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Changing Interpretations of Fosterage and Adoption
in Pacific Island Societies

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PACIFIC STUDIES

RELATIVE POWER CHANGING INTERPRETATIONS OF FOSTERAGE AND ADOPTION IN PACIFIC ISLAND SOCIETIES

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PREFACE

Mac Marshall
University of Iowa

UNTIL AT LEAST 1980, it was considered de rigeur for sociocultural anthropologists to report on kinship systems and practices in the communities where they studied. In large measure, this was because kinship provided the fundamental organizational framework for most of the societies under investigation, but it was also because in those years the topic of kinship provided the primary “battleground” for debating anthropological theory. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that when anthropologists wrote about kinship in the Pacific Islands they endeavored to describe Oceanic kinship systems in detail and to focus on particular practices that stood out as relatively unusual in comparison to their own societies. One such practice was the apparently easy and frequent movement or transfer of children among related households, variously labeled as adoption or fosterage.

Perhaps the earliest article that specifically treated this subject in the Pacific Islands was published in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* by H. C. Maude and H. E. Maude (1931). They noted that a study of this “custom” served “as an excellent introduction to the social organization of the Islanders, cutting, as it does, across their social structure and affecting in turn each of their social groupings” (1931, 225). Not long thereafter, Ian Hogbin (1935–1936) wrote about adoption on Wogeo Island off the north coast of New Guinea, and like the Maudes, he also noted how this practice highlighted important aspects of social structure. However, although other

discussions of adoption and fosterage appeared occasionally in the pages of published ethnographies during the first half of the twentieth century (e.g., Firth 1936: 203–06, 588–96), the subject languished as a particular focus of anthropological attention until the 1950s and 1960s when it began to receive renewed attention (e.g., Finney 1964; Kay 1963; Lambert 1964; Weckler 1953; see also Goody 1969). This resurgence of interest in child transfers coincided with the establishment of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO)¹ in the late 1960s, and adoption and fosterage provided the subject matter for the launch of the ASAO Monograph Series in 1970 (Carroll 1970a). Six years later, contributors to a second book—ASAO Monograph No. 4—which examined adoption and fosterage in Oceania as “transactions in kinship” (Brady 1976), stemming from of Ward Goodenough’s (1970) concluding chapter title to the first volume where he discussed adoption and fosterage as “transactions in parenthood.”

The twenty-seven chapters in these two publications more than doubled the number of specific chapters and articles on the topic for Oceania and extended the breadth of coverage to many other islands, although these were mainly in Polynesia and Micronesia. More or less concurrent with the appearance of these ASAO collections, two other discussions of adoption and fosterage in the Pacific Islands were published in leading disciplinary journals (Keesing 1970; Monberg 1970), and still others followed over the next decade (Baddeley 1982; Damas 1983; Donner 1987; Flinn 1985; Ritter 1981; Silk 1980), including a few studies from other areas of the world (e.g., Bledsoe and Isiugo-Abanihe 1989; Mandeville 1981).

This explosion of interest in adoption and fosterage occurred, at least in part, because of a major theoretical debate over “the nature of kinship” that occupied the attention of many anthropologists at that time, whether or not they conducted research in the Pacific (see Carroll 1970b). At the forefront of this debate was David Schneider. Schneider did his doctoral fieldwork in Yap, Micronesia, and there is no question but that the complexities of Yapese kinship influenced his position on “what kinship was all about.” But it was in Schneider’s ground-breaking 1968 book *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* that he mounted the argument that “the nature of kinship” was about much more than simply “blood” relations, or what he called biogenetic kinship. It was there that Schneider articulated his ideas that kinship should be studied as a system of meaningful symbols or what he called “a cultural account.” Because adoption and fosterage often concern kinship ties constructed from something *other than* biogenetic substance, these kinds of kin relationship were of special importance to the Schneiderian approach.

Schneider’s influence loomed large over ASAO Monograph No. 1—he chaired the symposium at the 1964 American Anthropological Association annual meeting out of which the volume grew, and he read and commented

upon other papers that were presented at a 1967 conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz, which were incorporated into the resultant book. These various contributions eventuated in the initial ASAO Monograph *Adoption in Eastern Oceania* (Carroll 1970a), edited by one of his first doctoral students at the University of Chicago.² That volume included six chapters on Polynesia, five on Micronesia, and two others (Rotuma and what is now northern Vanuatu). The book opened with an incisive introduction (Carroll 1970b) and concluded with a magisterial contribution on adoptions as “transactions in parenthood” (Goodenough 1970).

Six years later, those who contributed to the volume edited by Ivan Brady had the advantage of drawing upon the chapters in the Carroll volume and on the several other journal articles that had appeared by that time. As with the earlier ASAO Monograph, this one also was focused largely on Polynesian ($N=4$) and Micronesian ($N=5$) case studies, with but a single chapter on a Melanesian community (in Vanuatu). Once again, David Schneider’s influence was considerable. He was acknowledged for assistance by several of the authors: a great abundance of his published work is cited in the volume; two of the chapter authors were his PhD students at the University of Chicago; and a third might be thought of as one of his “grand-students,” having been supervised by Vern Carroll (see Marshall 1999, 419).

Why have I made so much of David Schneider’s roles in stimulating and sustaining these two volumes about adoption and fosterage in Oceania? I have done so because these studies greatly contributed to the germination of his ideas about whether what anthropologists confidently called “kinship” deserved to hold the special and central position it did for so many years. Schneider brought these ideas to fruition and into print in 1984 with publication of *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*. It was in that book in which he framed the following dilemma:

The question can now be rephrased; why has kinship been defined in terms of the relations that arise out of the processes of human sexual reproduction?

I suggest that it has been so defined because there is an assumption that is more often than not implicit. . . . It is the single most important assumption on which the premise of the privileged nature of kinship and the presumed Genealogical Unity of Mankind rests. It is the assumption that Blood Is Thicker Than Water. (Schneider 1984, 165)

Farther along in his argument, Schneider confronted Malinowski’s ideas on this matter, and he avered that “a note on adoption is in order” (1984, 171). In that “note” he wrote the following:

The problem that Malinowski points to is this. If the blood relationship is presumed to have inherent qualities of its own which “are” and which “exist” and are so strong and take such precedence, then adoption ought not to be possible, or at most it should be unusual and rarely practiced. For adoption creates “kinship” where none in fact exists, that is, no real blood relationship exists. Hence, there ought to be a clear cultural distinction between true kinship and all other kinds of relationship.

This is in fact the preponderant view. What is confusing is that adoption is confounded with the blood relationship by being called or treated as if it were the same kind of relationship. But in fact anthropologists have consistently treated adoption as something quite different from true kinship. (Schneider 1984: 171–72)

I might note that, in mounting the argument above, Schneider may have ignored one of the cardinal facts about adoption and fosterage in the Pacific, namely that the overwhelming majority of such transactions occur among people *who are related by blood*, whether the adoptees are the nieces and nephews or the grandchildren of the adopters. This point comes out very clearly in the contributions to the present volume.

Schneider’s work, perhaps more than that of anyone else at the time, stimulated a reappraisal of comparative studies of kinship and a redirection of the focus of anthropological theory away from kinship per se and toward power, hegemony, gender and the new reproductive technologies (in this regard, see Carsten 2004; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Feinberg 2001; Franklin and McKinnon 2001). As I’ve noted above, the focus on adoption and fosterage, especially in Oceania, was fundamentally important to Schneider’s efforts to challenge the biological presuppositions that underlay anthropological studies of kinship, and derivatively, anthropological theory. Even as he and other contributors to the volume he co-edited with Martin Ottenheimer mounted a critique of Schneider’s work, Feinberg pointed out its importance for anthropological theory: “in addition to freeing kinship studies from their biogenetic underpinnings and thereby laying the groundwork for much subsequent work by feminist, gay, and lesbian scholars, Schneider’s writings have helped to generate a renewed interest in adoption . . .” (2001, 25).

Judith Modell Schachter has been a central player in this resurgence of interest in anthropological studies of adoption (e.g., Modell 1994, 2000; Terrell and Modell 1994), and her interest in this topic grew at least in part from her doctoral research on Hawaiian families and the frequency of *hanai* relationships there (cf. Schachter, 2008). But Schachter is by no means the only one who has given renewed attention to adoption in the twenty-first

century as recent volumes by Bowie (2004), Dorow (2006), Howell (2006) and Volkman (2005) attest. And beyond those papers included in the present volume, a number of new studies of the topic have appeared for the Pacific Islands area as well (see Anderson 2004; Bauer et al. 1992; Demian 2004; Pameh et al. 2002; Peters et al. 2000; Treide 2004; Young Leslie 2000). That adoption and fosterage continue to have “legs” in contemporary anthropology is evidenced by a recent outpouring of new journal articles on the topic (e.g., Kim 2007; Leinaweaver 2007; Verhoef and Morelli 2007; Yngvesson 2007). Therefore, the contributors to the current volume on “Relative Power” find themselves in good company.

One of a spate of books that has sought to frame “the new kinship” in recent years is Carsten’s (2004) interesting effort. In that slender volume, she devotes considerable attention to Schneider’s work, particularly in her Chapter 5, “Uses and Abuses of Substance.” The pertinence of her critique to the current discussion is a section of Chapter 5 entitled “Substance in Melanesia” wherein she draws heavily on work by Marilyn Strathern, Roy Wagner, and Annette Weiner. In that chapter segment, she notes that “In American kinship, Schneider had emphasized the immutability of *substance* as well as its distinction from *code*. . . . In Melanesia. . . what is emphasized is the ‘analogizing’ capacity of *substance*—the way it can be substituted by detachable ‘things,’ such as meat, women, or pearl shells” (2004, 122). Carsten also draws on Strathern’s (1988) notion of Melanesian persons as “partible” or “dividual,” and although neither Carsten nor Strathern makes this connection, I suggest that the substitutability of substance in Melanesia, together with the partibility of persons may offer some insight into adoption and fosterage there (and perhaps by extension to other parts of the Pacific). Might it not be the case that adopted or fostered children in Oceania may be thought of as “analogous” to natural children (in the above “analogizing” sense) and further that adopted or fostered children may have nonexclusive identities shared partially with their natural parents and partially with their adoptive parents? If so this is quite different from the thinking that historically has surrounded adoption in the West.

If the above is so, then Laurence M. Carucci’s (2008) discussion of Ujelang adoption-like practices as “relationship-making,” with a host of possible connections that exist along a continuum of commitment and care with nurturance at its core, might be taken as a leitmotif of all such relationships in Oceania. Apropos Carsten’s point following Marilyn Strathern, noted previously, concerning the “analogizing” capacity of substance, it is, I think, no accident that in nearly all ethnographic cases of Pacific adoption that we have, including the new ones below, food is a substitute for kinship substance, even as feeding symbolizes “taking care of” a child or anyone else

who is pulled into such a relationship. In this regard note Jeanette Dickerson-Putman's (2008) discussion of the Tahitian word *fa'a'amu*, which means to informally adopt a feeding child, and Judith Schachter's (2008) translation of *hanai* in Hawai'i as "nurture, sustain, feed." Similarly, Laurel Monnig notes that "the mutual sharing of food" is a key element of the Chamorro custom, culture, or values within which adoption (*poksai*) exists on Guam.

Leslie Butt (2008), Laurence M. Carucci (2008), Jeanette Dickerson-Putman (2008), and Thorgeir Kolshus (2008) all engage with the idea of *flexibility* in regard to adoption and fosterage in the societies where they do research. At the risk of stretching this supple idea too far, let me note that Emily Martin, in her influential book *Flexible Bodies* (1994), cites Gregory Bateson's equally influential book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) and writes as follows:

With great prescience, Bateson aptly captured the notion of the flexible, constantly adjusting, constantly changing person, long before its appearance in ads for athletic shoes and temporary employment services. In subsequent chapters we will see how flexibility comes to play a role in our cultural ideas about who will be able to survive into the future at all. (Martin 1994: 158–59)

Insofar as flexibility has to do with survival, it seems appropriate that at least some of the contributors below have used the word "flexible" to talk about the *adaptation* of adoption and fosterage in the face of such changes as increased mobility, migration and movement to urban areas. Without wishing the word flexible to serve simply as a substitute for adapt, I believe that what Kolshus calls "the traditional flexibility of social relations" (2008, 57) in Oceania is an important survival mechanism and that adoption and fosterage figure into this (as Ward Goodenough [1955] argued years ago). To the extent that relationship-making is a built-in, inherent component of many (if not all) Oceanic kinship systems, then the contributors' concerns below with changes consequent on capitalist penetration, urban wage work, transnational migration, and the like give hope that Pacific Islanders' flexible kinship systems will assure that they are among those "who will be able to survive into the future."

Let me raise here an issue about a kind of relationship mentioned by every single contributor to this collection: "adoptions" of grandchildren by grandparents. I have purposefully placed adoptions in quotation marks so as to problematize it. It is commonly the case that such grandparental "adoptions" occur when a young woman bears a child out of wedlock and the baby is

taken and raised by her parents (see Butt 2008, Carucci 2008, Dickerson-Putman 2008, Kolshus 2008, Rauchholz 2008, Salomon and Hamelin 2008, and Schachter 2008). In such instances one might ask, “Is this *really* adoption? Or is it instead simply another demonstration of Radcliffe-Brown’s famous ‘solidarity of alternate generations?’” Put otherwise, are grandparents in these cases just doing what grandparents do, particularly if they reside next door to or even in the same house as the birth mother, or are they engaging in “relationship-making” the way other persons might?

Finally, a few comments on “new perspectives” that come out of this collection’s contributions are in order. One such is a focus on the effects of adoption on the adoptees themselves and on the birth parents. Rauchholz, especially, writes about the mostly negative emotions, feelings, and sentiments that surround these relationships in contemporary Chuuk. Both Butt and Kolshus mention the “ambivalence” and “ambiguity” that surround Dani adoption, in the former case, and adoption on Mota, Vanuatu, in the latter instance. And Salomon and Hamelin, writing about New Caledonia, discuss examples of adoptees who felt rejected because they had been given away, or “sacrificed for the good of the lineage” (2008, 150). Since the pre-existing literature concentrated primarily on adoption’s social structural implications, and on the ways that the exchange or circulation of children (and occasionally adults) link groups of kin and help bind the social order, this focus on the emotions surrounding adoption adds significantly to our cross-cultural understanding of such relationships both in the islands and more widely.

Another new perspective is to take a clear-eyed look at those situations in which adopted children are exploited, or even sexually abused in some cases. Salomon and Hamelin give this a good deal of attention for female adoptees in New Caledonia, and Butt addresses the Dani concern over the possible exploitation of adopted children in cases of out-group adoption by Indonesians. Rauchholz also mentions what he calls “Cinderella overtones” to adoptions in Chuuk.

The last new perspective these contributors examine is what adoption does or doesn’t do to adoptees’ sense of identity and belonging. Rauchholz explores this for Chuuk, as does Kolshus for Mota. Presaging Schachter’s discussion (see following) of “belonging to the land” in Hawai’i, Kolshus states that a similar notion is to be found among Motese: “inheritance and use rights to land are decisive factors in establishing a person as Motese or not. In addition, notions of belonging are commonly expressed through the idiom of land” (2008, 71). Belonging appears in a somewhat different guise in Schachter’s paper about contemporary Hawai’i:

In Hawai'i, the social construction of kinship enacts an ideology of incorporativeness that merges family with assertions of cultural identity. . . . a historical process that began as soon as North Americans reconstructed the laws and the governance of the Hawaiian Islands. The decisions they made about their family, incorporating children into the 'ohana in multiple ways, constitutes an interpretation of *belonging* that connects intimately with contemporary Hawaiian notions of nationhood.

Adoption in all its forms is a reminder, in practice as well as in interpretation, of the flexibility built into a concept of belonging, so that being a citizen of Hawai'i, belonging to the land, does not reduce to fealty to the United States or to an independent Hawaiian nation. (2008, 228)

Because adoption is all about belonging—to nuclear families, to extended families, and to kin groups such as lineages and clans where those are present but also to “the land,” “a people,” or even “a nation”—it possesses at least the possibility for transforming identity in fundamental ways.

The brief account I have provided above shows that the subject of adoption and fosterage—“relationship-making”—has captured anthropological interest in the Pacific Islands for at least the past seventy-five years, even though it came in for intensive scrutiny only a little over thirty-five years ago. That scrutiny contributed to a sea change in anthropological theory, a movement away from privileging kinship as the central arena for theoretical debate in the discipline and a rejection of the notion that kinship cross-culturally was based fundamentally on “blood” ties. In the resultant tumult from this reorientation of the anthropological gaze, a host of topics has replaced kinship per se as new basic foci of our attention. These have included power, hegemony, the person, and gender, and such varied subjects as gay and lesbian relationships and the new reproductive technologies. Amid these “hot topics” of the past quarter century, adoption has reasserted itself as a subject worthy of in-depth anthropological study, albeit viewed through rather different lenses than before. The set of papers in this collection employs some of these lenses to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of studies of relationship-making in Oceania and how and why such studies contribute to our greater understanding of the human condition.

NOTES

1. When it was first founded, the organization was named the Association for Social Anthropology in Eastern Oceania (ASAEO), with a specific focus on Polynesia and Micronesia and the exclusion of New Guinea. The name was changed to ASAO in 1970,

along with a formal decision to include New Guinea in the comparative studies that are the organization's *raison d'être*.

2. Indeed, three of the thirteen ethnographic chapters in the Carroll volume were by Schneider's doctoral students (see Marshall 1999, 419).

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INTRODUCTION

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WHETHER GIVEN AS GIFT, adopted through a court proceeding, moved with a migrating parent, or left behind with an elderly aunt, children have become a large presence in the circulation of peoples in the twenty-first century. While the terms *adoption* and *fosterage* dominate the literature on circulating children, they only partially cover the practices anthropologists observe. This is true in particular for those who work in Pacific Island societies. Drawn from Western terminology for the transfer of a child from biological to social parent, the words *adoption* and *fosterage* slant (or bias) accounts of the multiple ways in which children circulate from person to person and place to place. The terms also imbue notions of personhood, identity, culture, and nation with a Western cast. In gathering ethnographic cases from the Pacific, our volume accentuates the susceptibility of the terms adoption and fosterage to the interpretive strategies that characterize the circulation of children in the present and in the past.

The Pacific Island cases provide a perfect context for exploring both the diversity and the shared elements of child exchange. Long an example of the frequency, casualness, and normality of moving children from a biological to a social parent, Oceanic cultures challenge the very heart of Western assumptions about kinship (a “genealogical core”). The free circulation of children in those cultures also complicates colonial efforts to discipline indigenous populations. Subject of enduring imperial ambitions, the peoples of the Pacific demonstrate the centrality of parent-child relations to histories of conquest and colonialism. Those who governed also imposed governance on

the family, linking external to domestic order. Transactions in parenthood seemed to violate rules of order that were based on Western notions of the family. Mimicking the colonial marginalization of apparently loose parent-child relations, anthropologists of the Pacific submerged accounts of fosterage and adoption under other topics.

Our special issue brings Pacific Island societies to the forefront of discussions of adoption and fosterage. By pointing to the central role that practices of child exchange play in the changing structures of culture and the cultural structures of history, we expand the literature on contact, colonialism, and postcolonial movements.

A vast geographical area—25,000 square miles of ocean—the Pacific has piqued the imagination and attracted the imperial ambitions of Western nations for well over 500 years. On tiny atolls and within huge islands, peoples of the Pacific witnessed the arrival of strangers who imposed modes of production, notions of governance, and—last but not least—concepts of the family on the lands they conquered. The project of civilizing the savage became a project of disciplining “the heart, the soul, and the body of non-European peoples.”¹ Laws disciplined the bodies of adults by limiting sex to marriage. An ideology of biological reproduction disciplined the bodies of children by assigning a child to her genetic parent. Throughout Oceania, cultural interpretations of sexual and procreative practices were continually contested. The lines of battle were drawn around family and kinship, engaging colonizer and colonized in perpetual unstable motion. This battle is not something in the past: competing constructions of parenthood remain at the core of cultural encounters, still a site of power brokering.

Relative power signifies the relational dimensions of the concept of power. Not a fixed or absolute entity, power is dependent on context. The concept evolves out of relations between nation-states, between clans and villages, and between individuals. The ability to exert will or to achieve ends varies with circumstances and values, and with times and places. On an individual level, relative power refers to the brokering that makes and remakes kinship: relatives compete for goods and for status. Children, our essays demonstrate, are primary objects in this struggle. Relative power exists as thoroughly in the intimacy of an adult-child relationship as in the intimidation of a state-local relationship. The history of colonialism and postcolonialism conjoins the two domains. In order fully to grasp the civilizing project (“a socially transformative endeavor,” in Nicholas Thomas’s phrase²), we analyze the transformation of relations between adults and children, in which the very idea of “parenthood” is disputed.

Our analyses in *Relative Power* are based on detailed ethnographic cases, organized under three dominant themes: (1) the significance of changing

interpretations of kinship to colonial and postcolonial projects; (2) the ways in which intimate personal negotiations and larger political-economic systems inform one another; (3) the impact of state and, increasingly, international policies on interpretations of the value of children.

Historical and Cultural Confrontations in the Pacific

Eighteenth-century searches for a southern continent, for trade routes to Asia, and for enlightenment about the exotic flora, fauna, and people of a distant ocean brought sailors and sea captains, botanists and artists, scholars and adventurers to the islands of the Pacific. The “new world” succumbed to the exploitation of resources by traders and the appropriation of souls by missionaries. By the end of the nineteenth century, virtually all islands in the Pacific belonged to Western imperial nations—the United States, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Spain. A century later, colonized peoples of the Pacific were fighting for independence. Some islands achieved formal political sovereignty, others a dependency relationship, and still others a recognition of rights within a continuing colonial regime. Ideologies of colonialism were by then an aspect of “tradition,” and law had intertwined with custom.

The entry of colonial authorities and the implementation of colonial regimes reconfigured the migratory movements that had long been part of Pacific Islander histories. Islanders had sailed vast distances in precontact times and continued to do so under the impact of economic and political imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The reasons for migrating changed, but circulation on and off islands remained a fact of life.

We know the dramatic events of the twentieth century: the two world wars that radically shifted life in the Pacific. Atomic bomb testing forever altered the lives of Marshall Islanders, and the construction of military bases and large airports along the precarious sands of Tahiti and Hawai‘i did much the same. Other sorts of violent intrusion disrupted the lives of Pacific Island peoples. Missionaries disparaged old gods and imposed new ones. Education systems erased whole languages. And governments set standards for civic participation that eliminated large numbers of native peoples from political representation. Leaving was an option less often chosen than coerced, and economic deprivation drove people to migrate from rural to urban settings. The bright lights of a city offered refuge for some and opportunity for other Pacific Islanders.

The privatization of property under Western colonial authorities transformed the meaning and the use of resources. Newcomers took over the reaping of profits from the land. Alienated from sources of material and

spiritual support, Pacific Islanders left for other places, uprooted and often bitter. Forced away from home, some migrants chose to leave children behind, attached to homelands, while others brought children with them to learn new skills in a resource-rich setting. Often children moved back and forth between old and new, objects of the transition between cultures adults experienced. Intentionally or incidentally, these moves reconstituted parent-child relationships and altered interpretations of kinship.

Kinship has always been vulnerable to the encounter between Westerners and Pacific Islanders. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, visitors were both alarmed and attracted by the perceived “looseness” of relationships throughout the South Seas. From the perspective of those who had left Victorian morals behind, but who often brought Christian principles with them, the apparently open and casual sexual relations between adults shocked and fascinated. If not as titillating to observers or as spicy in the accounts they wrote, the relations between adults and children brought equal measures of astonishment and righteous condemnation to travelers, missionaries, civil servants, and the casual beachcomber. Children seemed not to know their biological parents, wandering freely from household to household. Whether in Papua New Guinea, the Micronesian Island of Yap, or Hawai‘i, family relationships looked mighty loose and unregulated to the Western eye.

Closer encounters and detailed observations on the part of visitors who became settlers—and virtual anthropologists—revealed differences within the culture areas designated by Euro-Americans: Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. Our essays span those areas, attentive to the differing “historicities” of the local.

Yet one unmistakable fact spanned the ocean. Across the Pacific, the rates of child transfer were exceedingly high. Early twentieth-century descriptive reports were substantiated by later systematic surveys of household composition. In the 1960s, anthropologists reported that in Polynesian societies as many as 80 to 90 percent of children lived with a social and not a biological parent. Similar figures were reported for the islands of Micronesia, where rates varied between 50 percent and a similarly high 80 or 90 percent. Melanesian groups shared the same propensity to pass children around to nonbiological parents, and in these small-scale societies the frequency with which children were transferred was obvious. Remarks on the high rates and astonishment at the ease of transferring a child reflected a comparison with European and American practices in the twentieth century: seen as startling or shocking, the transfer of children in the Pacific was notable precisely because of the contrast with practices at home.

Whether impressionistic or quantified, reports on child exchange reveal the persistent conjoining of biological parenthood, moral responsibility, and civilized behavior. Judges, teachers, missionaries, social workers, and scholars in the twenty-first century perpetuate the idea, by deeming the frequent and casual movement of children as at worst capricious and at best puzzling. Presented under the Western concept of the “best interests of the child,” this view of customary child exchange perpetuates the assumption that a genetic link assures the security—protects the interests—of a child.

The application of a best interests principle ignores the cultural contexts that shape the transfer of a child from biological to social parent. The principle sets conditions for a secure childhood that transcend the particular terms of an exchange. In its application, best interests reiterates the significance of colonial standards in the transaction of a child. Persons who now circulate children in a global arena negotiate the implications of best interests in their interpretations of fosterage and adoption.

Adoption: Relative to Kinship

Startled accounts of the high rates of child transfer in Pacific Islands did not assure the subject a central place in anthropological kinship theory. Rather, child transfer fell under the purview of other theoretical frameworks—exchange and alliance theory, for instance, or the notion of “goods” in a non-market economy. Anthropologists of the Pacific tended to regard the transfer of a child in functional terms, outlining the (several) purposes served by the transaction. These purposes included preserving land rights, establishing alliances, affirming bonds between adults, regulating family size, and redistributing resources. Treated this way, adoption was less a matter of relatedness than of adjusting social relations. For theorists of kinship, if adoption entered the picture, it was as an exception to the rule; the creation of social parenthood affirmed the importance of genealogical connections by replicating the ties of birth.

In 1969, Jack Goody published an article that treated adoption as a central and not a peripheral subject of analysis. “Adoption in Cross-Cultural Perspective” demonstrated the importance of transfers of children in a range of societies, and detailed the diverse forms these transfers might take.³ Pacific examples took a place among many others, outstanding in the frequency but not in the role of the transaction. At almost the same time, a panel at the meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) focused on adoption, yielding the volume edited by Vern Carroll, *Adoption in Eastern Oceania*. Contributors still treated the transaction in terms of the

functions child exchange served, minimizing the impact on interpretations of relatedness, of identity, and of personhood.

Six years later a second ASAO volume, *Transactions in Kinship*, promised a shift from the functional analysis of adoption to one that considered the role of child exchange in constructions of kinship.⁴ Adoption is “a socio-cultural process of recruitment to kinship identities,” claims Ivan Brady, reformulating the definition of adoption accordingly: “any positive or formal transaction in kinship. . . . that creates new or revised existing kinship bonds. . . .”⁵

Still the model of the biological family remained the touchstone or comparative base for analyses of the kinship bonds created by the transaction. A revolution was on the horizon, however, which would ultimately alter studies of “adoption” in Pacific Island societies.

By the mid-1980s, kinship theory was under close and critical scrutiny. The reasons were twofold: a shift in the “internal dialogue” of the discipline and an equally significant transformation in the external contexts of anthropology.⁶ David Schneider’s 1984 *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* made an earthshaking impact on the ongoing disciplinary discourse about kinship. Simultaneously, forms of family and modes of reproduction radically changed in the West. While Schneider’s *Critique* might have raised kinship “from the ashes,” as he put it, the spread of technologically assisted reproduction, test-tube babies, alternative families, and out-in-the-open adoption posed an equal challenge to kinship theory.⁷ Genealogy seemed to slip away from the core of kinship, and theorists of kinship relished the creativity and diversity individuals brought to the social construction of relatedness.

Although Pacific Island societies appear to be a best case example of the social construction of kinship, transactions in parenthood in Oceania remained on the periphery of theory. The documented high rates of child transfer were still too puzzling, a challenge less to kinship theory than to assumptions about a child’s safety, security, and ability to thrive. The old aura of casual, whimsical, and irresponsible clung to Pacific Island practices of transferring a child. Viewed as *custom*, on the edges of or resistant to the law, child exchange in the Pacific did not influence discussions of adoption. The legal form distinguished one mode of exchange from all other transfers of a child. Sealed by contract, legal adoption replicated the biological bond thought to ensure a child’s well-being. Contract granted the child a permanent attachment to a designated parent.

Customary, situational, and consensual, Pacific Island practices fell off the map, exotic to the West. Furthermore, with some exceptions, Pacific Islanders do not supply children to the global market that transfers children

from the “rest” to the “West.”⁸ This market—the phenomenon of international adoption—frames recent literature in ways that once again privilege the experience of Westerners over those of others. In recent anthropological studies, *adoption* emerges as the guiding concept for analyzing the circulation of children. Our accounts of circulating children in the Pacific contest the centrality of *adoption*. In so doing, they critique the Western conjoining of market, parenthood, and kinship.

Relative Rights

By the end of the twentieth century, the movement of children across national and cultural borders was hard to miss. Subject of news reports, governmental policy, and, increasingly, anthropological attention, the development prompted a literature on *international adoption*. The very phrase embeds two significant assumptions: that nations are the primary entities in the circulation of children and that adoption is the mechanism by which children move around the world. Neither of these allow for the instances we describe, in which individuals relate variously to the meanings of adoption established by a nation-state and by customary norms.

With its origins in Western law, international adoption promulgates a Euro-American notion of parent-child relationships. *Adoption* assumes a unidirectional, permanent transfer of a child from biological to social parent. *Adoption* excludes the back-and-forth circulation, the reciprocal responsibilities, and the life-stage shifts in relatedness that are characteristic of Pacific Island cases.

Alarm at the broadening scope of international adoption produced significant conventions for regulating the perceived flow of children. In 1989 the United Nations passed a Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) and in 1993 this was supplemented by the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Hague Convention).⁹ Both documents safeguard the rights of children and specify the conditions for a secure childhood anywhere in the world. The CRC recognizes the vulnerability of children to a harsh denial of human rights, and the Hague Convention addresses the inequities in resources that put children in danger of being exploited, commodified, and assessed as objects of exchange. Adoption is presented as a defense against these very real and threatening conditions.

The transaction, adoption, is organized by nation-states, the signatories to international conventions. The movement of children takes place across “national borders.” When Sara Dorow writes that adoption represents “a cultural economy of circulating relationships of power and exchange,” she

refers to the nation as the source of power.¹⁰ She continues her analysis by pointing to the imbalance between poor and rich nations that lies at the heart of international adoption: rich nations appropriate children from poor nations. While not entirely a step back into the past, the emphasis on a particular source of justice, dignity, and security for children does echo colonial policies, in which national purposes determine the form of family and the construction of kinship.

In focusing on nation-states, these documents downplay the imbalances of power and inequity of resources that structure interpersonal transactions in parenthood. Imbalance and inequity are essential components of exchanges of children that take place outside the purview of the nation, despite the nation, or in a compromise with national legislation. With urbanization, entry into global labor markets, and exposure to corporate takeover of resources, Pacific Islanders experience sharp inequities in the acquisition and distribution of resources. As Leslie Butt documents in her article, the city offers young girls in Irian Jaya opportunities that ultimately accentuate shifts in the power exerted by parents over children. Her case is not unique—urbanization is one example of processes that destabilize the protections promised by custom and, differently, by law.

Enforcement of the CRC and the Hague Convention does not prevent the conflicts between persons over children that our contributors describe. These conventions, intended to protect all children, actually protect only a narrowly defined group of children: those who enter the arena of nation-to-nation legally contracted transfer. The CRC and Hague Convention leave out the thousands of children who are circulated by adults within kin groups, villages, and social networks.¹¹ These children slip out of the grasp of international agreements and off the radar of national law. They may be at risk or they may be better protected by practices that occur beyond the eye of the panopticon.

Yet it would be naïve to deny the impact of Western ideologies of the family and of parent-child relations on practices that occur outside or on the margins of custom and of law. The CRC and the Hague Convention carry forward the civilizing project of colonialism by “disciplining” the relationship of a child to a parent. By citing *adoption* as the best mechanism for replacing a birth with a social parent, the documents imply the continuing value of the genealogical core of kinship: contract constitutes a vicarious replication of blood. By extension, genetics are at the core of identity.

In the CRC and the Hague Convention, an interpretation of identity emerges from an assessment of the “right” way of transferring a child. While not stated in exactly those terms, the establishment of social parenthood through adoption provides the child with a source of identity that mimics the

biological connection—presumed to be enduring, dyadic, and exclusive. Discrete, essentialized, and genetically determined, identity in these documents is the antithesis of the “consocial personhood” or “relational identity” described for Pacific Island societies.¹² The child is viewed not as a node of social relationships but as a legal subject.

Competing interpretations of identity and personhood are a fact in postcontact experiences of Pacific Islanders. The competition, our essays suggest, is intensified by the coincidence of prevalent practices of child exchange with the concerns expressed in the Hague Convention. These concerns extract the child from a social network and treat her as a person with identifiable and distinct traits. This in turn opens the way to a differential evaluation of children that, noted in critiques of international and national policies, influences the changing views of fosterage and adoption we confronted in our field work. When parents battle with their parents about where a child is best placed or best belongs, they inadvertently turn the child into an object of desire or need (Butt; Dickerson-Putman; Kolshus). Directly or couched in arguments about resources, adults calculate the value of a child in terms of their own interests. There is no sharing, no gift model, no blurring of the boundaries of parental responsibility—nothing that resembles the arrangements for caring for a child made throughout Oceania. A legal definition of rights undermines the model of generosity and solidarity that guides customary child exchanges.¹³ In the process, a gift model gives way to a market model for child exchange.

Changing interpretations are made meaningful in the day-to-day practices of individuals. Individuals talk about an ability to bargain successfully or to outbid the claims of others to a child. This is in part the language of capitalism and in part the language that stems from Western views of transacting a child. Either way, statements about capacity, bargaining power, and bidding insert child exchange into a new modality. A transaction that once played a part in the continuous cycle of constructing kinship in Pacific Islands now plays a part in transforming a transaction in kinship into a form of commodification.¹⁴

When Pacific Islanders evoke a market model, the transaction acquires the traits of Western adoption, with its enforced separation between those involved in the exchange. Even when geographically close—when still related—the parties to the exchange substitute the doubts and distrust of a market for the solidarity of kinship. This substitution eliminates the assumed contact and closeness between parties that has long been a dimension of child exchange in Pacific Island societies. One outcome of the resulting creation of strangers, as Rauchholz shows, is the retrospective view that child transfer is negative, painful, and abusive. From the perspective Rauchholz describes,

shorn of a birth parent, the child is deprived of the rights that guarantee dignity and full social recognition.

Relative Knowledge

Perhaps more than anything else, the matter of contact, knowledge, and familiarity underscores the intersection of Pacific Island practices with recent changes in Western adoption policies in the past quarter century.

Historically, children in Pacific Island societies knew a biological parent as well as they knew a social parent. A majority of the transactions occurred within the confines of a village or the boundaries of an extended family. Knowing relatives was not an issue, and the split between a biological and a social parent only came on the scene with Western laws of adoption. These laws prescribed secrecy, an absolute break between biological and social parent, and an assumption that the creation of an adoptive family erased the presence of a biological family. These laws ran counter to the practices and ideologies of Pacific Islander adoption and fosterage.

And yet the law brought advantages, a resource for individuals who demanded rights in the transaction of a child. Law may be a resource most available to those who already possess power but, as a rhetoric, law is also a resource for those who consider themselves to be powerless: the adopted person, for example, who feels marginalized, who remembers being abused, or who has been rejected. The language of rights, drawn from Euro-American law, draws interpretations of adoption and fosterage devised by Pacific Islanders into a global arena.

The CRC and the Hague Convention apply a version of human rights to the institution of international adoption. The documents specify a child's rights to security, safety, and "the full and harmonious development of her personality."¹⁵ When a biological parent cannot provide those rights, the documents continue, adoption is the best solution. With its insistence on the as-if-begotten model of Western law, adoption then excludes the birthparent from the child's cognitive and emotional worlds. Adoption is confidential, secret, closed, and permanent. The end is the paradox already mentioned: adoption reiterates the significance of genetic ties. The reiteration has not been lost on participants in adoption, who apply it to the claim of a right to know "biology." In this discourse, the concept of biology has multiple referents, to blood and genetics on the one hand, and to cultural background and roots on the other. The claim reflects a contemporary context, in which knowledge of DNA is thought to complete identity and experiencing a culture of origin is considered a step toward an integrated personality.

In the Pacific Islands where child exchange occurred within small communities, usually between familiars, concerns about genetics and “roots” did not arise, even when conflicts about inheritance or mutual obligation disrupted the terms of the agreement. For Pacific Islanders, the current diffusion of *a right to know* potentially transforms cultural assumptions about exchange into new constructions of personhood.

More than national law or international conventions, media spread the word about identity. Stories of searching and dramatizations of meeting a “lost” relative play across the airwaves in even the furthest atolls of the Pacific. In connection with other mechanisms of devaluation, these circulating stories promote a difference between biological and social parent in terms of attachment to the child. Perceived as less “related,” the social parent may exploit a situation—endangering or abusing a child, as Solomon and Hamelin graphically report for New Caledonia.¹⁶ Social parenthood acquires a negative cast, prompting the self-image of weakness and diminished capacity that adults confessed resulted from having been transferred (Rauchholz).¹⁷

The language of rights distinguishes adoption from other modes of exchange. In doing so, the rhetoric maintains a hierarchy of forms of family that continues the colonial project of the nineteenth century. At the same time, a language of rights facilitates the continuation of practices that challenge the hierarchy—an arrangement that benefits a person during a crisis, that satisfies a need, or that resists the dictates of a colonial regime (Carucci; Monnig; Solomon and Hamelin). Whether deliberate or incidental to the necessary movement of a child (whatever produces necessity), the placement of a child alters parent-child relationships and restructures the culture of child exchange. The terms that individuals apply to shifting practices of placement reflect intimate, emotional, and cognitive assessments of the event. These assessments come out in the stories people tell about their lives.

Relationship Making: A “Field of Stories”

In his introduction to the 1970 ASAO volume, Vern Carroll rightly pointed out that “there is great hazard in using the term ‘adoption’ in descriptive ethnography without indicating carefully what it is (if anything) that is being translated by the term.”¹⁸ Three decades later, despite the increase in studies of transactions in parenthood, the term remains problematic when it comes to comparisons across cultures. In her 2004 volume, *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Adoption*, Fiona Bowie rephrases Carroll’s warning: “Not only are the legal frameworks and cultural understandings of parenthood

different, but the terms ‘parent’ and ‘child’ themselves are not necessarily translatable, or may have very different resonances.”¹⁹ Yet, as both editors acknowledge, comparative studies require the possibility of classifying diverse behaviors under one rubric. We too have used the words “adoption” and “fosterage” to facilitate comparison. In addition, we used adoption and fosterage in our ethnographic accounts in order to emphasize the link between local practices and the international developments the terms encompass.

We also substituted concepts like “transaction in parenthood” and “transfer of children” in order to gather disparate behaviors together without imposing categories borrowed from a Western vocabulary in which, for instance, adoption is rigorously distinguished from fosterage. Yet “transaction” and “transfer” mean very different things, depending on place and time, and on the age, status, and personality of those involved in the transaction.

Moreover, the practices that might be clustered under the notions of transaction or transfer are not stable, either in cultural or in individual interpretations. Individuals transfer a child or transact parenthood before they articulate the principles through which they have acted. Embedded in needs, desires, exigencies, and crises, the exchange of a child may fall below the level of description until a conflict or the scrutiny of an outsider forces the transaction into the public. Then categorical distinctions come into play, resources for persons intent on preserving or defending their interests.

Laurence M. Carucci describes the changing meanings of *kokajiriri* for residents on Ujelang and Enewetak and for their kinsmen who move to the Big Island of Hawai‘i. In the case of Guam, Monnig writes, the meanings of *poksai* shift with bids for independence from the United States; whether fostered or adopted, *mestizo* or *mestizu*, the child’s identity is defined in the political contexts of a sovereignty movement. Schachter describes the shifting meanings of *hanai* under the eyes of Hawai‘i’s judges and in the conversations of native Hawaiians who transfer children in the context of an American state. Dickerson-Putman and Butt show how competing interpretations of terminology determine the outcome of generational quarrels over the place of a child. “Meanings are ultimately submitted to subjective risks, to the extent that people, as they are socially enabled, cease to be the slaves of their concepts and become the masters.”²⁰ The question is who and how a person becomes “socially enabled” in the transfer of a child.

Our essays put the circulation of children on the part of Pacific Islanders into discussions of hegemonic ideologies of identity, family, and kinship. Applied to children, concern with the impact of hegemonic ideologies has focused primarily on adoption and, recently, on international adoption. We depict the spread of these ideologies into transactions that take place outside

the purview of national law or international convention—the majority of transfers of parenthood that occur throughout the world. In balancing the content of custom against the dictates of law, peoples of Oceania draw on ideologies of individual autonomy to accomplish their ends, altering custom and exploiting law in the process. Kolshus tells us that in Vanuatu the exchange of children is now constructed in terms of choice and the ability to attain a *good*. Persons enter the exchange with different capacities for meeting their goals. The role of choice and autonomy accompany a turn of *exchange* into a metaphor for market rather than for gift.

An individualization of exchange may open the transaction in parenthood to more creative modes, as some argue, or it may, as others claim, put the child at risk. There is no definitive resolution to the debate. As long as the term adoption defines the better mode of placing a child, we omit from the debate forms of child exchange that nuance the argument. While the term adoption serves a heuristic purpose, its exclusion of widespread practices ultimately narrows the possibilities for children who are the subject of concern. At the same time, the term *adoption* and its shadowy companion *fosterage* are constantly put to the test by individuals in their practices and in the meanings they accord those practices. Our essays describe the ways in which individual accounts engage in ongoing negotiations with reigning terminology.

Our analyses are based on fieldwork methods that recognize the importance of the stories people tell. In some instances we conducted interviews that focused specifically on parenthood, family, and kinship (Dickerson-Putman; Rauchholz). In other instances, we discovered in conversations about a variety of topics the significance of a child's parentage to the continuity of cultural values and to the claims of independent status (Monnig; Schachter). Listening, observing, and participating, we detected the conflicts and bitterness that can attend the transfer of a child—the resentment that practices governed by custom bring in a world dominated by law (Butt; Dickerson-Putman; Rauchholz). We drew on other instruments, like surveys, to trace the impact on a child of her transfer from a biological to social parent, and we uncovered vulnerabilities to abuse and violence often missing from conversational accounts (Solomon and Hamelin). Finally, several of us were drawn into relationships, subject to the changing interpretations of kinship that focus our analyses (Carucci; Rauchholz).

These accounts from the field are not narratives of *adoption*. They are narratives about relationships, created and reconsidered over time. They are narratives peopled by an array of individuals, from those designated as kin to those regarded as authorities on kinship. These narratives from Oceania shed light on the contextual and historical fluidity of discourses on adoption and

fosterage. The stories that constitute our data do not present a coherent picture, even in the instance of one person or one period of time. Rather, stories of relationship making bump up against one another, “plural and often discrepant narratives of possibility.”²¹ The plurality underlines the resiliency of kinship, while also revealing the eruptions of conflict and of coercion that occur when kinship is articulated or arranged.

Narratives, too, convey the emotional dimensions that often disappear from kinship analyses, even the ones that focus on children and parents. Deeply imbued with the feelings of the tellers, the accounts in our chapters represent interpretations of emotion that at once reflect and resist the “techno-psychological” interpretations of Western discourse.²² Like children, interpretations cross national borders and breach the boundaries between persons. Talk of relatedness, kinship, and identity is a coin of the realm these days, challenging the viewpoints of legislators, experts in child welfare, and, we hope, anthropologists.

