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Clemente Hereveri Teao (Obituaries)

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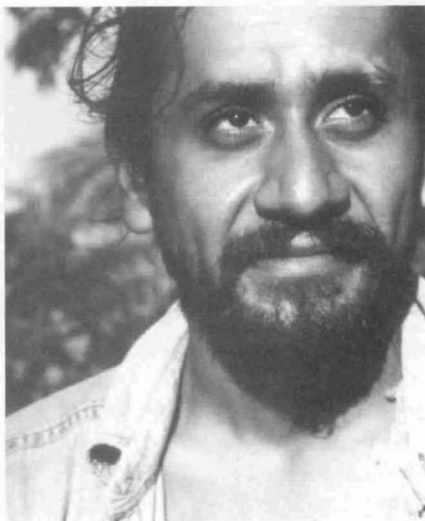
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Clemente Hereveri Teao

RAPANUI ISLANDER, CLEMENTE HEREVERI TEAO, died on December 5th, 2007, at age 32. Popular and beloved amongst his fellow Rapanui, he was also known in the foreign scientific community, as many of us worked with him in one way or the other. Highly knowledgeable about his ancestral culture, he was at the same time profoundly shaped by it. During his early years he spent many hours with his adopted father in the leper colony, an enclave where Rapanui culture was preserved and reproduced like nowhere else on the island. He also was a pupil of prominent Rapanui elder Juan Haoa, who taught him about Rapanui genealogies and other oral traditions.

Clemente spoke the Rapanui language like few others of his age group. I was told that his Rapanui was rich in vocabulary and syntax and conveyed the spirit of the ancients. Accordingly, he was deeply concerned about the future of the *vananga* Rapanui, a concern he expressed in his special interest in language conservation. At the time of his death he was the Secretary of the recently created “Academy of the Rapanui Language”. When I visited him in the Santiago hospital where he spent the last weeks of his life, he stressed the importance of the Rapanui language as the most important cultural feature to be maintained. Clemente was also a passionate proponent of political self-determination for the Rapanui people. He actively participated in discussions about the Special Statute for Rapa Nui, and his excellent command of Spanish allowed him to help formulate Rapanui proposals. He was the Rapanui spokesman in meetings with the Chilean Government on the island and in Chile. Other indigenous people also chose him as their spokesman. During the National Indigenous Congress of October 2006, he was asked to present the general conclusions to the Assembly, in the presence of Chilean President Michelle Bachelet. After reading the official conclusions he added that the Plenary also asked the Chilean Government to vote in favor of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights, and to liberate the Mapuche leaders imprisoned through an antiterrorist Law to squelch Mapuche protests.

Despite his mild demeanor, Clemente had a charismatic personality, imbued with *mana*. Some Rapanui saw him as a future *ariki mau*, a figure capable of uniting the Rapanui around a common cause. He was deeply concerned about the future of Rapa Nui and, despite his apparent cheerfulness, he embodied a profound cultural sadness, which may have led to his untimely death. It is difficult to say goodbye to him, even though his most Rapanui of friends sustain that he now is a *varua*, watching over us



Clemente Hereveri, from *Luces de Rapa Nui*, courtesy of Lorenzo Moscia.

from the skies. Many more things can be said about Clemente, as shown in the enormous outpouring of sympathy that followed the news of his death (www.herehara.scd.cl). His body was flown back to the island on December 8th, where he was buried in the local cemetery.

Riet Delsing, Anthropologist

I MET CLEMENTE IN 1995 at a *curanto* at the Shrine of Maipu, at the annual commemoration of the annexation of Rapa Nui by Chile. Clemente was dedicated to his studies and was talkative and happy. Later, he became one of the founding members of the *Pae pae here taina* association—the first Rapanui association to operate after the long mili-

tary dictatorship in Chile. Our relationship was based on the fact that we were both studying for a similar degree and that he lived in the Indigenous House in Providencia, relatively close to my house. I recall that he arrived at my house one day with a suitcase full of bones in order to help me study for an exam in Physical Anthropology!

By around 1997, Clemente had become a defender of the rights of the Rapanui and other indigenous peoples, and was in constant contact with youths of other ethnicities from throughout the national territory.

Clemente was a special person, different from his fellow Rapanui, but he never tried to stand out by his actions, instead fighting for justice and equality for all. Viewed from that perspective and in the development of his skills and abilities, his thinking was abstract and he had a memory that I never encountered among his peers. This was in addition to the Christian-Catholic principals he received from his adoptive parents.

For all of us who knew him, it was a surprise when he gave up his studies in archaeology and returned to the island in 1998. The reasons he gave were that he wanted to be near his old father, who had given him everything. We saw him close his notebooks leave for the island. No one understood his decision. On various occasions I saw him again on the Island. I know that he carried out archeological work along with other specialists, that he participated in community programs, and became a tourist guide as a way of supporting himself. It is worth noting his memorable participation in the Sixth International Conference on Rapa Nui and the Pacific in 2004, in which — with intelligence and composure — he stressed the importance of turning over the results of all investigations regarding the Island to the Sebastián Englert Museum.

At the time that he fell ill he was working as an official of the National Corporation for Indigenous Development in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago.

Paloma Hucke, daughter of Melchor Hucke