them being lost or privately duplicated by library patrons. This countered the main concern expressed by Rapanui musicians who were uneasy about contributing to a public collection where their songs might be easily copied.

Recordings could be added to the library catalogue, and the library's existing computer facilities provided both Internet access and the possibility of setting up an audio browser on a public access computer terminal. In addition to Tepano's recordings, I added the first of my own field recordings to this collection, together with the donations of audio material that I had already secured from overseas sources. In December 2004, I returned to Rapanui to deposit a range of recordings into the DMR, to devise a catalogue system for the audio collection, and to transfer a portion of this collection to a computer terminal for public access.

## Negotiating Practical Considerations

The greatest difficulty for the DMR initiative was finding a way of setting up the archive without direct financial support of any kind. The housing of the collection at BWM/MAPSE solved the immediate problems of storage, collection administration, and maintenance. The BWM was, furthermore, an institution that Tote Tepano trusted, thereby making him feel more comfortable about placing his own recordings on public access within this context, and ensuring his continued participation in the archive's development. The DMR contents were classified numerically and incorporated into the library catalogue database, the MAPSE website was expanded to include information about the audio collection (currently under formation), and I reconfigured disused audio equipment purchased by MAPSE in the past to support two listening stations for public use of the DMR collection.

For ease of maintenance, the DMR was created as a digital archive comprising two complete sets of CDs for public access. A further set of CDs was held in storage as backup, and medium quality (44.1Khz/16bit) WAV files of all audio contents were stored on hard drive and DVD. As a further mechanism for public access, part of the collection was duplicated as mp3 files and installed on a computer interface within the BWM. This collection is supported by Apple Computer's free software interface *iTunes*<sup>TM</sup>, which makes the mp3 collection searchable.<sup>[2]</sup> Another freely available audio editing software program, Sourceforge's *Audacity*, has been used to digitise many of the recordings in the DMR collection, and has been retained for future digitisation efforts.<sup>[3]</sup>

The DCMS and PARADISEC both provided valuable assistance in the establishment of the DMR's digital collection. These organisations donated recording studio time, expert staff guidance, digitisation facilities, backup storage, and CD hardcopies of recordings that are now part of the DMR, without incurring any direct cost to BWM/MAPSE. Alongside my own field recordings, the catalogue now includes field recordings by Tepano as well as donations of recordings dating back to 1958 from archives in Chilean tertiary institutions (particularly the Universidad de Chile and the Fondo Margot Loyola of the Pontífica Universidad Católica de Valparaíso). It is hoped that the establishment of the DMR will encourage future donations from institutions and individuals who possess recordings of Rapanui music.

## Outcomes of the Archive Establishment Process

The DMR was opened in late December 2004, and at this early stage, it is difficult to predict what the specific outcomes of the project will be. Superficially, the DMR stands as evidence of a commitment to Rapanui music culture on the part of institutions and individuals, both local and foreign. For myself, the DMR represents a tangible and quantifiable justification for the methodological changes undertaken in my own research, and hopefully, it is a resource that will benefit local musicians in years to come. The DMR contains old and new recordings ranging from the 1950s to the present day, and at the very least, the assembly of these resources under the one roof provides a forum for comparisons to be made and for notions of music tradition and continuity to be explored. The repatriation of recorded materials to Rapanui allows local musicians to instigate and participate in such discussions, rather than being dependent on the 'expert' analyses of non-Rapanui outsiders.

The DMR provides a permanent location for the ongoing repatriation of recordings of Rapanui music to the Rapanui community. In the future, researchers (and others) who undertake field recordings on Rapanui can be informed of the DMR's function and invited to contribute their recordings directly, while they are still on the island. Likewise, Rapanui musicians and ensembles that undertake their own recording projects can view the DMR as a repository for their creative output, and have already contributed to the community's understanding of Rapanui music culture by donating copies of their own recordings to the archive. At the very least, the DMR demonstrates that cultural preservation initiatives can be undertaken even in the absence of dedicated funding, provided that sufficient logistic support can be obtained.

The DMR provided me with a means of justifying my Rapanui music research to Rapanui musicians on the one hand, and owners/producers of Rapanui recordings on the other. By obtaining and repatriating recordings held off the island, I was able to demonstrate a commitment to local concerns, and thereby gain the trust, collaboration, and approval of numerous Rapanui musicians. Extensive fieldback was a key component of this process, and for that matter, a significant contribution to the methodological justification for my approach to fieldwork on Rapanui.

As a result of the fieldback process, I was able to reassess my research aims in order to include the DMR as a methodological outcome, thereby situating Rapanui musicians as end-users of the research findings, rather than just participants in the research process. This was achieved, without direct financial support, through the goodwill, advice and assistance of international institutions and numerous individuals. The DMR currently contains 60 hours of digitised audio, and while the collection is expected to grow in the future, it already represents a tangible outcome for the Rapanui music community and reflects the appropriateness of applying socially responsible methods to music research.

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## Further Information

For further information on the DMR or other matters relating to Rapanui music research, see: <http://www.mapse.cl>, or contact: dan.bendrup@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

## Endnotes

[1] The discography provided below lists some of the more prominent Rapanui music recordings that are available internationally.

[2] Software sourced from <http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

[3] Software sourced from <http://sourceforge.net/>

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