Relative Power is about the discourses that constitute and then substantiate certain kinds of relationship. *Relative Power* treats adoption and fosterage as forms of constructing parent-child relations that are part of broader processes of *relationship making*. From this point of view, the movement of a child from biological to social parent is only one among many ways of constituting relationship, naming kinship, and identifying persons.

The subtitle of our special issue, “Changing Interpretations of Fosterage and Adoption in Pacific Island Societies,” points to pliability in notions of child exchange. At the same time, our essays predict a further change, in which those terms—resonant of Western interpretations and evaluations—indicate one position on a continuum of practices for caring for children. As Barbara Yngvesson suggests, the notion of *belonging* may replace prescriptions for safety that emphasize the nuclear, biologically based family as the source of security for a child.²³ A notion of belonging brings Pacific Island cultures onto center stage, inasmuch as belonging has defined kinship throughout those cultures for centuries.

Binary contrasts haunt anthropology, especially but not only in our studies of kinship. Nature and culture, biological and social, “real” and “fictive” determine our disciplinary discourses as thoroughly as they determine colloquial interpretations. If our volume challenges these binaries and then goes on to eliminate yet another binary—that between adoption and fosterage—we will have accomplished a significant goal. If, moreover, our special issue banishes the binary contrast between *international* and *interpersonal* transfers of children, we will have accomplished another goal. The remaining goal is finding ways to implement the rights of children without denying the rights of adults.

NOTES

1. Merry (2000, 6).
2. Thomas (1994, 105).
3. Goody (1969).
4. Mac Marshall, "Preface," in "Relative Power," ed. Jeanette Dickerson-Putman and Judith Schachter, special issue, *Pacific Studies* 31, nos. 3–4 (2008): 1–13.
5. Brady (1976, 10).
6. Stocking (1987).
7. See, for example, Strathern (1992a, 1992b), Ginsburg and Rapp (1995), Weston (1991), Modell (1994), Ragone (1994), McKinnon and Franklin (2000).
8. The Marshall Islands are an exception.
9. For cogent critiques of the CRC and Hague Convention, see Yngvesson (2004) and Howell (2006).
10. Dorow (2006, 25).
11. There are of course no numbers for these transfers, and even the statistics on the number of children involved in international adoption are haphazard; see Selman (2006).
12. Linnekin and Poyer (1990, 7).
13. Marshall (1976, 34).
14. See Demian (2004) for a discussion of the commodification of child exchange in Papua New Guinea.
15. Hague Convention (1993, Preamble).
16. Christine Salomon and Christine Hamelin, "Beyond Normative Discourse: Adoption and Violence against Women in New Caledonia," in "Relative Power," ed. Jeanette Dickerson-Putman and Judith Schachter, special issue, *Pacific Studies* 31, nos. 3–4 (2008): 131–55.
17. Manuel Rauchholz, "Demythologizing Adoption: From the Practice to the Effects of Adoption in Chuuk, Micronesia," in "Relative Power," ed. Jeanette Dickerson-Putman and Judith Schachter, special issue, *Pacific Studies* 31, nos. 3–4 (2008): 156–81.
18. Carroll (1970, 11).
19. Bowie (2004, 6).

20. Sahlins (1985, x).
21. Volkman (2005, 4).
22. See Howell (2006) for a discussion of the impact of “technological expertise” on international adoption.
23. Yngvesson (2004).

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**THE MAKING AND NURTURING OF RELATIONSHIPS:
AN UJELANG/ENEWETAK MODEL IN THE
CONTEXT OF CHANGE**

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Pacific adoption has long served as a prototypical contrary case that complicates the ethnocentric and simplistic kinship logics of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology—logical approaches which themselves project and perpetuate Euro-American ideas about relatedness. Yet, at the same moment the Pacific adoption literature has confronted the biases of Euro-American categories of kinship and interpersonal relatedness, it also has perpetuated certain stereotypic contours of those categories by shadowing the outlines of their very existence. Escaping those contours in an English publication is, ultimately, impossible. Nevertheless, more finely rendered accounts are attainable. In this paper, I attempt to fashion one such account, a creolized rather than pidgin anthropological representation. By closely considering the etymological contours of “adoption-like” practices on Ujelang and Enewetak Atolls, by tracking meanings as well as cultural contexts of use, I expand the horizons of what is known about Marshallese nurturance and relationship-making. *Kokajiriri*, typically translated as “adoption,” might better be understood as “relationship-making” through “caregiving”. The varied contours of both relationship-making and caregiving are explored below, along with changes that have occurred in the form and frequency of kokajiriri relationships as a result of shifting forces of globalization and concomitant alterations in the daily lives of local Marshall Islanders.

MUCH OF THE ADOPTION LITERATURE in the Pacific, while confronting the biases of European and American categories of kinship and interpersonal relatedness, perpetuates certain stereotypic contours of those categories by shadowing the outlines of their very existence. Escaping those bounds in a

publication in English is, in all likelihood, impossible. Nevertheless, it is possible to remove to more distance, a Creole rather than pidgin anthropological representation, by closely considering the generation of local practices of child-making and nurturance on Ujelang and Enewetak Atolls. In this article, I follow such a path by aligning the etymological contours of “adoption-like” practices on Ujelang Atoll and tracking their meanings and practical uses.

Kokajiriri children, typically translated as “adopted children” Marshallese-style are in fact “made” (*ka-* “to make something occur,” “to bring [it] into being”), and in this case it is *ajiri* (“children,” or perhaps “dependents”) that are continuously made through certain social practices. Continuity is marked by reduplication (*-riri*), and continuity of practice is critical to *kokajiriri* ties. But *kajiriri* also means “to feed” or “to nurture,” and it is precisely the persistent practice of such nurturance that makes *kokajiriri* relations family or kin in a number of senses.¹ The varied contours of these practices are explored in the course of this article along with changes that have occurred in the contours and frequency of *kokajiriri* relationships as a result of shifting forces of globalization and concomitant alterations in daily life.

Tracking the shifting contours of *kokajiriri* provides us with an important reminder of the way that family forms are shaped and reshaped in specific ways that demonstrate the resilience and productive potency of human agency and cultural practices. Not only do the details of *kokajiriri* positively refute the ethnocentric and overly simplistic logics of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, which themselves project and perpetuate Euro-American ideas about kinship (cf., McKinnon 2005), but the shifting contours of *kokajiriri*-style practices also force us to consider the ways that the processes of so-called modernization, westernization, or globalization actually take place, not through assimilation but through the continuous reassertion and renovation of locally negotiated cultural practice. Thus, the details of Enewetak/Ujelang social practices outlined below not only hold significance as *sui generis* (social phenomena)—another country heard from (as Geertz would say of all such “thick descriptions” [1973, 23])—but these local practices take on added significance as evidence contravening the grand theories mentioned above, theories that fly so high above the ground that they lose any sense of legitimacy since they bear no relationship to the ethnographic facts, that is, the practices of actual people who are members of real societies on the face of this earth.

In the pages that follow, I explore *kokajiriri* relationships and practices of Marshall Islanders, particularly among Enewetak/Ujelang community members with whom I have continued to live for many years since 1976.

Most of this research has come from opportunities I have experienced while living with local people in the Marshall Islands, a group of coral atolls some 2,500 miles south and west of Hawai'i in the central western Pacific. Equally, however, as Marshall Islanders have begun to establish new communities in Hawai'i and the mainland United States, I have lived and worked with people in those locales as well. My greatest exposure to the contours of diasporic Marshallese has come from my research among Marshallese (and largely Enewetak/Ujelang Marshallese) who reside along the Kona coast of Hawai'i. I first selected the Enewetak/Ujelang community as an ideal location for the study of social change at a time when U.S. nuclear testing had forced them to reside in exile from their homeland for well over three decades. However, my own long term commitments to this community have created many opportunities for return research (Carucci 2004a), and these prolonged periods of living my life in intertwined relationships with members of the same community help me to situate the shifting interpersonal histories and practices to which I refer in the pages that follow.

Etymological Explorations and Historical Practices

If the essential contours of kokajiriri are expressed through semantic channels, the practices through which it comes to be instantiated are varied both in intensity and in historical manifestation. In one sense, “children made” (or, more appropriately, “dependents made”) through kokajiriri are quintessentially Marshallese. As the ultimate prestation, the highest form of exchange out of which social relationships are woven, these shared persona represent the essence of giving/sharing that provides the constitutive mastic of Marshallese communities, be they fashioned at the extended family level, the community level, or even at the level of the emerging nation state.

In its earliest life cycle manifestation (if we accept a certain bias toward the “naturalness” of gentrix/offspring birthing ties), young women prior to marriage frequently birth offspring who are kokajiriri(ed) by others, most frequently their families of orientation.² These are just as likely to be kokajiriri families as “birth” families (*nejin*) to begin with. Kokajiriri relationships of this type are fairly seamless ones in which feeding and nurturing of newborns by their grandmothers and grandfathers and by siblings of the gentrix, as well as by the birth mother who, at this stage, remains part of that family, weaves the newborn into the family so that s/he becomes as much a younger sibling of the gentrix as an offspring to her. Indeed, terms of reference and address often position the maturing young child in the family with precision, and, not infrequently (from the biogenetic bias of a Euro-American view), a “shift of generation” indicates that the child is brought up as a younger sibling to her (biological) mother.

Two of my own older sisters by adoption both had offspring of this sort (born to their daughters), and, in one case, my sister's own biological youngest child (*lokonji*) was just slightly "younger" (in Euro-American weeks) than her kokajiriri child (the biological child of her daughter). In my lengthy experience with this family, the kokajiriri children have never been looked down upon or treated in any way inferior to the biological offspring. Indeed, in some minor ways, they may be more highly indulged. Nevertheless, these children are called *ajiri turin ial* (children beside the path) or *ajiri turerein ial* (children at the side of the path). In translation these metaphors seem to stress abandonment, and, indeed, there is some possibility that this designation may have been a mission-inspired method of marginalization. Certainly, rampant sexuality was thought to be deserving of discipline.³

For local people, however, *ial* refers not only to the village path but also to paths of relationship, the so-called kinship ties long reified by anthropologists. And for an *ajiri turin ial*, his/her paths of relationship most typically will be identical to those of the mother and will exclude those paths that lead through the various families of the father. The child is left along the side of those paths, rather than being incorporated into them. Thus, although many kokajiriri relationships broaden the optative social pathways available to a person, this form of kokajiriri repositions the child in a network of social relationships already explored by his mother and her siblings. Although a number of relationships to land are available to an *ajiri turin ial*, these relationships will also approximate those of the child's mother and will not include other potential relationships through his/her genitor. Therefore, if there is any conflict felt by kokajiriri children residing with (biological) grandparents, it does not result from abandonment but from the oddities of their structural position vis-à-vis their agemates. Perhaps it is on account of the array of structural realignments that *ajiri turin ial* are overindulged by their parent/grandparent caregivers. Often among the youngest, they receive the overindulgence that is culturally proscribed for *lokonji* ("those behind," last born). These children will be closely bound to their families of orientation because they have no other locations through which they may weave their identities into the land. Finally, as the youngest members of their generations (as younger siblings to their [biological] mothers), they will likely have a limited number of potential marriage partners, prolonging the length of time spent with their families of orientation.

In emotional terms, kokajiriri relationships of this variety are frequently said to be the closest of all kokajiriri relationships since the endearment in grandparent/grandchild relationships exceeds that embedded in parent/child relationships (and is necessarily defined in opposition to it) (Carucci 2007). At the same time that grandparental kokajiriri children are made through

practices of residence, working land, feeding, inheritance, and other daily routines, the birthing relationship of the (biological) mother is not held in secret, and the kokajiriri(ed) child certainly knows that his/her parents are, simultaneously, grandparents. Therefore, the types of ambivalent emotions, feelings of rejection, and animosities that Rauchholz (2008) attributes to adoptive relationships in Chuuk are no more frequent in Enewetak/Ujelang kokajiriri relationships than they are in birthing and nurturance relationships (so-called biological relationships). Indeed, when the parent in a kokajiriri relationship is also fashioned as a grandparent, they are blessed with tinges of the cross-generational solidarities and indulgences that so impressed Radcliffe Brown (1952, chap. I).⁴ Even when the parent/grandparent dies, disputes over land will not cause animosities to surface since, in the abstract, a grandchild has as much right to grandparental lands as does an offspring by birth.

The dynamics of the grandparental type of kokajiriri relationships, like all relationships, change their contours throughout the life cycle, with one of the most volatile periods surrounding the time when the kokajiriri(ed) offspring is nearing or has just *koba*(ed) (“combined,” entered a marriage). Inasmuch as this period of time involves substantial renegotiations of power, its marking as “a (potential) time of capsizing” is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, kokajiriri relationships of the grandparental variety do not dissolve at this juncture, in all likelihood on account of the links to land that result from having lived on and worked a certain parcel of land for an extended period of time. Of course, those ties through land are equally shared with a person’s kokajiriri family, all of whom consume foods from that land, solidifying their unity as a social unit as well as expressing their oneness with the land.

My own elder sister’s kokajiriri child, along with her near-identical agemate, born to my sister, provides a good comparison of the experiential circumstances of a young kokajiriri child. Both of these young girls, just over two years old in 1982–1983, referred to their mother as “*mama*” and were referred to as *nejō* by their mother though, obviously, one of the girls, Belita (a pseudonym), was kokajiriri while the other, Marita, was, in Euro-American terms, Belita’s aunt (her birth mother’s youngest sister). The only time that Belita was separated out from her female agemate was when her “biological” mother was present. When addressing Belita, she would vary her references to her own mother asking Belita, for example, to “take this thing to *būbū*” (grandma), and “take it to *mama*” (mother; both Belita’s mother [kokajiriri] and her own). My sister’s treatment of both younger girls was similar, although inasmuch as her own offspring was slightly more cantankerous than Belita, it often seemed as though Belita received special favors. On March 23, 1983, Belita and her sister were both playing in the yard while one of their older sisters and mother were attempting to wash clothes. Belita’s sister

Marita kept dumping powdered soap in the laundry tub as my sister yelled at her from a distance: “Marita: *nanna, jaab kokurri men ne*” (Marita, bad, do not ruin that thing [near you]). As Marita persisted, my sister continued to chastise her and tossed small paving pebbles at her to get her daughter to desist. She then shifted to a new tactic: “*Ah, le, Marita, Belita ej mona kraka. Kwokonan ke mona*” (Hey, Miss Marita, Belita is eating cookies. Do you want to eat [them])? Belita was not yet eating cookies, but she clambered over to her mother/grandmother who opened the footlocker and opened a sleeve of cookies. Marita considered this option but still was not enticed.

When I saw the two girls for a shorter period of time in 1990, both girls (at that time around ten years of age) were the closest of siblings. Belita certainly gave no evidence of having suffered through a different sort of childhood than her sister. Now, with responsibilities for childcare, minor cooking tasks, and doing the laundry, both girls seemed to appreciate their sibling/agemate because sharing these burdens made them somewhat less onerous.

Three and a half years later, in 1994, Marita, my sister’s “own” child, was again the one to be sanctioned. Bolder than Belita, she was now running off to meet with her young male cross-cousins, again incurring her mother’s wrath. On July 12, 1994, I was in the household waiting for the girls to finish cooking a meal, and, again, my sister was scolding Marita.

“Belita, *eeh! Je jəɲin mōŋā.*” (Belita, *eeh* [suffix meaning “are you there”]! We have not yet eaten.)

B: “*Iŋā. Marita ejaɲin itok.*” (Yes [I’m here]. Marita has not yet come).

“*E bed ia?*” (Where is she?)

B: “*Ear etal im boktok aiboj eo.*” (She ran to bring back water.)

“*Etke ejanin bar roltok?*” (Why has she not yet returned?)

Belita’s sister’s son: “*Immotalok ippen laddik rane.*” ([She has] gone off to the windward with the young boys of ours.)

Z: “*Iio! Immotalok? Ebon emōn ledik eo.*” (An exclamation like “Well, there you go! Off to the windward? The girl will never be OK.”)

This particular day is not atypical for this period of time in the household. Belita is the ordinary, dependable, offspring and Marita the wild and adventuresome one. Does this particular dynamic result from the close age of the two and the fact that Belita is adopted? Does it result from the constant comparison of the demeanor of the two? Perhaps it does (although this case is unique in the girls’ age positioning as virtual-twins, and also as the youngest of the sibling set/“offspring” [*lokonji*] offering no exact comparisons). But the demeanor manifest in the family certainly does not inherently place Marita at an advantage over Belita. If anything, Marita’s relative rebellious

streak may have been fashioned out of the necessity for her to have to share the indulged position of the youngest with a female “twin” who, in lieu of Belita’s adoption, would not have been a sibling “just like” her. In large part, however, various positionalities within the family emerge in relation to the interactive practices of daily life, as much the result of my sister’s mode of coping with the two girls as the cultural proscriptions that give a certain contour to childrearing and to being a child.

By 1997, Marita was part of a *koba* relationship, an (experimental) marriage, and like Belita’s (biological) mother, this one did not prove to be perduring. Belita did not marry for some years, although when I encountered her on the Big Island (Hawai‘i) in 2003, she was married to a man from another part of the Marshall Islands. She had recently been living with one of her older siblings in Honolulu and was thinking of moving to the Big Island (although in 2006, she had not yet made this move). She said “*Mama, ej emon wot an moud.*” (Mother, [her] life is still going well [she is healthy]).

I hesitated, and began to ask “Mama, who?” since there were several of her “mothers” resident in Hawai‘i. But before I could finish, she said, “*Būbū. Ej emōn wōt.*” (Grandma. S/he is still well), indulging her thinking that, given an American sensibility, I would want her to track the genealogical connection to her “grandmother” rather than the relationship-making connection that was foregrounded in her initial reference.

Caregiving of the grandparental sort, along with its nuanced flexibilities, is explored in a different setting by Dickerson-Putman (2008). It is particularly noteworthy that the Raivavae practices outlined by Dickerson-Putman are themselves historically pliable, shifting their semiotic and pragmatic contours as issues of colonialism and globalization begin to have greater importance for Raivavae residents. As I demonstrate below, analogous patterns of change are apparent among Enewetak/Ujelang people. These patterns stress the primary importance of flexible relationship-making strategies that are refashioned in innovative ways in relation to shifting social and historical conditions, yet retain critical cultural contours of precedent practices. The emergent contours of such practices along with their multifaceted forms directly contradict the simplistic claims of evolutionary psychologists who see “the expenditure of resources on those who are genetically unrelated or distantly related . . . as a ‘waste’ of both genetic and economic inheritance” (McKinnon 2005, 62). By such a logic, the wide array of relationship-making practices of Pacific peoples multiplied many times over by the continuously emergent set of new historical forms constitute a vast wasteland of intellectual energy and practical activity. This paper, and others in this volume, demonstrates multiple ways that cultural practices operate in accord with a diversity of emergent *sui generis* logics that often revel in the squander of Eurocentric figurations of genetic and economic resources.

In a second form, as a type of coparenthood, *kokajiriri* inextricably weaves a young married pair into one arm of an extant extended family of one sort or another. The fetus or infant serves as the operative gift that indexically vivifies and announces this weaving, yet the actual thread-count that marks the solidity of the bond may become greater or lesser through time depending upon subsequent exchanges and demonstrations of mutual support that overlay this highest ranked of gifts. In the most tightly woven relationships, children birthed to two or three families flow in and out of the households that seem to give them spatial and temporal distinction with such fluidity that the *nejin/kokajiriri* boundary virtually disappears.

Indeed, since *kokajiriri* is a coparenthood/cochild relationship, not giving up one set of parents, and one family, for another (Carroll 1970a, 123), the blending and merging are often only the extant inscriptions of long-standing, cross-generational unities that mark “separate” extended families as “really one” (*juon wōt*). *Kokajiriri* links of all sorts serve as a practical pneumonics of life for Marshallese. Regardless of the types of links, engendered through birthing or enacted through feeding/caring for, with the passage of time and with the constituting of new alliances and relationships, there is a sense that old established relationships have become weaker and less intense. *Kokajiriri* is a practice that contravenes such separating tendencies bringing stories of past closeness back into practiced sharing, comingling, and solidarity. Of course, like all relationships that rely on continuity of practice, *kokajiriri* is but a singular prestation, even if it engenders both promise of continued sharing and obligation (Mauss 1967). In the most threadbare cases of *kokajiriri*, those in which subsequent interweavings do not overlay the primary warp and woof threads of coparenthood/cochildhood, one is allowed to look back on the *kokajiriri* relationship as marking what was at one point in the past an obviously closer relationship. In either case, these forms of coparenthood are quintessentially Marshallese. Based on practice rather than genetic ties,⁵ they ebb and flow with the actual invested energies of those involved in the *kokajiriri*.

An unlimited number of examples express the way in which past closeness comes to be reinscribed in contemporary discourses that revivify and enliven past histories of solidarity because, indeed, this is one of the most common ways of giving manifest form to the extraordinary social advantages of *kokajiriri*.

INTERVIEWEE: Don't you see that the great grandmother of Liperia and the great grandmother of Liaanji were siblings? Just because that group [Liaanji's family] now live in Majuro, this [fact] is meaningless. They *kokajiriri*[ed] the infant because they are really close.

LM: Don't they [the local family] really miss her?

INTERVIEWEE: They would never say no [to a request to kokajiriri Liperia's daughter], because they are one only [juon wōt]. Now, this group, when they go to Majuro, they "fly" right over and reside with that group [Liaanji's household]. And on the Tenth Day,⁶ and times of that sort, the other group they can fly toward us and stay on Enewetak. They do not go to their own place on that islet [Meden]; they stay here with this group [Liperia's household]. This group [the large extended family back through the common grandmothers] they are really close.

In point of fact, although close in certain ways, this large extended family is frequently mentioned as one that was nearly split into fragments by an Enewetak land dispute that began prior to World War II. The land dispute re-erupted with the move from Ujelang back to Enewetak in 1980, and, if anything, the request to kokajiriri Liperia's soon-to-be-born child served as a way to bridge significant rifts in the larger extended family. It was the relative position of the two women (Liperia and Liaanji) as agemates and friends in school that created a sense of unity between the young women, not the fact that their families were close to one another prior to Liperia giving her child to Liaanji in kokajiriri. Therefore, the entire discourse of perpetual closeness paraphrased above is an historical artifact fashioned out of kokajiriri.⁷ It draws on the "relationship-making" potency of kokajiriri to create an imagined nearness (although certainly with practical effects) out of an alternative history of turbulence.

A second example comes from multiple Enewetak stories that reconfigure the dual Enewetak chieftainships (the Enewetak chieftainship that Tobin equates with Pita and the Enjebi chieftainship associated with Ebream [Tobin 1968]) into a single entity.⁸ Although contexts vary, it was common for community elders in the 1970s and 1980s to say that the Enjebi and Enewetak chiefs were "really one." One senior man, with ties to both chiefly "halves" of Enewetak couched his talk of unity in the following way: "Do you not see that that fellow Pita, [he] took the offspring of Ebream as [his] own, really [his] own [lukuun an], he would never throw (him) away.⁹ And that fellow Ebream, (he) also took Rinton (Pita's biological grandson) and kokajiriri[ed] [him]. And up until the current day he resides there to the windward because he is kokajiriri.¹⁰ All of his power (*maroŋ*) it comes through Ebream, not Pita. These chiefs, in reality, are just one. They are chiefs birthed from one another (*kalotak nan doon*) and nursed together (*kaninin ippen doon*)." In other words, for certain purposes, kokajiriri serves to unify chiefly regimes that have long been understood, both within the community and by others, to be historically distinct.

These medial forms of kokajiriri were taken by an earlier generation of anthropologists to be the prototypical forms, and, perhaps examples similar to the above were the common forms that they witnessed. However, it is also possible that a certain ethnocentricity convinced these researchers that kokajiriri filled a gap that most closely resembled Euro-American adoption, providing children to childless couples and supplementing the size of a sibling set of those with children. Of course, many recognized the flexibility of this practice, such as Goodenough (1955) who argued that these fluid kinship arrangements, including Pacific-style adoptions, were functionally adaptive in a situation where the distribution of land might get out of sync with internal population dynamics.¹¹ There is little doubt that some kokajiriri relationships are established with the intention of family-fashioning in mind. For example, on Ujelang and Enewetak, Takaji and Jebe were a married couple who could not produce children of their own. Nevertheless, they were parents of a family of four, each of whom was a dependent made through a kokajiriri relationship. In many other cases, however, it is not the lack of children, nor the minimal size of a family that provides motivation for establishing a coparent/cochild relationship. Rather, it is the extant attempt to revivify or project into the future the relationship between coparents and the extended families of those coparents that inspires a young couple to engage in such an exchange and comingling of clan and extended-family essence.

The third major type of kokajiriri relationship lies at a substantial distance from the medial ideal described above. These relationships are established among adults and include, but certainly are not limited to, my own adoption by Biola into the *bwij in Jalij* and several other extended families, as well as the Ujelang/Enewetak community more generally (Carucci 1997b).¹² It is these relationships that force the semantic understanding of kokajiriri to be expanded from child-making to a broader concept of “dependent-making” and, with the passage of time, to something like relationship-making. Although the details of these relationships vary, all are rooted in feeding and caring for another (Carucci 2004b). One of my own fathers, Onil, originally from Pingelap, but integrated into the community during World War II, is also part of a kokajiriri relationship but one of yet another contour than my own. That is, when my mother, Biola, adopted me, I was clearly an outsider and far younger than mama. Thus, in several respects, my own kokajiriri relationship drew on many of the same features as the child-making ideal. Even though my own ineptitude in certain Marshallese skills made me more dependent than many kokajiriri islander offspring, in other respects (wealth and “white privilege”) made me less dependent and, perhaps, more desirable. Nevertheless, kokajiriri relationships of this sort were fairly frequent. Ben (from Saipan) and Itan (from Chuuk) were notable analogues at

the time that Biola adopted me. Both were outsiders, and both were substantially younger than the person who adopted them. In contrast, Onil's kokajiriri relationship with Druie was rather different. The two were nearer in age and had more of a friendship relationship, but Onil (the outsider) fortified the kokajiriri relationship with Druie, frequently stopping by her home in the opposite half of the village, not uncommonly with a request for a small favor, but with equal frequency bringing a gift for Druie or her husband. Somewhat younger than Onil, Druie always treated him as a father and addressed him as *papa*.¹³ In spite of the fact that Druie was, in absolute years, the junior partner in this relationship, her seniority derived from her local status and from the fact that she was a chief's daughter. Therefore, she was the instigator of the relationship: she kokajiriri(ed) (*kokajiririki*) Onil, not vice versa.

At a later juncture, when my future wife, Mary, first came to Enewetak from the United States in 1982, she became part of a kokajiriri relationship with Lombwe, and his kokajiriri relationship with her was one of older sibling/younger sibling, with Lombwe "adopting" Mary as his younger sibling. At one level, this relationship may have been established in this way to align my own generation with Mary's (and place us in opposite clans), since, even though we were not married at the time, we were clearly not siblings, yet resided in the same household, thus confounding local categories. Nevertheless, Mary's adoption caused me to ask more detailed questions about kokajiriri, and I discovered that Lombwe's adoption of Mary as a younger sibling was not unique. Other kokajiriri relationships, both on Enewetak and elsewhere in the Marshalls, were engendered along older sibling/younger sibling lines. Indeed, adoptions of this sort are far more frequent among mature residents who, according to one consultant, "were nearly one in their throats" (that is, felt as though they were especially close emotionally but of similar rank). Nevertheless, not all sibling adoptions are adult affairs. During the same year Mary was adopted, one of my own offspring-through-adoption, Erta (my older brother's daughter) around age seven, kokajiriri(ed) an infant with whom she was particularly enamored as her *jatō* (younger sibling). However, Erta's mother often spoke of the infant involved in this kokajiriri relationship as *nejin* Erta ("born to Erta," or "the offspring of Erta") and, in later years, Erta referred to her as both "nejō" and "jatō." Although some subtle contextual shifts may have accompanied Erta's selection of the different referents, I could not detect any systematic reason for the alternate forms.

Overall, none of these variants of kokajiriri relationships are as frequent as the child-making forms of the first two types, but they still occur with some frequency and are certainly not just marginal practices. Rather, such

relationship-making is the broader form, one that stresses “feeding” (*enajidiki*), “watching over” (*lali*) and “taking close care of” (*kajiriri* or *kejbaroki*) rather than the “making of children.” As such, I would argue, these less-frequent forms in fact capture the essence of *kokajiriri* which always involves relationship-making and taking close care of.¹⁴ Indeed, the switching of terms of reference and address in Erta’s *kokajiriri* relationship confirm the precedence of the practices of feeding, caring for, and watching over. These aims are equally well fulfilled with *ko(kajiriri)* sibling ties as with *kok(ajiri)ri* child ties. Although anthropologists have long recognized that Pacific adoption is somewhat different than Euro-American adoption, once relationship-making in the extended sense comes to be seen as its core, Marshallese adoption is, in many ways, the antithesis of American adoption which, even in its liberal current-day variants, continues to adumbrate the relationships between the co-relatives who give and receive the child rather than use this quintessential gift to publicly mark the elaboration of those social interrelationships.

Of course, “liberal” American adoptions sometimes do allow for contact between the birth parents (usually the mother) and the adoptive parents, but these relationships are often fraught with feelings of unease. Far more telling, stories that stress the paradigmatically central “naturalness” of biogenetic relatedness are captured and widely distributed in television clips of on-camera reunions of adopted children with their long lost (“real,” biological) parents. These depictions, which elide ambivalences and gloss over feelings of unease, highlight the (cultural) irrefutability of the biological links that irrevocably unify “parent” and “child.” Rather than stressing (in Marshallese terms) the social isolation of one set of coparents, or highlighting the intricate layers of emotional work and physical labor that “made” the real life family of the child, the film clips stress the latent sources of alienation, if only in the culturally foregrounded biological trope itself, that have driven the offspring to find life’s fulfillment in the discovery of their “real” parent. These nationally televised myths about the naturalness of the biological family, of course, never stress the subsequent relationships that may (or may not) emerge between the offspring and the genitrix/genitor, nor the shifting relationships with the very real parents who raised the child, much less the relationships between these long-isolated families who seldom share any relationship other than that differentially mediated through the birthed/adopted child.

Certainly, this glimpse of American adoption is far from exhaustive. It is meant only to demonstrate the ways in which American adoption builds centrally on a single set of nuclear-family-focused relationships at the cost of strangling many of the other potential relationship-engendering possibilities that are part of Marshallese adoptions. Nevertheless, my brief analysis of

the populist depictions of American adoption on television align with other systematic research on American adoption,¹⁵ and particularly with the work of Judith Modell (1994, 2001; also see Schachter 2008).

Digging far deeper than the selective, if overdetermined, images of show-host biological family reunions, Modell notes that adoptees who seek out their “real” (biological) parents, all too often are struck by “the thinness of a purely biological relationship” (1994). Far more critical than their biological or adoptive grounding, so-called real kinship relations were those where people “worked at” the relationship (Modell 1994), an idea that resonates with Marshallese ideas that kinship has little to do with genetic endowment or other inherent qualities of persons and everything to do with relationship-making. In related work, Modell found that even though so-called open adoption throws a gauntlet at the consanguineal core of (American) kinship (2001, 247), in fact, “redrawing the lines of kinship is rarely easy” (247), and “the move toward openness . . . has been slow and cautious” (249). In a very real sense, open adoptions are focused far more on “*the transfer of information rather than the creation of kinship ties*” (254: original italics) and this exchange of information helps distance adoption from the genealogical principle that lies at “the cultural core of American kinship” (258). The radical distinctions between the operational principles of American adoption and kokajiriri are even more evident in these comparisons inasmuch as kokajiriri, in its very instantiation, stresses relationship-making without any thought given to individual autonomy, choice, or control—core components that help to situate the conditions of American open adoptions (Modell 2001, 258).

Indeed, in a very real sense, kokajiriri exists as an embedded fragment of Marshallese social practices wherein the giving of a child engenders far more obligation and entertains the possibility of so many future social ties that the increase in rank through giving this highest of gifts far outweighs the concomitant risk of not having an equivalent gift returned. Ideas of personal autonomy are not even a consideration in Marshallese society where persons exist as social beings, not as radical individuals imbued with certain inalienable rights. All of these complex interrelationships only serve to reinforce my initial point about the absolute incommensurability of cultural categories and practices that make the idea of a simple translation process between kokajiriri and adoption nearly impossible to think.

Shifting Parameters of Marshallese Kokajiriri

Not surprisingly, rapid and substantial shifts in lifestyle among the Enewetak/Ujelang community, and among Marshall Islanders more generally, have

brought about concomitant changes in the shape of kokajiriri practices in Marshallese communities. Equally, it is of little surprise that such changes are, in a very general way, related to shifts in subsistence practices (or in the so-called economic conditions) that people have been forced to face in recent years. Nevertheless, the particular shapes of the shifts in Marshallese adoption are far from predictable from those base conditions. Rather, as Sahlins contends (1994), something far more fundamental, shaped not by subsistence practices or economics but by the cultural milieu, comes to lend a particular shape to historical practices. Such is certainly true of Enewetak/Ujelang social practices in the current day. To date at least, this shape is far different than that taken by American adoption and American kin practices which, during the past 150 years, have moved toward increasingly more mobile, nuclear family and subnuclear family units that can be moved across the landscape with some frequency in accord with the demands of the (largely urban) capitalist marketplace.¹⁶ Beginning in a rather different cultural landscape, Enewetak/Ujelang people, ultimately faced with similar economic forces, have come up with quite different solutions to the issues of family and adoption.

As is generally true throughout the Marshall Islands, the frequency of adoption among members of the Enewetak/Ujelang community has dropped significantly since World War II. Although the precise frequency of adoption is not known, Marshallese adoption certainly exceeded 50 percent prior to the war. Among a group of seniors with whom I worked in 1990 and 1991 collecting their recollections of World War II, the rate of adoption was over 80 percent. Similarly, over 85 percent of the members of the Enewetak/Ujelang community who were born prior to the war were in the “junior” part of a kokajiriri relationship at some time during their lives. Of this very high number of adoptive relationships among senior members of the community, perhaps only 50 percent were critical to that person’s own self-constructions. In other words, of the 85 percent, not all were vital relationships at the time, since, in many cases, the senior member of the relationship was no longer alive. In many of these cases, terms of reference (indeed, even sometimes terms of embedded address), along with residence and land rights, still marked the relationship quite clearly and made it vital. In other cases, an earlier kokajiriri relationship had not worked out. The relationship was remembered by the most astute oral historians but was not memorialized in a way that would give it any long-term historical efficacy.

This is only to say that, like other optative kin practices that are well known throughout the Pacific, percentage assessments of kokajiriri relationships are highly variable and, therefore, of limited utility. Noting that an adoptive

relationship once existed is far different from claiming an adoptive relationship as a primary component of one's identity. And, like many relationships, kokajiriri relationships are called upon strategically to serve one's own interests. As a person becomes aged, he or she may "call in" favors from adopted offspring and play one offspring against another to obtain certain desired foods, a particular residential situation, or other goods or services. And, after a person's death, the "closeness claims" of various offspring (birth kin or adopted) are strategically deployed to attempt to secure a certain right vis-à-vis all other claimants who were related to the dead person. Indeed, one of the most hotly contested land disputes on Enewetak in the current day focuses on claims from a kokajiriri relationship in the early twentieth century (Carucci 1997c).

However variable the rate between vital, comatose, and kokajiriri relationships in repose, the current rate of adoption has dropped substantially since the World War II era. My current rough estimate places adoptions at around 30 percent or 35 percent with about 20 percent of those being operationalized in daily practice. Taken at face value, this significant shift commands attention, but I believe that closer scrutiny of day-to-day practices demonstrates that something far more complex than simple assimilation to Euro-American forms is taking place. Clarity, however, requires us to consider the historical conditions under which these different approaches to adoption came into being.

Although the contours of Enewetak social organization in the pre-World War II era are far from transparent, it is clear that this community of about 165 people was not only small but relatively isolated, with intra-atoll migration tightly controlled by the Japanese government that administered the area. Skilled students were allowed to travel to Pohnpei to pursue schooling beyond the third grade, and a very small number of men were employed as laborers. In large part, however, the rest of the community remained on Enewetak, fishing, weaving, and making copra, with long-term face-to-face relationships guaranteed. The population had dropped substantially since the turn of the century, and people alive in the 1970s clearly remember being worried about the Enewetak community simply dying out or, during the war, facing eradication. Fears about the community dying out rested, in part at least, on the recognition that one of the four matri-clans on the atoll had recently "died" and a second would die in the near future. It was unclear to residents whether it was possible for two clans alone to successfully intermarry in perpetuity. On the other hand, community solidarity was such that one potential source of new clans, brought by women who were in-married into the community, was not welcomed. Instead, all in-married women were dealt with as though they were clan-less. Their offspring were marriageable

as if they all constituted one large amorphous clan with no manifest links to local lands or local extended families. These conditions clearly led to rampant relationship-making. Childless families, including the two women who were the final substance-transmitting persona in their respective clans, Mede (for diPako) and Bolina (for Jiduul), both had adopted offspring. But equally, adoptions linked numerous other extended families, both large and small. As noted earlier, Rinton, the oldest offspring of Ioanej (chief of the Enewetak half of Enewetak) was adopted by Ebream (chief of the Enjebi half of Enewetak) and, in a similar vein, Hertej, oldest male in the large *bwij* (extended family) of Jalej, was adopted by Pita, Ioanej's father. Therefore, kokajiriri helped to interweave powerful families at least as much as it filled the ranks of those without children. In this time period, relationship-making was an all-important aim in a community that saw its entire future as being dependent on banding together to survive the significant threats to its very existence by varied impacts of colonialism.

After World War II, when Enewetak people were placed in exile on Ujelang to allow the United States to conduct nuclear tests on their home atoll, the conditions of relative isolation they had faced on Enewetak were largely perpetuated, although there was no overt ban on inter-atoll migration. Indeed, the traditionalist policies of the United States toward Micronesia were quite effective for a time on Ujelang because the long-term isolation of the community, the independent chieftainships on Enewetak (without links of subservience or domination in relation to Marshall Islands chiefs), and the Japanese administration of Ujelang and Enewetak from Pohnpei, meant that Enewetak people had few links to other communities in the Marshall Islands. A few outside adoptions were constituted, including one between the Marshallese high chief, Kabua Kabua and Pita, one of the Enewetak high chiefs. But even this kokajiriri relationship remained in abeyance for years without nurturance, until it was resurrected as a political tool in recent years (see Carucci 1997c). Rather, the conditions for internal adoption continued on Ujelang until the time that the community was preparing to be repatriated on Enewetak.¹⁷ With the beginning of Tempedede (temporary resettlement), however, in 1977, new conditions of mobility began to significantly alter the contours of kokajiriri.

In an important way, the precedence for changes that have occurred since 1977 were already established in the 1960s and early 1970s when a few Ujelang families moved to Majuro to set up an urban enclave of Ujelang residents. It was at this time that Kabua gave the Ujelang people a tiny parcel of land on the small islands between Uliga and Delap that soon became known as "Ujelang Town." Early residents in Majuro included Alek, Ijmael, Balik,

Yojitaro, and Majao, to be followed eventually by the family of Jitiam and Erine and others. These family dwellings became residential headquarters for all sorts of urban migrants from Ujelang and, somewhat later, Enewetak. In particular, they took in the children of their relatives, who, in a very real sense, were their children as well, thus blurring the lines between ordinary Ujelang parentage, kokajiriri, and something that Americans might label “fosterage” (although no comparable category exists in Marshallese, except for a term to describe the caretakers of chiefly offspring). In ordinary parentage, a whole upper generation of persons are either mothers and fathers, or older or younger mother’s brothers to the generation of offspring who will succeed them, and in a very real sense, they take on the varied responsibilities for all of the younger generation offspring of the community (although what constitutes a “generation” has some considerable flexibility depending upon the extended family of reference and circumstances of the moment) (Carucci 1989). As we have seen, kokajiriri further marks certain of these social relationships and overly elaborates them as channels of caretaking and reciprocal giving. Fosterage, I suppose, lies somewhere in between, without a public announcement and the promise of continuity of kokajiriri but with relationship-making commitments that far surpass those expected of a communal parent in the community at large. This intermediate and more flexible form of “caring for,” which upon occasion becomes formally marked by a proclaimed kokajiriri relationship, is what has come to fill the percentage gap in kokajiriri in the era that has followed the community’s return to Enewetak.

With the return to Enewetak, formally completed in 1980, scheduled weekly flights connected the atoll with Majuro, 540 miles away. Although the flights occurred irregularly, they certainly led to a massive increase in mobility. Even in the late 1970s, Ujelang residents had become quite mobile, with summer trips, mainly to Majuro for church events, visitation, and resupply, taking as much as 40 percent of the population from Ujelang. Air transport on Enewetak provided an additional avenue for mobility that has continued to the current day. Financial setbacks that accompanied the end of the first Compact of Free Association, and that have been exacerbated under the Bush regime, have caused a significant slow down in travel. Nevertheless, community mobility continues at an unprecedented rate when compared to the first twenty years on Ujelang, an era when government supply vessels anchored in the lagoon only two or three times per year.¹⁸ Mobility placed an incessant stress on the residents of Ujelang Town, eventually causing some community members to seek housing in other sections of Majuro. In the 1980s, with partial compensation for nuclear damages in the form of monetary payments, the rate of visitations to Majuro increased,

the dispersal process intensified, and these movements by members of the community were accompanied by a rapidly increasing rate of intermarriage with people from the Marshall Islands and, particularly, from Majuro. Many of these intermarriages gave Enewetak people links to families with land rights in the government center.

One outcome of the stress on residence in Ujelang Town was a shift to more flexible forms of caregiving by full-time residents of this small enclave. Shorter-term agreements to “watch over” a relative’s offspring moved caregiving from the long-term coparentage commitments of *kokajiriri* to a form that resembles fosterage. A formal term has not yet arisen to classify these relationships, but usually, in discriminating them from *kokajiriri*, they are described as *lali wōt* (solely watching over) or *kejbaroki wōt* (just taking care of).

Beginning in the early to mid-1990s, the pattern of “taking care of” expanded in quantum proportion as people began to move to the Big Island of Hawai‘i in considerable numbers. If living in Majuro was a short-term affair for most Enewetak visitors who tended to stay until their supply of money (and often much of their welcome) ran out, those who lived full-time in Ujelang Town had to have two or three extended family members who were employed. On the Big Island, visitors typically stay for much longer periods of time; therefore, several workers are required for each large household. Some are engaged in full-time labor, whereas others harvest macadamia nuts, coffee, or perform other tasks that allow for flexible schedules. Nevertheless, even though the Ujelang/Enewetak residents on the Big Island must adapt to the same conditions of a capitalist marketplace as long-term U.S. residents, their specific modes of dealing with these conditions is quite different. Household size, already robust on Ujelang and larger in Ujelang Town, has further increased on the Big Island ranging from a small domicile with thirteen to the large household where I frequently ate in 2002–2003 with as many as thirty-two residents.¹⁹

These households, some with multiple sleeping quarters, all of which share a common cookhouse, include people related through a number of different paths, including *kokajiriri*. Lacking the standard senior household head that was common on Ujelang, each is headed by a young or middle-aged couple, with younger and older relatives attached to that founding couple. A small group of such couples founded this Big Island community and continue to be the leaders in the group. Several of these households also include more distant kin that are being “watched over” as they attend school or seek to get established on their own somewhere on the Big Island. The duration of their stay varies. Some of the school children have been in residence for several years and many of them are not likely to leave until they

graduate or find a marriage mate and begin a splinter household of their own. Others find jobs and soon move to other residences. If the job does not work out, however, they often return to this household of migration orientation until another work opportunity presents itself. In a few instances, Enewetak/Ujelang families on the Big Island include Marshall Islanders from Bikini, Jaluij, Majuro, and elsewhere. Caring-for relations of this sort are probably not unique, since Marshall notes that Namoluk residents in the United States often build increasingly generic notions of shared identity with Chuukese and others from Micronesia (Marshall 2004, 140).

Nevertheless, tracking the histories of contemporary kokajiriri relationships in Majuro and on the Big Island demonstrates that some of these caring-for relations will become formal kokajiriri relationships.

Although some of those in residence in these large Big Island families are related as kokajiriri, many are in a caring-for relationship reminiscent of fosterage. This more transitional link of interpersonal relationship offers far more flexibility than kokajiriri. Nevertheless, kokajiriri relationships may grow out of such links. Indeed, four of the frequent residents of the household with which I affiliated were linked through kokajiriri relationships that had begun as reciprocation for a watching-over relationship in Majuro. In a neighboring household, one young girl, a daughter (or in anthropological jargon: a brother's daughter) of the man who coheaded this household had adopted one of the young children in the household. Although she helped with most household tasks, she also dedicated extra time to her young kokajiriri offspring. Other such caring-for relationships will fall into disuse. These pathways of relationship may become overgrown with brush and simply abandoned. On the other hand, they may be resurrected, cleared of brush, and revitalized several years in the future.

In the diasporic conditions that Enewetak/Ujelang people now face, the formerly multifaceted tentacles of kokajiriri have further differentiated themselves, forming a new set of affiliate practices that draw on the same symbolic toolkit as kokajiriri but with new arms that allow for greater temporal and spatial flexibility. These flexibilities now perhaps better translate as fosterage rather than adoption, yet neither term captures the sensibilities of Marshallese practice that align *kejbarok* (watching over) and kokajiriri. Even though the look of these Marshallese practices is quite different from American social adaptations to increased urbanization and capitalist production, the two forms share in common their stress on flexibility. However, these flexibilities have their unique cultural and historical contours, and in the Enewetak/Ujelang case, the newly arisen social practices incorporate a long-standing cultural focus on relationship-making while shifting to new globalized senses of spatiality and temporality in which social connections

may shift their focal contours several times over during a person's lifetime as increased mobility demands. Such flexibilities have always been an integral part of Pacific relationship-making; it is their relative pacing that has, in recent years, contributed to the emergence of innovative social forms.

Meaning-Making and the Histories of the Disempowered

In their moves from Ujelang and Enewetak to Majuro and the Big Island, a substantial shift in the locus of power has occurred. Communal self-sufficiencies on the outer islands were substantial. In Majuro, new chiefs and newly emergent governmental authorities had to be reckoned with, and on the Big Island, Enewetak/Ujelang Marshall Islanders are made marginal, not only through the discourses and exclusionary practices of other residents of Hawai'i, their new associates at a certain level, but equally through their participation in a capitalist economy that reiterates and creates many of the conditions of their marginality. At the same time that evidences of these marginalizing forces are heard and felt routinely, however, Enewetak/Ujelang people live their lives with other concerns and motivations occupying the core of their lives.

There are certainly those who then say, "so why do these newfounded strategies that maximize flexibilities of relationship-making matter? Are they not just a minor detour along a trail that ultimately leads to assimilation and submission to the inexorable forces of capitalism?" I believe that the answer is "no," that the detours are, in fact, the real, meaning-making histories of lived experiences of actual people who, through their daily encounters, their struggles, and resistances, inscribe the uncharted counter-hegemonic pathways that represent the practice of cultural reason in the making. And ultimately, assimilation does not occur. Indeed, the discourses of modernization, westernization, and assimilation are little more than the rationalizations of members of a hegemonic regime that serve to reinforce the beliefs of those in positions of power about the extent and irresistibility of their own unstable base of power. Therefore, as much as the strategic circumstances of Enewetak/Ujelang Marshallese have come to be affected by capitalist forces in 2006 on the Big Island to a far greater extent than they were in 1906 on Enewetak, as much as current-day Marshallese lives may necessarily be inscribed in opposition to their assessments of others in more empowered positions around them, the actual practices of relationship-making and the discourses that surround these increasingly flexible family forms are unique and powerful cultural forms, innovative in their contour, yet inscribed with cultural specificities that represent long-standing and socially productive sets of Marshallese lived practices. As they come to be lived through on the Big Island, these practices are radically different from

the increasingly restrictive scope and atomized contour of American family forms that have emerged in response to other local variants of capitalism. And, of course, the same practices, by extending social relationships rather than promoting “individual self-maximization,” utterly contradict the underlying logic that, according to evolutionary psychologists, should cause all cultural personae to act in accord with the mandates of “genetic individualism and self-interest” (McKinnon 2005, 58).

If anthropologists began their disciplinary quest, somewhat misguidedly, in trying to track the trails of marginal societies that were supposed either to die out, or become us, in this era of capitalist expansionism and globalization, we should have learned that subject-making (Ong 1996) is less about becoming us than it is about the definition of selves in relation to meaningful pasts and in opposition to us/U.S. (Sahlins 1994, 379). It remains the task of anthropologists, who have long cast their lot with the marginalized, to represent the vitality and distinctive character of those who speak with disempowered voices, yet those who also continuously and collectively create and perpetuate distinction in direct proportion to any attempts to eradicate difference and enforce unitary hegemonic contours to human discourses and social practices.

NOTES

1. A number of authors have noted the salience of shared food in relationship-making. Although in far less consubstantial terms, M. Marshall notes, for example, that “Shared food on Namoluk symbolizes kinship and friendship” (1976, 39), concluding that “Children of close relatives on Namoluk are shared via adoption and fosterage in the same way that land, food, residence, labor, physical possessions, political support, and money are shared [These practices] . . . flow logically from the system of kinship and represent . . . ways for demonstrating what it means to be ‘close kin’” (1976, 47). In some senses, Rynkiewicz makes an analogous point for Marshall Islanders in noting that “Adoption is clearly one part of a cultural domain that might be called kinship sharing or reciprocity” (1976, 95), pointing readers to Carroll and Marshall. Nevertheless, he leads his readers in far different directions than those I regard as salient when he states that “the most common and effective form of adoption [among Arno Marshallese] is *kokajriri*, the adoption of children. The etymology of this word shows that the process is patterned after consanguinity” (Rynkiewicz 1976, 99). I am suggesting the etymology, in fact, establishes the primacy of feeding and of establishing relations of (inter)dependence, in a very different sense that has nothing to do with consanguinity but everything to do with feeding and relationship-making. My own earlier writings on feeding and relationship-making, although not solely in regard to adoption, include Carucci 1980, 1997a, 2004a, 2004c, 2007.

2. Caregiving of the grandparental sort, along with its nuanced flexibilities, is explored more thoroughly by Dickerson-Putman (2008). It is particularly noteworthy that the Raivavae practices outlined by Dickerson-Putman are themselves historically pliable, shifting their semiotic and pragmatic contours as issues of colonialism and globalization come to have greater importance for Raivavae residents. As I demonstrate below, analogous

patterns of change are apparent among Enewetak/Ujelang people. These patterns stress the primary importance of flexible relationship-making strategies that are refashioned in innovative ways in relation to shifting social and historical conditions yet retain critical cultural contours of precedent practices. The emergent contours of such practices, along with their multifaceted forms, directly contradict the simplistic claims of evolutionary psychologists who see “the expenditure of resources on those who are genetically unrelated or distantly related . . . as a ‘waste’ of both genetic and economic inheritance” (McKinnon 2005, 62). By such a logic, the wide array of relationship-making practices of Pacific peoples, multiplied many times over by the continuously emergent set of new historical forms, constitute a tidal wave of wastefully expended intellectual energy and practical activity all oriented toward making close relationships with persons (initially and “biologically”) more-or-less distant.

3. *Ajeri iturin ial* are mentioned by Erdland (1914, 124), but he does not track the source of the term. By the time of Erdland’s work in the Marshall Islands, the mission had been around for several decades.

4. Of course, like Rauchholz, Radcliffe-Brown grounded his argument in ideas about the primacy of biological kinship. While noting the same types of cross-generational familiarities that struck Radcliffe-Brown, I suggest that these structural oppositions arise out of the socially constructed discontinuities between parents and grandparents that derive from and are fashioned out of linguistic referents and daily demeanors not out of any type of cross-culturally shared understandings of genealogical kinship or biological relatedness.

5. I am comparing Marshallese family forms to American kinship ideas that go back to Schneider (1968) not in any sense suggesting that there is another type of Marshallese family that is based on genetic ties. Marshallese families may be based on the “actual invested energies” of birthing, which link a woman and her child by shared clan essence, and they may rely on ties of blood, which, as a symbol, links offspring to their fathers (but not their mothers). Of course, this means that neither birthing nor blood mean sharing genetic material, though, being more dynamic than signifiers themselves, the meanings are constantly shifting and, at some future point in time, may come to include ideas about shared genetic material.

6. The Tenth Day or “Coming Out of the Holes Day” commemorates the end of the suffering during World War II. This “liberation day” celebration is now held on March 10 on Enewetak (for further detail, see Carucci 2001).

7. Single quotation marks indicate that this conversation is an approximate transcription. The interactions at my older sister’s home, quoted earlier with double quotation marks, are from more exact notes taken as the interactions were in process. Some side conversations, backchannels and, of course, a lot of nonverbal communicative materials are still elided in the double quotation-marked interactions, but the spoken words are represented with relative precision.

8. As I have discussed elsewhere (Carucci 1997c), life in a single village on Ujelang served as a major force that realigned chiefly arrangements that had existed previously on Enewetak.

9. This stands in sharp contrast with Rauchholz’s (2008) contention about Yap. For Enewetak/Ujelang Marshallese, the same root, an “his/her real (inalienable) soul material”

moves, without qualification, among all “made children” whether they are made along pathways of birthing, nurturance and feeding, residential sharing/land working, kokajiriri, or along male-linked pathways of blood.

10. Renton’s “official” house was placed by the Americans in Kabinene, the leeward most land parcel, next to the house of his sibling by birth, Nebtali. Nevertheless, he chose to live far to the windward on a land parcel through which his rights were established through Ebrean. When I asked Renton why he did not reside in his Kabinene house, he replied that “I am comfortable [*menene*] in this spot. From the time I was tiny and growing older, I liked to reside here and play, and gather sprouted coconuts and throw drinking coconuts, and many other things.” In other words, through living on his kokajiriri land, Renton had woven his identity into the land in a way that made him feel that he belonged to a greater degree than he felt he belonged on the land parcel to which he had rights by birth. The fact that he chose to have the Americans build his house in Kabinene simply served as a reminder to people that he also had rights in that spot, rights that, in lieu of the house, might be questioned.

11. Thorgeir Kolshus (2008) explores adoption-like practices on Mota (Vanuatu) to show how the flexibilities and fluidities of interpersonal relations are greatly expanded because local people use adoption to build a wide variety of “individualized” social relationships. These individualized strategies are related to land distribution, but frequently extend far beyond land as well.

12. This form of Pacific adoption is hardly unique to Ujelang and Enewetak. Carroll (1970b, 10) outlines these forms in some detail.

13. There are alternative, although not entirely contradictory, accounts of how Druie’s and Onil’s kokajiriri relationship came into being. In the 1970s, Onil told me that he had asked Druie if she would adopt him because they were close, but in 2006, Druie’s son told another relative that there had been a Father’s Day celebration on Ujelang, many years ago, and that Druie had selected Onil’s name to honor for this event (undoubtedly preparing him food as part of the honor). This, he indicated, was the inception of the kokajiriri relationship.

14. The multifaceted nature of relationship-making in the Pacific, although widespread among Austronesian speaking people is not restricted to them. For example, Butt (2008) argues that among Dani (Highland Papua residents), persons are not born as complete beings. Rather, “persons are multiauthored, built through contributions of others.” Indeed, although Marshall Islanders place the stress on relationship-making rather than person construction, if one focuses on the person, the objective product that exists as a residue of relationship-making, multiauthorship is precisely what occurs in the Marshall Islands by feeding and watching over.

15. Some of the tropes of natural connection, as well as feelings of unease, that are manifest in American adoptions are captured at an earlier moment by Charis Thompson (2001) in her analysis of relationships in an infertility clinic, and Signe Howell (2001) explores some differently inflected “oscillation(s) between biology and culture” in her work on Norwegian transnational adoptions.

16. This, of course, is a grossly simplified picture that captures only the most generic outlines of change in American families.

17. Since adoption is closely linked with residence and land holding, it would be inaccurate to think that adoption remained unchanged during the times that preceded World War II on Enewetak, or during the time that people lived in exile on Ujelang. Clearly, land on Enewetak was frequently transmitted to kokajiriri offspring prior to the war, as long as they actively invested labor in that land. On Ujelang, land was initially divided on a head-by-head basis, and adopted children at the moment of the division (circa 1948) typically received land parcels contiguous with their adoptive parents. All newborns after the land division, whether adopted or not, received no land. They became part of a family with a pre-established amount of land. Once the contradictions of this principle of land division became evident, it may have constrained family size to a certain degree, but nuclear claims compensations (which came largely in the form of U.S. dollars beginning in the late 1960s and increasing in the 1980s) absolutely reversed this dynamic since the dollars were divided each quarter depending upon atoll population, rapidly increasing the reproductive rate, and giving a new contour to kokajiriri relationships as well.

18. Many residents recall waiting as long as eight months between field trip ships.

19. The shifting dynamics of these extended households are worthy of further exploration, but the thirty-two member household in 2002–2003 was not unique. In 2006, I frequently visited another household that varied between thirty-four and forty-one members. Not surprisingly, at this scale, discourses of empowerment that talk about (properly) watching over and caring for household members by the heads of those households are balanced with stories of disgruntlement at some fragment or another of the huge household. As these stories of disgruntlement are more publicly voiced, they promote processes of fission that reduce overall household size. Indeed, the thirty-two-member household of 2003 had been reduced to 10–16 members by 2006, and the tenor of discourse aligned with these shifts.

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ADOPTING CHANGE: RELATIONAL FLEXIBILITY AS VICE AND VIRTUE ON MOTA ISLAND, VANUATU

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On the island of Mota in the Banks Islands, children and adults frequently have their matrilineal and even matrimoiety affiliation, and consequently kin relations, altered and multiplied through various forms of adoption. Most of the 850 Motese count themselves as belonging to several kin groups. This creates personalized kin inventories for each individual. Consequently, an element of choice concerning which relation to emphasize is intrinsic to the Motese kinship system. In this paper, some of the reasons and motivations for these choices are outlined. The traditional flexibility of social relations, with their associated transfer of rights and obligations, also proves beneficial in a situation where an increasing number of matrilineal lines are facing shortage of land due to population growth. However, a new tendency seems to emerge: the relational ambiguity that follows from the many cross-cutting ties is thematized in disputes over land allocation, pointing toward an increasing emphasis on exclusive relationships in this situation of mounting relative scarcity and impact of cash cropping.

Introduction

IN ORDER TO ENGAGE IN AND COMPREHEND any social situation on Mota Island in the Banks Islands of north Vanuatu, knowledge of the kin relations of the people present is pivotal. To most anthropologists working in the Pacific region, this will sound as a truism, as indeed it probably is. Getting an operational picture of even the mere basic connections between the approximately 1,000 Motese, including the 200 living on other islands, is far from an easy task, however, although the Mota matrimoiety system on the level of

representation appears very straightforward. When various kinds of adoption, the use of different names and relational expressions for the same person, rigid name taboos, and the element of choice caused by virtually any two people having several mutually exclusive kin relations between them is added to the equation, the “Mota Kinship System” becomes frustratingly obscure to the anthropologist trying to act within the confines of the prescribed behavioral framework and create a neatly structured overview, spurred on by disciplinary ideals exemplified by analytical exercises like the debate between Needham and Keesing (Needham 1960, 1964; Keesing 1964) on the so-called Mota Problem. While Needham and Keesing struggle to identify which category of women a Mota man might marry, given that there seemingly is no eligible candidate within a man’s own generation, the Motese have no problem finding spouses, and of course never had.¹

The empirical foundations for the Needham/Keesing discussion were the works of ethnographers Robert Henry Codrington and William Halse Rivers. Codrington was a gifted linguist and long-serving missionary and Bible translator with the Anglican Melanesian Mission, who for more than twenty years worked closely with people from Mota and therefore gave the cosmology, customs, and social relations of Mota a prominent position in his opus magnum *The Melanesians* (1891). Codrington’s most famous contribution is arguably the first description of the cross-disciplinary renowned phenomenon *mana*. On his research tour in 1908, Rivers was a passenger on the Melanesian Mission’s ship *Southern Cross* covering large areas of insular Melanesia. During the months at sea, he elaborated on his research approach, the genealogical method, by collecting kinship terms in every port of call and with the Melanesians from many different islands on their way to and from the Melanesian Mission’s central school on Norfolk Island. He looked for similarities in kin terms and sociocultural practices, in order to establish connections between the islands—and indeed far beyond the Western Pacific, to which his remarks on megaliths and sun cults bear witness (1914b, 579–80). Rivers’s ambitious goals were hampered by incomplete data, frequently gathered during landings lasting less than two hours and without the assistance of able interpreters, so when reading his analyses today, they appear more bold than firmly empirically founded. However, his by far longest research period was spent on Mota, where he stayed at the Mission school for a full three months. The prevalence of secret male cults on Mota, seventy-seven for a total population of only 400, caught his eye, and his desire to understand the causes for this high number led him to describe a wide range of practices. He writes, “In civilised culture we are accustomed to distinguish certain definite departments of social life which can to a large extent be kept apart, but among those people we usually speak of as primitive, these

departments are inextricably interwoven and interdependent so that it is hopeless to expect to obtain a complete account of any one department without covering the whole field.” (Rivers 1914a, 1). Although this early holistic credo did not prevent him from displaying ethnographic “butterfly collections” from the majority of the societies he visited, the few places from where he was able to gather information on a wider range of practices were presented in broader context. Consequently, the Mota ethnography occupies a substantial part of the two volumes of *The History of Melanesian Society* (1914a, 1914b).

The works of Codrington and Rivers have provided rich material for later anthropologists with generalizing ambitions (Frazer 1890–1936; Mauss 1954; Lévi-Strauss 1973; Allen 1967, 1984). Unsurprisingly, given the difference in experience and exposure to life in insular Melanesia, Codrington’s work stands out as the more reliable of the two. Rivers’s genealogical method and theoretical approach was also discredited after his death in 1922. Although his version of diffusionism was more muted and empirically grounded than earlier strains, it was nevertheless seen as being based on pseudohistory.² Neither was his flirt with psychological explanations—evident in his edited volume *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia* (1922) and several posthumous works—well received by the principal actors within the Durkheimian paradigm of British social anthropology.

Engaging the Mota Adoption Ethnography

On one particular point, Rivers’s contribution to the Mota ethnography proves more valuable than Codrington’s, namely, his receptivity toward the inherent flexibility of the Mota kinship system caused by the widespread adoption practices, which Codrington merely mentions as a matter of fact (Codrington 1891, 25; Rivers 1914a, 50ff; 1914b, 137–38). These data are not taken into consideration by the later analysts of Codrington’s and Rivers’s empirical material, which might be due to the stains Rivers’s rather provisional analysis had thrown on the historical background for the phenomenon. He speculates:

It seems possible that in the widespread adoption of the Banks Islands [. . .] we have [. . .] a relic of community of children. [. . .] The especial rôle of the father suggests that the emergence from communism was connected with the recognition of the relation of a father to his child, but the latter factor cannot explain the whole [adoption] institution. (Rivers 1914b, 136–37; compare Codrington 1891, 27)

After discussing *couvade* and adoption as an early step in the evolution of the family, Rivers later elaborates on this rather Engelsian approach (Engels 1884; see also Meillassoux 1972). He argues that the Mota practice of gaining social parentage to a child by paying the midwife for her services is a consequence of the invasion of a group consisting exclusively of men of a kava-drinking people into the area of the indigenous Melanesian islanders, who were characterized by their dual social organization (1914b, 400–01). Rivers unflinchingly disentangles which practices might be associated with the different peoples and how these practices in their turn are modifications of customs originating in other contexts. It would be speculative equaling the level of Rivers to ponder how his descriptions of the high adoption rate would have influenced the study of kinship had they been submitted without the pseudohistorical wrapping. Slightly more sober guesswork suggests that later theorists like Lévi-Strauss, Needham, and Keesing found the sheer frequency of adoption documented in the Mota ethnography to be so excessive that the phenomenon in their view could not possibly imply the solid and enduring bonds of duties, privileges, and emotional attachment that were necessary for these social relationships to serve the same function comparatively, and be of the same social significance, as the kin relations in other societies.

Contrary to such more or less deliberate omissions, we find two articles with generalizing ambitions that have contributed in repatriating the notion of flexibility from its pending exile as a structural anomaly to the functional core of kinship systems. In his classic work on the dynamics of Malayo-Polynesian (which today would have been referred to as Austronesian) kinship, Ward Goodenough links sociocultural adaptability to kinship ideology and provides an argument for the virtues of flexibility in kin group recruitment. He finds that in every community with limited land resources and a unilineal principle of descent, the fluctuating size of the various groups poses a challenge to solidarity. Therefore, “Unless devices are developed to redistribute land rights to persons outside the owning group, intracommunity conflict is inevitable” (1955, 80). Such devices can be a nonunilineal principle, where the individual can choose among all the groups to which he or she can claim ancestry; bilocal residence in a strictly unilineal system, where the couple relocates in response to strained resources; and “adoption of the land-poor by kinsmen in land-rich groups,” which he finds to be particularly important in communities with a unilineal distribution of land rights (1955, 80–81; see also Kirch and Green 2001, 209ff, 283). Michael Allen’s ambitious comparative work on the relation between principles of descent, postmarital residence patterns, and the evolution of political systems in Melanesia (1984) is more daring still. In showing how ethnographies

from the areas of Melanesia with matrilineal descent describe more elaborate systems of rank, open and secret male associations, and graded male societies, he challenges the still widely held judgment that matrilineal descent is primordial by being a logical consequence of undisputable maternity and questionable male contribution to progeny. Organizational expansion is particularly widespread in areas where matriliney combines with a patrivirilocal postmarital residence pattern—a Melanesian manifestation of the so-called “matrilineal puzzle” (see for instance Scott 2007, 77ff). From this, Allen concludes that matriliney “is more likely to stimulate the development of autonomous political institutions than is patriliney” (1984, 26; cf. Jolly 1991, 52ff). Consequently, societies with these characteristics have proved better able to incorporate the influences of cash cropping, Christianity, and party politics (36–37), as well as other “traumas of European contact,” as he rather crudely puts it (37). Patrilineal systems, on the other hand, are much more flexible in membership recruitment, both through their ability to incorporate male nonagnates and the potential for increasing their numbers by polygyny (28f). Neither are patrilineal societies, with a virtually ubiquitous virilocal residence pattern, constrained by the challenges of forming localized descent groups that is inherent in the matrilineal puzzle, and they are consequently better suited to incorporate new members. However, Allen finds that patriliney rarely stimulates the evolution of political institutions that operate free from notions of descent, the Big Man system being the *locus classicus* (34ff). By stressing the adaptability of matrilineal societies in encounters with external impulses, Allen points to a highly interesting social mechanism: in societies where the leadership structure does not rest more or less exclusively on descent, the resourcefulness in establishing institutions that facilitate the public recognition and personal acquisition of authority seems to stimulate cultural creativity and flexibility also in other domains. But the tempting pedagogical dualism Allen establishes—that patriliney easily incorporates new people whereas matriliney easily incorporates new ideas—leads him to insist that “throughout the matrilineal areas of north Vanuatu [. . .] [m]embership in [matrilineal groups] is always exclusive and with but very rare exceptions determined solely by birth [. . .] The rare exceptions are when adoptions take place across clan lines; significantly enough, these are confined to girls as a last resort to prevent a clan from dying out” (29). This insistence on the rarity of cross-matrilineal adoption is contradicted by both Rivers’s and Codrington’s ethnographies (see for instance Codrington 1891, 25), which Allen engages closely in other parts of his discussion. He attempts to qualify his argument by stating, “Ethnographers unfortunately do not always provide the necessary information, yet my strong impression is that a comparable rigidity in descent-group recruitment obtains throughout the

matrilineal areas of Melanesia” (29). Nonetheless, the old ethnographic descriptions of Mota cross-moiety adoptions are unmistakable and seem to have been disregarded by Allen for the sake of the argument.

This article will show that also in contemporary Mota, adoptions across matrilineal and even matrimoiety divides are common. Thus, Mota society combines the social elasticity that Allen holds is the hallmark of patrilineal societies with the adaptability to new ideologies and materialities that he argues characterizes matrilineal societies. More importantly, it will discuss how the various forms of adoption constitute a crucial factor in the construction of Motese sociality, contributing to a kinship system characterized by flexibility and deliberate choice; how the relational mobility of people has been used as a vehicle for the tentative reproduction of the moiety system, at the core of Motese collective identity and ritual life; and what role adoption plays in diversifying people’s inheritance and use rights to land in a situation where land for garden making and cash cropping is becoming an increasingly scarce resource, which might be regarded as a continuation of the variability in group formation that Goodenough argued is a characteristic feature of Austronesian kinship systems. These issues are addressed by use of examples from the personal histories of Kate and Paul. First, however, an outline of the various types of adoption is required.

Part I: Continuities

Adoption: Terms and Forms

The generic term for claiming a parental connection with a child other than your biological³ child is *lareag* (take away, remove). The term is rarely used, since the three forms of *lareag* have distinct social implications and are referred to with different words.⁴

Ramramwö is the procedure closest to the Euro-American notion of child adoption.⁵ The adoptee, most commonly still an infant, is transferred from one set of parents to another and is given the same rights and obligations as the family’s original members enjoy. If the adoptee is considered old enough to remember its first parents, he or she is counted as belonging to two families, although, as we will see below, transferable rights to pieces of land might be contested at the death of the adoptive parents or mother’s brothers, should the *ramramwö* take place outside the child’s birth *tarañiu* (matrilineage). Many *ramramwö* adoptions occur within these *tarañiu*, but it is not uncommon to adopt a child who has birth rights to land of a different *tarañiu*. Today, many *ramramwö* adoptions take place when an unmarried woman gives birth to a child, whereupon her parents frequently adopt the child (see

Butt 2008; Salomon and Hamelin 2008). This was also most likely the practice in previous times. In such cases, the truth is rarely revealed to the adoptee until both adoptive parents are dead.

The peculiar ethnographic instance Rivers interprets as a structural relic of a proto-family organization (1914b, 136–37) is called *rsarsag*, which might be seen as a less consensual form of *ramramwö*. Rivers held that when a woman gave birth, it was the man who first paid the midwife for her services who gained social parentage for his wife and himself. Thus, when the wife of a penniless, or in Rivers's days shell money-less, man was in labor, attempts were made to keep the news hidden from the public.⁶ Should a childless couple be aware of what was going on, they would be standing by, prepared to rush and pay the midwife and thus be counted as the child's parents after weaning (Rivers 1914a, 50ff; 1914b, 401). Although Mota has been geographically and politically peripheral to the British-French Condominium and the later independent Vanuatu government, I had for some reason expected that the *rsarsag* practice would have ceased to exist, or at least be radically different due to influences from other legal traditions, when I arrived for my first fieldwork in 1996. This assumption was flawed. My adoptive mother's mother Hansen, commonly recognized as a general cultural expert and on the topic of childbirth an undisputed authority, plainly stated that the ones who pay the woman assisting during the birth of a child will be the child's parents. Both women and men could hand over the money. Members of younger generations modified her statement slightly, saying that if the would-be adopter belonged to a family that had few ties to the parents by birth, the transfer of the child could be made a matter of discussion, but if a reasonably close relative claimed the child, the parents could not object.

Metrin, who is in her thirties, has two sons with her husband Richard Ron. She has expressed her wish for a daughter for several years, but since she does not seem to believe that a daughter will befall her, she got excited when I told her one day that her sister's son's wife, Sellin, who lives in a village on the other side of the island, had given birth to a girl earlier that morning. Even though this was only Sellin's second girl child, after first having conceived five boys, Metrin immediately made her intentions clear: she wanted to rush to the dispensary, since Sellin's husband Ken is chronically broke and probably would not have had the time to raise the money—only to realize that she did not have the required sum of money either. She ogled her husband and passed some scornful remarks about his indolence in producing copra before returning to weaving a mat.

Taptapui, the third form of adoption, might at first glance appear to be a very casual form of relationship, barely justifying the label "adoption" since

it does not involve the transfer of a person between families, merely a seemingly informal extension of parental affiliation. This is usually a relation between a single adult and a child.

Angela's taptapui relationship with her mother's brother's son, Ken, is quite characteristic. He was a child whom Angela found both adorable and good natured. Following the logic of the Mota matrimoiety system—of the "Crow" ideal variety—a sister's son assumes the same structural position toward a man's children as the man himself while sister's daughter would be counted as his children's father's sister. Angela was consequently already Ken's *vevegai* (father's sister) who plays an important part in finding suitable partners for sexual liaisons during adolescence and eventually a fitting spouse, and he was her *natui* (child). She wanted to expand on this relationship, however, and brought some soap and a piece of cloth to Ken's parents, as a sign of her desire to be associated with their child. Ken continued to live in his parents' house, and he did not address Angela *veve* (mother) although this is not an unusual way to address a *vevegai*. When Angela married, she moved to a different village and the two were subsequently not in regular contact with each other. Nevertheless, now that Ken has a family of his own, he plants gardens on land that has been allocated to Angela by her mother's brothers, among them Ken's father Aidan and Paul, to whom we now turn our attention.

Expanding Relational Experience: The Histories of Kate and Paul

Kate and Paul, who adopted me when I first arrived in Mota, are in their late forties. They have seven children aged between one and twenty-five, five girls and two boys. To my knowledge, they have never adopted away nor ramramwö adopted small children, but they have several taptapui adoptees, as well as ramramwö adoption of a man who lost his mother when he was an adolescent. Both Kate and Paul were adopted ramramwö as infants, and were made aware of this by accident.

Paul was adopted when he was a toddler, by a couple from a village three kilometers away from his biological parents. The adoptive mother belonged to a different tarañiu from that of Paul's mother, but they were of the same moiety. She and her husband already had a son and a daughter, but they wanted a second son to take care of them when they grew older, and since Paul was the sixth child and third born son of his biological parents, who also had ramramwö adopted several other children, his biological parents had no objections to the request. When Paul talks about this period in his life, he retrospectively emphasizes a feeling of being very different from his family. On Mota, similar to Anderson's descriptions from Wogeo, one of the

Schouten Islands of Papua New Guinea (Anderson 2004), speculating on family connections based on physiognomic traits is risky business and is strongly discouraged.⁷ In Paul's case, he was very visibly the odd man out. He was adopted into a family where everyone was tall and sinewy, while he was short and sturdy. Likewise, linking temperamental dispositions to family lines is rarely done publicly, as Hoëm reports from Tokelau (2003). Paul's adoptive family were very mild mannered, whereas he had a hot temper and incessantly got engaged in quarrels and fights—like his biological brothers and father Wilson, who according to popular belief had inherited this trait from Wilson's father Jack.⁸ When Paul was approximately eight years old, he one day threw rocks at his brother and his parents. His father obviously had had enough of his waywardness, and shouted, "You, go back to your mother and father! Yes, do return to your mother and father!" His mother managed to convince Paul that his father's outburst was just caused by frustration. However, Paul stuck to his rock-throwing habit, and on one occasion, the victim was Iliad, an older boy who incidentally was his biological mother's sister's son. Angered by the attack, Iliad shouted at him that his real mother and father lived in a village to the north. When the bewildered Paul asked his mother what Iliad had meant, she started to cry. The next day, she took him for a walk, and although she did not reveal her intentions, Paul knew that she was taking him to see his biological parents. They arrived in Tuqetap, the village next to theirs, and for each house they left after pausing for a chat, he knew they were getting closer. They stayed there over night, but in the morning, they moved on to the village of Lotawan. Here, they went straight to the house of Wilson and Kake, and spent the day with them. No one told him that these were his parents by birth, but there was no need to. When his adoptive mother was ready to leave, Paul refused to follow her, and he was allowed to spend the night with Wilson and Kake and their other children. The next day, he returned to his adoptive parents. In the years that followed, he shared his time between the two families, until he settled more or less permanently in Lotawan when he was about the age of eighteen. He said that although his adoptive parents had always been kind to him, when he first was taken to his other parents he instantly felt a sense of belonging and calm that he had never experienced before.⁹ Even after marrying Kate and forming a household of his own, he continued to assist his adoptive mother and father both in their daily chores as well as in feast-giving and ritual activities, until they both had passed away some twenty years after Paul settled in Lotawan. He enjoys undisputed access to the land of his adoptive mother and is on good terms with both his adoptive siblings, Anna and Leo. In fact, the relation between Paul and Leo is much closer and more harmonious than the relation between him and his biological brothers, and he is frequently

included in decision making regarding the management of his adoptive tarañiu's land. He also intercedes as a regular mother's brother when Anna's children, infamous for their waywardness, go astray.

Kate was also ramramwö adopted shortly after she had been weaned. Since her adoptive mother belonged to the opposite moiety from that of her biological mother, the adoption implied a shift in moiety membership. Her adoptive siblings were many years her senior, and she grew up being the youngest child of the family in a village on the opposite side of the island. Just like Paul, she discovered the fact of her adoption before she had reached puberty, following a quarrel with other children. Unlike Paul, she did not spend much time with her adoptive family after she returned to her biological parents. The relationships created by the adoption persist, however, and her adoptive brothers and Paul call each other *rawolus*, indicating a strictly regulated brother-in-law relationship, since the adoptive brothers received shares of her bride-price when Kate and Paul married.

Enduring Bonds and Temporary Permanence

Signe Howell has suggested the comparative term "kinning" for the cross-cultural study of the process of incorporating new family members (2003, 2006). On Mota, an island of less than 10 square kilometers, the biological family necessarily lives close to the adopting family and will in most cases see the adopted-away child on a regular basis. Therefore, rather than a ritualized or otherwise behavioral concern placed on the incorporation of the adopted child by its new family, I see signs of a deliberately reduced contact on the part of the birth family, a process that might be labeled "deliberate estrangement" or, to pursue Howell's term, "off-kinning." This "inverted" practice is mirrored in stories that I recorded on the possibility of returning to the biological parents and severing the connection with the adoptive parents (cf. Rivers 1914a, 52). Rivers mentions that if an adopted child appears to be good natured and possess unusual qualities, the biological father¹⁰ might try to ingratiate himself with the child without disclosing the "real" nature of their relationship. If he succeeded in establishing bonds of affection, the biological father would approach the adoptive father, who invariably would deny his request for the return of the child. The few instances where the adoptive father did not object, out of fear for the potent magic of the biological father, he would secretly conspire to have the child killed.¹¹ In recent years, severing the ties to the adopting family in order for the adoptee to return to the biological parents has happened on several occasions. Such occurrences involve the transfer of a pig and some money to the adoptive parents in return for the material goods and immaterial services they have

provided for their adopted child. Usually, however, the connection is maintained. The story leading up to the return of an adopted infant to its biological parents always includes a critical episode where the fact of the adoption is revealed to the adoptee. The theme “quarrelsome child being told of his/her fate as revenge for bad behavior” is so common that it might be labeled a cultural leitmotif, and I have heard several stories very similar to Paul’s and Kate’s. Codrington mentions this as the most common way of disclosing that an adoption had taken place, even though adults take great care to keep the truth hidden, particularly when a child is adopted into the other moiety (1891, 25ff). According to both him and Rivers (1914a, 51ff), when a cross-moiety adoptee reaches marriageable age he or she is told of the adoption to prevent the choice of a spouse belonging to the adoptee’s moiety of birth. Rivers states that even though an eventual marriage will be between members of the same moiety, no sanction is involved, since people know that the marriage is in accordance with customary law.

In other words, because of the prevalence of cross-moiety adoptions, the neatness of the system of exogamous moieties as it historically has been presented by ethnographers and anthropologists, and currently by the Motese themselves, has always been a figment of the analytical imagination. In addition, owing to the classificatory reckoning of kin, by which everyone shares the affinal relations of one’s siblings and parallel cousins, the kin relations burgeon with each new matrimonial union. Since relationships are exclusive and reciprocal, agreements necessarily have to be made concerning which of several possible relationships shall be emphasized. Hence, the aspect of *choice* has always been intrinsic to the actualities of the Motese kinship practice—even though it tends to obfuscate the clear-cut picture of Rivers’s genealogical method and consequently is left out of his analytic equation. Therefore, in the classic Mota ethnography lies implicit a description of social complexity that was disregarded by the later theorists, which is complicated further by the classificatory principle. With a total population of 1,000, kin relations necessarily become entangled and open for mutually contradicting relationships between two people or groups of siblings. Since I started my research on Mota more than ten years ago, I have recorded a relational intricacy that is quite intriguing, once the frustration over never being able to reach an unambiguous structural outline has been overcome. This is no doubt caused by the very considerable adoption rate on the island. More than 90 percent of people above the age of fifteen have been adopted in one way or the other, and a majority of these more than once. An estimated three out of ten children are adopted ramramwö or rsarsag as infants.¹² The histories of Paul and Kate, which by no means are atypical, will again serve as illustrations of peoples’ choices within this matrix of available kin relations.

Further Muddling the Picture

Kake and Wilson, Paul's mother and father by birth, had three daughters, who all married. Paul's eldest sister died many years ago, and her husband Bobby had to pay *sako-sako* (a large fine imposed on a person responsible for another person's death) to compensate her brothers and mother's brothers for the loss of a life, since it was a generally held opinion that he forced her to work while she was recovering from a seriously infected leg wound. Her condition worsened, and she died after a short while. After her death, Paul's eldest brother Fred continued to treat Bobby as a rawolus, sister's husband: using neither his English Christian name nor his Mota birth name or words that have parts of his names in them; never standing in a house where he was sitting; never touching objects placed higher than his head; always referring to him using the third person dual and addressing him with the second person dual pronouns; and protesting when he is made an object of ridicule—which in Bobby's case happens very frequently, since he has many people standing in a *poroporo* joking relationship toward him and regularly displays rather eccentric behavior. Paul and his second brother Aidan, however, chose to sever the ties of the rawolus relationship after the first portion of the money for their sister's life had been paid. Instead, they emphasized their status as Bobby's father's sister's child, thus counting Bobby, twenty-five years their senior, as their son. Through the ritual of *rave ō epa* (pulling the mat) at his father's funeral, Bobby had secured a nontransferable right to continue making gardens on his father's land, which was now administered by Paul and his two brothers. While Bobby's wife was still alive, she was landholder and took part in decisions over land allocation together with her brothers, thus securing access for Bobby and herself. Now that she had passed away, however, Bobby had to ask the brothers for permission before clearing and planting on his father's land. If all three had remained his rawolus, this would have implied an imbalance in their relationship, which should be based on strict symmetry. It is not appropriate for a rawolus relationship that one of the parties should grant favors that could not be reciprocated. By redefining their relation from rawolus/rawolus to father/child, Paul and Aidan consequently made it possible for Bobby to ask for land without obstructing the balance of the rawolus relationship. There was also another slightly more prosaic consequence of the conversion. Since Bobby's house is situated between the houses of the two brothers, the relational redefinition eased everyday interaction, as the behavioral restrictions between father and son are much more relaxed than those applying to two rawolus.

Paul's second sister Velicita married Edley. He is the undisputed rawolus of the two eldest brothers. For Paul, however, it is different. When Edley

was a child, Paul's adoptive mother had taptapui adopted him. Therefore, Edley and Paul decided to treat each other as brothers also after the marriage. In other words, even though they belong to different moieties and are affinally connected through the relation second only to spouse's mother/child's spouse in gravity, they choose to emphasize their brotherhood because of an act of affection directed at one by the other's adoptive mother.

In Paul's case, the picture is yet further complicated. Nelly, his third sister, was ramramwö adopted when she was a little child, just like Paul. This was a cross-moiety adoption, and she grew up without being aware that her parents had ramramwö adopted her. Incidentally, she married Leo, Paul's adoptive brother. At the time of her marriage, she had been told who her biological parents were, but since she was already counted as a girl (*malama-la*) and not a child (*muvera*) she was considered to belong permanently to the moiety into which she had been adopted.¹³ Therefore, there were no objections to her marrying Leo. The union has some interesting implications. Paul's brothers consider Leo their rawolus, even though they belong to the same moiety. They also count Leo's three sons as their sister's sons, although they strictly speaking are members of the other moiety. Paul, on the other hand, through his unbroken fraternal bonds with Leo, at times acts as their father. The difference between the expected behavior associated with these dyads—the father/son relationship implying respect and distance whereas the mother's brother/sister's son is an amiable joking relationship—is occasionally discernible in the interaction between Paul and Leo and Nelly's children.¹⁴ Nelly's children are considered to belong to both moieties and might therefore marry with people from either moiety. This is a privilege enjoyed by a handful of Mota men and women.

From these examples, one might infer that Paul, when negotiating choices of relationships, always opts for the one carrying the more relaxed behavioral code. This, however, is not the case. Kate's eldest sister had a son out of wedlock before she married. The boy, Dick, was adopted ramramwö by Kate's mother, and he was raised as his mother's brother. The facts of the adoption were revealed to him after Kate and Paul's marriage, from which Dick received a major share of the bride-price. Consequently, even though Paul and Dick could easily have converted the strict rawolus relationship into a father/son relationship, they continue to treat each other according to the most restricted version of the *qaliga* in-law rules. Another choice of the "narrow path" was made when Kate and Paul's second eldest daughter, Jeanette, became the fiancée, *vatvatalig*, of Serelañ, the son of Anna, Leo's sister and Paul's adoptive sister. Anna and Paul decided to call each other *gasala* (child's parent-in-law) instead of brother and sister. Kate and Anna have preferred to remain *rarōwal*, equivalent of rawolus, to each other,

instead of emphasizing the less severe *gasala* connection. Common to these relations is that they all involve the transfer of the bride-price, which seems to limit the choices available to the parties. Nevertheless, Paul explained that there in most cases still would be room for alternatives. Five of Kate's father's brother's sons lived in a neighboring village, and they had all received a minor share of the bride-price paid for Kate. Paul and four of the brothers acted as *rawolus* toward each other. However, the men were also Paul's mother's brother's son, and hence his classificatory children. Consequently, one of the brothers, Selwyn, and he decided that they should emphasize the father/son relationship. Paul explained that this made it easier for him to speak his mind when the brothers appealed for extensions of their patrilineal use rights in his *tarañiu*'s land.

Part II: Changes

The most common reasons for adopting a child have already been mentioned. Childlessness or having only either boys or girls is a typical motivation, and in these cases, there will rarely be many objections to an adoption request. Most couples will assume parental responsibility for any of their daughters' children who have no known or socially recognized father. Some are even so fond of having children who depend on them that they continue to adopt new children even after their own grandchildren have children (see Dickerson-Putman 2008). "Fatherless" children who are not adopted shortly after birth will almost without exception be adopted when they reach school age by a man who feels sorry for the child who has access to only one piece of land and consequently is less attractive as a suitable partner for marriage. In most of these cases, the adoptee continues to live with his or her biological mother.

All these motivations for adoption are mentioned in Rivers's and Codrington's ethnographic accounts from Mota. However, in the past fifty years the Mota society has undergone developments that both have gradually changed the Motese's perception of the institution of adoption and shown its potential for incorporating and negotiating changes in other sociocultural fields. These developments are rapid population growth, increased importance of cash cropping, and a proliferation in intramoiety marriages.

People and Land

The Motese rely almost exclusively on horticulture for their subsistence, and inheritance and use rights to land are decisive factors in establishing a person as Motese or not. In addition, notions of belonging are commonly expressed through the idiom of land, particularly among the 200 Motese who live in

diaspora on other islands in Vanuatu. Therefore, it might be surprising to learn that the general impression of the Motese's knowledge of genealogies and lines of descent is one of shallowness. During my interviews with the members of each household on Mota in 1997, which were repeated five years later, people frequently answered, "Sorry, I don't know/remember their names," when asked about their deceased grandparents.¹⁵ If a person's grandparents had died before he or she had reached an age where impressions would linger, it is more of an exception than a rule that he or she will easily recall their names.¹⁶ When it comes to reckoning relationships with any of the more than 800 people living on the island, however, there is hardly any hesitation, and even the most recently born infant will be included. Consequently, what seems to be important is the personal memory and experience of a social relation rather than a more collectively held notion of descent. It could be argued that the reason for this relative lack of interest in narratives of descent is that they are not considered to be of great cultural importance, either to the creation of identities, to the transfer of customary practices and histories, or to the more material aspects of Mota life. To paraphrase Marx and Engels, property and land rights are not material relationships between man and land, as it is represented in capitalist ideology, but is a social relationship between people (1978 [1888], 485ff). A sympathetic reading of the Mota attitude to genealogies might therefore conclude that the emphasis is on the synchronic relations between living people rather than the diachronic and more exclusive relations between persons and their ancestors and ancestresses. One might also suggest that the system of land rights and inheritance has an inherent flexibility, facilitating quick responses to fluctuations in matrilineal microdemography, to which a more rigidly descent-based ideology would fail to adjust (cf. Goodenough 1955). In other words, the Motese know who holds the right to every tree and every piece of land on the island, even though they do not necessarily know how that right came to be. And indeed, such an understanding might very well be correct—and given demographic conditions in postcontact Mota history, it probably is at least part of the explanation: the population on Mota dwindled from the 1870s onward, and when the Mota Anglican Church eradicated poison and sorcery on the island in the early 1950s (see Kolshus 2007, 1ff), credible Mission accounts put the number of people to approximately 100, including no more than ten adult men. Since the land-intensive production of copra had not yet begun, it is safe to say that land was ample but labor was scarce. Consequently, the need for accurate genealogies might have been less urgent than was the case for previous generations. When talking to those who are old enough to remember the years before and after the Church's intervention, including the two women who had begged the Anglican priest to do something about the ceaseless fighting and use of poison and sorcery, they all

emphasize the feeling of a critical emergency, but also that of a new beginning. It might seem far-fetched, and possibly too crudely cultural materialistic, but I will suggest that this new beginning—which also marked the Mota Church's ascent to supremacy and the demise of the *Suge* male graded society as a challenger to the influence of the Church—led to an adjustment of temporal focus from before-and-present to present-and-future. In the wake of this development, the significance of genealogical knowledge has been downplayed, since its use-value is not critical for the continued existence of Mota society. Acquaintance with lines of descent was still an important genre of *kastom*. However, whereas land was abundant, people and their labor were in short supply, and the emphasis shifted from historic succession to synchronic social relations.

What complicates this picture is the current prevalence of land scarcity and conflict in the wake of an annual population growth of 4 percent for the past fifty years, implying a doubling every seventeen years. In 2003, the population density on the island was above 80 per square kilometer, not including the 200 living in diaspora who still had use rights to land, and disregarding that a substantial part of the island is occupied by virtually unarable mountain slopes and ravines and the island's location in an area highly prone to droughts, cyclones, and other natural hazards. If we for a moment were to hold on to our materialistic functionalism and see cultural traits as waxing and waning in response to the ever-changing circumstances of demography, ecology, sociocultural values, needs, and requirements, then a steadily increasing population, getting involved in frequent and enduring land disputes, should long since have encouraged a shift of attention to histories of descent and inheritance. Simply knowing who has the right to every piece of land is not sufficient when a counterclaim is presented that is substantiated by a plausible history. In these cases, the need for an unbiased third party is obvious. The problem seems to be that a person who is sufficiently nonaligned to be approved by both sides of the conflict and who possesses the required knowledge of the history of the land is very hard to find. There are two possible consequences of this situation: (1) those who have access to genealogical knowledge will use this expertise for what it is worth or (2) the lack of people capable of seconding the experts' versions undermines the validity of their knowledge, thus leveling the historical depth of the testimonies provided for the case in hand. The development on Mota during my ten years of research suggests a steady motion in the direction of the second scenario.

Another development that has had a major impact on the Motese's perception of land allocation and transfer of rights is the relatively new importance of cash cropping, which on Mota is restricted to copra. The

requirement for money to pay for school fees, clothes, cooking utensils, and ritual activities has increased significantly since Vanuatu became independent in 1980. On Mota, land rights are distributed matrilineally while trees are inherited patrilineally (cf. Rodman 1987 from Ambae, and Scott 2007 from Makira). Thus, if a man plants coconut trees on land he has been given access to by his mother's brothers, those trees become the property of his children when he dies. Owing to the growing need for money, the patrilateral inheritance has become much more important than it once was, and some men take great pride in their diligence in preparing coconut groves. Since these groves exhaust the nutrition of the ground on which they are located, the possibility of multicropping is excluded. This implies that such areas could remain inaccessible for the land title holders for the full length of the coconut tree's productive life, i.e., up to seventy years. Those who oversee the management of the land on behalf of their tarañiu matrilineage will still in most cases let these challenges to the matrilineal principle pass without much objection, knowing that members of their tarañiu will enjoy the same privilege on other people's land. In addition, since these managers usually are men, they secure their own children's opportunity to exercise their patrilateral rights in land. Too, they know that even though the principle of patrilateral right to trees was devised centuries before the possibility of commercial exploitation of arboreal produce was conceived, it still remains an important element in Mota tradition, *kastom*. Failure to heed *kastom* is seen as a flaw in a person's moral standing and could reduce the impact of his or her opinion in other areas. Relatively few conflicts therefore arise because of children of male land title holders who benefit from working on another lineage's land.

A second litmus test for a family's affability and peaceful nature, which is yet another important criterion for moral evaluation, also concerns how a tarañiu manages to retain solidarity over land issues, namely, how they treat their adopted-in and adopted-out members in relation to use rights and inheritance rights. Faced with the ever larger number of people depending on the same land resources, one of the options available to those responsible for managing the tarañiu land is to limit the number of people who are granted access. Thus, in Paul's case, his adoption has become a factor in the management of his matrilineage's land. As one of three brothers who hold the title to the land on which Lotawan village is situated, his opinion would normally have major import on decisions concerning both the allocation of land rights within the tarañiu as well as village issues more generally. His view does indeed matter, but only as long as it is in line with that of his elder brother, Fred. When they disagree, however, Paul's possible double agenda due to his connection with another family is brought into play. Fred himself

belongs to the minority who never has been adopted. He was born on the same day as Nora, his wife-to-be, and his father went to see her family that very day to secure that none of the children were adopted away, with the intention that the two should marry each other when they were old enough. The Motese acknowledge a principle of moderate primogeniture, and as firstborn, Fred is *ō mwōe tape tanō* (first to the land) and in this capacity has the privilege of the final word in cases where the brothers disagree. Nevertheless, the value of being *pulpul ape tanō* (friends over land) is emphasized, and this was also their father's and mother's brothers' relentless lesson to them. Fred seems to elevate his position as *primus inter pares* to unprecedented heights—much to the frustration of Paul and his second brother Aidan. However, the two fail to form a firm opposition against Fred, because of the privilege Paul enjoys to his adoptive mother's land. This is used against him also by Aidan when the brothers discuss how they should distribute their land to all the tarañiu members. In addition, the amount of tarañiu land he is granted is less than that of his two brothers, with reference to his continued relationship with his adoptive family. Paul accepts that his unrestricted access to another tarañiu's land should be taken into consideration, but he finds that he gets significantly less than his fair share, particularly of the areas with mature coconut trees for copra production. He also reminds his brothers that the right to work on his adoptive mother's land does not come free of charge, but involves ritual, social, and, to a certain degree, financial obligations. This argument, he finds, falls on deaf ears. After Aidan moved to the village of his daughter and son-in-law a few years ago as a result of a particularly severe falling out with Fred, Paul's position worsened. According to Paul, Fred invokes his rights as a firstborn too often, instead of searching for options that will be agreeable to all. When Paul interferes on behalf of some unhappy tarañiu member, he feels that his opinion is disqualified both by his status as the youngest brother and by the story of his adoption. Kate and Paul have taptapui Winston, one of Fred's sons, and he acts as a mediator in confrontations between his temperamental father and brothers and Paul. Nevertheless, disagreements over land allocation follow from, and further inflame, the latent conflicts in the brothers' already strained relationship, and they impede a sustainable administration of the resources they are managing on behalf of their tarañiu.

Elegies of Moieties

Thus far, our discussion of Mota adoption practices has focused on their practical and emotional aspects. But the institution also serves as a tool for the preservation of cultural ideals, through the cross-moiety prenuptial

adoption of the male spouse of an endo-moiety union. On Mota, as in virtually every other society within the Melanesian culture area, “kastom is lost” is a mantra repeated at most occasions involving the display of allegedly traditional activities (cf. Akin 2004). Such nostalgic sentiments are spurred by national discourses with an orientation toward the past (cultural heritage) and the future (economic and social development) that implies a devaluation of the present, as well as international discourses on the homogenization of cultural values that allegedly follows in the wake of transnational incursions and Western cultural imperialism. This encourages caution when making statements about past conditions (*amwōa*), particularly when the empirical foundation for these statements is a context emphasizing “loss.” Yet there can be little doubt that the Motese ideal of moiety exogamy has been seriously challenged during the past five decades. In earlier days, the punishment against a marriage, or even just a relationship, with a member of the same moiety was *sañ-sañ*, which involved the destruction of the house, gardens, and trees associated with the couple’s nearest family by the enraged members of the other moiety (Codrington 1891, 23).¹⁷ The *sañ-sañ* was banned by the Church at the same time as it took action against sorcery.¹⁸ The last major *sañ-sañ* took place when Lillian, today an immensely charming old lady, expressed a desire to marry a man of her own moiety with whom she secretly had been having an affair. When the couple’s wish, and consequently the story of the affair, became public knowledge, their families’ houses were torn down, and many trees and parts of their gardens were destroyed. Both eventually ended up marrying someone else. In the fifty-odd years since the *sañ-sañ* for endogamous marriages was lifted, the occurrence of such marriages has steadily increased, even though the term *lagtatas* (bad marriage) still is used when referring to these unions. In 2003 of all couples on Mota, 34 percent had married within their own moiety, and counting only those married between 1988 and 2003, the endogamous marriages made up almost half of the total of married couples. One might therefore say with some justification that the Motese no longer practice exogamy on a moiety level. However, the regulation still exists as an ideological guideline and is therefore applicable when judging a family’s moral standings—which consequently also makes it a tool for questioning a political rival’s aptitude.¹⁹

Apart from its importance as *kastom*, which in most cases would be sufficient cause for holding on to a cultural practice, there are several other problems, according to the more outspoken traditionalists, that follow in the wake of this widespread neglect of the prohibition against marrying within the moiety. One curious factor frequently mentioned is the key role the

moiety system plays in the traditional game and leisure activities. Most of these involve competition between the two halves. In some villages where the rate of endogamous marriages is low, these games are still occasionally staged, but no longer on an intervillage or island level, as they often were according to elder Motese as well as Codrington and Rivers. The main concern over the social implications of intramoiety marriages, however, voiced by a number of people both in private conversations and public settings, is that they undermine the familial authority structure by making the role of the father highly ambiguous. The father's position as a last instance measure when it comes to correcting his children's behavior is facilitated by the respect he pays them, in their capacity of being members of the other moiety, by not engaging in the everyday family conflicts. If a mother or mother's brother fail in their guidance, a father must be listened to—simply because the restraint he has shown by not interfering at a previous stage is a sign of respect that his children are expected to reciprocate. An opinion frequently aired is that when a father belongs to the same moiety as his children, they are free to joke with each other and are possible objects for each other's ridicule, and therefore the father does not have sufficient authority to sanction repeated misconduct and insubordination. As the Motese increasingly have defied the principle of exogamous marriage, their choices have cumulatively nourished the seed for an even greater challenge to Motese ideals of sociality, namely, a more widespread tolerance for noncompliance with decisions, rulings, and regulations. To those who express the greatest concern for the development of Mota society, the proliferation of endogamous marriages is symptomatic. Even though they agree that the abolishment of the full-scale *sañ-sañ* was reasonable, since the cutting down of mature trees and the destruction of tools and other durable property imply punishing future heirs who should not be blamed for their predecessors' offences, the fear for *sañ-sañ* had clearly contributed in retaining the moiety structure, and thus also the customary principles of authority. Lack of restraint in fighting, prolonged conflicts over land rights and land allocation even after a proper verdict, and the high number of juvenile pregnancies are all attributed to the changing family structure, which in the last instance is caused by the father no longer necessarily being a *tavala ima* (other side of the house) and therefore entitled to his children's unreserved respect. Therefore, I occasionally heard proposals concerning the introduction of a limited *sañ-sañ*, as a means of accentuating that marriage between two members of the same moiety neither has been nor shall be accepted unconditionally. Like so many other ideas concerning bodies of law and government on Mota, this too will most likely remain unimplemented—if for no other reason than the fact that such unions now are found even in the most proclaimed traditionalist

matriline, and it is therefore difficult to pass judgment without being judged by the very same ruling.

When the first couples had married within the moiety after the *sañ-sañ* was abandoned in 1950, the Motese showed their desire to retain the link with earlier practices by making arrangements for a woman from the excluded moiety to adopt the husband-to-be. This rather essentialistic practice rapidly became the norm, and until recently it was done as a matter of course. In this way, the cultural image of the two moieties being the walls that uphold the roof, i.e., the Mota society, by marrying each other and therefore being mutually dependent was preserved. However, an unmistakable improvisational air stuck to the arrangement, and the adoptee was in most cases never counted as a full member of the adopting family, neither being given access to significant amounts of land nor contributing in feast-giving on the same scale as his adoptive siblings. In addition, since the transfer of the bride-price took place between the couple's premarital families, the nature of the *qaliga* in-law relationships became awkward. The groom's new adoptive family would only give a small contribution, and occasionally none at all, to the payment of the bride-price, which is the defining marker for the rights and duties associated with the *qaliga* institution. Therefore, the two "original" families remain the actual parties, with the adopting family being an ambiguous third wheel to what on Mota necessarily is a dyadic arrangement. Possibly as a consequence of these uneasy relationships, recently a handful of couples have married endogamously without using the adoption institution to bestow the union a veneer of cultural appropriateness. This has caused several analytically minded Motese to maintain that there are now four lines on Mota: two lines formed by the children from exogamous marriages and two lines with the children of those who have married within the two moieties.

Conclusions: Flexibility in Flux

Michael Allen's argument on the connection between matriliney and political structural innovation that is relatively independent on kinship (1984) is an apt illustration of the political structure on Mota. But, as we have seen, actual kinship practices generate a highly complex social matrix, particularly through the various adoption practices. The frequency of adoption serves to overcome the structural impediment to the formation of localized descent groups that Allen holds is inherent in matrilineal patrivirilocal systems, namely, the rigidity in group recruitment. In addition, the island's relatively inconsiderable size contributes to lessen the impact of patrivirilocality, since no one lives more than an hour's walk apart. Therefore, one might argue with some justification that Mota as sociocultural system harbors both of Allen's

principles of flexibility: it incorporates people as well as ideas with relative ease. The Mota case is thus an empirical correction of Allen's analytical statements and provides support for Ward Goodenough's contention concerning the need for kin group flexibility in all Austronesian societies with a unilineal ideology and limited land resources, regardless of matrilineal or patrilineal principles of succession (1955). On Mota, adoption and the classificatory reckoning of kin personalize and diversify social relations and call for active choice—a feature that is neglected in the old ethnographies, but that undoubtedly has been just as crucial to the workings of the system as its ostensible orderliness on the level of representation. The frequency of adoption might also contribute to the independence the Motese seem to enjoy in their ceaseless creation and recreation of political alliances, exceeding the level of autonomous institutions relatively free from the restraints of kinship that Allen maintains is typical for Melanesian matrilineal societies in general. The widespread adoption practice has also traditionally entailed a potential for ambiguity and conflict, of which the stories of parental jealousy and intentional disclosure of birth family relations bear witness.

However, the rapid population growth of the past five decades, in combination with the impact of cash cropping, seems to cause a gradual change in how the Motese perceive the connection between rights and relationships. The current pressure on land resources that is experienced by virtually every tarañiu matrilineage has increasingly led to people questioning the validity of multiple land rights enjoyed by individuals who through the various forms of adoption belong to several tarañiu (compare Schachter 2008). Recent developments, spurred by the dilemmas of land management in a time of evolving scarcity, indicate a move toward more restricted use rights to matrilineal resources and attempts at a stricter enforcement of land allocation, as illustrated by the case of Paul and his brothers. One might therefore argue that a logic of exclusiveness of kin relations similar to that which characterizes Western kinship ideology seems to be gaining ground. Such an understanding might be correct. Yet, to deduce from this that these emerging changes are brought about by external influences is jumping to conclusions. In the wake of cash cropping, the economic aspect of social relations might to some extent have become departmentalized from other sociocultural domains, and thus the issue of land rights has become partially detached from other features of kinship. But the very high frequency of adoption that has been characteristic of Mota kinship practice prevails, and the cultural significance of the institution shows no signs of being in decline. Indeed, it is likely that the traditional flexibility of the Mota system, in accordance with Goodenough's assertion, will prove advantageous in a situation with even more acute pressure on land resources.

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NOTES

1. The debate culminates with Needham's article "The Mota problem and its lessons," where he answers his original question, "[f]rom what category . . . is the spouse taken in the Mota system" with stating that "she [*sic*] is not taken from any category at all" (Needham 1964, 311). Needham's abandoning the search for the one answer to the Mota problem causes him to pose some other unsolved questions in the Mota ethnography, such as postmarital residence, inheritance, and the role of the father's sister's husband—but he still feels confident that the discussion has led them closer "towards the solution of the Mota problem" (Needham 1964, 313). Needham's and Keesing's application of the culture-specific notion of "generation" adds further haze to the analytic muddle. Knut Rio presents an overview of a similar symptomatic discussion on the Ambrymese kinship system, where a range of reinterpretations by a number of leading anthropologists contributed to a debate that lasted some sixty years (Rio 2002, 142ff; 2005; cf. Patterson 1976; see Jolly 1994, 94ff). His outline rekindled the debate (Rio 2005, 2007; Patterson 2006).

2. His methods have lately been vindicated by anthropologists wading the murky waters of globalization studies and are regarded as an early version of "multisited fieldwork" (see for instance Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Eriksen 2003). There is also a resilient opinion reproduced particularly among Cambridge-trained anthropologists over the years that if the discipline had followed in the footsteps of Rivers rather than the methodological ones of Malinowski or the theoretical ones of Radcliffe-Brown, anthropology today would have been very different—with which it is hard to disagree—and implicitly more able to grasp alleged contemporary social processes—a point that is highly questionable. Vincent (1990) defends Rivers's approach and points the finger at Malinowski for the ousting of his theories (see also Kuper 2005, 52–53), while Strathern (1987, 254, n. 9) finds that Radcliffe-Brown was equally to blame. Hart (1998) holds both men accountable. Firth, however, who followed Rivers's route on the *Southern Cross* when on his way to his first fieldwork on Tikopia, reaches a crushing verdict over his work: "while I admired the industry with which he amassed so much of his data, from brief calls at villages and sessions with natives on the deck of the vessel I became increasingly convinced of the arid quality of this material, its superficiality and lack of perspective" (Firth 1957 [1936], xviii).

3. "Biological" is a term I use with the greatest reluctance, since it tends to reify the culture-specific nature/nurture divide. However, I struggle to find a better word for getting the meaning through, and I therefore opt for ungracefulness instead of possible misunderstanding.

4. The term *lareag* might be a relatively recent introduction, by being a literal translation of the Bislama (Vanuatu Pidgin) term *karemaot*. The 1896 dictionary of the Mota language does not list "adopt" as one of the meanings of *lareag*.

5. The label “Euro-American” is of course very crude, since both the legal and (other) cultural context of adoption within this vast area is highly diversified (see Howell 2003, 2006). Nevertheless, the notion that the relation between parent and child is exclusive seems to be generally held in a Euro-American context.

6. The term *gōtō* (to be in labor) is also used for the time a man spends in the secret male *Tamate* associations’ *salagōrō* dwelling preparing his tamate headdress before a dance, *gōtō vag ō tamate*. *Gōtō* is a term of concealment (*ō vavae tape vatīōreag*) and giving birth and making a tamate are regarded as analogous activities. In the old days, the women would gather in the forest while the mother-to-be would *gōtō*, in the same way that the men gather in the *salagoro* before and after a dance. Neither Codrington nor Rivers mention this practice. It is considered very bad manners to use a more revealing term, such as *la ō tete* (give birth to a child) or *ge ō tamate* (construct a tamate).

7. On Wogeo, this is also due to the transfer of malevolent magic/sorcery in the matrilineages. Therefore, matrilineal kin connections are a subdued topic, never to be discussed in public. Wagner notes a different attitude from Usen Barok, New Ireland (Wagner 1986, 62).

8. Jack was originally from Small Malaita, where people have a reputation for being prone to fighting and quarrelling, but was returned to Mota after the completion of his contract on a sugarcane plantation in Queensland during the days of the “Blackbirding” labor trade in the second half of the nineteenth century.

9. It should be remembered that Paul was particularly fond of his father, who was his spitting image, and that he had passed away less than a year before Paul told me this story the first time.

10. This probably applied to both the mother and father, which is the case today. Rivers’s attributing this to the father is most likely a consequence of androcentric bias.

11. I witnessed several cases of parental jealousy during my fieldworks. My mother’s mother Hansen contextualized these incidents by telling me about a practice called *mawō*: if a father who had a son of whom he was particularly fond felt that his days were numbered, he would have the son killed to assure that he would not be emotionally attached to a new father, who would enjoy the good company of his son, buy him new fires in the Suqe male graded society, etc.

12. This figure is bound to be inaccurate, since a substantial portion of those adopted as infants are not aware of their being adopted. Many would secretly reveal the facts of people’s adoptions to me, but my records are far from complete. My Lutheran upbringing prevented further prying into these well-kept secrets.

13. There seems to be a vague but general understanding that the person’s moiety allegiance when passing through puberty is the one that will be imperative. It should be kept in mind that adolescence, only marked by a change of reference term from the gender neutral “child” to “girl” or “boy,” is a period when the Motese engage in sexual relations of usually short duration. Traditionally, they have been strongly encouraged to have these affairs exclusively with members of the other moiety.

14. Currently, there seems to be a gradual transfer of influence from the mother's brother to the father. In this respect, Paul's double position, or perhaps rather intermediary status, seems to facilitate a very modern role. Leo's sons have told me that when they are reprimanded by Paul, as he occasionally is asked to do by Leo or Nelly, the message seems to stand out more clearly than when coming from either Leo or Paul's two brothers, whose roles are less ambiguous, even though Paul generally is regarded as a less intimidating and more easygoing person than his brothers.

15. The fact that they readily admitted their not knowing is of course admirable, given that knowledge of tarañiu family lines indicates knowledge of *kastom*, which again usually implies social esteem. On several occasions people I had been interviewing about their family lines later came to tell me that they doubted the accuracy of some piece of information they had provided.

16. White reports the same from Santa Isabel, but adds that there garden land is still plentiful. He sees a change in attitude when facing the prospect of commercial development of land (cf. Rodman 1987), and anticipates a growing concern in the wake of the "phenomenal population growth of recent decades" (White 1991, 35)—a growth that is well below the Mota figure.

17. In the old days, the fear of *sañ-sañ* unintentionally caused the creation of new lineages, according to several elderly Motese. Children conceived in a secret relationship between two people of the same moiety were immediately after birth placed in some semipublic location where there were good chances that they would be found. The finders would look for a likely source from which the child might have sprung forth. Several children were found crying on top of the roof of the *gamal*, the building of the Suqe graded male society, and were therefore considered to belong to the lineage of *nōta* (roof). When an infant was discovered by the seaside, it was regarded as the offspring of the yellow-bellied sea snake, *marea*. Both the *gamal* and the narrow stretches of sand beaches were places that were regularly frequented, and there were good chances that a newborn child would be found by someone passing by.

18. The *sañ-sañ* is still in use within the domain of the secret male Tamate associations, sanctioning severe violations of the laws of the Tamate (see Kolshus 2007, chap. 3).

19. There has not yet been elected a head chief who has married within their own moiety. The leaders of two of the three major political parties have done it, although one of them makes a point of his being adopted by his mother's brother when he was little, thus making him a member of both moieties. The other was adopted into the other moiety when it was clear that he intended to marry one from his own side. To those who hold that party politics is dirty business that tear the Mota society apart and is at odds with the maintenance of tradition, these instances add fuel to the fire.

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**POWER, UNCERTAINTY, AND OBLIGATION: UNRAVELING
CONTEMPORARY ADOPTION AND FOSTERAGE ON
RAIVAVAE, AUSTRAL ISLANDS, FRENCH POLYNESIA**

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Today, as in the past, the creation of informal adoptive or *fa'a'amu* relationships is a very common and highly significant social process on the Austral Island of Raivavae and throughout French Polynesia. In the following I will describe the indigenous tradition of informal adoption on Raivavae in general, and the grandparental adoption of grandchildren in particular, as it was practiced in the past. Then I will explore how post-1994 forces associated with culture change, globalization and environmental crisis have impacted the construction of and the obligations associated with grandparental adoption and the definition of intergenerational relationships in a contemporary world.

I HAD JUST RETURNED to the Austral Island of Raivavae in French Polynesia in 2004 and was awaiting the time when Mata and I could have our first private conversation. Mata was my friend and research assistant in 2002 and 2004, and in 2004 Mata and her family were gracious enough to share their home and family life with me.

Mata's husband's extended family had just completed the funeral rituals for her mother-in-law two days before I arrived. When the guests who filled her house finally went to bed, Mata, who was visibly upset, turned to me and said, "She didn't release him." Her mother-in-law had invoked her right to informally adopt Mata's firstborn child, a son named Metua, at birth in a special kind of relationship called *aine mo'otua*. Since he was informally adopted into this special grandparent/grandchild relationship, Metua was obligated to live with and assist his paternal grandmother until she died.

Since her mother-in-law just recently died, Mata believed that Metua had fulfilled his obligation and that he would be released from his commitment to his extended family.

Although I was well aware that informal adoption and fosterage were routine kinship practices in many Polynesian societies (Baddeley 1982; Brooks 1976; Elliston 1997; Hooper 1970; Modell 1995; Ottino 1970; Shore 1976), to date, these processes had not been a focus for my research. I also developed a close friendship with Lucy, a thirty-four-year-old married woman, and I was fortunate to have her as a research assistant in 2002. During my conversations with Mata and Lucy I learned that both of them had given firstborn children to paternal grandparents, and my friendship with them, and my interest to understand the cultural forces affecting their lives, meant that informal adoption and fosterage became one focus for my 2004 fieldwork on Raivavae.

In this paper, I will describe the indigenous tradition of informal adoption on Raivavae in general, and grandparent adoption in particular, as it was experienced by my Raivavaen friends in the past. Then I will explore how post-1994 forces associated with culture change and globalization have impacted the construction and maintenance of grandparent adoption and the definition of intergenerational relationships in a contemporary world.

Raivavae: The Setting

I conducted research on Raivavae in 1994, 2002, and 2004 as part of a longitudinal study of the impact on island residents of an airport constructed between 1999 and 2003.

Raivavae is a six-square-mile volcanic island that is almost completely encircled by a series of twenty-five coral atolls. In 2004 about 95 percent of the people living on Raivavae belonged to the Evangelical Church of French Polynesia. Islanders receive education in both French and Tahitian and speak Tahitian at home. In some elderly households Raivavaen is also spoken. A cargo ship that visits about once a month has been serving the island since the 1960s.

Raivavaens, as part of the French Overseas Territory of French Polynesia, receive French social welfare benefits such as free medical care, educational allocations, and retirement benefits. Up through 2004, at least half of Raivavaens have consistently supported the movement for Independence from France, and this political position continues to be an important component of Raivavaen identity.

Because of Raivavae's limited educational and employment opportunities and lack of amenities, most residents spend both short and extended periods

of time off the island, primarily in the capital of Papeete. Despite the need for circulatory migration (see also Flinn 1992; Graves and Graves 1974; Lockwood 1993), Mata and Lucy, like most Raivavaens, feel that Papeete is not a good place and that life there is far inferior to life on Raivavae.

Kinship, Caregiving, and Adoption on Raivavae

Raivavaens, like other French Polynesians, use bilateral principles of kinship to create kin groups called *'opu ho'e* and *'opu feti'i*. One's *'opu ho'e* includes one's natural and adoptive parents and siblings and their immediate descendants, and one's *'opu feti'i* includes people from multiple generations including the siblings of parents and grandparents (Brooks 1976; Hooper 1970; Ottino 1970). In everyday discussions with me, Raivavaens refer to both groups as *'opu feti'i* or extended family. Although theoretically bilateral, on Raivavae these kin groups have always had a clear patrilineal bias.

The reality of circular migration means that at any point in time only a part of one's extended family is resident on the island. Kin who reside on Raivavae are critical to the continuity of kinship groups because they retain an identity with the land and manage and exercise control over the properties, farms, and uncleared land of nonresident family members (see also Ottino 1970).

All members of an extended family have equal rights to inherit land and other family property. Individual members request allocations of land and other family resources, and family elders make the final decisions concerning these requests. Remaining family members are obligated to carry out the inheritance "laws" articulated by the elders. In some families competing claims of resident and nonresident family members lead to long-term land disputes. Although most Raivavaens view the French legal system with disdain, a small number of families have legally registered land allocations as a way to resolve these disputes.

Children, like other family resources, are communally "owned" by extended family members (see also Billard et al. 1994; Hooper 1970), and they circulate between houses in search of affection and food from a wide variety of relatives. Since children are jointly owned by the extended family, members are obliged to provide various types of care when called upon to do so.

As elsewhere in French Polynesia (see also Hooper 1970; Brooks 1976), different kinds of extended family support form points on a Raivavaen continuum of caregiving (see Dickerson-Putman 2007 for a detailed discussion of this continuum). One point on this continuum of care is referred to in both Tahitian and Raivavaen as *ha'apa'o*, "to seek, to watch" (Wahlroos 2002). The duration of care can range from five minutes to five days. For example,

Lucy will ask a neighbor to look after her older child while she takes her newborn to the medical clinic. A second point on the caregiving continuum is called *tia'i*, “to keep, to foster” (Wahlroos 2002). This type of care is requested by birth parents when they must temporarily live off the island, so it involves a longer duration of caregiving, a higher level of responsibility, and a greater intensity of care. For example, Lucy might ask her sister “to foster” her children while she and her husband attend a four-month-long church conference in the capital city of Papeete.

A third point on the caregiving continuum is referred to in Tahitian and Raivavaen as *fa'a'amu*, “to informally adopt a feeding child” (Wahlroos 2002). Although it is impossible to reconstruct the extent and character of adoption, elderly Raivavaens I spoke with told me that informal adoptions were a common type of kinship relationship in the past.

Below I will briefly outline a general description of informal adoption as it is practiced on Raivavae. Then I will more specifically discuss the unique character of the adoption of grandchildren by grandparents.

Adoption on Raivavae

Today, as in the past, the creation of informal adoptive relationships or *fa'a'amu* is a highly significant process in the formation of kinship relationships on Raivavae and throughout French Polynesia (Brooks 1976; Elliston 1997; Levy 1973). In fact, in some communities, adopted children can be found in over 60 percent of island households.

According to local residents, *fa'a'amu* are limited to close extended family members as a way to maintain the continuity of family resources and ensure that the children will be well taken care of (see also Elliston 1997). Although all members jointly “own” the children of the family, the requests of grandparents and aunts and uncles almost always receive priority. According to Mata and others on the island, “it’s best to adopt a newborn so that the child will bond with the adoptive parents as soon as possible.” Adopted children, like biological children, are expected to reciprocate the nurturing and “feeding” they received in the past by giving care to their adoptive parents.

As described by many local residents, informal adoption is a situational, negotiable, and contingent kinship process (see also Elliston 1997; Oliver 1974, 1981; and Levy 1970). At the time of the initiation of the *fa'a'amu* relationship, extended family members negotiate and define the residential and inheritance options of the child and the economic responsibilities of the two sets of parents. Control of French welfare benefits (introduced in 1966) including family allocations and educational stipends are also a major point

of extended family negotiations. Parents must legally register the births of their children in order to receive benefits for them. In a small number of families, birth parents share some or all of these benefits with the adoptive parents. According to Mata and Lucy, birth parents almost always register the child, and so they usually retain control of these valuable resources.

If the life circumstances of either set of parents changes, the terms of the adoptive relationship may be renegotiated. Because children are jointly owned by extended families, there is no legal and permanent transfer of jural rights and responsibilities over the child at the time of adoption. In fact, most of the fa'a'amu children that I know of on the island divide their time between their biological and adoptive families.

As French Polynesians, Raivavaens have the right to use the French legal system to adopt children. My friends Lucy and Mata can clearly articulate the differences between a Western form of adoption, locally referred to using the French verb *adopter*, and fa'a'amu adoption. For example, Western adoption involves the legal transfer of jural authority from the biological to the adoptive parents and usually involves the termination of relations between the child and his/her biological parents. According to Lucy, "people in Western cultures with nuclear families, such as France, must resort to legal forms of adoption because they lack the resources and support of extended families." Raivavaens take tremendous cultural pride in their practice of informal adoption and, as of 2004, I knew of only one set of parents who used the French system to legally adopt two children in Papeete. Both parents came from families that were well known on the island for their disputes over land. They went through the time and expense of legal adoption because they were worried that after their deaths some family members might question the inheritance claims of informally adopted children. Transnational adoption is not yet a significant process in French Polynesia. In 2002, for example, only seventy-four French Polynesian children (none from Raivavae) were legally adopted by French adults (La Depeche de Tahiti 2002).

Grandparent-Initiated Adoptions

Maternal and paternal grandparents, like other extended family members, can initiate the adoption of a grandchild at any time. The requests of grandparents receive preferential treatment because residents of Raivavae feel that grandparents have a special affection for grandchildren and this creates special bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. In fact, higher status is given to children who are adopted by their grandparents (see also Hanson 1970; Hooper 1970). As elsewhere in French Polynesia, the majority of fa'a'amu relationships on Raivavae involve the adoption of grandchildren by

grandparents. Grandparent-initiated adoption has all of the characteristics of the fa'a'amu relationship described above. Grandparents could initiate an adoption of a newborn or an older grandchild depending on their age, physical state, and current needs.

Although it is impossible to reconstruct past motivations on Raivavae, conversations with residents suggested various reasons for why grandparents initiated the adoption of grandchildren. Grandparents may want to adopt a grandchild if they believe that the child's parents are not able or willing to nurture the infant. This situation is locally perceived as distinct from the one in which grandparents adopt the offspring of their adolescent children (see Marshall 2008). In French Polynesia, there is a culturally defined period of the life course (*ohipa taure'areia*) during which sexual experimentation is expected from young people (Hooper 1970; Levy 1973; Lockwood 1993; Oliver 1981). If an adolescent girl became pregnant, the child would be adopted by her parents (see also Butt 2008, 106). Raivavaens differentiate this type of adoption from grandparent-initiated adoption because the child refers to the grandparents as parents and is viewed as their offspring. In grandparent-initiated adoption, children refer to their grandparents as grandparents.

Grandparents may also initiate the adoption of a grandchild who is living off island with their migrant parents. Many elderly Raivavaens that I know requested to adopt a grandchild because they felt that life in Papeete was very difficult for young parents who lacked economic resources and extended family support. Other reasons for grandparent adoption were to ensure that one will have a caregiver in old age and to replace the lost household labor of children who have migrated elsewhere (Coppentrath 1994; Hooper 1970; Ottino 1970).

Paternal grandparents also had the opportunity to create a special type of adoptive tie with grandchildren in the context of the aine mo'otua relationship (Calmel et al. 1994; Walker 2002). According to the precolonial practice of this relationship, paternal grandparents had the right to demand and receive their firstborn grandchild.

It was a child's filial obligation to "give" an offspring to their parents if they demanded one to show respect, to reciprocate for past care, and to provide them with assistance in the future (see also Finney 1973; Hanson 1970; Lockwood 1993). In the Tuamotus, Ottino (1970, 103) found that grandparents, when asked, usually maintained that adoptive children were given to them. Parents of the children, however, claimed that their children were taken from them. Both Mata and Lucy told me that even though giving up a child was very difficult, it was extremely rare in the past for a child not to acquiesce to the demands of the parents (see also Walker 2002, 49).

The aine mo'otua type of adoption had some unique characteristics that set it apart from other fa'a'amu relationships. Unlike grandparent-initiated adoptions, the grandparents would have jural and economic responsibility over their grandchild. These types of adoption were also unique because they were not negotiable once they were established. If negotiation did occur it was only at the initiative of the grandparents.

Paternal grandparents demanded to adopt grandchildren to fulfill their needs and desires. The same factors that may have motivated grandparent-initiated adoptions may have also played a role in the creation of the aine mo'otua relationship. In the past, one unique motivating factor for this relationship was that the adoption of a firstborn grandchild provided a conduit for the transmission of extended family ancestral knowledge (*paari*) from one generation to the next (Ho Wan 1994; Walker 2002). In this case the transmission of knowledge between the firstborn grandchild and the paternal grandparents linked the contemporary extended family to the mythological family of ancestors.

The adopted firstborn grandchild was also allocated a special inheritance called *tu'a'a mata'iaipo*. This would be a significantly greater inheritance than would be received by younger grandchildren. This inheritance was given to a firstborn grandchild to reward the child for bringing happiness to his/her paternal grandparents (Walker 2002: 49–50).

Patterns of Grandparent Caregiving and Adoption on Raivavae in 1994

Paternal and maternal grandparents provided various types of care (including ha'apa'o and ti'ai) to grandchildren when I conducted ethnographic research on Raivavae in 1994. It is especially common for children to ask their parents to look after their grandchildren while parents work, while they attend school or church meetings, and when they experience illness. Since most Raivavaen grandparents lived in independent households in either a family compound or in close proximity to their children, grandchildren either moved in with grandparents or grandmothers helped with child care and food preparation and returned to their own homes to sleep at night.

When adult children needed to take advantage of school and work opportunities off the island, they often asked their parents (usually paternal) to look after one or more grandchildren. Most grandparents did not expect their care to be reciprocated in the future. While many grandparents told me that they wanted to help their children and ensure the welfare of the grandchildren, they may not have felt that caregiving was the best thing for them.

This was certainly the sentiment portrayed to me by one grandmother. Tera lived in a family compound surrounded by the homes of her three married sons and their families. Her youngest son, Maurice, had migrated to Papeete to find work in 1988 and in the process had met a woman and fathered a child. When the relationship fell apart in 1994, Maurice returned to Raivavae with his young daughter and moved in with his parents. Maurice spent most of his time on Raivavae fishing and producing taro for the family. While he worked, his daughter Nina was left in the care of her grandmother Tera. She told me that this was not easy for her because Nina was an extremely active child and she spent most of her day chasing after her. At least in the evening, Maurice did take care of his daughter after he returned from the taro farm. Although she resented the amount of time and energy she devoted to Nina's care, she was grateful for the labor that Maurice gave to his family.

Grandparent-initiated adoptions and *aine mo'otua* adoptions were highly important kinship processes on Raivavae in 1994. About 56 percent of the sampled households on Raivavae included at least one adopted child. Most (74 percent) of these adoptions involved the adoption of a grandchild by a grandparent. In 1994, about 89 percent of these grandparental adoptions involved paternal grandparents, and the remaining 11 percent involved maternal grandparents. Because this information was drawn from a random sample of households, I do not know what circumstances or what motivations led to these adoptions.

As in the past, grandparent-initiated adoptions involved both newborns and older grandchildren, depending on the age, physical state, and needs of the grandparents. In most cases (93 percent) the biological parents of the grandchild were living on Raivavae so children received food, care, and attention from both households. In a small number of families, grandparents had full responsibility for the care and discipline of their adopted grandchild because their adult children lived off the island. Undoubtedly, many of the factors that motivated grandparent adoption in the past also affect recent adoptions.

Although I do not know how many of the numerous grandparent adoptions reported by the random sample were *aine mo'otua* relationships, Lucy and Mata told me that "many paternal grandparents still want to hold on to their firstborn grandchildren." Conversations with them, and with other island residents, helped me to understand the circumstances and motivations that led to existing *aine mo'otua* relationships in 1994.

Lucy's mother-in-law had permanently relocated to Papeete in the 1980s because of chronic medical problems. Shortly after this move, Lucy gave birth to her firstborn son named Patua. Her mother-in-law immediately

invoked her right to an aine mo'otua adoption and claimed her firstborn grandchild. She later told Lucy that she felt caring for a newborn would bring her the energy and motivation to regain her health. Lucy and her husband agonized over this demand because they wanted to keep the child but did not feel able to say no to Lucy's mother-in-law. She told me that "I grieved for many months after we handed over Patua." In 1994, Lucy told me that in retrospect she felt they had made a good decision because her son has a close family member to cover his expenses and care for him while he attends school in Papeete.

Mata told me that mothers become lonely when their adult children leave home and this motivates them to demand a firstborn grandchild who will bring life and joy back into the household. This certainly was the motivation of a grandmother named Lita. In 1994, Lita and her husband were in their sixties. Although they had five biological children, they had also adopted numerous children throughout their married lives. Lita adored babies, so when her biological and adopted children (some grandchildren, some nieces/nephews) became older she sought to adopt a firstborn grandchild to make her home complete. I was living in Lita's compound in 1994 when she demanded and received the firstborn child of her youngest son. Today this fa'a'amu is especially important to Lita because she lost the child's father (her son) in a fishing accident only a few years later. Since the child's mother is absent, living with another man on her home island elsewhere in the Australs, the grandson will remain with his grandmother for the rest of her life. It is Lita's expectation that her grandson will take care of her in her old age.

Grandmothers may also want to adopt their grandchildren if they feel that the parents lack either the resources or skills for caregiving. Mata's mother-in-law demanded Mata's firstborn child, Metua, when he was born in 1984 because the marriage was unstable and Mata was very young. The mother-in-law asked for the child because she was worried about the welfare of her grandson.

During my stay on Raivavae in 1994, I also heard many stories about how difficult it was to release a child upon the demand of a grandparent. Marguerite, the wife of one of the pastors living on Raivavae, was distraught when she gave birth to her firstborn child for fear that her parents-in-law living on Tahiti would demand the newborn son. Her husband was able to avert an aine mo'otua demand from his parents by convincing them to adopt the firstborn of their younger son. Another demand for the firstborn son came from the paternal grandparents after the birth of their second son. Although her husband, the pastor, supported her wish to deny the request, Marguerite felt a tremendous amount of guilt and eventually allowed the

firstborn son to stay with the grandparents for three months. She worried the entire time that her in-laws would not give back the two-year-old. At the end of the three months the paternal grandparents did demand an *aine mo'otua* adoption. Because the child was already in the hands of his parents, the pastor felt unable to deny their request. The tension created by this decision eventually led to the demise of their marriage.

Mata and Lucy, as well as older residents of the island, told me that in the past, grandparents had greater power to demand the creation of a special relationship with their firstborn grandchild. This power was based on their control of extended family resources such as land, ancestral knowledge, and *mana* (see also Ho Wan 1994; Walker 2002). Both of them felt that younger people on the island were having more and more difficulty giving up their children. They know many young couples, and especially young mothers, who, like them, had difficulty parting with their newborns and who experienced a long period of grieving after the event. According to Mata and Lucy, many young mothers are now beginning to question the power and the right of parents to demand adoptions. Many people also told me that they believe that there was more consensus in the past concerning the future obligations of the firstborn child to their grandparent(s). It appears, then, that in the past there were fewer uncertainties surrounding grandparent-initiated and *aine mo'otua* adoption on Raivavae. When I returned to Raivavae in 2004 I explored these perceptions and resumed my exploration of grandparent adoption.

Changing Contexts for Grandparent Caregiving

During the 1990s, a series of environmental events brought a great deal of change to island life. After my departure in 1994, a very damaging cyclone hit the island and led to the poisoning and contamination of the fish in the lagoon. Although the local marine life should be free from contamination by 2009, frozen fish and chicken, carried to the island by the cargo ship, continue to replace fresh fish in the local diet. In 1996, a fruit fly infestation made its way to Raivavae on a New Zealand yacht, and local tree crops were removed from the diet until the late 1990s. Local production of taro declined during this period, and, for the first time, households were selling taro to each other. Processed foods, such as rice, served as a replacement for taro. The lack of potable water also became a problem. Those households that could afford it either bought bottled water or installed filtration systems in their homes. In a short period of time, the local diet had changed from one based on taro, fish, and fruit to one based on frozen fish or chicken and rice. Fresh water has been replaced by captured and bottled water.

Many Raivavaens, and especially the elderly, firmly believe that the environmental crises of the 1990s reduced the local quality of life and led to the increased emigration of their children and grandchildren. An examination of census figures for 1996 and 2002 (Ministere des Archipels 2002) supports this impression. Although the out-migration of young people in their late teens and twenties is an established demographic pattern, during the period 1988–2002, Raivavae lost about 28 percent of its population. Much of this change can be attributed to the combined impact of a declining birth rate and the emigration of persons in the fifteen to thirty age group.

Environmental crises and the contamination of local food are not the only sources of change to impact Raivavae during the period 1994–2004. The construction of an airport between 1999 and 2003 also initiated various changes into island life. Many younger people on Raivavae believe that the increased linkage to the outside world introduced through the construction of the airport is a positive source of change for island life. Nonlocal workers and return migrants, who were hired for the construction of the airport, brought their lifestyles and ideas with them. It also allowed children attending school off the island to more easily come home during the school holidays. The availability of air transportation also attracted more qualified and socially active school teachers from Papeete, who applied their new ideas in various initiatives to improve island life. Air service to Papeete is available twice a week, and these flights bring visitors/tourists who are also a source of new ideas.

The introduction of satellite television and the opportunity to rent videos have also accelerated the importation of new ideas and models for behavior. In late 1994 a free government-sponsored satellite television station became available to Raivavaens. Programming on this station was limited to news and weather reports, public-service announcements, and Western soap operas. By 2004 island residents such as Mata could choose from a wide variety of satellite packages. Television and videos brought Raivavaens new models of autonomous nuclear families. This led some younger people to question the advantages of an extended family model where elders had the power to control family resources and in which parents had little impact on the circulation and adoption of their children.

Public-service announcements broadcast on satellite television brought global issues of human rights into the awareness of local residents. In recent years and as a result of their work with Tahitians in French Polynesia, French and French Polynesian legal experts and social workers have initiated a movement to protect the rights of all extended family members involved in fa'a'amu adoption (Ho Wan 1994). This call comes from their experience

of trying to define the legal rights of birth parents, adoptive parents, and children in a French Overseas Territory that tries to reconcile both a legal and an informal type of adoption. Much concern is focused on whether or not birth parents really have a choice when grandparents and other family members request to adopt a child (Ho Wan 1994). The psychological and emotional effects of being adopted and a rise in delinquency among fa'a'amu children in Papeete are also contemporary models of discourse that may impact the perspectives of younger generations on Raivavae (Calmel 1994; Cizeron 1994; Nadaud 1994).

It was clear from my discussions with Raivavaens in 2004 that older and younger people often have very different perspectives concerning change. Younger persons, such as Mata and Lucy, value the new ideas and linkages that have come to the island and hope to apply this new information in their future family decisions.

The elderly focus on the degradation of resources and associate this with the increased and more permanent migration of young people. When I asked both Tera and Lita about the impact of these changes they both told me that “the poisoning of our resources has driven our children away.” Some couples with good income-earning opportunities and family support in Papeete took their children with them hoping that eventually the richness and diversity of island resources would return. The majority of couples, however, left one or more children behind in the care of their extended families and especially with their parents. Grandparents appeared willing to extend their caregiving to keep both their children and grandchildren connected to the island.

Patterns of Grandparent Caregiving and Adoption in 2004

The increased monetization of the economy, increased global-local linkages, increased exposure to new ideas and models for behavior, and the environmental challenges described earlier have transformed various aspects of life on Raivavae in a relatively short period of time. Of particular interest here is how these changes have impacted the context for grandparent-initiated and aine mo'otua adoption.

The initiation of adoptive (fa'a'amu) relationships has increased since I have been working on the island. In 1994, of the sampled households 56 percent had at least one adopted child, and by 2004 that number had risen to 65 percent. The number of adoptions of grandchildren has also increased from 74 percent of all adoptions in 1994 to 80 percent of all adoptions in 2004. Although, according to Mata and Lucy, the majority of these adoptions are initiated by paternal grandparents, there is also an increase of adoptions

and adoption requests by maternal grandparents. The increased number of adoptions by paternal and maternal grandparents is also associated with an increase in the intensity of caregiving. In 1994, some 93 percent of the biological parents of adopted grandchildren lived on Raivavae, and by 2004 that number had fallen to 80 percent. When the parents of the adopted grandchild are off the island, all of the care and responsibility of the grandchildren falls to the grandparents. The increased out-migration of children also means that some parents have lost the security and support of having their adult children living close by.

Most of the patterns that I identified in 1994 still characterized grandparent-initiated adoption in 2004. Yet it also appears that a shift in the power to control the initiation and definition of grandparent-initiated and *aine mo'otua* adoption is occurring on Raivavae. Although grandparents still want to adopt their grandchildren, there is less certainty about their control of these relationships. My discussions with various residents helped me to identify some examples of the beginning of this power shift in contemporary adoptive relationships.

In the past, all adoptions, including the adoption of grandchildren, were initiated by the adoptive parents. In 2002 and 2004 both younger and older Raivavaens told me that more grandparental adoptions are now being initiated by adult children than in the past. Young couples, concerned about both the decline in the quality of life and lack of economic opportunities on the island, now anticipate that living away from Raivavae would be a more permanent stage in the life course. These perceptions lead parents to initiate an adoptive rather than a fostering relationship between their children and a grandparent. Some young couples explained to me that they wanted their children to learn about their local language and culture; once they were established in Papeete they may ask one of the grandmothers to come to the city and claim an infant to be raised as an adoptive child in the grandparent household on Raivavae.

Other young couples asked one of the grandmothers to adopt a young child before they left for Papeete because of their concern that it would be too expensive to feed and educate a child in the city. Mata and Lucy suspect that in some extended families, adult children initiate grandparent adoptions so that their children can take advantage of the retirement pensions offered to the elderly citizens of French Polynesia. In this case, children encourage their retired or soon-to-be retired parents to adopt an older grandchild to help them. By living in the household the grandchild would share in the higher quality of life that these pensions might bring. The control of these new economic resources gives the elderly, including grandparents,

a new source of power that partially replaces the control that elders used to have over other extended family resources. All of these accounts suggest that the increase in the number of grandparent adoptions of the offspring of nonresident children could be the outcome of the needs, motivations, and initiatives of children.

The story of Paul and Alice provides a good example of both contemporary power shifts in the definition of grandparent caregiving and the agency of younger people to create adoptive relationships that meet their needs. Paul (age 57) and his wife, Alice (age 63), adopted two of their grandchildren. One of the couple's daughters, Maria, married a man from the Austral Island of Rapa named Georges, and they moved there to establish their own household because he had a job there. About nine years ago when her two children came of school age, Maria asked her parents (Paul and Alice) to adopt two grandchildren because the primary school on Raivavae was far superior to the school on Rapa. Although the children return to live with their parents on Rapa during school vacations, daily responsibility and expenses for the grandchildren fall to their grandparents. When I talked with Paul and Alice in 2004 they told me that "we love our grandchildren and are happy to help Maria and Georges provide the best possible life for them." They also feel fortunate to have the time to educate their grandchildren in the language and culture of Raivavae despite the fact that the level of care can at times be burdensome.

While they are happy to help their daughter, Paul and Alice are also uncertain about the future. Paul and Alice have accepted the fact that the relationship will end when the grandchildren leave the island to attend secondary school. They also don't expect their care to be reciprocated in the future. Paul retired from his job in 2002, and although he will receive a government pension, he and Alice worry about whether they will be called upon to help with the educational expenses of their grandchildren. These future requests could compromise both their quality of life and their ability to meet their own needs in the future.

Paul's and Alice's caregiving to their grandchildren blurs the boundaries between adoption and fosterage as they were understood in the past. The initiation of the relationship, the lack of expected reciprocation, and the fact that the relationship fulfills the needs of the children and not the grandparents are all characteristics of fosterage (*ti'ai*) and not adoption. Although Paul and Alice responded to their daughter's request to adopt her children, the care they are providing does not seem to be in their own best interests.

Tera has also become uncertain about the parameters of her relationship with her granddaughter. As discussed earlier, when Tera's son Maurice's

relationship fell apart in 1994, he returned to Raivavae with his young daughter, Nina, to live with his parents. Maurice worked for the family during the day while his mother looked out for (ha'apa'o) Nina. One day in 1994, Maurice got word that a long-term construction job awaited him in Papeete, so he left on the next cargo ship, asking his mother to care for or "foster" (ti'ai) his daughter. Although she was not thrilled at her age to be the primary caregiver to a young and very active child, she reluctantly agreed to his request because she knew how difficult it was to find employment and she didn't want to stand in the way of her son's opportunity. During the period 1994–2002 Maurice visited Raivavae various times to be with his daughter and family.

When Maurice returned to Raivavae in 2003 he built a house and expected that Nina would live in the house with him. In other words, Maurice felt that he had the right to end the fosterage relationship between his mother and daughter because he had initiated it. Tera, however, did not want her relationship with Nina to end. She told me that after Maurice left "the amount of care and 'feeding' I gave to Nina made her mine." In other words, she felt that she had adopted Nina and that Nina was obligated to care for her until her death. In 2004, Nina was still living with and serving her paternal grandmother. When I departed the island later that year, Tera and her son Maurice had not resolved their different opinions on the future obligations of Maurice's daughter Nina.

The shifting power in contemporary adoption on Raivavae is also reflected in the refusal of grandparent requests to adopt grandchildren. Lucy and her husband met the demand of her mother-in-law to adopt their firstborn son. But in 1996 she refused the demands of her father for her last born child.

When Lucy became pregnant with her last child in 1996, her father asked to adopt the child. After talking it over with her husband, Lucy decided not to allow the adoption largely because of her father's new wife. Lucy's mother died when she was finishing secondary school on another Austral Island and her father took up with another woman who showed little kindness to his five children. She also would not allow Lucy's father to send her money for school supplies, so that Lucy had to borrow money to buy them. Her father wanted more children with his new wife but this did not happen. Lucy told me in 2004 that if her father had been on his own, she would have allowed him to adopt a grandchild. She also told me that none of her siblings had allowed their father to adopt any of their children. In short, she was not alone in her rejection of her father's request for adoption.

Mata, who had granted her mother-in-law's request to adopt her firstborn son, turned down her own parents' request to adopt their second born son

Joshua. Her younger sister and the last child in the family was adopted by a cousin when the baby was six months old. Mata was the major caregiver to the baby and she opposed the adoption because of the cousin's reputation for neglecting her own children. Mata's parents were aware of her opposition and they delivered the child to the cousin when Mata was away on a school trip. The baby died two months later. Mata never forgave her parents and this was why she turned down their request.

I talked in detail with both Mata and Lucy about their decisions. They told me that it was the past behavior of their parents that led to the denial of their request to adopt a grandchild. Lucy and Mata also told me that they found the courage to deny their parents' requests because they learned that they "had the right to keep their families together."

The forces of change that have impacted grandparent-initiated adoptions have also affected the contemporary construction of *aine mo'otua* relationships. According to Lucy, the giving of firstborn children especially to the paternal grandmothers has declined since 1994 because contemporary mothers want to be close to their children. In the past the parameters of firstborn adoptions were not negotiable. If renegotiations took place it was at the request of the grandparents. In 2004 both Mata and Lucy told me that they were going to demand a change in the previously negotiated relationship with their mothers-in-law.

In 2004, Lucy and her husband were renegotiating for an early return of their firstborn son. At the time of the adoption in the 1980s, all parties (Lucy, and her husband, and Lucy's mother-in-law) agreed that the child would stay with the mother-in-law until she died. Lucy and her husband now want to renegotiate the relationship so that their son will be returned to them when he finishes his formal education in Papeete. They want to "call him home" sooner because they feel that the mother-in-law is not teaching their son to respect them. They also feel that their firstborn son is obligated to care for them and not the paternal grandmother who adopted him.

Alternatively, Mata and her husband are demanding that the family should adhere to the original terms of agreement for the adoption of their firstborn son, Metua. Mata, her husband, and her mother-in-law agreed that the boy would be returned to his biological parents after her death. In 2003, Mata had expected that on her deathbed her mother-in-law would release the boy so he could come back and live with Mata and her family. Instead the mother-in-law asked the boy to care for his aunt, her daughter, who would be lonely after the death of her mother. Just before I left Raivavae in 2004, Mata told me that she would wait a few months to allow her sister-in-law to grieve and then she would ask her to release her son Metua.

Conclusion

In the past, the practices of grandparent-initiated and *aine mo'otua* adoption were closely tied to the motivations, needs, and power of the elderly couple. Although it was not always easy, younger people accepted the right and power of grandparents to demand and design adoptive relations with grandchildren.

Various dramatic social and environmental changes in the 1990s were associated with an increased emigration of younger people and created new contexts for the practice of grandparent adoption. Exposure to new ideas and relationship models through satellite television, newspapers, and interactions with airport workers and tourists, as well as increased opportunities to interact with urbanized relatives, has encouraged some younger Raivavaens to question the power of the older generation to control the choices and lives of both children and grandchildren. This shift in perspective is revealed in the increased number of child-initiated adoptions, a decline in the belief that adoptive care must be reciprocated, the rejection of parental requests for adoption, petitions for the renegotiation of the duration of adoptive relationships, and the creation of a new style of adoption that doesn't necessarily fulfill the needs or best interests of the grandparents. New patterns have not replaced the old. In many families, the right of grandparents to initiate or demand the adoption of grandchildren remains unquestioned.

A comparison of my island censuses for 2002 and 2004 revealed no significant change in island population. It is too early to know how the availability of air transportation will affect the shifts outlined here. Air travel could bring migrants permanently back to the island and could offer increased opportunities for interactions between families on Raivavae and Papeete. Both of these developments could strengthen the long-term viability of extended family kinship and adoption. On the other hand, as the tourism industry grows on the island, local residents, like Lucy and Mata, will be exposed to a greater flow of new ideas, and this could further empower younger people to create a new type of family in which parents have the right to control the destinies of their children. If the trends that I identified during my research continue, the decreased ability of grandparents to control both initiated and *aine mo'otua* adoptive relationships will have important future implications for the welfare of the elderly, relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, and the continuance of the Raivavaen way of life.

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A TRANSACTION IN AMBIVALENCE: ADOPTION IN CONTEMPORARY HIGHLANDS PAPUA

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This paper describes the results of a study conducted from 2000 to 2006 about childrearing among young, sexually active Dani women in highlands Papua, Indonesia. Interview results suggest the most accepted way the Dani deal with infants born outside of sanctioned marriage patterns is for the biological mother's father to adopt the infant and to incorporate the child into his lineage. Dani cosmologies view the infant as a flexible person-in-the-making, which encourages contests over who has the right to care for newborns. This paper explores adoption practices by describing three case studies representative of wider trends. The experiences and wishes of birth mothers contrast with the goals of the grandparents who end up assuming care for the children. Results suggest the ambivalences woven into cultural notions of flexible parenting are exacerbated by capitalist economic systems of flexible accumulation increasingly present in highlands Papua.

Introduction

The closer the tie, the greater the ambivalence of feeling.
(Turner 1957)

WHEN CONFRONTED with the rapid social and economic change associated with late capitalist economic systems, young men and women often respond by pushing boundaries of what formerly constituted appropriate sexual values and practices. Novel transitory work opportunities, novel encounters with highly mobile strangers, and quick and novel means to escape traditional opprobrium and censure means that young people can more readily engage

in sexual relations outside of sanctioned marriage patterns. What often happens, however, is that novel sexual opportunities quickly transform into an age-old issue: an unexpected teen pregnancy. This paper addresses how Dani families respond to unplanned infants born to teenage girls. Research conducted from 2000 to 2006 shows Dani grandparents adopt unplanned infants in the vast majority of cases. The infant grows up to call his biological mother his “sister,” and his grandparents are his “mother” and “father.”

The pattern of adopting unplanned infants occurs partially in response to rapidly changing economic conditions. The Dani are a tribal group indigenous to the central highlands of Papua (Irian Jaya, or West Papua), colonized by Indonesia since 1969, and who are living in the midst of unrestrained development and resource exploitation typical of an Indonesian “frontier culture” (Tsing 2000). As has been noted elsewhere, grandparents play a critical role in inscribing filial piety and stability onto unstable family configurations (Franklin and McKinnon 2001, 13). Dani grandparents take on the care of infants in part to counter the disempowering effects on indigenous lifeways of new patterns of mobility, and political and economic disenfranchisement (see also Leinaweaver 2007). Yet grandparental care in the Dani cases as a preventive reaction to new conditions offers only a partial explanation for the trend. Grandparents also make the choice to adopt their grandchildren from a long-standing perspective that views infants as persons-in-the-making, as physically needy corporeal entities requiring sustenance, substances, and nurturing in order to be “built” into adult Dani persons. Infants are viewed in Dani cosmology as inherently flexible beings, capable of responding to the nurturing and the work of “building” by others, irrespective of their actual biological relationship to that caregiver. The logic of clan inheritance gives the father of an unmarried mother a powerful argument for assuming care of a newborn. Grandparents adopt infants to create a person who can be formed into a loyal member of the grandfather’s and birth mother’s clan, bringing benefits and prestige to the clan.

However much grandparent adoption appears as an unquestioned cultural truth, the act of Dani adoption is not an unproblematic process. Dani adoption is a transaction in which exchanges are given and sought for (Demian 2004). Because it is a transaction, as in other Melanesian societies, it is fraught with the potential conflicts and ambivalences inherent in transactional relationships more generally. Dani grandparents are not unwilling to give up a grandchild if a bride-price is paid and their daughter is established in a new household. But, if those conditions are not met, grandparents appear to have a large amount of power to appropriate an infant in order to provide what they see as the best care for the child, but also to serve their own political ambitions of expanding their lineage or obtaining future bride-price gain. A key argument of this paper is that the nurturing and affective relationships

I observed between grandparents and grandchildren should not obscure the scope of contests and negotiations that take place in the transaction of adoption. Contrary to earlier ethnographic accounts that describe adoption in highland Melanesian communities as rare and unproblematic, my research suggests that coercion, secrecy, denials, and betrayals are some of the experiences of birth mothers, adopters, and would-be adopters in the present day (cf. Modell 1994; Turner-Strong 2001; Peletz 2001). Some of these ambivalent experiences result from the immersion of the Dani into global economies as they are diffused through colonial relations in a frontier economy. Yet cultural survival is not the sole strategy in motion. Grandparents counter the destabilizing effects of colonialism and exploitation, even as they gain from them by acquiring offspring: an uneasy, unstable truce.

This paper describes three case studies of adoption in detail as a means to highlight the ambivalences found in contemporary Dani adoption practices. These cases draw from interviews with twenty-six sexually active Dani women aged fourteen to thirty-one, living in the town of Wamena (population 25,000), Jayawijaya district. In interviews with ten families where the pregnant girl gave birth outside of the normative ideal of birth within a marriage where a bride-price had been paid, in nine cases, the parents of the unmarried girl took the infant in as their own.¹ The first case presented here describes decision making around the adoption of an infant whose mother died in childbirth. The marital status of the birth parents determined which candidates would be able to adopt the infant, and the case shows how clan membership determines adoption outcomes under clear-cut circumstances. The second case describes how grandparents ended up caring for an infant born to a young college student. This case highlights the power grandparents have to decide who will be the caregiver when an infant is born outside of a sanctioned marriage. The third case describes one married couple's unsuccessful attempts to adopt on two separate occasions. Grandparents on both occasions intervened and claimed the child as their responsibility. The economic and political conditions within which the Dani live strongly shape these complex cases. In particular, the last case highlights how rapidly changing social conditions increase personal opportunity for young would-be parents, alter their personal commitment to the work of parenting according to traditional norms, challenge the power grandparents have to determine clan identity, and otherwise subtly undermine social relationships seen as critical to successful childrearing.

Reproduction in a Frontier Culture

Contemporary patterns of adoption need to be seen within a context of durable values pertaining to marriage, exchange, and lineage ideals. The

subsistence horticulturalist Dani who have remained in primarily rural locations in the Baliem valley have managed to maintain many daily subsistence patterns. Many of the 60,000-strong Dani continue to cultivate mostly sweet potatoes in raised garden beds. Women continue to raise pigs, which men strategically exchange to promote their status and to strengthen their political alliances. Dani gender roles remain strongly demarcated, and fairly antagonistic. The strict division of labor appears to favor men, for women do most of the hard physical labor in gardens and do not engage in the male-only rituals that give political power. Although marriage patterns are changing due to the effects of Christianity, around 30 percent of marriages remain polygynous. Many parents continue to arrange marriages for their teenage daughters.

Whether a “modern” Christian wedding or an arranged marriage, when men pay a bride-price, the woman is said to belong to her husband. Her children are said to belong to her husband’s lineage. As Wardlow (2006, 107) summarizes, “what holds the clan together, and what enables social reproduction from one generation to the next, is the collective payment and receipt of [bride-price] for women.” Bride-price solidifies the rights of a husband to claim his wife’s child as a member of his lineage: “at marriage a woman is a lost resource to her own clan, the instrument through which another clan will reproduce itself” (Wardlow 2006, 112). Thus when a woman gets pregnant before a bride-price is paid, the infant is understood to belong to his or her grandfather, not to the birth mother. In general women support bride-price for it conveys the social worth ascribed to their reproductive and nurturing abilities. However, bride-price payments have increased in recent times, causing some women to complain they are being valued only for what material and financial benefits they can bring to their family (see also Jorgensen 1993). In the past as in the present, failure to pay bride-price is one of the principal reasons for failure of a marriage.

In the past, adoption was rare. As O’Brien notes in her comprehensive assessment of the 1960s marriage patterns of the nearby Konda valley Dani, premarital pregnancy was also rare and did not occasion any concern. Even though premarital sexuality was not heavily regulated and was known to occur, beliefs about the need to copulate several times with the same person to produce a pregnancy mean that the Dani “are unconcerned about the possible offspring of premarital and extramarital affairs. Men assured me that children never resulted from such unions . . . Illegitimate children are unknown and I discovered no ready way even to express the concept of illegitimacy in the Dani language” (O’Brien 1969, 351). O’Brien records only two cases of adoption in her 1960s study. When premarital births happened in other highland societies, there is some evidence for parents taking the

daughter's offspring (Langness 1969; Strathern and Strathern 1969). Parents took the child, seemingly unproblematically, and the child was given the father's clan name. In Langness' study from the 1960s, for example, "the bastard is raised by the girl's parents as her sibling and she later marries as if nothing had happened" (Langness 1969, 43). In other coastal Melanesian societies where adoption was more common, it served primarily as a means to ensure future exchange transactions among kin of the same generation (Tonkinson 1976; see also Rubinstein 1981, 308; Anderson 2004; Kolshus 2008).² The prevalence of grandparent adoption among the Dani, in short, appears to be a relatively new phenomenon.

Flexible, even brittle, marriage patterns take their toll on childrearing. In a long-standing tradition, about 30 to 40 percent of married Dani women run away from their husbands or former husbands at one point in their life (O'Brien 1969; Butt 2005). When a young mother runs away, if she is still breastfeeding then she normally brings the child with her. If the child is older, he or she may stay with the father. If the mother or father then remarries, the new spouse often refuses to take on responsibility for caring for the child from an earlier marriage. In some cases, parents remain committed to caring for their children even if they do not live together. For example, in a Dani village some 8 kilometers from the town of Wamena, Salomina's daughter Juli stayed with her grandmother in a household led by an elder within Salomina's patrilineage. Salomina lived apart from her daughter because Salomina's new husband refused to support another man's child. Nonetheless, Salomina was recognized as Juli's mother and was able to visit her daughter and bring her food and money almost every day. Other children make do without regular parental support. When parents separate, children are sometimes more or less abandoned to their own devices at a young age. Some children migrate to town and become street children; others align themselves with relatives and contribute labor and support in an effort to become accepted as close kin.

These values pertaining to marriage and parenting retain much of their ideological clout among second-generation urban dwellers, many of whom are pursuing novel opportunities afforded them by the incorporation of the province into Indonesia and the implementation of broad state policies of development. In particular, Dani views of successful parenting and childrearing are increasingly being challenged by their observations of the lifestyle practices of the approximately 15,000 Indonesian migrants³ who have relocated to Wamena from other parts of Indonesia.

Most Indonesian migrants move to Papua, and the highlands in particular, because they see the province as an "empty" piece of resource-rich land. For them, Papua is a place of dreams and a place for speculation. Tsing

documents how the collusion between global financial investment patterns and local dreams of profit-taking largely free of regulation has created a “frontier culture” in other resource-rich provinces in which Indonesian migrants push the boundaries of exploitation: “the migrant dreams of a regional frontier culture in which the rights of previous rural residents could be wiped out to create a Wild West scene of rapid and lawless resource extraction: quick profits, quick exits.” (Tsing 2000, 121; see also McGibbon 2004; Schulte Nordholt 2003; King 2002). In Wamena, migrants run virtually all businesses and dominate government postings. Migrants dominate the illegal logging and bootlegging industries. They make up most of the 30,000 troops currently in Papua, many of whom provide protection to mining and other resource extraction industries as well as enforcing the pacification of the highlands (Tebay 2005; McGibbon 2004) (see Fig. 1). Because migrants get most of the stable work, indigenous Dani jobs tend to be lower paid, higher risk, and temporary.

The incredible intensification of individualism typical of late capitalist economies in general, and frontier economies in Indonesia in particular, is particularly pronounced for youth. Success for young people is increasingly measured by the speed with which they can move to a location, make money, and move on. Young Dani often seek short-term jobs at resource extraction sites away from the Baliem valley, which offer lucrative pay. Education, conversion to a Christian faith, and emulating Indonesian “modern” ways have become important avenues to success. Young men and women increasingly attempt to carve out autonomous lives with fewer social responsibilities.

In their desire to give their children an education, many Dani parents end up inadvertently encouraging individualistic behavior by sending their teenage children to high school in Wamena. Wamena is an exciting town, labeled by one researcher as “the town where people go to have sex.”⁴ Teenagers live in dormitories, religious boarding houses, fosterage situations, or with kin while they are attending school. However much rural families like to believe their teenage children are being supervised by relatives while in town, it is easy for youth to escape opprobrium and explore novel enticements and practices that come with this frontier culture. Although prohibited, alcohol is readily obtained. Many small distilleries sell moonshine, and those with connections smuggle whisky in from the coast. Gambling is popular. Pornography is widely available. It is possible to eke out a living by doing odd jobs. There are small gangs of indigenous “car wash boys” (*cumoboy*s) who live a gang culture, sniffing glue and seeking cheap ways to have sex.⁵ Many teenage girls can and do engage in a wide range of sexual transactions with a wide range of sexual partners who pass through Wamena as soldiers, entrepreneurs, students, skilled workers, bureaucrats,



FIGURE 1. Soldiers patrol the busy shopping area of Wamena. Police and military are ubiquitous features of the urban landscape.

officials, or opportunity seekers. Because in urban locations, distant kin come to assume greater importance, it is often “sisters” (*kakak*) or “family” (*om*) who can facilitate the move toward formal sex work by acting as brokers for adventurous teenage girls (Butt and Munro 2007; Butt, Numbery, and Morin 2002). Some young girls may also have fractious relations with violent parents and may have sought refuge among town friends rather than relatives. I met one young girl who was twelve, for example, who had been abused for years by her hard-drinking soldier father. She joined a youth gang and was in the process of being brokered by a migrant Indonesian for sexual

favors to low-ranking soldiers in exchange for food and board. Her case is not unusual.

It is in this context that the young girls described in the cases below find themselves pregnant. Their urban lives may differ dramatically from what their parents expect of them, and they may have different expectations of sexual relationships, marriage, and childrearing than their parents. Nonetheless, the cases demonstrate the power kin, in particular parents, continue to wield over decision making surrounding infants. The first case describes an adoption understood as unproblematic—e.g., as adhering to long-standing cultural norms—by the key players. It contrasts with the more complex accounts that follow, where the hidden emotions of the birth mother or innovative thinking about parenting bring to the fore the contests and power relations at play in contemporary Dani adoption practices.

Adoption Stories

Coercion, displacement, secrecy, anonymity
(Turner Strong 2001, 479)

Case 1: Ivan Adopts a Daughter

Ivan is a thirty-five-year-old man who was born and raised in a small village on the outskirts of Wamena. He received a high school education, and married a coveted beauty, Maria, who not only had been to high school but also had a government job working for Radio Indonesia (RRI). He paid an astronomical bride-price of twenty-nine pigs for Maria, for her parents were opposed to their marriage.

Just after Maria gave birth to their first child, the wife of a close relative of Ivan's called for assistance in helping his wife deliver a child. This relative had married a few years before and had paid the bride-price in full. The birth mother was young, and it was her first birth. Ivan sat on the ground and held his sister-in-law in a reclining position as she pushed the baby out. She gave birth without difficulty, but died one week afterward from complications associated with the birth. Ivan's wife Maria took the infant Bety under her care and breastfed her alongside breastfeeding her own newborn, while Ivan prepared to meet with his family to discuss who would adopt the infant. Ivan's clan, the Lagowan clan, was understood to be in charge of raising the infant because Ivan's relative had already paid the bride-price in full. Thus the mother's family—also from the same village and involved in every other way in the woman's pregnancy—had no formal say in who adopted the infant.

Ivan had a "strong desire" (*kemauan keras*) to keep the newborn girl. He spent a great deal of time preparing his reasoning to present to his family

at a day-long meeting called to decide Bety's fate. Some of the reasons he drew on were that he had helped give birth to Bety: "I've already touched her blood,⁶ I've washed with her blood, I know her blood, the baby's blood is already my family's blood." He also argued that his wife Maria was already breastfeeding Bety and could provide milk for the baby, even though they had their own newborn to feed as well. Last but not least, Maria was a government employee and had regular money coming in, so they would be able to pay school fees and other costs associated with raising a child in Wamena. He was not the only member of the Wuka clan to want Bety. In particular, a childless couple also wanted to raise Bety, and they too prepared arguments. But the general consensus was that Ivan was best prepared to look after Bety, and he has raised her since that time.

Ivan's case illustrates the constancy of Dani ideas surrounding infants, infant well-being, and notions of personhood. According to the Dani, neonates are not yet persons, and their existence is understood primarily in corporeal terms. A person's body is not finished at birth and needs to receive food, nurturing, gifts, and ritual recognition in order for the baby's body to become "dry," "hard," and "finished." Substances contributed to infants by relatives—ritual foods, gifts of netbags, breast milk—are meaningful because an infant will not thrive on nurture alone; the baby needs gifts from others to physically thrive.

The infant Bety is seen as responding to maternal nurture from Maria irrespective of their biological relationship. I have collected multiple accounts of women such as Maria breastfeeding infants other than their own because "building" the infant is more important than the biological relationship of the person who is doing the building. As Strathern (1988, 316) argues for Melanesian societies more generally, communities, not women, make babies: "Melanesian women are not seen as the sole agents of childbirth. . . . Children are the outcome of the interactions of multiple others" (see also Merrett-Balkos 1998; Demian 2004). Persons are multiauthored, built through contributions of others. Infants are corporeal entities, but with limited human identity. Profoundly flexible and passive, they are recipients of strategic nurturing in which feeding plays a prominent role.

In other parts of Melanesia, scholars have emphasized how looking after the well-being of children allows adults to ideally safeguard their own future well-being (McDowell 1988; Demian 2004). While this is the case for the Dani as well, one reason for the intensive social effort to "build" healthy infants may be because infants are scarce in Dani society. Infant mortality rates are high in the highlands, with estimates in the Baliem valley at over 200 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1995 (Butt 1999), and recently estimated reliably at over 117 deaths per 1,000 live births provincewide, with higher

mortality rates in rural areas (Somba 2003). The biggest health risks are pneumonia and other upper respiratory infections, which cause over 50 percent of recorded infant deaths. In tandem with high death rates, birth rates are low. The average number of children living per family is around 1.5 children per mother. Almost no mothers have more than three children. Abortion has long been a contraceptive strategy.⁷ These patterns are slowly changing due to changing religious values promoting fecundity and to increased infant survival due to better access to a wider variety of foods and more education for girls. Adherence to long-term values where children are perceived as scarce, however, remains very strong. Ivan, like other Dani, thus views his adopted infant daughter primarily as a highly desirable addition to his family.

The work of relationship making remains an important logic underlying decisions about infant nurturing, but it explains only one side of the story. As the following cases show, when scrutiny moves from cultural ideals and norms to the specifics of actual experiences of individual adoption, the notion of unproblematic disengagement of birth mothers no longer appears to hold. These stories show there is considerable ambivalence on the part of the birth mother about this pattern of grandparent adoption, and considerable strategy deployed on the part of the grandparents to ensure control over their daughter's offspring.

Case 2: A "Bad Girl" Gets Pregnant

A young woman named Junita, the daughter of a prosperous and industrious health care worker, was sent to Java at age eighteen to attend a training school for future civil servants. Living in Java gave Junita extraordinary freedom from kin supervision. Junita was flirtatious, attractive, and disinclined to study. After fifteen months away, she got pregnant by a young highlands Papuan man, also studying in Java. He refused to marry her, partly because distance from kin made it possible for him to evade responsibility for paying the bride-price. Relatives and acquaintances noted her condition and alerted the family in Wamena through cryptic telephone calls. Her parents' suspicions were aroused, they said, when Junita, who is normally rude and sullen, suddenly started acting polite on the phone. Junita denied the problem; "come and see for yourself," she said for weeks on end. Junita finally confessed her condition when she was eight months pregnant. The family sent Junita's older sister to Java to help with the birth, but more specifically to bring the infant back to Wamena. Junita's sister arrived before the birth in order to ensure Junita would not breastfeed the baby in defiance of her parents' requests. Breastfeeding, her parents feared, would have made Junita love the infant and refuse to give her up to them.⁸

Junita's parents had long seen their daughter as a challenge. She was "bad from the start," her father said in an interview. Junita was sexually active from her early teens, and her father felt that she deliberately chose problem boyfriends just to be contrary. When Junita's family found out she was pregnant, her father ordered Junita to remain behind in Java and continue her schooling. In a decision brought about jointly between himself, his brother, and his wife, he decided the best person to care for the baby was his wife, and the best place to care for the baby was in the village where he and his wife worked in the health clinic.

By adopting the child, Junita's father felt that he was minimizing his daughter's suffering. Clearly emotional, he noted, "My daughter is in enough trouble already. Why would I want to make her life harder for her than it already is by making her raise her own child?" However, he also believed that Junita would quite likely be seriously stigmatized if she chose not to hide her reproductive history from potential suitors. A modern, Christian man expects his spouse to be a virgin. Suitors also look for educated women who have the potential to become civil servants and to earn wages. As he said, "It is necessary for Junita to finish her education." Last but not least, he coveted the child. I was fortunate to be staying in their house for the first few days after their granddaughter's arrival from Java. When asked if Junita could change her mind and one day raise the child, he responded strongly, "We love the new baby; we care for her very much. If she wants this baby back, she can't have her. She's already in my clan." When I asked the grandmother the same question, she gave me what can only be described as a dirty look. "Not possible" (*Tidak mungkin*), she replied curtly, "returning the child is not possible. Not possible under any circumstances. She can't have the baby back. We have five children now."

Junita's position was more ambivalent. On the one hand, she was grateful to her parents for assuming responsibility and she felt guilt for bringing shame upon the family. She agreed with the decision to move the infant to Wamena: "I acted wrongly, so it is up to my father to decide." On the other hand, she argued that her father's decision to take away her newborn baby was part of a series of ongoing attempts on his part to control her life. He had tried to stop her from doing what she wanted to from the time she was a young teenager, she said. She complained that she wasn't allowed to bring her daughter home herself and share childrearing duties with her mother even though that was what she wanted because, according to her parents, her education "is the most important thing." She lamented, "Now I *have* to stay in school."⁹

Junita's case raises the issue of parent's power over their daughter's offspring. As Peletz (2001) notes, to get beyond idealized statements of

affection to the ambivalences embedded in kinship, it is often necessary to look to suppressed and alternative discourses among close kin. In this case, the unmarried birth mother's understanding of the situation brings home the extent to which clan ideals and kinship norms accrue power to older males. When Junita describes the role her parents play in her child's life, she sees the loss of her child as a pity, but not as something she has the power to alter, even though she adheres to "modern" values and has experienced the thrills of a modern, urban lifestyle far from Wamena. Many other young women interviewed for this project articulated similarly muted but heartfelt expressions of loss that speak of relative powerlessness within kin relations. When I asked one young woman how she felt about giving her infant over to her parents, she snapped quickly: "I feel real pain!" (*Sakit hati betul*). Another teenager summed it up: "It wasn't easy." Last, a young woman voiced ambivalence in the tone of her voice and in the expression on her face when she spoke the expected line: "It's all for the best; it is my father's role to care for the child."

Adopting infants, because it involves gaining say over a person's future social relations, including their exchange obligations, is a highly strategic action. In particular, Dani adoption allows men to control women's reproductive abilities. In Dani thinking, as elsewhere in Melanesia, women's reproductive capacity is dangerous to men, and men seek to control the production of children wherever possible (Salomon 2002). In response, women can and do use sex as a means to thwart the aspirations of men to regulate their reproductive capacities (Wardlow 2006). It is noteworthy, however, that young women such as Junita do not use the act of childbirth as a means to assert their reproductive rights, even though insisting on keeping a child could be as potent a statement about controlling reproduction as is defiant sexual practice. That they do not highlights how powerful are the combined social roles of their parents in Dani society. This power forecloses the possibility of a radical expression of agency.

Adoptive parents such as Junita's father and mother do the work of childrearing because they expect their efforts on the child's behalf will one day return to them. Their role is also to establish a group identity in the child. This decision benefits grandfathers in particular. Dani grandfathers manage to acquire offspring at an age where it is relatively easy for them to afford the economic costs associated with childrearing. Grandfathers also gain an offspring without incurring any transactional costs. The grandfather has increased the numbers in his household and clan with no investment in bride-price, gift exchange, or political negotiations. He has also managed to reproduce without having to expose himself to the health risks copulation are widely seen to incur. He has gained a child without depleting his store of

semen, seen as a serious problem for older men, and without running the risk of having potentially toxic female substances enter and weaken his body. He has managed to have a child at an advanced age, without having to incur the costs and risks of taking on a second wife. The grandfather has successfully engaged in nonsexual reproduction.¹⁰

The final case shows how adoption can be used by grandparents not only to control their children's offspring, but to thwart the aspirations of others, particularly when those reflect nontraditional values surrounding marriage and reproduction. A young couple sought, and was denied, the chance to adopt infants of close relatives on two separate occasions because both times grandparents asserted their rights to the child. The case also shows how decisions are increasingly inflected by changing social and economic conditions in the Baliem valley region.

Case 3: Agus and Nosa's Desperate Search for a Baby

The third of six children, Rosa was raised by a violent and alcoholic father who was from a coastal tribe and who had been part of the earliest cohort of soldiers sent in the early 1970s by the government to pacify the highlands region. He met Rosa's mother, a Dani woman, when she was a teenager and living in her natal village. He wrested her away from her relatives and forced a marriage. The marriage was difficult, with ongoing episodes of violence and binge drinking, and when he took a second wife, Rosa's mother left him and settled in her modest two-room house in Wamena.

By the end of grade school, Rosa was actively having sexual relations. Rosa engaged in sex for fun, sex for money, and sex for material goods with a range of transient sexual partners. These fleeting relationships were usually with policemen, soldiers, state officials, fellow students, or resource extraction workers. Rosa also dated Dani boys who were themselves similarly destabilized by fractious family histories. Joel was a young man who had been abandoned by his mother when she married another man. He had lived by his wits in Wamena for several years. With Joel, Rosa experienced a range of new enticements, including pornography as a prelude to sexual relations, sniffing glue, and drinking whisky.

When Rosa first told Joel she was pregnant, he exploded with rage. She said she wanted to get married, "official style, pay the bride-price and marry," but Joel refused, saying he liked his life the way it was. He wanted her to have an abortion, and offered to go with her into the bushes and help push the fetus out. She refused, which led Joel to taunt her daily: "So, have you miscarried yet or not?" Heartsick at Joel's violent and abusive response to her pregnancy, Rosa broke up.

Joel's refusal to take responsibility for Rosa and her unborn baby left Rosa with no prospect of a husband and no family she felt she could rely on. She kept her pregnancy a secret from her friends and from her family until her seventh month, when her legs stopped moving and her sight failed. Rosa was taken to the hospital in Wamena, where she was diagnosed with gestational diabetes. While in the hospital, she went into labor.

After the birth, Rosa's family had to decide who should nurture the child. Given there had been no marriage or exchange of bride-price, baby Angela was understood as belonging to Rosa's father's clan, the Apia family. This decision occurred only after the family tried to force Joel to marry Rosa. According to Rosa's brother, "Because the child is still small, Joel must take responsibility for her." Joel agreed to live with them for a time, assuming at least the appearance of being committed to gathering together the bride-price payment, but he kept up his lifestyle of drinking, sniffing glue, and sleeping with other women. He soon left their home for a life on the street.

What Rosa called her "stress level" exploded at that time. She responded to her shame about her nonconformist marital status by going wild. She stopped breastfeeding the baby, started drinking and going out, and formed a "girl gang" of which she was the leader. It fell to Rosa's mother to raise Angela. Rosa agreed in part with having her mother raise Angela and giving her daughter her father's name for school registration, to get rice subsidies and to avoid stigma: "That way my daughter can't be teased, it can't be known if she has a father or not." In 2005, however, Rosa changed her mind and unsuccessfully tried to get Angela back because she was in a stable relationship with a man willing to accept Angela as his daughter.

At the same time, Rosa's older brother Agus and his wife Nosa also expressed their wish to raise Angela as their own. Agus and Nosa had tried for years to become pregnant. As Agus said, "If I don't have a child, then when I'm gone there's no one left on earth who is a part of me. Having a child stops the finality of death." Rosa's mother was initially open to the possibility of having Nosa and Agus adopt Angela because they had money, two stable government jobs, a house, and no children of their own. Rosa and Agus took over care of Angela for a few short weeks. Although everyone agreed that Agus would make an excellent parent, in particular because he was from the Apia clan, Rosa's mother suddenly demanded Angela's return. Rosa's mother said the baby lost weight and fell ill under their care (by implication, they did not engage in the exchanges, nurturing, and collective care required to build a successful person). Agus and Nosa used the same core argument to argue they should be the ones to care for Angela. They said that Angela's body suffered under her grandmother's care. "She goes fishing all

day,” they said, and refuses to work in the garden to gather sweet potatoes for the baby. As a result, they say, Angela’s body remains skinny and stunted, even at the age of five (see Fig. 2). Agus and Nosa were never consulted when Rosa’s mother came and took Angela back: “She came, she went, we had no say.”



FIGURE 2. Angela, age five, in the foreground, holding her two-year-old friend. Compare wrist size and overall height.

Shortly afterward, Agus and Nosa were given a second opportunity to adopt. Nosa had a sister who, like Rosa, was engaged in sexual relationships with a wide number of partners and who had a baby born outside of a sanctioned marriage. As with Rosa, Nosa's sister gave her infant up to her parents to look after, so that they could raise the child under her father's blood, the Mabel clan. Initially, the grandparents gave baby Maxim to Nosa and Agus to raise. Agus and Nosa actually believed they had been granted the chance to adopt Maxim, and they were ecstatic. They threw themselves into the project, purchasing baby care items, and giving unstintingly of their love and affection during the first four weeks of Maxim's life. However, Maxim's grandfather had long had issues with Agus, his son-in-law. Two issues were particularly galling. First, Agus had never formally paid the bride-price for Nosa. Second, Agus's father was born and raised on the coast. Although Agus was born and raised on Dani territory to a Dani mother, in Nosa's father eyes, Agus was not a member of a Dani clan and was therefore untrustworthy. According to Nosa's father, a non-Dani cannot know the important rituals and feeding practices required to raise a Dani child properly, and to give a Dani child to a non-Dani father was to decrease the importance of his clan. As a result, one month after Nosa's father gave Maxim to Agus and Nosa, he came and took the child back! He claimed Agus and Nosa were not doing a good job of raising the child, and that this was evident by observing the infant's skinny body and failure to thrive. In contrast, Nosa and Agus said the reason Nosa's father came and took the baby away from them was that he was jealous of how fat and happy the baby was. As Nosa said: "At one month, baby Maxim was already fat. My parents saw how fat the baby was and realized we actually knew how to look after a child. The baby was evidence Agus was a good man. That made them jealous and so they took the baby back." Agus was unable to contest his prosperous and influential father-in-law's change of heart. Both Agus and Nosa went into a prolonged depression. Losing the chance to care for two children in a row was devastating for them, especially since Nosa had suffered through multiple miscarriages and did not think she would ever be able to bear children of her own.

Throughout my observations and interviews of all the players in this case study, I constantly heard articulations of love. Angela's grandmother explains her fight to keep care of Angela as motivated by "pure love" (*sayang penuh*). Maxim's grandfather, everyone notes, loves Maxim deeply. "He's always there, looking after him," observes his daughter Nosa. When Nosa and Agus were given Maxim, they said their love for him knew no bounds. Most grandparents in other interviews said that they love their daughters, and took on care of the grandchild to protect their daughters from a difficult life. Enduring affective relationships based on nurturing between generations thus motivate many of the decisions around infant adoption and care.

Articulations of love notwithstanding, grandparents can impose decisions about infant care even if those around them are opposed. As Peletz notes, “grandparents can both provide identity and deny it” (2001, 425). When grandparents call the infant their child, this takes precedence over other claims such as the biological mother’s desire to care for the child, or offers by relatives who are themselves childless. In some cases, such as Maxim’s, grandparents will draw on ideologies about clans and “building” infants as a means to explicitly thwart efforts of others to claim the infant for themselves. Even though marriage appears to be solidifying for modern couples such as Nosa and Agus, who build their marriage around ideas of monogamy, love, and mutual respect (and explicitly not around bride-price payments), doing so weakens their status in the eyes of powerful elders. Nosa and Agus’ experience of losing two infants in a row attests to the destructive emotional power elders can wield when they make decisions about infant care by invoking the importance of clan descent and bride-price over other factors.

Grandparents also take on the work of parenting as a means to avoid what they see as the deleterious effects of contemporary life under colonial rule. The grandparents of both Maxim and Angela state in no uncertain terms that the least likely option for their grandchild’s care was to place them in a Wamena orphanage. All Dani I talked to were loathe to place babies at this Christian institution. Parents worried that the quality of care would be less than they could provide themselves. Mostly, they worried that the infant would be adopted by an Indonesian family and would end up a victim of the perceived rapacious ways of Indonesian newcomers. The child would become at best a family’s “house boy” or “house girl,” a live-in who would provide a range of household chores in exchange for an education or a salary. Worse, the child would simply be enslaved by an Indonesian family.

Grandparents hold a complicated position in trying to advance their own interests, both affective and strategic, while countering the impact of political and economic conditions on their children and grandchildren. They may be only partially successful. I offer here a final piece of evidence: an interview with the highly intelligent Angela, age five. I asked Angela who her mother and father were. She promptly responded, “I have three mothers: one mother is Suster [Nosa]; one mother is Febe [not a relative]; one mother is Mama Nia [Rosa]. My fathers are Suster’s Bapak [Agus], and Bapak Edo [Rosa’s current live-in partner].” It is noteworthy that her grandmother, the one who Angela actually calls “mother,” the one who has primary care of her and the one I observed Angela loves the most, does not make her list. When I pointed to her grandmother and asked her who she was, Angela named her “grandmother” (*nenek*) even though she had called her “mother” (*Mama*) just moments before. Angela also neglects to mention Joel, her

biological father, who continues to wander the streets of Wamena and always yells out excitedly to Angela, “Hey, daughter!” whenever he sees her. He always finds a few hundred rupiah (US\$0.03) for candy, and shows Angela off to his friends as evidence of his reproductive prowess. Angela’s confusion is not surprising given there are so many interested parties involved in her care, and given her grandmother herself has regularly allowed others to take on temporary responsibility for her care. But everyone observed that the work of “building” Angela has been a fractured affair, with Angela having a fractured sense of allegiance and no real clan affiliation as a result. Angela’s answers were interpreted as a failure in childrearing.

A Transaction in Ambivalence

This paper has emphasized the love as well as the ambivalence and uncertainty embedded in Dani adoption practices. Among the Dani, as elsewhere in Melanesia, children are understood in primarily positive, emotional terms that emphasize love and nurturing (McDowell 1989; but see Pameh et al. 2002; Salomon and Hamelin, 2008; Kolshus, 2008). The cases in this paper offer strong evidence for the power of adoption practices to help sustain cultural values through flexible kinship strategies in conditions of acute disempowerment (see also Leinaweaver 2007). Indeed, a complementary paper to this one could emphasize how well Dani adoption can work in the present, highlighting the strength and resilience of traditional cultural logics about clans, descent, and inheritance in the face of rapid and invasive social and political transformations.

When we look at the adoption process at an everyday level, in the realm of interpersonal relations and on-the-ground strategies, multiple contradictions come to the fore. Birth mother stories, in particular, draw out some of the sentiments kept otherwise hidden by a narrative of cultural tradition and resilience. For young birth mothers, adoption is primarily a transaction in ambivalence. On one hand, they do not have to do the work of raising their own children, but on the other hand they do not get to choose to do so. This paper has shown that the ambivalence and the negative side of adoption arises not out of the act of adoption *per se*, but out of the act of thwarting the desires of some of the key players involved in the transaction.

The extent of intervention by parents on behalf of their daughters is striking, because it questions the truism in Oceanic societies that it is more important to act like kin than to be kin (Scheffler 2001; Marshall 1984). The idea that kinship in Melanesian societies is inherently flexible, and that a person can through strategic actions become a member of a group, holds for most relationships described surrounding adoption *except* for the

relationship between birth mother and adopted child. The birth mother in most cases cannot take on a particular kinship relation—the mother of a child—even by dint of her own efforts. To do so threatens to undermine the power and privilege of clan elders. Perhaps in the past, when girls were married before the age of menarche, and babies were born into kin groups already enmeshed in exchange relations, it was less critical for men to worry about the outcome of an unplanned pregnancy than it is now. But in the present, elders are able to “act like kin” and do so in order to retain control over reproductive processes in an era when that control is increasingly under threat.

Colonization and modernization exist as more than a backdrop to the transactional politics of adoption. Many of the young girls currently being told what to do by their parents are being increasingly influenced by what they see around them. They see individualistic, seemingly autonomous people who are driven by the desire to own, to consume, and to succeed. The presence of successful migrants or wealthy itinerants helps challenge the Dani ideal of a person who repays obligations to those who help “build” them through the various substances contributed during conception, nurture, and through adulthood. Bride-price, gift-giving, and long-term alliances come to seem increasingly onerous because so many more opportunities seem to be available by slipping through those bonds of obligation. So too the respect accorded those who regulate the reproductive well-being of the clan is being challenged by new ideas about love, marriage, and parenting. Married couples such as Agus and Nosa are a particular threat to elders, because they remain committed to each other despite Agus’ long-term refusal to pay bride-price, because they insist on their right to care for a child within the confines of a nuclear family, and because they signal through their childrearing goals their commitment to new relations of responsibility.

From the viewpoint of some of the young people I have profiled here, adoption appears to be shifting away from a practice that is about acquiring offspring and toward a practice that is about living out fantasies of idealized patterns of parenting. Parenting becomes something that is not automatically aligned to long-standing ideologies of nurturing, feeding, and continuities, or even to the quality of one’s marriage mate. Parenting becomes a demonstration of commitment to being a modern person. As one young mother noted, she just wants to be married, with her child under her care, “like regular people.” Rosa wants to legalize her pregnancy by getting married, “official style.” Parenting is also becoming something one can acquire. To gain a child, Ivan deploys his wife’s salary in arguments. Agus and Nosa present their case by referring to their combined salaries. Rosa draws unsuccessfully

on the qualities of her stable, income-generating partner to try and get Angela back. When parenting becomes something one can acquire through money, the logic of adoption as rooted in transactional economies of kin obligation holds less allure. Young potential parents are on the cutting edge of what LiPuma calls the “greater visibility and public presence of persons as individuals” (1998, 57), where the ideal of individualism should extend to being able to decide who can become one’s child and how that child is raised. It is testament to the powers embedded in the gerontocratic structure of Dani society that young people are not yet able to get what they want: scarce, valued offspring. It remains to be seen how long grandparents will be able to provide the stability to counter the impacts of colonialism and flexible economies on their children and their children’s desires and, at the same time, how long they will be able to counter the impact of those same forces on how they themselves raise their grandchildren.

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NOTES

1. The pattern appears to persist among young Dani women who leave the highlands of Papua to attend school in other parts of Indonesia, as described in one case below. J. Munro (personal communication) notes eight women over the age of eighteen who had children outside of marriage while attending school in Manado, Sulawesi province: half of the children were placed with their maternal grandparents. The other four children stayed with their mothers. These four women were all in long-term stable relationships with the baby’s father.

2. Tonkinson (1976) notes that only 16 percent of the adoption cases he recorded were of the infant’s father’s father adoption, and in these cases the infant was adopted on behalf of another one of the grandfather’s sons. The majority of adoptions (72 percent) were by patrikin of the same generation as the infant’s father.

3. Many migrants relocated to Papua for religious reasons. Christians who feel persecuted in other parts of Indonesia often choose to live and work in Papua, where 85 percent of the population calls themselves Christian. In 2000, a violent racial incident in Wamena saw many migrants fleeing the area. Migrants have returned since that time, many looking for economic opportunities, and the population is rapidly growing. I estimate the migrant population in Wamena to have grown five times in size since 2001.

4. This statement was made by an indigenous researcher when asked to conduct research about sexuality in a community two days' walk away from Wamena. "Why do sex research in Ninia," he asked, "when everybody who wants to have sex goes to Wamena to get it?"

5. These young men identify themselves as having "no parents" or as having parents who have abandoned them. Their presence reinforces the idea that older Dani children are seen as unadoptable. Indonesian migrants use the presence of cumoboyos to criticize Dani childrearing as deficient.

6. The centrality of blood in Ivan's explanation suggests the importance of bodily fluids in conferring social relations. In Dani cosmologies, menstrual blood is seen to combine with semen to build a child. Thus, touching blood that has emerged from a womb would be a strong symbolic representation of clan relations between Ivan and his sister-in-law.

7. Abortion is a "women's secret" and it is difficult to estimate rates and patterns of abortion (see also O'Brien 1969 for earlier patterns of secrecy). I know of several cases of abortion and of two abortionists. I have been shown medicines said to induce miscarriage. Indonesia's Family Planning Program (BKKBN) currently offers contraception, but only to married women.

8. With the exception of two of the study respondents, this pattern of prohibiting breastfeeding holds for all the young women interviewed in this study.

9. These statements echo the experiences of American birth mothers who are typically confronted by family expectations to "surrender" the child without discussing options. Pregnant girls are treated as "a girl who had gone wrong." Social workers infantilize the pregnant girl, "tricked" her, and are "greedy" (Modell 1994, 67). The parallels between Dani girls and American girls' reactions suggest the combination of kin hierarchies and perceptions of infant scarcity may be a critical factor propelling acquisition strategies by those in positions of power in both Dani society and in American social work institutions.

10. Contrast with Modell's description of American adoption as "parenthood without birth" (1994, 9). Here it is offspring without birth, not parenting, that seems to be the priority.

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BEYOND NORMATIVE DISCOURSE: ADOPTION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NEW CALEDONIA

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Formal and informal transfers of children remain a widespread phenomenon in the Kanak community today, although these transfers are somewhat influenced by the French legal system. This paper, which focuses on the intersection of gender-based violence and adoption among Kanak women, combines ethnographic data with findings from a questionnaire-based survey about violence against women in New Caledonia. The strong link between adoption and mistreatment, especially rape in childhood and adolescence, is a disturbing contradiction of generally accepted opinion regarding adoption in Oceania. Some effects on adult life also deserve attention, most notably the increased rates of intimate partner violence and lifetime substance abuse. These adverse events seem much more common than acknowledged so far and suggest a crisis in foster care, related to persistent imbalanced gender relations and social change in families that we try to better understand in the postcolonial setting of New Caledonia.

THIS ARTICLE COMBINES ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA with the findings of a questionnaire survey on violence against women in New Caledonia; we compare the answers by Kanak women who were transferred as children with the responses from those who were not. While establishing that adoption and foster care remain a large-scale, open, and common practice in contemporary Kanak societies, the analysis underlines a clear link to mistreatment and reveals an especially disturbing aspect: its co-occurrence with early rape of girls. Our intention in this paper is to contribute to the understanding of a social reality and not to defend a moral point of view on transfers of children,

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which can be the topic of highly normative discourses (see Modell 1998) and the focus of considerable institutional and political attention (see Fonseca 2004). For this purpose and to contextualize such violence, we felt it was necessary to provide enough historical and social background to convey the scale of the relevant family and societal changes, some long-standing and others linked to the country's recent political history, which impact on the practices and representations associated with transfers of children today.

Over more than 150 years of French colonization, the family structures and social networks of the indigenous Melanesians, the Kanaks, have been disrupted by colonial land conquest, forced relocation, mandatory work for the settlers and, until the 1950s, restrictions on their rights under the "Native Regime"—that is, the French administrative system for indigenous peoples. The imbalance in land distribution has continued since then, together with economic and social inequalities. Lack of political will, failure to integrate the Kanaks into the economic mainstream, and the rise of Kanak nationalism resulted in several years of near-civil war during the 1980s. Because neither side could impose its preferred solution, a first settlement, presented by the Matignon Accord of 1988 as decolonization within the framework of French institutions, initiated greater Kanak participation in the government and public service and in the modern economic sector. A decade later, the Nouméa Accord of 1998 took further steps toward a form of independence-in-association, although perceptions of where this arrangement should lead remain contradictory.

As of 2004, the indigenous population of New Caledonia accounts for slightly less than half of the total population of 230,000 (Census 2004, see Rivoilan 2007). The social world of the Kanaks today—both its material conditions and its social constructions—has been strongly influenced by interactions with the West, and there is a growing amount of cultural mixing, especially in Nouméa, the only real urban area. Even there, however, permeability between communities seems not to be a general feature of life: distinct cultural settings and separate sets of social characteristics still exist. Despite two decades of rapid social change, disparities persist. Europeans remain more advantageously placed in terms of education, employment, and access to economic resources, while Kanaks are still on the bottom rung of the social ladder, the victims of structural violence, that is, "the invisible social machinery of inequality that reproduces social relations of exclusion and marginalization" (Scheper-Hughes 2004). Social problems, unemployment, housing difficulties, and institutionalized racism all rebound onto and affect children. According to the current Director of the Association for Protection of Childhood and Youth (*Association pour la Protection de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse*) in New Caledonia, two-thirds of those under

eighteen who have been reported as neglected or abused belong to the Kanak community.¹ For girls and women, violence stemming from poverty and inequality is combined with gender-based violence, which is also much higher among Kanaks than among other communities in New Caledonia.

Our previous ethnographic studies have shed light on violence in Kanak women's lives (Salomon 1998, 2000a, 2000b) and drawn attention to trends during and since the 1990s: the increase in reported rapes (accounting for up to 80 percent of criminal court cases) and women's recent gravitation toward French law to seek redress after sexual violence against them and their children, mostly girls. We have also noted a connection between adoption and victimization in fieldwork observations and interviews as well as in court records (Salomon 2003, 2005). This link should be confirmed by the activities of *SOS Violences Sexuelles* cofounded in 1992 by Marie Claude Tjibaou, the widow of the assassinated Kanak leader; this association focuses on identifying sexual abuse of children and giving legal support to young victims. These victims are often adopted, while the perpetrator is frequently an adoptive relative or a legal guardian, generally the mother's new partner or a male relative in whose house the girl lives. Accordingly, when in 2002 we decided to measure the extent of violence by conducting a general population survey of women from all communities throughout New Caledonia, one of our research theories was that adoption could be a risk factor for exposure. Data were anonymously collected using a standardized questionnaire in face-to-face interviews lasting one hour on average and related to a random sample selected from the electoral rolls of 1,012 women aged eighteen to fifty-four, including 441 Kanak women.² To the extent that the interviews were to be applied to women from the various communities and to be synoptic enough to enable statistical processing, requiring a certain number of responses to each question, we broke down the question on transfers of children according to the categories generally used in French as spoken locally and understood by all communities in New Caledonia.³ Specifically, all women were asked (in French): Were you adopted? Were you given into foster care (by someone other than your birth parents)? Of course, these statistical categories merge situations that may differ substantially at a micro-social level: they mask a complexity that is accessible only through ethnography. Their limits must be determined, but to accurately describe events on a larger—population-wide—scale, anthropologists cannot ignore their value.

Transfers of Children in New Caledonia: Which Categories to Use?

Child transfer is a long-standing practice in all Kanak societies, as documented in oral tradition. It is still very common, as its current scale shows

(see following section, “The Scale of the Practice Today”). The situations in which it occurs and the issues related to it, however, both differ. When we appraise actual situations, it can be difficult to determine whether it is indeed a permanent transfer or a temporary one. Cases of supposedly permanent transfers assigned to the adoption category have been more extensively described (see Leblic 2000, 2004). In reciprocal marital exchanges, when there is no woman available to be given back in marriage, an infant girl can be offered instead. This is the most valued form of adoption for a girl because it has a place in the alliances between social groups. The gift of a child—more often a boy—can also be a means of strengthening a political alliance between groups henceforth supposed to act as kin (with subsequent marriage prohibition) or of providing a descendant to a lineage that would otherwise die out. In the latter case, adoption is most often accompanied by ceremonial exchanges in which the biological roots of the child are said to be cut in order to integrate the child completely into its adoptive patrilineage. The adoptee takes the name of this new lineage, for Kanak societies are patrilineal.

Less formal transfers, without ceremonial exchanges, occur and can also be seen as permanent. A child may be given to a childless sibling, either to balance the sex ratio of a relative’s offspring (for ideally every individual should have both brothers and sisters), or more often to be a caretaker for an elderly person whose own children have grown up and moved away. Such gifts of children take place within the agnatic group but can also occur outside it, going to allies. In the Kanak languages we know (specifically, A’jië and Päicî, spoken in two adjoining northern zones of the main island), the parents who give a child for adoption use two different terms, depending on the ties they have with the adopting parents. One—*nââ* (identical in the two languages)—means to give, to leave, to place, and it is used whenever a ceremonial exchange takes place; the other term—*viëi* in A’jië and *mêai-ri* in Päicî—instead means to offer, to give out of a sense of generosity, and it is used when the arrangement is informal, for example, between siblings or close relatives. Kanak languages thus underline the kind of gift and the kind of social bond between the birth parents—or birth mother—and those who adopt.⁴

In addition to these long-established rules, adoption also appears today to be a response to the increased number of unplanned births among teenage girls or young women without a recognized companion. In reviewing the configurations for child circulation in one of the indigenous societies of New Caledonia, the Päicî of the main island, and providing a detailed census of adopted children through genealogical data, Isabelle Leblic indicates that more than half of the adoptees (178 of 341) were born to single mothers (2004). She also shows that children born to single mothers are largely (up to

81 percent) adopted, in most cases by their maternal grandfather or uncle. They thus remain in their mother's patrilineage. Because Leblic's analysis does not distinguish the various genealogical levels, it cannot measure the increase in the proportion of such children in later generations.

Generally, regardless of the type of transfer concerned, there is no secret and the identity of the parents or the birth mother is not concealed. Neither is the temporary or permanent nature of the transfer (which is designed to distinguish between adoption and fosterage) necessarily established at the outset. There certainly are children whose birth parents hand over custody temporarily to someone else, usually from the same kinship group, for a variety of reasons. But there are also children placed by their parents at birth under the symbolic patronage of someone else (in local French this is called "to give morally to someone"), without the child necessarily leaving the parental home and going to live with that person, although the bond created opens the prospect of living for a time with this guardian, who then becomes a foster parent. In contrast with adopted children who supposedly have the same rights and obligations as all other members of the adoptive lineage, fostered children retain their rights in their birth patrilineage and in principle have none in that of their foster father. The latter—in agreement with his brothers—can however sometimes also grant them rights in his own lineage.

Coming and going not only between birth parents and foster parents, but also between birth parents and adoptive parents is quite often observed, especially during adolescence. On the other hand, temporary fosterage can become permanent and foster children may never in fact return to their birth parents. The adoption and fosterage processes should therefore be considered as extended trajectories.

A child fostered young can subsequently return to and grow up with its birth parents. But it may also stay with those who raised it until adult age while still keeping its birth name or even end up being adopted by the latter and taking their name. As a result of conflicts with members of its adoptive kin, an adopted child, even if the transfer has been sealed with a ceremonial exchange, may also come back later on and take up its place in its birth lineage, while keeping the name of its adopted lineage. In this way, the adoption and foster categories, like those within adoption that distinguish between transfers formalized by ceremonial exchanges and those not so formalized, are insufficient to express the complex trajectories of transferred children and the possible kinds of interaction between their parents, whether birth, adoption, or foster.⁵

In contemporary Kanak societies the issue of whether the child's custody status has legally been changed under French law also arises. The two

categories commonly used in French by Kanak language-speakers to describe a transferred child, “adopted” or “given into (someone else’s) care” (*donné à garder*), also include this aspect. “Given into (someone else’s) care” here generally means that the child has the surname of the adoptive parents and is registered as adopted in official civil status records. This service was introduced in the 1930s, but only became operational in the 1950s in rural areas. There are, however, two separate civil registration systems in New Caledonia, one for French civil law and the other one dealing with Kanak affairs. The Kanak registry—recording personal customary status (*statut coutumier*) since the recent Nouméa Accord (1998), which was previously known as “special legal status”—is the one that most Kanaks⁶ have kept and that differentiates them from other citizens to whom general civil law (*statut de droit commun*) applies; it governs adoption and more generally family law, plus property law (but not penal law). Whereas under general law, adoption is a long process requiring an enquiry and a court decision, which in some cases extinguishes the original filiation, under customary status the original filiation remains and only the agreement recorded between the parties is necessary for the change in the adoptee’s name to be recorded by the civil status documents. Today the emphasis on the child’s patronymic to define adoption, even for the Kanaks who have kept their customary status, thus seems to be borrowed from the French system. The change of surname, however, does not necessarily mean that the child was transferred according to ancient Kanak practices, and the failure to change names does not exclude a transfer formalized by ceremonial exchanges.

The second category “given into (someone else’s) care” is not uniform either and covers at least two different situations. It may be a kind of symbolic patronage, also described as being “morally” given to someone (see above), where the gift takes place at birth, to reinforce bonds between allies by marriage or between different patrilineages, but where the child does not take the adopter’s patronymic and often does not even live with them. On the other hand, it may be a much looser transfer of children, where they are left with other relatives for varying lengths of time and different reasons, as circumstances require. These situations occur much later than formal transfers, for example when the child has to go to school, which is compulsory in New Caledonia at the age of six, and when it is easier to stay with a family member who lives closer by.

The Scale of the Practice Today

The results of the survey indicate that more than one in four Kanak women were transferred as children, which findings are quite consistent with Leblic’s

among the Païcî (2004), where the genealogies collected showed that one child in four had been adopted. Of our 441 Kanak respondents, 126 (28.5 percent) reported some form of adoption or fosterage.⁷ The two situations are equally distributed: 14 percent (sixty women) said they had been adopted, and 14.5 percent (sixty-six women) that they were given into someone else's care.

Wondering if a generation effect might underlie the scale of the practice, we also looked more closely at the different age groups in our sample: there were equal numbers of transferred girls in all age groups. The transfer of children thus does not appear to be declining in the Kanak community. We counted many more adoptions among those younger than twenty-five years than among their elders: the rate was twice as high in women aged eighteen to twenty-four years than with those aged thirty-five to fifty-four. On the other hand, more thirty-five to fifty-four-year-old women than younger women had been given into the care of someone other than their birth parents: the trend is thus reversed. Regardless of the kind of transfer, it took place before the age of six in 80 percent of cases. Adoption, however, was more likely to occur at birth or before the age of two (73 percent) than the other form of transfer: 54 percent occurred before the age of two and nearly all of the rest between the ages of two and six years. Another important difference is that adoptive parents were more often both the mother's kin and the child's actual caregivers, while foster parents were most often relatives of the birth father, and the children less frequently spent their entire childhood with them. Several theories may explain these findings.

Over the past two decades and with the identity renaissance, the influence of the various churches over young people's upbringing has weakened considerably: no one any longer purports to eradicate teenage sexuality. The falling age at first pregnancy,⁸ the trend toward less and later marriage and the fact that unions are less stable than in previous generations, when lifestyles were more influenced by the missions, are all factors favoring short-term and informal couple relationships and higher percentages of children born out of wedlock or whose parents separate. This social environment may explain the high rate of adoptees among young women born in the late 1970s or early 1980s. As abortion is still somewhat stigmatized and thus difficult to obtain, especially for young girls,⁹ and since Kanak social norms also make it hard for young single mothers to keep their babies, giving up the infant for intrafamily adoption has become the most common response to unplanned pregnancies in teenage girls and single young women. This form of adoption was used in the past, as the oral literature shows, to regulate the situation of children born out of wedlock or from adultery or incest. The girl's parents often make the decision during her pregnancy, and infants are adopted at

birth or very soon after by either a relative of the young mother, often a brother, or her parents themselves. The boyfriend's parents may offer child-wealth during pregnancy or at birth and ask that the child bear their name, but unless they prove ready to give bridewealth as well as childwealth, they are frequently refused. The child is thus *de facto* appropriated by the birth mother's patrilineage, sometimes against her will. Although adoption is generally viewed as beneficial to adoptive kin, the relative chosen by the mother's parents to adopt the child may not be prepared and may also be somewhat reluctant. When the grandparents adopt the child and the mother continues to live with them, the child will often call her "Mum," while calling her mother "Grandma" and her father "Dad." The child's situation in this family configuration can be abruptly disturbed if the mother gets married and leaves to live elsewhere, with her new partner, as demonstrated by this interview recorded in French by C. Salomon (June 25, 1990) with a thirty-five-year-old woman:

My mother was a single mother. She had me very young, at the age of about 15 or 16. It was at school that I was told who my real father was, but I always avoided him. We lived with my grandfather and my grandmother (maternal). When I was young—about six years old—I used to sleep with my mother. This period is vague, but I remember that when I woke up in the night, sometimes there was a man sleeping with us. I would push him away, try and make him fall out of the bed—I didn't like him. Then my mother would beg me not to make any noise so as not to wake grandfather, who did not know. When I turned seven, my mother married this fellow and went to live in the next village with him. I stayed with my grandfather, who had adopted me, but I was very unhappy. I ran away all the time to see my mother, and my grandfather hit me when I got back for going to see my mother, and he said, "You don't go over there. It's not your house." I always resented my mother and father-in-law, her husband, for that, and I always felt unrelated to my sisters (half-sisters). The person I see as my real mother is my mother's elder sister, who works in Nouméa. She bought my clothes and everything I needed.

Contemporary forms of grandparental caregiving and adoption may differ from traditional adoption patterns. They also overlap in important respects with information from elsewhere in the Pacific, e.g., for the Dani in Papua see L. Butt (2008), in Raivavae French Polynesia see J. Dickerson-Putman (2008), and for the Maori of urban New Zealand, see J. Armstrong (2005).

In addition, changing constructions of parenting have led some young single mothers to keep their children with them when they move in with

a man, even if the grandparents have adopted the children. In the past, if the mother went to live with a new companion, as in the example above, her children never went with her, but remained within the mother's patrilineage (unless they were adopted by the mother's spouse at the time of the wedding exchanges). These relatively recent situations show that many adoptions by maternal grandparents, although legal insofar as surname and registrar's office requirements are concerned, are intended to deal with circumstances as they occur. In our group of sixty adopted women, twenty-nine (49 percent) reported they had been adopted by a mother's relative, twenty-six (43 percent) by a father's relative, while five (8 percent) had been adopted by others. Most were adopted as infants or in very early childhood, before the age of two. The questionnaire did not ask about the marital situation of the respondent's mother, but ethnographic knowledge suggests that a high proportion of women adopted by a mother's relative were born to single mothers. Among those adopted before the age of two, only 61 percent grew up with their adoptive parents. Of those who did not, the largest proportion reported that their grandparents brought them up.

The extent of change over the past two decades may also explain the decrease among the younger women, compared with their elders, in the proportion given to someone else's care. New policies about school infrastructure and school bussing in rural areas have led to a decline in the number of children sent to live with relatives in a European township to maximize their educational opportunities. In our sample, no woman given into someone else's care between the age of five and seven (the age primary school begins) was younger than twenty-five. Moreover, while school, beginning at the age of two and a half, is promoted as the best way to socialize children, the French educational system puts harsh pressure on Kanak parents and judges them for their children's failure in school (see Salaün 2006). It also puts forward parenting standards that, in accordance with Western views, implicitly consider that only birth parents can be good parents. The new norms are reinforced by economic measures that encourage couples to keep their children with them and caregivers or foster parents to become adoptive parents or legal guardians. For example, foster or temporary parents cannot receive the family allowances available to birth parents and to legally recognized guardians or adoptive parents. Nor can they receive other social services, such as scholarships (unless they produce evidence of a court-approved transfer of parental rights). Of the sixty-six women in our survey who reported they were given into someone else's care in childhood, 64 percent went to a paternal relative, 30 percent to a maternal relative and 6 percent to someone else. Interestingly, among the women given into someone's care before the age of seven, very few (only 1 in 5) were actually raised by these

foster parents. The same proportion remained with the birth parents, but the largest group stayed with their grandparents who were not those to whom they had originally been given. Thus, grandparents remain potential caregivers in all situations, with very special bonds of affection and closeness to their grandchildren, socially expressed by demonstrations of fondness and normative teasing behavior.

Women in the survey were also asked whether they had themselves “adopted” one or more children, without specifying the kind of transfer involved. We presume that the answers concern mostly adoption and may exclude temporary transfers. Regardless of age, almost 1 Kanak woman in 5 (eighty-two women, 18.5 percent) reported adopting at least one child.¹⁰ This proportion is undoubtedly an underestimation because it is calculated from a sample including young women with no partner or no stable partner at the time of the survey, but who may well adopt a child in the future, if they marry. Among those aged forty-five to fifty-four years, the group least likely to adopt in the future, the rate of adoptive mothers reached 40 percent, with no differences between these women and the others regarding education and resources. Rates were much higher in rural areas. They were also three times higher in the Loyalty Islands and twice as high in the Northern as they were in the Southern Province, where Nouméa is located and where cultural intermingling among communities is greatest. Not surprisingly, adoptive mothers are also overrepresented among women whose unions were formally approved by the families through bridewealth exchange, compared with those whose marriage or cohabitation was not so formalized (33 percent vs. 10 percent).

Among the adoptive mothers, only 18 percent have no other child and would otherwise be considered childless. Most adoptive mothers have also given birth and raised their children. They differ from their nonadoptive counterparts in the number of children they have borne: an average of five for adoptive mothers compared with three-and-a-half for the others. This result shows that, in most cases, adoption is not intended as an alternative to sterility or insufficient child numbers, these being contexts in which parents yearn for children, and women escape the stigmatized status of childlessness by becoming adoptive mothers (see Salomon 2002). Adoptees are rather supernumerary children in already large families, where the parents struggle to make do, although they cannot refuse to take in another child for a relative. This is an environment that may be conducive to lack of attention and possible neglect. Our data do not show significant economic differences between the households of cohabiting Kanak women who have adopted and those of women who have not (for the same marital status and age). But they do show the inadequacy of resources in Kanak households in general, because

in women with partners, whether or not they are adoptive parents, 63 percent of those with five children at home live in poverty (40 percent in great poverty). Thus we cannot rule out the possibility that economic deprivation is one factor contributing to the unfavorable treatment of some unwanted adopted children, who are thus considered a supplementary burden in this context.

Interestingly, women who were themselves transferred during childhood adopted half as often as women who were not. Further enquiry would be needed to know why there is this disparity, which may well differ according to circumstances. The thirty-five year-old woman adopted by her grandfather who related her childhood memories in our first interview (see p. 138), explained in a second interview her reluctance to adopt, even though after ten years of marriage she still had no children, which in the Kanak world is a problem.¹¹

Personally, I would prefer not to adopt. I would prefer to have my own child. I don't know about other people, but for me that's how it is. It would be hard for me to bring up a child who was not mine. I know there are always problems when you adopt a child. Sometimes it's the child who causes problems, sometimes it's the parents, the adoptive parents, or the real parents. It never really works—there are always issues with it. What I've seen is that it never works when you adopt a child. Well, that's my opinion. Someone always has to go and say that the child is adopted, and I don't like that. It irritates me. That's why I was saying that at one time, my husband and I said that if we couldn't have children we would adopt. That was when I started thinking about it, wondering what I would do, whether it would work. No, no, for me it doesn't work—I don't want to. And also, you can't say no. The child is given to us or to my husband. In custom, I have no choice but to agree, to make sure I keep the child. It's stupid, but that's the way it is because the child is given to us, and we can't say no. I don't mind being given a child. I have no objection. But I don't want to go and see someone and ask them to give me their child. I don't want to ask. If the family has thought of us to give us a child, I would readily agree. But if we go and ask, then the real parents, they will give, but reluctantly, and later, there will be problems. The mother will say [to the father], "You agreed to give away the child, but I didn't want to." Or the mother agrees to give the child away, but the father says, "I'm going to take it back." They give, but not wholeheartedly. And that's why there are always problems. There are squabbles—there are problems with adoption.
(in French; recorded by C. Salomon, August 9, 1990)

**Suffering and Violence among Transferred Children:
The Darker Side**

“Adoption problems” are not only related to the reluctance of birth parents. Their frequency and possible occurrence even in the most favorable adoption circumstances reveal a fragility and uncertainty inherent to the adoptee status. An illustration of this is the concern felt by an adoptive mother aged over seventy years, a widow and sole survivor of her patrilineage, to whom her sister’s son has just given a small boy, aged only three years, so as to perpetuate this group’s name:

We were only two daughters, and the other one, my sister who married out, is already dead. Now I am the only one left in my clan. That is why I am bringing up this young boy so that he can be in my clan. He is mine and also belongs to the woman who married over there [the deceased sister]. He is our grandson, and our grandson is our reflection. I took this young boy for him to be the tree which will go on when I die. If not, when I die, the Joa and Karanorê lineage will die out. His father thought of me. Like my sister, his grandmother was dead and only we two [the two daughters] were left in our clan. He thought that if there was another boy, he would give him to me, for that boy to come into my clan. But it wasn’t my idea. It was his idea. He took pity on me. He gave me one of his sons for my clan. But I cannot pass on my medicine¹² to this boy immediately; he has to grow up first. If I die soon, what will I do? I don’t know. It worries me. I have to find someone who will continue to bring him up, and I need to show that person the medicine before my death for him or her to pass it on to the boy when he grows up. I will give everything to do with my land and that protects it for it to be shown to my son when he grows up, because I do not have long to live. My problem now is that I do not trust the two couples who are down there [the only neighbors who are relatives]. But we had a talk the other day to work out who would get what, and I went down to see the gendarmes for the child to be given my name, for him to inherit my land, my medicine.

(in A’jië; recorded by C. Salomon on September 20, 1991)

Subsequent visits to this region did enable us to note that this interviewee’s fears were founded: she passed away five years after the interview, and the adopted child was given to one of the neighboring couples (in which his adoptive mother had no confidence), who neglected him. He

underperformed at school and ended up a few years later returning to live with his birth parents who lived in a different area from the one where the land he could claim was located. Over this period, enjoyment of the land reverted to the neighboring relatives. Although the adoptive mother had taken the precaution of registering the adoption at the civil status office (with the gendarmes representing the French Government) so there was a written record, the recovery of the land by the young man would imply that those who were working it would have to be displaced, which could lead to a serious dispute. In August 2007, therefore, at the age of nineteen, he had still not claimed the property.

Although we lack first-hand information on this topic from adopted males, ethnographic observation of land disputes is relevant. Even in the most harmonious forms of adoption, adopted boys often lose their male prerogatives to land (women have no land ownership rights, except if they are the only survivor of their patrilineage, with no male alive). They have forfeited their rights in their birth patrilineage and may be further deprived of some privileges where they have been adopted. Moreover, male adoptees seldom inherit their adopted father's political power if he is a chief.

When male children are adopted within their birth mother's patrilineage, their legitimacy to inherit land appears even further reduced: during disputes with the sons of the maternal uncle—and land disputes are frequent in view of the scarcity induced by colonial despoliation—it will be pointed out that the adopted son is but “the woman's son,” a social status inferior to that of the man's son. In societies structured by patrilineal descent, where children are metaphorically called “the fruit and flowers of the [marriage] alliance” and where a single mother may be called a “roadside spouse” (an expression also used for prostitutes), children born to unmarried mothers and most often adopted within the mother's patrilineage are vulnerable in very specific ways. In intimate conversations (voice lowered) or during arguments (voice raised), they may be called a “product made in blindness,” that is, a bastard. The term is a major insult. To be so considered dramatically lowers one's social position. The highly charged category of the illegitimate child and the stigma attached to it imply an obvious association with social vulnerability. It can cause great psychological injury. In this way, an adopted young woman, herself having in foster care the born-out-of-wedlock daughter of one of her sisters, refers to the affront done her by her partner in calling the girl a bastard, such an offensive term that she could not say it during the interview:

We had an argument [my partner and I]. I can't remember what it was over. He called me that name, both the little girl and me, and it

hurt me. I cried when he came out with that. I said, “You’re the first person to have ever said that to me, because my adoptive parents never spoke to me like that. They may have told me off, but they never treated me like you have.” Anyway, I didn’t tell him, but I wanted to find my [birth] father. When I met him—it was not long ago—my partner was no longer living with us [her and her daughter] for me to be able to tell him, “You see the things you said to me were wrong, because I am not what you said I was.” That’s a shame. I would have liked to throw that back in his face, that I’m not a whatever, I’ve got my father!
(in French; recorded by C. Salomon on July 9, 2000)

Today, the maternal family members—grandparents in particular—who adopt in the cases of children born to single mothers may express some ambivalence with respect to these adoptions, which are no longer perceived and presented as a benefit but rather sometimes as a burden. Although there are still grandparents who demand that one of their daughter’s or son’s children, usually the first-born grandchild, must be given to them to be brought up (without necessarily adopting it), an opposing trend is now emerging: elderly grandparents, often with no resources (with tiny pensions) complain that their opinion is no longer requested and end up with a “herd” of children on their hands.¹³

Physical and sexual violence does not appear totally uncommon among transferred children. A few years ago, in one of the areas we were familiar with because we had been working there for fifteen years, a case of extreme physical mistreatment—torture—of a twelve-year-old boy by his adoptive parents and his elder adoptive brother was discovered by staff at his boarding school and reported to the courts. The parents stated during the trial that they had reluctantly adopted the boy, born to a single mother, when he was three years old. Although the defense lawyer argued it was a simple matter of corporal punishment, they were sentenced to a two-year jail term (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, October 2 and 5, 2000). During the court proceedings however the parents received the unconditional support of their respective lineages. The mistreated child, who had been born out of wedlock, seemed to count for even less as his mother lived far from the residence group of the adoptive parents and did not belong to a high-ranking lineage. The trial showed a profound misunderstanding between the judges on one hand and the accused and their extended lineages on the other. Thus legal considerations seem to be able to excuse a degree of negligence or even mistreatment. Kanak oral literature also refers to situations in which children are the victims of hierarchy issues and physical violence (see Bensa and Rivierre 1983).

Representations change, however, and in the current context the positions taken by some Kanak leaders in strongly condemning violence toward adopted children and attributing it to the erosion of social structures and a regression in moral principles shows a form of interpretation closer to a model put forward as universal. During his lecture on childhood in Kanak society held at the Tjibaou Cultural Center on May 15, 2001 (transcript published in 2004), Joseph Streeter, a prominent Kanak teacher, mentioned specific acts, especially toward children of single mothers and subsequently adopted, by more or less unwilling adoptive parents; Streeter qualified these as far beyond standards of acceptable conduct:

Today we see the rejection of children adopted by the clan, especially children of unmarried mothers. A young girl who has a child and is not married can have her child adopted by her clan, by an uncle, for example. Often the child is mistreated when it grows a little older, it can even be disowned, because uncles have today somewhat lost the sense of blood. They would rather give preference to their own son to the detriment of the child they adopted . . . Today many children are rejected because, it is said, they are children from the street. (2004, 21)

Adoption is also a gendered practice: even in the most favorable social conditions for the child, when the adoptive parents are clearly seeking to adopt, “taking” a girl and “taking” a boy are not accompanied by the same expectations. Adopting a girl is seen as a means of securing household labor and services, while adopting a boy is presented rather as a means of perpetuating a lineage. The text below, collected in the Bwatoo language (spoken in one area of the northwest of Grande Terre), clearly expresses a gender construction that can in some cases veer for girls toward a certain amount of harshness and overwork.

I had two sons, the first was nine years old and the second six, I would have enjoyed having a daughter, but without any hope of another child, I decided to take (i.e., adopt) a girl. And a girl happened to be born at a cousin's. I heard of it half a day after the birth. So I asked my wife to come and I told her about my intention. She agreed because it was her wish too. When I told her what I had decided, she agreed and she added: a young girl can wash the dishes, she does things to help her mother, she sweeps up and so she learns many things. (Raymond Diela, in Rivierre and Ehrhardt 2006)

In the questionnaire study, comparison of the responses between adopted Kanak women and those given into someone's care during their childhood with those from women who had not been so treated revealed contrasts, notably where exposure to violence was concerned. For the purposes of statistical analysis, we grouped together the women who said they had been adopted and those who said they had been given into someone's care. When we use the general term adoption in the section hereafter, without further qualification, it refers to both categories of child transfer. (Data from the questionnaire are in the Table.) Although we observe no significant difference in educational level¹⁴ or personal income between Kanak women who were and who were not adopted, one of the most striking results lies in the frequency of sexual abuse in childhood among adopted women, vastly more common than recognized or acknowledged: roughly one-quarter of adopted Kanak women (23 percent) reported some kind of sexual abuse before the age of eighteen (fondling, attempted rape or rape, by a relative), a proportion higher than among nonadopted women (17 percent). If we consider rape alone, the gap is still wider: 12 percent of adopted Kanak women reported one or more rapes, compared with 5 percent among nonadopted women.¹⁵ Of the twenty-nine women adopted in their childhood and victims of sexual violence then, twelve declared that they had been formally adopted and seventeen given into care. This distribution indicates that the latter category is slightly overrepresented among victims, and the situation was worst for those given for care to someone in their father's patrilineage (fifteen). Age at transfer did not differ between victims and nonvictims, nor did the category of relative with whom the woman actually spent her childhood. The only noticeable difference is that, of the twelve formally adopted victims of sexual violence, nine were adopted by a maternal relative. This finding supports our hypothesis that girls born to single mothers and thus adopted by a maternal relative are overexposed to violence.

Early sexual violence is known to be related to subsequent sexual health problems,¹⁶ and among adopted women we observed a tendency to report higher rates of forced first intercourse (15 percent vs. 10 percent), teenage pregnancy (19 percent vs. 12 percent), and sexually transmitted infection (STI) during the past year (10 percent vs. 5 percent of those with any sexual activity). Our data also show that adopted women were more likely to have left the family home before the age of sixteen years (6 percent vs. 3 percent).

Further, intrafamily violence is not limited to childhood and adolescence but persists later on. Overall, adoptees older than eighteen continue to suffer much higher rates of violence perpetrated by a relative (other than their intimate partner) than do nonadopted women, including sexual violence (4 percent vs. 2.6 percent). In the survey, 1 adopted Kanak woman in

TABLE. Differences between adopted ($n = 126$) and nonadopted ($n = 315$) Kanak women.

	Adopted women (%)	Nonadopted women (%)	p^\dagger
Childhood and adolescence			
All sexual abuse before age eighteen (fondling, attempted rape, and rape)	23	17	ns‡
Rape only	12	5	*
Coercion for first sexual intercourse	15	10	ns
Teenage pregnancy (before age eighteen)	19	12	*
Early departure from the family (before age sixteen)	6	3	ns
Adulthood—events during the past year			
Intimate partner violence			
Physical abuse	41	28.5	**
Sexual abuse	17	12.5	ns
Psychological harassment	16	12.5	ns
Intrafamily violence (by a relative other than the partner)			
Physical abuse	14	8	*
Sexual abuse	4	2.6	ns
Verbal abuse	21	12	*
STI during the past twelve months	10	5	ns
Substance abuse			
Cannabis users	14	6	**
Tobacco smokers	42	35	ns
Kava drinkers	12	8	ns
Simultaneous consumption of alcohol and either kava or cannabis	14	9	ns
Has herself adopted at least one child	7	15	ns

† Chi-square test.

‡ The difference is not statistically significant.

* The difference is statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < .05$). There is less than 5 percent probability that the difference found in our sample occurred by chance.

** The difference is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < .01$). There is less than 1 percent probability that the difference found in our sample occurred by chance.

5 reported insults and death threats (21 percent vs. 12 percent) and 1 in 7 reported physical violence (14 percent vs. 8 percent) during the past year. We note that verbal and physical violence by women within the family against adopted women is more than twice as likely as violence against nonadopted victims (13 percent vs. 6 percent). Female perpetrators were more often adoptive mothers and older sisters than mothers-in-law (who are entitled by Kanak norms to discipline their daughters-in-law), a point that reflects the inferior status of many adoptees within their own family.

In terms of the couple, adopted Kanak women with an intimate partner and their nonadopted counterparts did not differ substantially in their marital status or in the gift of bridewealth used to formalize the cohabitation or the marriage, but the adopted women were—all else being equal—markedly more exposed to physical violence than their nonadopted counterparts (41 percent vs. 28 percent).¹⁷ They also suffered higher incidence rates of psychological and sexual violence.

Finally, another important difference should be stressed. Drug use in adult life was correlated with adoption in childhood. Among adopted women, all else being equal, there was a significantly higher proportion of current cannabis users (14 percent vs. 6 percent). Adoptees also tended more frequently to smoke tobacco (42 percent vs. 35 percent), drink kava¹⁸ (12 percent vs. 8 percent), and combine alcohol with cannabis and/or kava (14 percent vs. 9 percent). They also used psychotropic drugs much more frequently than nonadopted women (5 percent vs. 1 percent). Drug use here may be viewed as a coping device that these women use to deal with problems that social convention requires to be concealed. The powerful relationship between adoption and adult drug use indicates that time does not heal the adverse experiences common in the childhoods of many adopted Kanak woman. These data suggest how difficult it is to “just get over” some events and situations and show that they tend to lead to self-damaging behavior.

Similar observations about a crisis in adoption and foster care have been made elsewhere in the Pacific. In Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands, it has been suggested that “loose” transfers of children create an environment conducive to mistreatment and abuse (Cox 2001). In the 2006 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report (Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Solomons, and Vanuatu), most of the studies indicate the same unfortunate trend with informally adopted children. The Vanuatu study similarly drew attention to government concerns around the “mistreatment” of traditionally adopted children, particularly the sexual abuse of girls by males in the family. Both the Fiji and PNG studies also expressed these concerns, noting that in some families the adopted child is treated differently, subjected to discrimination and ridicule, or considered a burden on the adopting family. Epidemiologic studies of children admitted to Port Moresby and Mt Hagen Hospitals have recognized adoption as having the potential for severe adverse effects on the child’s well-being (Peters, Kemiki, and Vince 2000; Pameh et al. 2002). In Tahiti, French Polynesia, a link between adoption (*fa’a’amu*), maltreatment and incest has also been established (Chollet 2001). In Chuuk, Micronesia, Manuel Rauchholz (2008) mentions, in addition to the frequency of negative emotions among adoptees them-

selves, a “Cinderella overtone” and the existence of abuse that may not be able to be explained away as the exception.

All this requires reconsideration of the previous dominant anthropological discourse about adoption in Oceania as “a loving and generous transaction, not a response to need or crisis” (Terrell and Modell 1994). Attention to issues such as child abuse and the relationship between adoption and violence has long been constrained, it appears, by the same considerations that limit the anthropology of violence more generally, especially when it occurs in dominated minorities or colonial situations. It is certainly difficult to report everyday family violence, without a risk of stigmatizing the dominated social group under study. The political use by the Australian Federal Government of the Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (2007) is ample demonstration. But should fear of giving weapons to racism prompt us to continue to conceal this kind of fact, on the grounds that any disclosure is doomed to contribute to a pornography of violence that reinforces negative perceptions in the eyes of unsympathetic readers, or at least may nourish and arm racism (Bourdieu 1998; Bourgois 2001)? While we agree that the presentation of these issues deserves careful weighing up, we do not think that knowledge of violence, objectified in facts and figures, should be hidden. Moreover, we think it important to describe the complex linkages that produce such facts, to reach a better understanding of their social significance.

In an article on suffering and structural violence, Paul Farmer asks if we can identify those most at risk of greater suffering and if certain “event” assaults, such as rape or torture, are more likely to lead to late sequelae than are sustained and insidious suffering, such as the pain born of deep poverty or of racism (Farmer 1997). Our findings of course do not answer his question. But they do show that among Kanak women suffering from the same poverty, racism, and sexism, those who have been adopted are at risk of greater suffering through more frequent early abuse, especially rape; subsequent intimate partner violence; and drug use. The constraints on Kanaks as a community are strong and tend to be cumulative. The postcolonial situation gives them neither the same economic autonomy nor the same educational and employment benefits as most Europeans in New Caledonia have. Moreover, within Kanak societies, these constraints are added to the gender norms and gender violence still often legitimized by men (Salomon and Hamelin, 2008). This vulnerability is doubled in women who are statutorily made inferior as adoptees in unfavorable family situations.

It is not enough, however, to consider adoption per se as an injurious event or an adverse childhood experience, as physical or sexual abuse, lack of

affection, or growing up in a dysfunctional household all are. But these New Caledonian findings suggest that within specific historical, social, and cultural contexts, it may be linked to a risk of violence and abuse. Ethnographers who have highlighted the vast range of nonbiological forms of human kinship must now face the dark side of adoption as well. The emerging crisis may reveal a broader reorganization of family structures in a setting of rapid social change.

Conclusion

Our description—grounded in facts and figures—and the questions it raises point to the need for ethnography based not on normative discourse, but on an analysis of contemporary shifts through the collection of life histories from adoptees themselves, as well as from their birth mothers, adopting parents, and the grandparents who often raise them. Such histories would let their voices be heard and provide insight on their perspectives. This approach could allow us to fully understand mistreatment situations by examining the role of individual, family, cultural, and socioeconomic factors and finding out how, in today's Kanak societies, adoption affects a person later in life. Childhood memories of some Kanak friends, although adopted by a sibling of their biological father in what is one of the more legitimate forms of adoption, report difficult emotional experiences, including the feeling of having been sacrificed for the good of the lineage. "It took me a long time to get used to it," recalled a man in his late forties, adopted at age six. A woman in her fifties mentioned her feelings of rejection when her biological father told her, during major arguments between him and her adopted father: "That's none of your business, you still go there [to your adoptive father's]." While grandmothers often complained about the burden of caring for their daughters' children, biological mothers too expressed guilt and grief, sometimes reporting that they had no other choice but to agree tearfully to an adoption request, for refusal might lead to an evil spell being cast on the baby. Adoptive parents in turn, anxious not to be seen as bad parents, explained that indeed they gave very special care to the adopted child so that it would not feel different from the others or that they loved it "still more because it's not from the family." Ethnographic data and quantitative results both suggest important shifts in the types and conditions of child transfers, a link between present-day conditions of adoption and families' changing social relationships in this postcolonial context, and a strong influence by the French legal and welfare systems on permissible forms of family and adoption among the Kanaks. These results raise still more questions about transformations in constructions of parenting and children's well-being and in ideals of child rearing and education.

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NOTES

1. Personal communication from J.-F. Suas, Director of the Association for Protection of Childhood and Youth, which is informed whenever a case is reported by either the social services or the correctional institutions (2006; on the same point, see also Streeter 2004).

2. The total sample was representative of the general population of women in New Caledonia and included representative proportions of women from the different ethnic communities: 44 percent Kanaks, 33 percent Europeans, 13 percent Polynesians, 3 percent Asians, and 6 percent other. Finally, only 1 percent refused to answer the question about their ethnic group.

3. All Kanaks in New Caledonia speak French. Because of the sensitivity of the issues we studied and because of the number of languages, more than twenty, for a rather small indigenous population, conducting the interviews in local languages would have made confidentiality very difficult: interviewers and interviewees might have come from the same community and possibly have had family ties.

4. A child is usually given to a couple or cohabiting person (man or woman) but, less frequently, a child can be given to a man or a woman living alone.

5. In Kanak languages, the term that means to give birth, nurture, and raise children is applied equally to birth, adoptive, and foster parents and does not distinguish among them (Salomon 2002).

6. Some Kanaks have French civil law status, either because one of their ancestors did (for example the descendants of the sandalwood traders in the Loyalty Islands) or because they specifically requested a status change, which has become possible since the end of the "Native Regime," the French administrative system for indigenous peoples. This strategy is used by women especially to be able to divorce and benefit from the advantages French civil law provides for mothers in terms of child custody.

7. The rate of adopted women is only 12 percent among Polynesians living in New Caledonia and 9 percent among Europeans. Most of these were not adopted formally, but given into the care of someone other than the birth parents.

8. In the general population survey, more than one third of Kanak mothers first gave birth before turning twenty, a rate twice as high as among Europeans.

9. While traditional restrictive practices have declined substantially, the French law on voluntary termination of pregnancy (1975) was not applied in New Caledonia until twenty years after its enactment (1995) and until recently, there has been no real family planning policy (see Salomon 2005).

10. This proportion among Polynesian women living in New Caledonia is 4 percent and among Europeans 2 percent.

11. In the past childless women ran the risk of being repudiated, and today they continue to be vulnerable to labels such as “empty womb” or “dry coconut” and to accusations from their in-laws that they “eat for nothing” (Salomon 2005).

12. These are plants specific to a clan, whose healing power depends on ancestral forces that normally only a man from the group is allowed to use.

13. Any comparison with cattle is pejorative for the Kanaks of Grande Terre and refers back to the agricultural colonization when the settlers’ cattle were sent to trample the fields and displace the Kanak groups from the fertile land.

14. Among Europeans the difference is significant: only 24 percent of the adopted women had successfully completed secondary school, compared with 54 percent of their nonadopted counterparts. Significance is determined by the results of chi-square tests ($p < 0.05$).

15. The very small proportion of rapes reported to the police, 10 percent, also deserves attention.

16. There is a wealth of epidemiologic and public health literature on this topic (see among others Felitti et al. 1998; Fleming et al. 1999; Dietz et al. 1999).

17. Multivariate analyses were conducted showing that adoption was a significant predictor of intimate partner physical violence. Analyses were checked for age, educational level, economic resources, and urban/rural living.

18. Kava is not native to New Caledonia but imported from Vanuatu two decades ago. In New Caledonia women as well as men drink it casually; it is not a male privilege during ceremonial occasions as it is in Vanuatu.

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DEMYTHOLOGIZING ADOPTION: FROM THE PRACTICE TO THE EFFECTS OF ADOPTION IN CHUUK, MICRONESIA

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Most research on adoption in the Pacific has primarily focused on the motives behind and the practice of adoption within the context of kinship studies, because usually children are exchanged between the closest of kin, and adoption thereby reveals something about the nature of kinship. Children who are adopted in Pacific societies are not giving up their biological parents—as would be the case in North America or in Europe—but they are in effect being co-parented. This paper presents studies conducted on Chuuk, Micronesia, where between 10 and 90% of an island population may have been adopted. It asks how this common practice affects adoptees' (emotional) lives, familial relationships, and identity. The results are quite stirring, revealing that in more than 90% of the approximately 200 adoption cases collected for this research project, adoptees report struggling with feelings of rejection and low self worth. This paper seeks to refine and challenge some generally held views on adoption in Chuuk and in closing, points to the relevance of these findings for the study of adoption in other Pacific societies.

Introduction

WHEN ANTHROPOLOGISTS FIRST DISCOVERED the widespread practice of adoption in the Pacific they were inevitably led to ask the question of why Pacific people would so willingly engage in such a practice of “child sharing,” which, from their experience in the United States or Europe, was something marginal, not actively practiced, unless some familial crisis made an adoption necessary. Therefore, research about adoption in Oceania has seemingly focused on describing the practice and finding reasons and motives for

adoption (Carroll 1970; Brady 1976). It was soon recognized that most adoptions took place between close kin, most commonly between sibling sets, and were a form of expressing and strengthening the ties between close kin and to “create” or revitalize existing relationships between kin and even between “created kin,” that is, people treated like kin (cf. Brady 1976; Lieber 1970; Lingenfelter 1971; Ottino 1970). Adoption, in Micronesia, it has been noted, does not mean a child is giving up one set of parents and one family for another as is commonplace in the United States or Europe. Instead, adopted children can choose from added options, now that they are being coparented (Carroll 1970; Douglas 1998; Thomas 1978). Also, adoption has proved to be a means to provide childless couples with children to grant them the role of the highly valued nurturer and to cover up incompleteness and the shame of being childless. For children born to young women out of wedlock, adoption has been a way to provide the child with a father and mother, and like all children, they are integrated into the kin group as a whole (Carucci 2008) even if it means being adopted by the child’s grandparents or other close relatives.

From such patterns of nurturance and adoption in the Pacific, anthropologists have made assumptions and built theories of personhood, concluding that the importance of the natural or biological family in Pacific societies is clearly of secondary, if not even lesser, importance. For the Pacific Islander, biogenetic origin is not needed for a person to become “family,” as is often the case in the West where “descent, innate characteristics, and unchanging boundaries” (Linnekin and Poyer 1990, 6) are the focus of personhood and “where ‘blood’ renders even some ‘full members’ as ‘minorities’” (Wendel 1998, 11). Rather, it is the making and maintaining of relationships that dominate and are stronger than biogenetic or “blood” ties—to use a common term (Linnekin and Poyer 1990). Again, the widespread practice of adoption throughout the Pacific, along with the anthropologists themselves, who in many cases have been adopted into a Pacific Islander family at the onset of their research, is proof enough that this practice works (cf. Rynkiewich 1976: 93–94; Wendel 1998, 53; Carucci 2008). “It is important to emphasize,” we can conclude with Wendel, “that it is not kin who share, but that through sharing kin are created and maintained” (1998, 53). Thus, to be a person is to “be in relation” (Strathern 1988; Wendel 1998). And these relations are expressed and maintained in everyday behavior of nurturance and exchange, hence reciprocity (Carroll 1970; Brady 1976).

Historical Review of Adoption in Chuuk

Following the work of Weckler, who in 1953 first published an article exclusively devoted to adoption in Micronesia (cf. Marshall 1999, 117), much

of the research on adoption in Chuuk, one of four states in the Federated States of Micronesia, has supported and promoted these findings. As for the rest of the Pacific, the focus has primarily been on the reasons, motives and the practice of adoption.

In R. Goodenough's findings for Romónum, an island in the western part of the Chuuk Lagoon, infertility, among other reasons, seemed to have been a primary motive given for adoption (1970, 337; cf. also Rubinstein 1979, 221ff for Fais; Ritter 1981 for Kosrae; and Damas 1983 for Pingelap). Marshall, who worked on Namoluk and the Mortlocks, added the value-based motive of "sharing among relatives" (1976, 47), where children are exchanged "in the same way that land, food, residence, labor, physical possessions, political support, and money are shared" (1976, 47). Then, sometime later, Flinn, working on Pulap (1985, 96), pointed to adoption as a means of strengthening the bonds between siblings of the same matrilineal descent group, the "building blocks" (Marshall 1981) of greater Chuukese society, as well as the "somewhat tenuous offspring relationship between a matrilineal descent group and the offspring of its men" (Flinn 1992, 65). It is also generally agreed that "adoption gives adopted children added social and economic options" (Goodenough 1970, 337; Rubinstein 1979; Thomas 1978) and that it "allows childless adults to validate their adult status by demonstrating their ability to play the (valued) role of the nurturer" (Goodenough 1970, 337), whereas at the same time their "need" of having a child is being fulfilled as well. Therefore, adoption is seen to function as vital part of a reciprocal system that binds people together. Such reciprocal relationships of need fulfillment and nurture affirm social relationships between kin. At the heart of this cycle of need, fulfillment and nurture, Lowe suggests, lies an idealized cultural model of attachment (2002).

Initial Encounters with Adoption

When I began my research in Chuuk in late 2004, I came to the field with the benefit of having spent the formative years of my childhood and early adolescence in Chuuk (between 1972 and 1986 with subsequent visits in 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1996) and was able to fall back on relationships with people from all over Chuuk. I was familiar with these ideas of the naturalness of adoption and nurturance of children beyond the realms of the biological family. Early on in my fieldwork, I was confronted with the issue of adoption in a conversation with an older friend I had known all my life. In a conversation with her, she mentioned to me that she had been adopted (something I had not known) as an infant in the early 1950s. I asked if we could talk about her experience and, thus, the first interview on adoption began.

As an infant, Hilary (names of informants throughout this paper are pseudonyms) had been adopted by her mother's brother and his wife who were without children (*riit*). The person she thought to be her biological mother was actually her aunt, and she also grew up with her siblings and other aunts and uncles on the same piece of lineage land in their home village. Food was usually prepared and shared by the extended family. Her adoption had been kept a secret, but when she was about ten years old, she discovered who her biological parents were. That was when feelings of rejection (*nikinikingngaw*) surfaced. Issues of self-worth and identity troubled her, and the question Hilary often raised was "Why me? Why not my brother or sister? Did I do something wrong?" As a result, she felt isolated, withdrew and harbored feelings of not belonging. Even though she was the *finniichi* (firstborn daughter), treated very well, and even spoiled (*fón*), she felt *neeti-pengngaw* because of being adopted (this describes the disposition of a child who will not be comforted or is unwilling to reconcile itself, feeling itself to be treated negatively, as well as feeling disturbed, disappointed, and sad).

In short, *neetipengngaw* summarizes all negative character traits and abilities of the intellect as well as all unpleasant dispositions felt by a person in his or her *tiip* (the core of the self [Käser 1977, 57]), the Seat of Emotions, Intellect, and Character (SEIC; cf. Käser 2004: 177–93).

Hilary's biological mother, like everybody else in the lineage, was sworn to secrecy; and her mother later on told her how badly it hurt her to give her away and that she would often stand around the corner of the neighboring house listening to her daughter cry after breastfeeding her and then she too would cry secretly over the loss of her daughter. What made matters worse was that, when Hilary was a teenager, her adoptive mother adopted two more children from her own lineage. This led to a greater estrangement between Hilary and her adoptive mother because the mother showed more affection toward the two children who were of her own matrilineage and, thus, from her own flesh (*fituk*).

What this person was telling me was obviously contrary to the ideal view of adoption and personhood in the Pacific with which we all have been acquainted. Even though she still suffers from these feelings of rejection and has ill feelings toward both mothers, it did help her to discover later that her biological mother was suffering just as much from the separation. When I shared this person's biography with an anthropologist who had worked in Chuuk, he was surprised as well, and we thought it to be a rather marginal finding. Hence, I revisited R. Goodenough's 1970 article on adoption in Romónum where she mentioned a few cases that, to her, seemed to deviate from the norm, in that they revealed something "about the real feelings that may be involved in adoption and how they must be camouflaged" (1970, 336). What she meant by real feelings becomes clear in the account she gives

of a woman from the neighboring island of Wútéét who herself had “adopted children from three different families. For each adoption her account was full of the richest emotional detail. Mothers yearned and wept, whole lineages gathered to discuss a proposed adoption, children were torn in their feelings, and a grandfather [in 1964/65!] remarked that ‘it is easy for an animal to give up its young, but for people it is not easy’” (1970, 335). The reason R. Goodenough did not follow up on these accounts of adoption was “because they did not involve Romonum people” (339 footnote 14).

Nevertheless, these two cases of adoption, the personal encounter and the historical encounter, have led to asking a whole new set of questions and turned the focus from looking at the practice and quantitative data to the effects adoption has had on those persons who have become objects of exchange “in the same way that land, food, residence, labor, physical possessions, political support and money are shared” (Marshall 1976, 47). That meant I turned my attention to those who had been, or still were, such objects of exchange and asked them how they experience and have experienced their adoption in the course of their lives. Second, it became my task to more closely revisit and include the work of those who have gone before me in search of corresponding data from the past and for questions left unanswered.

Solidifying the Data

To answer these questions, data have been collected so far on the life histories of some 200 people, who have been adopted (*mwúúmwú*) as opposed to cases of mere fosterage (*túmwínúúw*), for example, a student staying with his uncle while studying abroad. What the two cases above reveal is that—although commonly practiced—adoption is a very delicate issue when one tries to follow up on the effects it has had in the everyday lives and sentiments of those most intimately affected by it. This is especially true on the “one island” or “one village” level, where traditionally, fieldwork on adoption has been done. As we will see below, honest information relating to feelings people have about their own kin and other people in a closely knit society is hard to obtain because of the danger involved for those who are heard talking or suspected to be talking about these issues. My own experience has shown that multisited ethnography has been the most effective approach for this set of questions. I have performed structured interviews with people from all parts of Chuuk, rather than simply focusing on one island or village. With this approach, the identity of the informants could be more easily concealed and provided the groundwork for an open exchange of information.

The data on the 200 cases mentioned above were obtained through interviews with friends and relatives of adopted persons and their families as well as grandparents, mothers and fathers, and brothers and sisters, all who either had a son or daughter given to them or personally had given away a child (or more) in adoption. Where possible, biological and adoptive siblings of those interviewed were also consulted. Beyond these, thirty people who themselves have been adopted gave in-depth and detailed insight into their personal experiences, their struggles, and feelings and traced for me the effects adoption had and still have on their lives. Oftentimes they were able to include siblings and others they knew of in their generation from their island who shared the same adoption experience, thus expanding and solidifying the data.

It must be added here that, within Chuuk, Goodenough and Sugita (1980: xi–xiii) distinguish three language groups, the Lagoon Chuukese (Goodenough 1970), Mortlockese (Marshall 1976), and Pwolowótese, which includes Pulap (Flinn 1985) and the Namonuitos (Thomas 1978), all of which are represented by previous research on adoption (see previous section, “Historical Review of Adoption in Chuuk”). The people I have consulted here represent all three of these language groups within Chuuk. It will become clear that, although some regional differences (Caughey 1977, iii) in the practice of adoption exist (e.g., much higher number of people adopted, more customary than legalized adoptions, less land disputes, etc.), they do not erase, but rather underline, the overwhelming conformity of the emotional struggles that accompany the great majority of people who have been adopted in greater Chuukese society. The case described below will serve to illustrate this. The names used are fictitious.

Susan and Sam, her younger brother, were both adopted by their grandparents as infants in the early 1980s. They grew up with their grandparents on an outer island atoll while their biological parents were both busy working on Wééné, the capital island of Chuuk. One reason given for their adoption was to strengthen the bond between their father and his parents left behind on the atoll and at the same time to “remind” him to keep sending money to his parents. But to actually “ask dad why I was adopted away” (Sam) is hard for Sam to do. He discovered he was adopted when he was in third grade. A sister of his grandmother told him while talking about his older brother on Wééné that he was not his brother but his father: “We both thought grandma was our mother and our dad is only our brother” (Sam). That was when Susan began having a hard time. Three or four years later, the grandfather passed away and after about ten years, the grandmother died and both children were then legally adopted by their biological father’s sister with her

husband, both still residing on the atoll. This couple had already been caring for Susan and Sam because the grandmother had grown older. They had three younger children of their own. Sam never felt he was not loved as much as the real siblings, and his relationship with his adopted dad is very open. He is treated like a firstborn (*mwáániichi*) son.

As a teenager, Susan left the atoll to attend high school on Wééné. During this time, she stayed with her biological family who also paid for her tuition. But she never felt at home there. She had a lot of problems with her biological parents, “because she has not had a chance to talk to her real parents about her adoption” (Sam). After school or work, she would just go to her room and avoid the company of the rest of the family. When she was asked to do something, she would not do it.

Sam, in turn, went to another high school on Wééné and stayed with a brother of his adopted father who was paying for his tuition. It was there that life began to get complicated for him. There were times when his adopted father’s mother was also residing with them, and she would always be complaining that his uncle was spending too much money on him, the adopted one, and not enough on his real niece.

“She hated it a lot when I stayed with my uncle” (Sam) because she felt there were others, more closely related who deserved more help. She would often play the real and adopted sides against each other behind Sam’s back. “In some cases like that I really struggle a lot and blame my adopted and real parents a lot. If I was not adopted, I would not be in this kind of situation.”

What made matters worse is that his biological parents would often say bad things about the adopted side and that troubled Sam even more, especially when residing with his biological parents. Matters only got worse between the two families when Sam’s younger biological brother committed suicide and the adopted dad—who had been sick at the time—did not show up for his adopted son’s biological brother’s funeral. Since then, communication died down between both sets of parents, and Sam, like his elder sister, was being torn up in between this conflict. Suicide, Sam concluded, would be the only way to escape from these feelings. When comparing himself to his brothers and imagining them being in his shoes, he thought his brothers “would just commit suicide right away” (Sam).

One key problem that surfaced was which side actually had the last say in decision making, residency, and the choice of a college. During this time, it was impossible for him to go to the atoll or even visit with his adoptive father when he was on Wééné because then his biological parents would be saying “Oh, you really belong to the other side” (Sam). So many times Sam would cry in agony over his situation of being caught in the middle.

In the course of the in-depth interviews with Sam, he also mentioned stories he heard on his atoll about adopted people and inheritance. When an adopted person died, the adoptive siblings would take the lands the deceased person had inherited and give them to their children, claiming that the deceased never owned any land in the family because they had been adopted. Also, if, for example, a chief died on his island, the people would trace the matrilineal line of the chief, and if the next in line was found to have been adopted, he would be excluded from becoming the next chief. In Chuuk, exception to that rule was always possible as well (cf. following section, “Cinderella Overtones in Adoption”).

What can be concluded from the preceding case, as well as from the 200 cases collected thus far, is that the great majority (approximately 90 percent) will testify that their adoption has led to (varying) feelings of *neetipengngaw* caused by being adopted, and they harbor these feelings either in their relationship to their biological parents or toward their adoptive parents or because of relatives complaining about the money adoptive parents are spending on the “wrong” person. Deep down they feel like a trust has been broken, “a rope has been torn,” and “there is no clear cut in a tear. You cannot really make a clean cut. There are always threads hanging around” (L.H.); so many feel detached and live with the feeling of not having been cherished (*rese éwúchcheyáániyeyi*) enough by their biological parents, “for if they had, they would not have given me away in the first place” (I.S.). However, public opinion might argue that adopted children are spoiled and treated much better than biological children. When true, adopted children will readily confirm. Yet they will often comment that, despite being spoiled, “I was still not fully happy and satisfied until I returned to my [biological] parents . . . deep down they [adopted children] have an emptiness for their parents’ place” (Anne). This aspect becomes very clear in a conversation between a father in his fifties and his college freshman biological son who was adopted by a close relative who actually all lived together in the same house: “Every time I talk to my son about his adoption he cries, really cries. He feels sold he says. Then I answer him and say: ‘You are fully mine, I love you just like all my other children.’ ‘No, you do not. I do not feel that way,’ he responds. Then I tell him: ‘See it positively, you are lucky to have two sets of parents!’ His answer is: ‘I rather just have you!’” (P.K.). The answer of the son shows in a very unmistakable way that being spoiled or having “added options” does not fill the emotional emptiness. This is certainly still one major explanation why “[o]lder persons who were adopted in childhood are usually functioning as members of their natal lineages just as if they had not been adopted at all” (Goodenough 1951, 215).

It is important to emphasize here that some of the most detailed, reflected, and “complete” information has come from consultants in their fifties and even sixties. They can fall back on a lifetime of experiences and observations within their family, lineage, and on their island and are often able to include data from people above their age group and from their lineage history as well. Many of their adoption experiences naturally date back to the time before “Western influences,” such as the nuclearization of the family and the “monetization of the economy” (Hezel 1999, 318), which began in the 1960s. These experiences led to what Hezel calls the “breakdown of the lineage system” (318) in Chuuk. Older informants can confirm that my findings are not of a recent origin, the “logical” result of modern Western influences, but that they also existed in the past, before island life was “polluted” by these mostly Western influences.

This does not mean that the cultural changes that have taken place over the past 100 plus years under Spanish, German, and Japanese colonial rule had no influence on the practice of adoption and, in some respect, also on the emotions. Outside influences have diversified or even complicated emotions people might have toward their fate and identity as an adopted person. But what the historic and present-day data clearly reveal is that change cannot be turned into a scapegoat for already existing innate problems surrounding adoption in Chuuk. Declaring cultural change as the culprit for all negative discoveries surrounding the practice and the effects of adoption would be an oversimplification in itself and does not do justice to the historical and current data obtained.

Again, Western influences, such as a rise in individualism, increasing economic independence over the past thirty to forty years have never seriously altered the fundamental issues adopted people have had to confront in Chuuk. Rather, these changes that have taken place have made it easier for people to talk about the often troublesome effects and the emotions involved in their adoption experience, something most consultants admit they would never have dared to talk about in the past, when their closely knit lineage hierarchy dominated all social life and talk, and where they, as younger members, were expected to conform to everything their elders said and did and to hide their true feelings by keeping them to themselves. To express them would be threatening to their kin relationships.

As we now turn to the effects of adoption in Chuuk, it must be emphasized that, although adoption as a practice seems to come naturally for people in Chuuk—as it supposedly does for people in other Pacific societies—it does involve a lot of (negative) emotion. Therefore, emotions can serve as a key to understanding the effects adoption has on those people most immediately affected by it. This makes it necessary to look more closely at

the problem of expressed and unexpressed emotions in adoption. The change of time and society, in particular the loosening of kinship ties and greater personal economical independence, has assisted in creating the context needed to gain a more complete access to emotions otherwise hidden very carefully from the sight of others. They will lead us to a better understanding of adoption and its effects and, in connection with it, of our understanding of person, self, and society in Chuuk. Emotions, we will discover, are a window to the tiip and can lead us to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a person in Chuuk (cf. Käser 1977: 48ff; 2004: 177–93; Goodenough 2002: 63–82; Gladwin and Sarason 1953; Lutz 1988; Caughey 1977).

Problem of Expressed and Unexpressed Emotions

Collecting data on the states of the human psyche in general can be hard enough (Käser 1977; Lutz 1988), but trying to collect data from individuals on personal or real feelings is taking it a step further, especially when it involves talking about the closest of kin. This can only be achieved in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. What W. H. Goodenough found to be true in the past is still much alive today. Still, it is important “to dissemble (*epinéech*) and conceal . . . true feelings” (2002, 78) especially toward older kin. To do otherwise is considered not only foolish (Larson 1989, 189) but also detrimental to maintaining group harmony (Dernbach 2005, 247; Lutz 1988) or the image thereof. It is not appropriate for someone to actually talk about personal emotions involved in adoption because in doing so, “I am bringing disgrace to the family that adopted me. It is like I am attacking them even though they cared for me” (Pam). In some instances, informants I had not known well enough, clearly showed signs of *mengiringir* (bad conscience) and *niyamaam* (deep regret, anger toward oneself for having said or done something). In these cases, I ended the interview. There is a latent and clear risk in talking about personal emotions toward close kin because, if discovered, the person will be exposed and others will know who has disrupted the “harmony” within the family, who was disloyal, and sanctions would most likely follow. Therefore, the problem of expressed and unexpressed emotions will continue to surface later in this paper.

It is not my intention to focus on negative feelings attributed to adoption by individuals who were adopted. It does help the way an adopted child feels if the heads of a family or lineage are forceful in emphasizing with word and deed the equality of both adoptive children and biological children. Both children will then be treated alike and, therefore, may feel equal, but experience has taught that trouble is often up ahead when family or lineage heads become old and die. That is when conflict will arise, even if it had not been

present (or brought into the open) before. Here too, the same principle of concealing and dissembling emotions comes into play when the generation in authority slowly moves out and the next generation or sibling set begins to take over the leadership. The incoming generation or sibling set will then exhibit their real feelings toward an adopted child and it will show whether or not they continue to respect an older adopted sibling as an authority above themselves. In such transitional periods, power, inheritance, the right to talk and speak for a kin group, and rights of individuals within a group are often restructured. With no one above to lead, true feelings surface. An example will make this point much clearer:

A man and his wife adopted a girl and loved her like their own child. The father gave her land, and she was treated well within the family and lineage. But when the father grew old, he told his daughter to sell off the pieces of land he had given her, because he knew that, when he died, his siblings and relatives would give her a hard time and possibly reclaim the land he had given her. In response, the woman sold all the land to a paternal uncle and moved back to her birthplace—with the money. Today, that lady is in her seventies. Out of respect for the adoptive father, nobody had dared to openly challenge or express negative sentiments toward the adopting father for giving his adoptive daughter pieces of land during his lifetime. But as soon as he died, he suspected that this respectful behavior would be dropped and the true feelings of his siblings would surface, and they would have, as people in this lineage have confessed.

There are also a great number of adopted firstborn sons (*mwáániichi*) and daughters (*finiichi*) who may feel that they are only being accepted as the firstborn out of respect for their still living parents or because they may have more wealth or a better job than others in the family. There often remains a deep uncertainty regarding to whether they belong and are fully accepted by their sib group only because of their achieved status and the benefits everyone has because of their economic or political success. Should they, once on top in their clan hierarchy, decide to reconnect to their natural father or mother, they could undermine their authority, and clan members would begin to question and challenge their leadership position. People would fear the loss or diversion of their leader's resources to another family and matrilineage and disqualify him as a leader of their matrilineage saying he is not of their flesh (*fituk*). That then is seen as final proof to the adopted person that he is only accepted on the basis of his wealth, political power, or influence rather than being an unquestioned equal member and accepted natural heir of the matrilineage position of leadership.

What these findings reveal to us is that an adopted child is not naturally accepted as being one like all the other children in a family or lineage but

that his or her position is at a higher risk and can be challenged and questioned, unlike the position of a biological child who cannot be questioned in the same way (against Linnekin and Poyer 1990, 6; Wendel 1998, 11). Loyalty and belonging must often be proven and “created” daily so as not to be questioned. Hence, the adopted child simply cannot just be, but must become a member of the new family or lineage. This fact has major implications and consequences regarding identity, sense of security, and belonging of such persons. At the same time, adoptive parents will often find themselves and be found to be spoiling their adopted child to show the public just how much they “love” their adopted child. Adopted children will argue the same way: “My adoptive dad just bought me that because I am adopted . . . , but I do not know his true feelings” (Anne). Oftentimes, all actions, of love and punishment are evaluated by the adopted child from the perspective of not really belonging. Every action is questioned: “are they doing it because I was adopted? Is that why I am receiving a lesser beating than their biological child? Or if I am being beaten more intensely, is it because I am adopted?” (Anne). Thus, even children who are spoiled by their adoptive parents have said that these feelings and doubts always went along with everything their adoptive parents did for them, the good and the bad.

We must also keep in mind that there is a notion in Chuuk that a person cannot really give away his or her own child. It will in some way also always belong to the real parents and will have access to their food and home if need be. A person’s “real identity remains intact, whether as a latent social fact or as an expressed one” (Goodenough 1970, 326; see especially the context). “I am not worried about my daughter because, even though she is adopted, I know that she belongs to me and I have that authority to claim that she is mine” (P.D.). Linguistic evidence underlines this fact in that the possessive pronoun (*neyi*) “my child to keep” signifies the inseparable personal possession of something or someone as opposed to alienable possessions such as “my pair of zories” (*ipweey choori*) (cf. also L. Käser, pers. comm. October 24, 2005; Weiner 1992).

But in adoption, parents will “override their emotional attachment to a child for the purpose of the greater good for the whole ‘family’ (*inepwin-néwú*)” (Jerry). Out of courtesy and respect for the arrangement, parents giving a child will always try to avoid referring to their adopted child as being “really mine” (*wesewesen neyi*) and “as much as they can, they want to solidify the adoption” (Jerry). So we can see that the cognitive and emotional dissonance (giving away something one cannot actually give away) provides the ground for the emotional turmoil surrounding adoption and belonging in Chuuk.

It is no surprise that the emotions are often not expressed in the context of adoption, and the emotions of those of lesser rank are of even more

secondary concern, including those of the adopted child and of younger siblings of the adopted child who might have otherwise enjoyed the role of being a firstborn themselves. They all must subordinate themselves for the benefit of a higher cause, in this case, the strengthening of relationships between siblings in the parental generation. The case of an outer island community will illustrate this.

Peacemaker

Similar to the findings of Flinn for Pulap (1985, 68), informants from this outer island have, for instance, pointed out the role of adopted children as *sowuwekinamumweey* or *át iká nengnginin ekinamumweey* (the peacemaker or as the boy or girl who brings peace) between siblings and families. They say it will be hard for brothers to live in complete dissent or disunity if the biological child of the one was adopted by the other. They will always be aware that a biological part of them is with the other or that part of the other has become a full part of them. This awareness will heighten the prospects for peace and unity. However, the adopted child will be the one suffering the most emotionally from any disunity and gossip because of its strong bonding to both sets of parents, the “real” or “natural” versus the adopted. It will also be expected to be the one to call a meeting of “peace talks” when tensions between the families arise. Adopted informants here have talked of the heightened emotional stress and the burden they carry with them all their lives, a burden placed upon them through adoption, of being embroiled in the middle.

From what we have learned from Gladwin and Sarason (1953) and Marshall (1977, 649), this practice makes sense and seems to be a necessity in light of the often ambivalent relationships between consanguineal siblings that are “ever conscious of rank and careful to observe the amenities of rank” (Goodenough 2002, 78–79) and can easily get caught up in disputes related to inheritance and other often limited resources.

The overarching theme for adoption in this island community is to promote the *mecheres* (positive emotions) between kin such as *kinamumwe* (peace). For the emotional stability of the whole, individuals are adopted and, as a result, the negative emotions they may harbor are secondary in nature. Yet their feelings of belonging to both families (e.g., here of brothers) can be used to promote emotional stability and bonding for the group as a whole, a highly valued goal that keeps the *fééféen neefin* (ties between kin) strong and keeps them from “tearing apart” (*mwúúfeseen*). “Relationships in Chuuk are looked upon as rope” (Jerry). When a child is *mwúúti* (torn away or adopted) from its natural mother, it is tied to another, thus itself becoming

the rope holding together something greater than itself. It has become the mortar between the “building blocks” (Marshall 1981) of greater Chuukese society.

However, what may be a great benefit for some may be an emotional sacrifice for others. In times of peace, dual belonging is beneficial, but in times of conflict, it easily turns to a sense of split belonging, where the adopted person feels torn between two parties. The account of a young man and his sister (who together were both adopted by the same family), caught in the middle of their two families in conflict, illustrates this:

“The real burden is on me and my sister. We are caught in between emotionally. At times, when I am alone, I would just cry, cry, cry.”

“Because of this burden?”

“Yes.”

“Have you talked to your sister about this?”

“Yes. She complains: How come these people always tell us these problems and always bring their problems to us? They are just thinking of themselves and not thinking of how hard it is on us!” (Sam)

In summary, it has become quite evident that there are strong emotions involved in adoption, yet it is expected that all people involved will subordinate themselves to a greater cause and keep their emotions “concealed” (W. Goodenough) or “camouflaged” (R. Goodenough). That factor complicates the study of emotions in the context of adoption. This seems to be one of the main reasons why the bulk of data collected and presented on adoption in the past, at least in the case of Chuuk, seems to reflect more of the ideal, the *ééreni* (customary ideal), surrounding the practice of adoption. This ideal can only serve as a general framework because it only scratches the surface of what goes on after a child is adopted. The data we have so far (e.g., Flinn 1992: 66–67; Goodenough 1951; Goodenough 1970; Thomas 1978; Marshall 1999) does not show how these ideals play out and affect adopted persons in everyday decision making such as residency, household chores, food preparation, land rights, religious affiliation, political support, and money that is shared or what happens when disagreements emerge pertaining to such decision making in life. Who, for instance, has the greater say over and primary ownership of a child—the adoptive or biological parents? Who does it belong to, and where does the child itself feel it belongs? What does a five-year-old girl feel who goes to visit her biological parents but is not allowed to do so by her adopted mother and gets a beating every time she is caught at her biological father’s house? What does disagreement between the two sets of parents do to the child involved? Can the adoptive child, even as a grownup, still move freely between its “added social options”? How do

siblings feel about the “newcomer” (e.g., if they would otherwise be the first-born among their siblings)? Do they challenge and undermine the position of the firstborn who is not their immediate flesh (*fituk*), or do they accept the adopted person like they would an immediate biological sibling? These are all open questions and loose ends that need to be tied up because they influence how an adopted person will feel about being adopted, whether he or she is accepted, fully integrated, and functions as one in his or her adoptive family. For now, we will focus on major issues that bring to light and life the effects of adoption in Chuuk. The work of Flinn, R. Goodenough, and Marshall will accompany us along the way.

Problem of Residency

Residency is very crucial, in that it indicates belonging. A child, permanently residing at a house, is subject to labor for that household and, like everyone else, is expected to partake in the everyday chores of subsistence. The heads of the house can tell the child what to do, indicating their ownership of the child. Flinn’s comments on alternate residency on Pular reveal potential for open conflict on the same page when she writes that “[p]arents do not force young children to stay if they are reluctant to live with adoptive parents but simply encourage them to do so” (1992, 66). Flinn does not explain what happens when at the same time “some adoptive parents insist more than others that the adopted child remain with them” (1992, 66) and that “Pulapese consider it unacceptable for the child to reside constantly with the birth parents” (1992, 66). The contradictions here are obvious because, in the end, the adopted child has to succumb to the pressure, the older it gets, to stay and reside with the adoptive family. What does “insist” imply? How are children “encouraged” to live with their adoptive parents when they do not want to reside there permanently? In one case, a grandfather told me the following about the adopted child of his daughter: “If the girl goes to her real dad, the [adoptive] mother beats her up” (P.M.). In another case, a mother would beat her adopted child anytime she saw it near the biological mother (who was her sister), and that happened almost daily because they lived together on the same plot of land.

From the over fifteen cases collected in the region where the Pwlowót language is spoken, consultants will testify to their emotional suffering when at a young age they were forced to all of a sudden stay at their adoptive parents’ house and could not stay with their mother. Scenarios like the one below are also described in detail by Douglas (1998: 156–204).

Every morning after the morning service, my adoptive mother would have to pull me, while I was screaming and trying to go to my

mother, who was also sitting in the church, but I could not. I had to stay with my adoptive parents. My brothers and sisters were allowed to visit me, but I was not allowed to stay with them. Then my [biological] parents adopted another girl and she would push me away saying: “This is *my* mom” even after she already knew that I was the real daughter. (Anne)

These two women today get along well as sisters, but yet they both say they would have rather not been adopted and had rather stayed with their biological parents, even though their adopted parents really spoiled them. Two other people, who were adopted at an older age in their teens, reacted to the adoption by isolating themselves whenever they could from their fellow siblings and the adoptive parents and say they felt detached and that they did not belong. As soon as they had the opportunity to leave, they left the adoptive parents. They actually insisted on telling me not to believe anybody from their island and in Chuuk who actually was professing to be happy with being adopted. “They are all lying and not honest with themselves” (Pam). For many adoptive children, increased mobility and the greater distance (travel to Wééné, Guam, Hawai’i, or mainland United States) can be a gateway out of the unwanted situation. Talk of alternating between residences of biological and adoptive parents says nothing about what is going on inside the child. There are also cases where the adoptive child preferred to stay with the adoptive parents. These were exceptionally good adoptive parents, father and mother alike, who loved the adopted child like their own, and the child got along very well with its siblings in the adopted family. But such cases make up only about 10 percent of the 200 adopted persons on whom I have been able to follow up.

Problem of Secrecy

Given that on Pulap “few adoptive parents attempt for a time to hide an adopted child’s true descent line and clan identities” (Flinn 1992, 66), we must infer that most children on Pulap, at a very early age, know that they are adopted and know who their biological parents are and where they live. This poses a major problem for adopted children because age and knowledge about being adopted are important factors determining whether or not an adoption is seen to be strong (*pechekún*) or loose (*nikátomwotomw*). Children adopted as infants will usually have a stronger allegiance to their adoptive parents and are less likely to run away (e.g., Sam). Parents who adopt and opt for secrecy do so because they want the child to love them as natural parents. For this reason, couples will opt for secrecy in the adoption, a practice that

seems to be more popular in the Chuuk Lagoon. This is important to understand because it reveals that there is a notion in Chuuk that children will also feel differently when they know they are adopted. Oftentimes couples who are barren (*riit*) will opt for this kind of adoption. When the child discovers its true identity, it will often try to connect with the biological parents, but in such cases the adoptive parents will usually monitor such movements very carefully for fear of losing the child. Such children mostly do not want to leave their adoptive parents because they may have grown to love them as their natural parents. Yet, often when the adoptive parents die, they too will most likely move back to their birthplace. Secrecy is also often kept when a child was born out of wedlock or even out of an incestuous relationship. The child is supposed to feel safe by having a father and a mother. Yet, such children will usually discover the truth about their origin by the time they are teenagers. If there are fights at school or disagreements between fellow kin while playing, the secret might be let out in the form of a verbal attack. The child will then usually go home and ask the parents for the truth. In some cases, a child was beaten extensively for even raising the question, and as a result, the reaction of the parents harmed the relationship rather than strengthened it.

Grandparents and Adoption

I have not been able to confirm what R. Goodenough found to be true in Romónum, that “[g]randparents do not adopt grandchildren in this society” (1970, 317). This statement has been denied by older and younger informants alike (from most parts of Chuuk and Fáyichuuk), and almost all the people I have asked could immediately tell me of someone they knew of who was adopted by their grandparents. This is not to say that it is very common for grandparents to adopt their grandchildren, but under certain circumstances, such as a child born to a daughter out of wedlock (primary reason given), they will adopt their grandchild. In other, more modern cases, the economics of an adoption come into play so that the adopted grandchild “can get the social security when the grandparents die” (Jerry). Another development that may be emerging and still lacks further study is the adoption of grandchildren after they have been left behind in Chuuk by their parents who have emigrated to Guam, Hawai’i, or mainland United States in search of work and money, a better education, or for health care. A few such cases have been reported to me. In most of these cases, though, the grandchildren are being fostered by their grandparents or helping them with everyday chores and, in some ways, also taking the place of the parents, who through their absence are not themselves caring for their parents like they feel they

should be doing. Instead, grandchildren are taking over that role, for purposes of staying connected or for economic reasons, because they know that land is given (*niwiniin túmwínúún* Chuuk Lagoon / *pawín móór* Mortlocks) when an old person is cared for and especially when the aged grandparent needs special physical care (e.g., when bedridden). In other instances, grandchildren have been sent to Hawai'i to receive a better education or as an additional source of income for a grandparent living there who can in turn cash-in on childcare money given by the government of Hawai'i. What is still more common in the outer islands is that the grandparents will foster (*túmwínúúw*) their firstborn grandchildren. One reason given for the practice is that they can teach them the knowledge they need to become good leaders and decision makers who are respected for their knowledge and character. What appears to affect children adopted by their grandparents is when they discover that their "sister" or "brother" is actually their mother or father. Many will withdraw and then purposefully continue to treat their parents as siblings and not as their parents. If their parents try to treat them as a child, they will often ignore these advances and "talk back" (*éppénúwa*) to their mother or father. When a child discovers such a scenario, it often does not want to believe what it hears and will begin to talk to other relatives, usually more senior relatives, in search of the truth. All in all, such a discovery does trouble the child emotionally and basically alters and reshapes all of the relationships a child had grown up with and taken as the way things are, as reality. All relationships are then seen under a whole new paradigm, confusing the encultured sense of belonging within the network of kin relationships.

Cinderella Overtones in Adoption

"There were no Cinderella overtones in any of our cases of adoption, with the exception of one" (Goodenough 1970, 333; Thomas 1978, 148). People I have talked to from the Mortlocks reported that this possibility existed there but only for a chief who might adopt a boy or a girl as a personal laborer without them receiving the full personal rights normally associated with adoption. But the one such remaining laborer, they stated, is now the chief of his island. Traditionally, that should not have been so, but after the death of his adopted father and brothers, the chiefly clan wanted him to take over that position even though the whole island community disagreed with it, claiming he was not the rightful heir to that position.

Next to this exceptional form of adoption, I have come across numerous cases where a person felt he, or mostly she, was adopted for the sake of doing household chores. One man in his fifties, when talking about the adoption of

his wife said “she felt that they just adopted her for the sake of using her, for the purpose of working or helping or something like that. . . . She did not feel comfortable to stay [with the older sister of her mother]. She ran away often to her real mom” (P.D.). In another case, I asked a man in his sixties why his single, unmarried daughter had adopted a child, a girl, and the answer was quite frank, “So the girl can help her. She can tell her ‘bring me the cup, bring me the bowl,’ and if she gets sick she will have someone to help her” (P.M.) even though the lady has over ten siblings, most of whom are living in the same village and, in any case of sickness, would hurry to assist their sister. In both cases above, the adopted child had been the biological child of a younger sibling of one of the adopting parents. In the past and up until today, girls have been frequently adopted to assist older female relatives with their household chores. Oftentimes these were children whose mother had died or had been divorced from her husband. Until today, many such children are being treated as second class family members. Although they might be the oldest son or daughter, they may not exercise leadership or participate in decision making (e.g., in land use or other important family decisions) but must leave these responsibilities to their younger siblings who are the natural children of their adopted parents. A clear distinction will often be made here when it comes to inheritance, and many an adopted child can loose on both sides just as well. Because the child was raised by another family, the natural parents or siblings might revoke title to land, and the adopting family might do the same.

Another type of such adoptions reported has its origin in the 1970s and 1980s when people were flooding Wééné, the capital island, for work. Many families with a job would bring in female relatives who had either finished high school or came to Wééné for just that purpose to help them in the household with their own children. Oftentimes, these young females became pregnant by the head of the household. The wife of the male head of the household, feeling disgraced, would then usually adopt the illegitimate child and purposely give the child a hard time by putting it to work like a maid, thereby taking vengeance against her husband, the genitor of the child (P.N.). These types of cases have receded in the 1990s because women have become more aware of the problem and are taking necessary precautions to prevent such scenarios.

A newer development in Chuuk, caused by the emergence of a wealthy upper class and a very poor lower class people, is that wealthy people may adopt or care for (*túmwinúúw*) a poor relative in exchange for labor in and around the house. This does not automatically lead to a Cinderella effect, but in some cases it does.

Adoption and Child Abuse

Of course there is child abuse, and the problem exists in Chuuk (Marcus 1991; Thomas 1978: 144–47), but it has not been researched in any systematic way until today. Marcus distinguishes three types of abuse: child neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse; and his explanation of the problem is rather superficial and simplistic in that it sees the cause in the changing society. Surely, the changing of family structures and the changing patterns of residency have opened the door to such abuses, because the restrictions built into traditional Chuukese society, especially the sexual restrictions, were used as a way of protecting young women and girls from such (anticipated?) abuse. Over a handful of well-respected male and female consultants from Fááyichuk have confirmed that adopted children have a higher risk of being sexually abused. That was one of the main reasons, they stated, why especially young girls are adopted away from a mother whose husband has passed away or divorced his wife. It is to prevent the sexual abuse of her daughters by a possible stepfather. In the past, a brother, classificatory or biological, would be looked for to take the place of the deceased, but not necessarily in the case of a divorce. In traditional Chuukese society, an incident of sexual abuse or sexual intercourse of a stepfather with a stepdaughter would, strictly speaking, not be considered as incest (against Marcus who refers to these cases as incest in the Western sense of its meaning), because no biological connection existed between the new father and the daughter, hence the practice to “remove” such daughters from the household of their mother. Another source from Wééné, though, the capital island in Namwooneyas, believed there was no specific relationship between adoption and sexual abuse. Of the four cases she specifically knew, none of the victims had been an adopted girl. The same is true for three cases collected from other parts of Chuuk, where it was the biological father for instance, who had been abusing his daughters. In the past, such behavior would have been punished by death, older informants have said, to wipe out the shame brought upon the clan. In one multiple case that was known in the late 1950s and early 1960s, one informant personally intervened to prevent the killing of the father who had sexually abused his own daughters. Personally, I know of one case where an adopted male was sexually abused as a boy by men of his island and of three cases involving adopted females. One of those from an outer island in the north and northwest region of Chuuk involved older adopted brothers or cousins of the adopted girl who abused her over many years in the 1950s to 1960s because she was evidently of another clan, meaning, not of the same “biological blood line” but only adopted into their clan. The abused girl reported discovering her adoption in the process of her

abuse because she questioned her assailant's culturally questionable incest behavior toward her, whereas her cousins in turn justified their actions by explaining they were not of the same flesh (*fituk*) or as we would say "biological blood line." Hence, their argument was that it was okay, because they were not breaking any incest taboo. This argument, I was told, was also generally accepted by the island community. The cases collected on sexual abuse do not indicate a higher rate for adopted children, than for biological children, although people will assume the higher risk surrounding an adopted child. The same seems to be true for child neglect and physical abuse, although more detailed research in this area has yet to be undertaken (cf. Marcus 1991).

Conclusion

The study of adoption and the effect it has on individuals being adopted in Chuuk has led us to see that at the core of personhood lies the question of belonging. The question of identity in Chuuk is not "Who am I?" but "Where do I belong?" People must know where they belong. This determines who they are (rather than the answer to "Who am I?"). If individuals have an assured sense of belonging, they know who they are and who and where they are in relation to everybody else. Because "being a person" is "being in relation," the question of where a person (primarily) belongs within this network of relations that supposedly constitutes the self and identity of persons is a priori to being in relation. This question must be clarified for the individual—to know and to be assured about how he or she is related to the people within the kin group and beyond. Where the sense of primary belonging of an adopted person is disrupted, unclear, or frequently disputed, challenged, and possibly criticized, much emotional turmoil arises and leads to a sense of insecurity, rejection, isolation, and not belonging. A first common reaction is withdrawal from the family. In the more severe cases, "the only way to escape from that feeling" is to "run away or commit suicide" (Sam). Between the summers of 2006 and 2007, four males in the communities of people I am close to committed suicide. Three of their deaths were directly linked to feelings of rejection, not belonging, and being torn in between, an effect of their adoption.

Studying adoption has brought these foundational aspects of personhood to the surface. In studying the effects of adoption, it becomes evident that coparenting will most likely lead to insecurity regarding where a person belongs. It exposes at the core of the self in Chuuk the strength of "blood" (to use the Western term) or direct biological descent over more distant biological and social relations. Where the relationships take priority over flesh (*fituk*) and blood (*chcha*), it is almost always because the rejection by

the biological parents was so complete. Philosophically speaking, the innate question of human identity is constantly put up for disposition, and that makes the life of the adopted person difficult, especially when conflicts arise. What may at first seem to be unproblematic, well intended, and harmonious in the practice of adoption may have severe life-long emotional consequences. The sign of being a mature (*miriit*) person is to be (*mósónósón*), to keep quiet about these things out of respect for higher ranked persons (cf. Käser 1977, 68) and to maintain the ideal of an intact family and clan.

One intention of the field research for this paper has been to understand what it means to be a person in Chuuk. And the study of adoption has given us access to fundamental aspects of personhood and its expression and effects in everyday life. From the start, it was not my intention to bring out the negative effects adoption has on those most affected by it. What I had intended was to determine what people in Chuuk really feel and think below the often calm surface, what deeply influences their whole being as a person. This paper presents some results in this undertaking. Or to use a Chuukese saying, we have found the practice and effects of adoption to be *choopi me wóón, nge aa éwít me faan* (calm on the surface but with currents and turmoil below).

Brief Look beyond Chuuk

It must be noted here, that this is not only true for Chuuk alone but just as well visible in the accounts given by Smith for Palau (1983: 203–74; see especially the opening story pp. 203–04 about Ngelekek Budel and Ngelekek Chelsel) or Kirkpatrick and Broder for Yap (1976: 200–27):

Yapese note that in order to carry out their agreement with the adopters, natural parents must treat their child as being of little worth, as something that can be given away. This conflicts with the stress on the value of the person. . . . Following up on the importance of exchange to parenthood, informants assert that since the natural parents rejected the child, the child will treat them unkindly in return and may steal from them or fight them (1976: 209–10)

Therefore, people conclude “It is better . . . to have a child born to the estate than to ‘adopt’ one because of the above-mentioned difficulties. Some people expect children born to an estate to ally against adopted children” (1976, 210)

In the end we can say with Kirkpatrick and Broder that “. . . the possibility of conflict between adopters and children is barely hinted in the expectations discussed here” (210) and conclude that further research on the (emotional)

effects of adoption in Yap and Palau—just to name two other Micronesian examples—is a field waiting to be worked upon as we refine the debate on adoption in Oceania.

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**ADOPTION IS BLOOD: UNDERSTANDING CHAMORRO
POKSAI AS CHAMORRO AUTHENTICITY WITHIN RACIALIZED
DECOLONIZATION POLITICS ON GUAM**

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In my analysis of two Guam public meetings in this paper, I explore the messy, imbricated issues of identity, authenticity, family/kinship, and race within the Chamorro struggle for self-determination. *Poksai* (adoption) and ancestors—and more importantly “the Chamorro *familia*”—become the key narratives through which some Chamorros can assert a sense of authenticity within a landscape complicated by colonizing and decolonizing forces. As evidenced in these two public meetings, the discursive use of “the Chamorro familia” along with conceptions of race (*mestizo*) becomes a recuperative strategy for some Chamorros to infuse a sense of authenticity into representations of themselves. This permits them to claim Chamorro identity and thus membership in a group deserving decolonization from U.S. colonialism, sovereignty, and a vote in the proposed Chamorro-only vote. Another crucial aspect of the “authentication” of Chamorros is that these narratives about “the mestizo Chamorro familia” can act as a powerful decolonizing discourse by resisting the delegitimization of imposed racial identity and as a location to formulate Chamorro political resistance.

Chamorro *Poksai* as More Than “Adoption”

A CHAMORRO MAN FROM GUAM, a long-time land rights activist and supporter of Independence, Antonio “Tony” Artero Sablan and I had a running joking exchange. He would ask for my infant son, and I would laugh and tell him that it wasn’t going to happen. By “asking for” my infant son, he meant he wanted to raise my son on Guam—he wanted to *ma-poksai* him. His

children were grown, he made plain, and he yearned for a child again. He would regale me with all the advantages my son would have being raised by him; after all, what better place to have a son grow up than on Guam? He assured me it wouldn't be forever, just long enough for him to teach my son how to be a man with island sensibilities and skills. This almost ritualized, mirthful tête-à-tête was humorous because neither he nor I believed this was a real possibility because of the nature of our relationship, but it hinted at what could be.

Initially, I was a bit bewildered because Chamorro *poksai* (usually translated to mean "adoption" in English) broke with my notions of what constitutes family life. Although I knew it was a joke, and I had read and heard about Chamorro *poksai* practices in which children are "given" to relatives to "raise," I (at first reacting with my white, American cultural background) still couldn't fathom simply handing my child to someone else to raise unless extreme circumstances necessitated it. Through research into the complex world of decolonization politics on Guam, I learned that Chamorro families were constructed differently than what was understood as the white, American norm pervasive in island institutions and hegemony. Furthermore, I discovered that *poksai* came to represent not only a dynamic yet age-old system of expanding Chamorro families but a powerful metaphor and symbol for authenticating Chamorro identity within racialized decolonization identity politics on Guam. Chamorros¹ are the indigenous population of the Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific, of which Guam is the largest and most southern; Guam has been a colony of the United States since 1898. Chamorros are just one group among many grappling for power and negotiating the complexities of identity politics on Guam.

This essay deconstructs the statement "adoption is blood" uttered at a public meeting about the defining of who is Chamorro as a way to explicate the intersection of Chamorro identity, race, colonialism, decolonization, and the Chamorro family. It illustrates how within the 'Government of Guam' (GovGuam) efforts to define Chamorro, *poksai* is offered by some Chamorros as one prime example of how "being" Chamorro is something other than what U.S. powers say it is because "family" means something different to Chamorros than it does to U.S. colonial culture. Chamorro *poksai* clearly substantiates that "Chamorro *familia*" and relatedness is more expansive and less conceptually rigid than U.S. notions of "biological" relatedness. The public meeting described in this paper encapsulates how, on the one hand, U.S. colonial discourse for political legitimacy required a construct of authenticity that relies on ideas of racial, cultural, and linguistic "purity" which stigmatizes hybrid/*mestizo* identities as inauthentic and politically illegitimate. In other words, the colonizer can exert extreme power over the construction

of knowledge about decolonization of Guam, both locally and internationally, by reframing the language of decolonization into racialized narratives about valid indigenous authenticity, a power that the colonized negotiate and subvert (e. g., Foucault 1980 [1972]).² And, on the other hand, given these grounds for colonial political legitimacy, the Chamorro familia is presented by some Chamorros to signify and construct a claim of authenticity that relies on notions of *mestizo*³ racial, cultural, and linguistic identity which contests the colonial imposition of purity as the only valid basis for political legitimacy.

This is not to say that those who identify themselves as Chamorro do not rely on notions of purity as well. This essay presents the very multifaceted negotiations between “hybridity” and “purity”, resistance and compliance. It is about the cultural and political space where the statement “adoption is blood,” as spoken by a Chamorro politician in the public meeting, is both a hearkening to the resistant power of hybridity as symbolized in poksai and to purity through the symbolics of blood. Indeed, “being Chamorro” can be at times about the extent to which they are maintaining what might be called “pure types”; at other times, Chamorros seem to be all too conscious that pure types simply do not exist. The public meeting discussed is an example of the former. Some Chamorros are demonstrating that because of how the Chamorro familia is constructed, pure types do not exist because being Chamorro means having families that are both socially sprawling and mestizo—characteristics that do not seemingly correspond to notions of racial purity. Chamorros establish that not only are their families organized on different terms, but Chamorro identity in general (i.e. racial identity) is also ordered on different—mestizo—idioms. Chamorro families and Chamorro people are indeed mestizo; therefore, their identity cannot be constrained by U.S. notions of purity. The discursive use of the Chamorro familia within decolonization processes by certain, but certainly not all, Chamorros becomes a recuperative, resistance strategy to infuse a sense of “authenticity” into representations of Chamorros. Chamorro familia is then translated through and predicated on the politicized narratives about the colonial/racial assignment of Chamorro mestizo-ness, the Chamorro employment of mestizo-ness along with familia as a strategy of authentication. As is similar in the Hawaiian case in this special issue and in her earlier work, Judith Modell Schachter explains, “the concepts of *hanaii* [informal adoption] and *’ohana* [kin] have become crucial public symbols in Hawaiian struggles for cultural autonomy and national sovereignty” (1998). One of the most vital aspects of Chamorro authentication is that these overlapping narratives about the Chamorro familia and mestizo can act as a powerful decolonizing discourse to contest imposed racial identities that delegitimize Chamorros.

“The Circle”: Expansive Chamorro Families

In the Chamorro project to authenticate their “culture,” “Chamorro culture” is perceived to be lived at its most expressive through family life. Complex relationships of reciprocity and networking define family life, as well as the other family “values”—or *I Kustumbren Chamoru*. This is the stuff of Chamorro authenticity, the stuff that marks a continuity between their pure Chamorro past (pre-European) into a hybridized past (post-European). Lilli Perez, a Chamorro scholar from Guam, calls *kostumbren Chamoru* a “homogenized cultural blending” (1998, also see Souder 1992, Stade 1998). By the 1970s, many of the same family values maintained as definitive in traditional (be them before or after Spanish colonization) times were still circulated as central to Chamorro familia, as reported by Robert Underwood (a former Guam Congressional Delegate for the U.S. Congress) whom, in the *Pacific Daily News*, analyzed Chamorro family through six belief statements:

- i) Family authority and ties are preeminent in all social relationships. . . . ii) Interdependence in man is more important than personal interdependence. . . . (*Ina’fa’maolek*—help each other in an agreeable fashion) . . . [and] (*Chenchule’* and *ika*—the giving of gift in the form of money and goods to assist in the cost of a feast). iii) Responsible persons always respect social position and the social situation. . . . iv) Old age brings wisdom and age governs social relationships. . . . v) Nature must be lived with, not struggled against. . . . vi) A sense of *mamahlaho* (shame) guides your daily behavior (Underwood 1979)

These values and familial structures, in turn, permeate constructions of class and local politics. Chamorro talk, indeed, is infused with family. A plethora of familia and familia-related subjects abound in my fieldnotes and memories from Guam because family was one of the main topics of conversation. For example, a Chamorro meeting another Chamorro for the first time will immediately ask, “Are you related to so and so?” or “What is your clan?” Lilli Perez described in her dissertation that, while conducting interviews, her informants always insisted in identifying her within family networks before answering questions from her.

The primary interest of informants was my family’s association (clan affiliation). This entailed a delineation of my parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles until key family members were recognized. Once the informants recognized my clan affiliation, I was identified by

such affiliation and introduced by my informants to other members of their families accordingly. (Perez 1998, 120)

The extended familia (clan) and the networks (based on extended family/clan units) that sustain them are essential to how people mobilize connections and are inextricably linked to political workings on the island. Clan membership, or extended family relatedness, is often understood as the hallmark of the strong and authentic Chamorro familia. It is the basic structure through which networking is accomplished and sustained. These clans⁴ do important work: actual physical work of preparing food and all the other tasks related to hosting large (or small) gatherings; exchanging resources and information; supporting one another emotionally and materially, and assisting one another in most situations. In addition, Chamorros can locate, participate in, and construct identities: within an extended clan; within a clan that has a name with a certain history marked with class or status distinctions; within a clan that has certain historical relationships with other clans; and within an island nation that has people who reckon clan familia in similar ways.

Clan networkings are the real strategies that are defined as “genuine” Chamorro culture, and it is this that self-determination efforts desire to maintain. Guam is analogous to Hawai‘i in this case; Schachter (2008, 226) states, “. . . hanai can be an assertion of Hawaiian identity even for those individuals who reject the politics of cultural autonomy and consider the sovereignty movement elitist or misguided.” Chamorro narratives of self-determination/decolonization are rooted in familia speak and familia metaphor because Chamorro familia plays a major role in defining who is and who is not Chamorro and, therefore, who does and who does not have the right to self-determination. As mentioned above, Chamorro familia has large extended family networks; has a steadfast tradition of sharing food; is bound by reciprocity among its members; has unyielding respect for elders; has reverence for matrilineal ancestry; is manifest in the Chamorro values it promotes (Thompson 1969 [1947]; Perez 1998; Department of Chamorro Affairs 2003). A person embedded within Chamorro networks of relations, or as one Chamorro told me, within “the circle,”⁵ can claim to be Chamorro—the very same group vying for self-determination.

Poksai—Exemplary of Chamorro Mestizo Families

John Benavente,⁶ a sixty-something, comfortably retired U.S. military, Chamorro man, was someone who was fascinated with both social scientific

understandings of the Chamorro familia and the intricacies of his own genealogy. Indeed, he is a self-proclaimed “family politician” who knows his extensive family intimately. Mr. Benavente admits to a “military frame of mind,” but he nevertheless is a steadfast supporter of Independence, and a member of the Independence task force (an option, he admits, many other Chamorro military servicepeople saw as oppositional to the U.S. military to which they had dedicated their lives). Mr. Benavente was a child of World War II, having been a young boy when the United States both lost and then retook the island. He remembers being forced to survive in the jungles of northern Guam with his parents and siblings, all seven of them, when Japan had control of the island. He now owns a comfortable house with beautiful landscaping in Dededo, the northern village of his family roots, but has spent and continues to spend a great deal of time in the United States or abroad. His “global” existence began during his career in the army in which he lived away from Guam—usually the United States—on military assignment. He is a man who is well versed in Chamorro artistic traditions and is the son of a famous basket weaver (his mother, Tan Elena Benavente⁷). Tan Elena passed her skills on to her son John who takes great delight in it. Well-read on a variety of subjects, he spent a great deal of time researching his family genealogy and spoke with analytical precision not only on the topic of Chamorro family life but on any political/social/cultural issue related to Guam or the United States. Since his military career, he has been active in politics on Guam and has been linked with well-known Chamorro politicians. He was always ready to inform this naïve anthropologist about the ins and outs of Chamorro culture, especially political culture, and had the added duty of acting as my Chamorro language teacher and translator.

During one lengthy conversation, he explained to me his interpretation of the details of how the Chamorro clan system works. He described that he belongs to seven clans (*Brunu, Chedo, Lile', Bobo, Duenas, Loddo', Dalalai*)⁸ related to him both through his mother and father. He emphasized that clan relationships and obligations are flexible. Here he describes how certain clans of the seven are more closely related to him and take precedence in obligations. As he states: “Your primary responsibility is your clan, so it’s important in that respect. I think members of your clan have a social obligation to your clan. And how important is that? It’s very important because in the networking, if you are in need of help or you are in need of information, your first source of information would be coming from your clan.” Generally one is closer to those clans that were the primary clans of one’s father and mother; thus, technically speaking two clans from his mother and two clans from his father (one from each grandparent). Which clan one feels closest

to or feels the most obligated toward is relative—based on how the relationships between the individuals develop over time. Even if one is of mixed parentage, or mestizo, and only one parent is Chamorro or even part Chamorro, clan membership would be passed to the child through the Chamorro parent. Chamorros say that they belong to a clan by saying “*familian Titang*,” for example.

I asked Mr. Benavente about the responsibility of clans to an individual in one’s life rituals. The Department of Chamorro Affairs (2003: 29–41) precisely spelled out these stages: *Finanagu* (Birth), *Baotismo* (Baptism or Christening), *Primera Kumunion* and *Komfetmasion* (First Holy Communion and Confirmation), *I Inakkamo* (Marriage), and *Finatai* (Death). Each major event in life requires a certain complex of rituals and requisite family gatherings.⁹ Many of these fiestas or family gatherings are enormous undertakings that involve organization, family reciprocity, and a great deal of prepared food and work. This reciprocity, or *chenchule*, is much touted in conscious narratives of familia as being a cornerstone of Chamorro culture. L. Perez asserts: “I view reciprocity among Chamorro families and their networks of social support as a method of providing their membership with prescribed avenues of social interaction. Here, both kith and kin, relations and friends, function as a social network by which members engage in social exchange and effectuate a sense of social support” (Perez 1998, 14). Once more, *chenchule* is part of the narrative complex that defines and identifies Chamorro family and, to a great extent, Chamorro culture, but it is also a practiced principle for family reciprocity, lived out among familial connections.

Poksai and *kompaire* (Chamorro godparent system) can be seen as exemplary of Chamorro family clan mechanics in which reciprocity and a relative openness is valued. Chamorros have narratives that consistently expand relatedness beyond “blood” and “biology” (such as through *kompaire*, *poksai*, and to some extent friendship). The *parientes*, or “relatives,” brought into the family through *kompaire* or *poksai* are also part of the networks, “the circle,” which make life go. Lilli Perez states, “Affiliation in the network is defined by consanguinial, affinal, and ritual relations and is not confined to members of the family” (1998, 313). Most notably, the *kompaire* system is also often referred to as the *compadragazo* system, which is also common in Southern Europe, throughout Latin America, and the Philippines (Quan 1976; Perez 1998). John Quan explains that godparents, parents, and “initiates” (a child) are bound in a relationship that revolved around the Roman Catholic life rituals of baptism, confirmation, and occasionally, marriage (Quan 1976, 2).¹⁰ It creates relatedness through, according to the Department of Chamorro Affairs, linking generations and serving to “fortify the families’ relationships and to strengthen the traditional value of

inafa'maolek (harmony, interdependence) for the benefit of the families. In the Chamorro familial belief system, it becomes the godparents' responsibility to look after the spiritual and material welfare of the godchildren when their parents die; they provide a supportive environment in the godchildren's future and understanding of their cultural heritage" (Department of Chamorro Affairs 2003, 29). Most often godparents are chosen from family members. However, sometimes they are selected from distant relatives or friends with whom one wants a closer relationship or maybe a political favor. John Benavente stressed the closeness felt between godparents, parents, and godchildren: "You're the closest that is not blood, that is not a blood relative."

I would like to linger a little longer on Chamorro poksai. Poksai is a system that straddles "consanguinal, affinal, and ritual relations." And similar to poksai on Guam, adoption is an extremely common form of relatedness across the Pacific Islands, to which other articles can attest (e.g., see other articles in this issue of *Pacific Studies* and examples in Carroll 1970a; Linnekin and Poyer 1990; Marshall 2004). Whether it is grandparent adoption in among the Dani of the Highlands (Papua Indonesia; Butt 2008) or Raivavau (Austral Islands, French Polynesia; Dickerson-Putman 2008), or a variety of other dynamic adoption practices in Mota Island (Vanuatu; Kolshus 2008), New Caledonia (Salomon and Hamelin 2008), Ujeland/Enewetak (the Republic of the Marshall Islands; Carucci 2008), Chuuk State (the Federated States of Micronesia; Rauchholz 2008), or Hawai'i (Schachter 2008), what is translated as adoption remains a feasible and forceful component of kin relationships throughout the Pacific. Vern Carroll in his 1970 anthology remarks on the "extremely high incidence of adoption in many parts of Oceania . . ." (Carroll 1970b), although what is considered adoption may vary considerably throughout the Pacific region. Yet, adoption practices across the Pacific share certain similarities, such as adoption occurring between those considered related; "land tenure considerations" (Brady 1976b) figuring in kinship relationships of all types including adoption; and the lack of conceptual distinctions between adoption and "fosterage" (Carroll 1970a; Brady 1976a).

The word poksai means "to nurture" in the Chamorro language, a term of parental responsibility to any child brought into the family through other means than giving birth. The Department of Chamorro Affairs handbook summarized Chamorro familia and values, and poksai's place in the Chamorro family, as the following:

Familial relationships and responsibilities emerged from the Chamorro ancestral belief that members of a clan—loosely defined

as family or families—have responsibility to each other from birth to death. Chamorros believe that familial bonding provides an extensive and dependable network for the Chamorro people, particularly in times of need; it is [an] arrangement that ensures Chamorro self-sufficiency. The *familia* demands a strong commitment of respect and loyalty among its members, which include the *manaina*, or elders, *mane'lu*, or brothers and sisters, and *famagu'on*, or children, *tiha yan tihu siha*, or aunts and uncles, *primu yan prima siha*, or cousins. It is a communal organization of families that provide [*sic*] support and assistance in all activities undertaken by families. Whether by birth, marriage, or adoption, once a person became a member of the *familia*, he or she stayed a member forever. Women did not have to get married to have children, nor did they have to bear children to become mothers. The rule of Chamorro clan membership provided for all children, no matter how they came to be born. If the child's mother died, the child immediately would be taken into another family in the clan. This kind of "adoption" system is called *poksai*, which meant to nurture. It provided a way to care for mother[-]less children, and it also provided a way for childless women to become mothers. Familial bonding goes beyond family membership—it is not unusual to address all elders as *saina*, contemporaries as *che'lu*, and a child as *patgon-hu*, or my child. (Department of Chamorro Affairs 2003: 23–25)

In the past, *poksai* often occurred when a family had many children; the parents would then give one or two children to a childless relative or a relative with few children. This helped the parents, and it allowed the relative to have the pleasure of raising a child—something of great value within Chamorro communities. Even today, this type of *poksai* occurs; although from what I could gather, it does not happen as often because the size of families has reduced and families often are scattered all over the world. However, because of the imposition of U.S. legal and cultural concepts and institutional structures, *poksai* has come to be understood as adoption in the U.S. sense, although this is a misnomer. Because of this mistranslation, there often is confusion about what constitutes Chamorro *poksai*.

Alexander Spoehr stated in his 1954 ethnography of Saipan¹¹ that adoption in the Chamorro community on Saipan occurred at a lower rate than other Micronesian islands and was organized more like European or American models of adoption. Because this "lower rate" is most likely attributable to the designation adoption, *poksai* is saddled with what

adoption connotes to various researchers. For example, Joe Tyquiengco (1989), a Chamorro researcher, more or less repeated Spoehr's observation of the low frequency of adoption on Guam. However, his explanation is expanded:

Adoption, although not frequent, does exist and may occur in Chamorro families. Adoptions exist in special cases only and the adopting parents are usually relatives of the child. Some cases of adoption would be upon death or separation of parents or childless married couples who are unable to have their own children and might want to adopt. Another case in which adoption occurs is with illegitimate children born to young mothers who because of age or reasons of the parents are unable to adequately raise the child. *One likely reason for few adoptions in Chamorro culture is because it is not unusual for a child to be raised or live with another family or couple* [emphasis added]. Examples of this would be a child being raised by or living with his or her grandparents for the purpose of caring for them. An instance like this occurs more out of necessity or obligation.

Adoption in these cases could be construed to mean something legally permanent, something more akin to what adoption means in the United States, whereas poksai denotes something much more expansive.

Poksai is a flexible system that denotes a continuum of the intensity of care given to children—a combination of U.S. understandings of fosterage and adoption. Mr. Benavente clarified to me in a 2002 interview how poksai may work in Chamorro families today:

These are true examples. The mother passed away and the kids are only four, five, six, seven. You have a father, but then the auntie and her husband [who is the brother of the woman who passed away] talk about it. They say, "Let's help the kids. Tell Mariano that we'll take care of the kids." And of course the single dad, he appreciates this because it's his wife's brother's family that want to take care of the kids, so he agreed. So need is sometimes a factor. Children born out of wedlock are usually candidates for that. Especially if the family is trying to hide the fact that you have already mothered a child. So then the family takes over this child that is born out of wedlock, and grandma raises you. And then as you got older, you discovered or you were told that your Mom is Maria. That kind of thing.

It is not uncommon while perusing the obituaries to notice a elderly woman's next of kin to include the category "raised," which implies that she not only gave birth to how ever many children but she "nurtured" other children. These children may have been with her for a year or their whole lives. In one instance from my fieldwork, one young boy (the second of three boys in the family) was given to a grandmother to raise for about five years because he was a rather difficult and demanding child who, it was deemed by all adults involved, needed individual, grandmotherly attention.

There was no legal change of guardianship and no thoughts of making the arrangement "legally" permanent. And the amount of time one may ma-poksai a child varies considerably. To name a few possible scenarios: it can occur, as mentioned, with a "problem" child who moves to live with another relative who is willing and able to deal with the child; children being sent to a relative in the United States to obtain access to better schooling; children of financially strapped parents who send their kids to relatives of more means. However, many of these rather "informal" situations in which adults raise children have increasingly become embroiled within the U.S. legal system, which establishes the poksai relationship within specific formalized conditions. John Benavente explained that because of U.S. legal regulations, it is increasingly believed that whoever is going to ma-poksai a child nowadays, they must either have legal guardianship or legal adoption. Mr. Benavente states: "[U.S.] [b]ureaucracy has entered the picture. Whereas before there was no bureaucracy." He continues with an example:

A young couple is divorcing, and grandparents are not well-to-do, but they are comfortable. And the young couple, marriage is shattered, grandparents will come into the picture and grab the kids. They will say, "We will take care of the kids. You guys don't know how do to it. You are doing this all wrong and the kids are suffering." Now that's happening. Now what's happening, again because of the American ruling, parents are adopting formally their grandkids. And also because of the benefits involved. See, right now if I adopted one of my son's children, that child is a recipient of social security benefits right off the bat. And in my case, because I am a military retiree, I would take her and get her a military I.D. card. So now because of the change of games and change of benefits . . . then adoption is the new word. But really basically, I'm doing ma-poksai. And I'm, for example, in my case, if it's my daughter, and her name is McDonald, I would raise my grandkids, I don't care about changing the name to Benavente. That doesn't matter. That's the point for me to be taking

the kids—[to help the kids]. Not to increase my Benavente name, but to assist.

Poksai occurs most often among “related” families, as in the cases described above. However, it can occur between people not related; indeed, I was told by Chamorros like John Benavente, it is poksai that makes one related. It is a mechanism that links an individual to a system of obligation and reciprocity—a clan network. When describing the ways in which individuals participate within the clan network, John Benavente stated:

There are many variations that can determine to what extent you participate. Were you ma-poksai? If you were, even if you were a third cousin [or a very distant relative], but if my mom raised [i.e., poksai] you guys—man, you’re in. You have an outstanding obligation. You have the same obligation as the siblings or the children.

Although on the surface, poksai may resemble some fosterage practices in the United States (because they themselves are diverse), the underlying concepts are significantly different. Although Modell (1994) explicates how U.S. adoption is something outside of “blood ties,” poksai is a natural result of and extension of Chamorro relatedness and all its accompanying obligations. Alice Pomponio (1990) explains Mandok (Papua New Guinea) adoption practices are “conceived in terms of the fruits of human effort, close association, and enduring solidarity” rather than “shared biogenetic substance.” Like the Mandok, poksai practices among Chamorros tether Chamorro familia, and indeed identity, to something beyond biological ties.

Poksai, Mestizo (Race), Blood, and Identity

Poksai is a process through which those sometimes not related by birth are incorporated into a family; it is a familial system which is deeply couched in all the discourses about the Chamorro family. Therefore, it is necessary to understand poksai and its relationship to blood through understanding the Chamorro family’s relationship to race. To begin, the language about the Chamorro family on Guam often dwells in the imagery of outsiders. For example, one Chamorro man entertained me and a group of other Chamorros by humorously describing his discovery of “Jesuit priests and a Chinese woman” when researching his family genealogy, whereby his audience of friends responded with much laughter. He went on to say he expects to find

a smattering of foreign “sailors and tradesmen” as well. This anecdote was amusing to others because it encapsulated a sometimes tacit, sometime overt, nugget of “truism”—the belief that all Chamorros have those defined as non-Chamorros in their family genealogy; in other words, narratives about mestizo are akin to understandings of—sometimes recent, sometimes past, or sometimes both—Chamorro familia. It is reminiscent of my friend John Benavente’s saying, “. . .if you shake a Chamorro family tree long enough, a Japanese, a Chinese, a Yapese . . . person is bound to come falling down.” By mestizo narratives, I am denoting those racialized stories created about and valued as Chamorro ancestry and family genealogy that indicate that all Chamorros, because of historical understandings, have some non-Chamorros in their family past. All Chamorros, if you go back far enough, are the product of a “mixture” of peoples. Therefore, stories about the Chamorro familia and stories about mestizo often become overlapping narratives; they end up chronicling the same tales about Chamorro identity.

The Chamorros of Guam have struggled to define themselves and their political future in a colonial environment infused with an intricate racial tapestry; one woven through three periods of colonization and corresponding racialization (Spain 1565–1898, Japan 1941–1944, and the United States 1898 to present). The ever-active subtext of race has forcefully shaped the colonial mechanisms operating between the United States and Guam and is a powerful conduit through which the colonizer and the colonized contend with each other and deal with other people on Guam (e.g., Cooper and Stoler 1997; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2001 [1995]; Loomba 2001 [1998]; Stoler 2002). Historically, these racial/colonial processes have represented Chamorros in a specific way, as mestizos, whose cultural and linguistic lives have been extinguished rendering them “inauthentically” indigenous (Alva 1995). Authenticity, premised on conceptions of mestizo (race), has become the conceptual lattice through which Chamorros must navigate land, language, citizenship, and the overarching concern of decolonization. For indigenous peoples across the globe, and indeed inherent in most identity politics (indigenous or not), issues of authenticity are often at the heart of political negotiations of identification surrounding such diverse issues as land rights, water rights, or sovereignty (e.g., Osorio 1999; Sylvain 2002; French 2004).

As is the case on Guam, some indigenous peoples are often placed in situations where they must negotiate “essentializing” Western legal and administrative tendencies. The resulting political contestations surrounding authenticity and identity are often at the core of the tugs and pulls between cultural—and racial—tendencies of purification or hybridization (Handler

1988; Latour 1993). It is at this juncture—in the complex, racialized realm in which what is believed to be pure clashes with what is believed to be mixed—where this essay sits, in the realm of how mestizo and authenticity are negotiated in Guam. As scholars such as Marisol De La Cadena (2000, 2001), Lourdes Martinez-Echazabal (1998), and Arlene Torres and Norman Whitten Jr. (1998a, 1998b) point out, these identity concepts are culturally, legally, economically, and politically forged through complex power dynamics between groups. Once again, when I use mestizo (“hybridity”), I mean to denote that concept rooted in Western racial ideologies, signifying the notion of privilege in racial purity which justifies racial discrimination against those who are classified as mixed—mestizo. Simultaneously, it is a powerfully emergent, fully embraced indigenous identity category that speaks to synergistic cultural forms and identity formation, one specific to each colonial situation (Alva 1995, 243). Therefore, in this essay, when I use mestizo, I am referring to the Spanish-American word for mixture, and its usage will refer to the colonial narratives of mixture as expressed in Guam (Rafael 1993, 2000, 2005; Espiritu 2005).¹² When I use mestizu, as opposed to mestizo, I am referring to a Chamorro word, meaning mixed or hybrid, and a Chamorro narrative about the nature of mixture and cultural hybridity between Chamorros and non-Chamorros.¹³ Of course, these two types of narratives overlap considerably at points.

Defining Chamorro in Practice: The Chamorro Registry Public Hearing

During my fieldwork on Guam, I was a regular at Guam’s vast array of public meetings. Whether for political status issues, environmental contamination, or election campaign speeches, I criss-crossed the 32 × 12 mile island to attend these meetings. Common to local government and large agencies in the mainland United States as well, GovGuam used these venues to both publicize an issue and allow for public feedback. Be it in a local village community center or the legislature building, people from local government officials to farmers, of little to great financial means, Chamorro to immigrant gathered to air their feelings and listen to others do the same. These assemblies, often similar in structure but diverse in style and content, drew families—grandmothers to grandbabies, uncles to aunties, brothers to sisters. If I was lucky, they sometimes were exceedingly rich cultural sites where the politicized nature of Chamorro extended familial networks were patent and thriving. For me, one meeting in particular was exemplary in highlighting the coalescence of Chamorro family, identity, race, and decolonization.

On a sun-filled Friday at the end of January 2000, there was a public hearing on the proposed Chamorro Registry regulations for an upcoming political status plebiscite. Before the Chamorro Registry meeting, individuals from the local citizenry (i.e., “the public”), along with locally elected and appointed government officials gathered at the Guam Legislature building in downtown Hagatña in west, central Guam. After a bevy of social exchanges both outside and inside the meeting room, the event was off and running; everyone palpably eager to express opinions about what it is to “be Chamorro.” That is to say, the goal of the event was vigorous debate about how to define “Chamorro” in quite literal terms, as a “group of people.” Ideally, the definition, if one could be determined, would then be used to judge eligibility for voting in the as-yet-never-held, so-called Chamorro-only plebiscite in which those defined as Chamorro would express their wishes for a political status option for the island. Unlike previous plebiscites, all of which failed to result in any political status change and all of which were inclusive of every citizen of Guam regardless of ancestry, some Chamorro activists pushed for a divergent path for constituting self-determination. This vision was one that would restrict self-determination to those who were descended from the indigenous Chamorro who were initially colonized by U.S. powers in 1898 and, thereby, eliminate those many others who immigrated to Guam after, or as some Chamorro activists argued, as “a result of,” colonization.¹⁴ It was reasoned that Chamorros, as the indigenous population of Guam, were never able to truthfully and legitimately state their desired political status preference because their voices, as expressed through votes, in previous political status plebiscites were drowned out by the many non-Chamorros who demographically outnumber them (that is, non-Chamorros who may have other opinions on political status).¹⁵ Today, the people of Guam have the possibility of changing their current political status from an “unincorporated territory,” or colony, of the United States to either Statehood, Free Association, or Independence. There are decolonization movements, mainly comprised of, but not limited to, self-identified Chamorros, that support all three options.¹⁶

Like the rest of the crowd, my discussion of the definition of Chamorro started in the hall outside the formal meeting space. I chatted with two political status task force chairmen with whom I was acquainted, Jose “Joe” Ulloa Garrido of Free Association and Antonio “Tony” Artero Sablan (the same man who wanted to ma-poksai my son, who was yet-to-be born at the time of this meeting) of Independence, both Chamorro men in the middle of their lives, with ample reputations for Chamorro rights activism. Since my first baby was going to be born on Guam (I was about five months pregnant

at the time), Tony asked me, half in jest, “Do you think that [your baby] should be considered indigenous?” In naïve, stereotypical ethnographic fashion, not wanting to guide a response, I evaded the question by saying, “I don’t know. What do you think?” According to both Tony and Joe, of course my child would not, under any circumstances, be indigenous, but to “some people” on the island, my baby would be considered indigenous simply because he happened to be born on Guam. Our conversation got no further because the crowd was promptly channeled into the conference room of GovGuam by Senator Mark Forbes. An experienced Chamorro senator, Forbes was the official moderator of the meeting. At the time, GovGuam was using the U.S. census of 1899 as a benchmark to determine membership in the Chamorro group, meaning those who intended to register as Chamorro must have documentation demonstrating they had an ancestor who was defined as Chamorro in the 1899 census.¹⁷

Until after World War II, the vast majority of the population of Guam (around 90 percent) was comprised of self-identified Chamorros; only through U.S. colonial maneuvers in response to that war did the demographics of the island shift dramatically (Bettis 1996). Especially after *Rice v. Cayetano* (Kauanui 1999, 2002)¹⁸ in Hawai‘i, the Guam legislature was sensitive to any racial language in defining Chamorro. They anticipated legal challenges to this so-called Chamorro-only vote based on a perceived racial preference prohibited in elections within the U.S. Constitution. Notice that the above definitions of Chamorro avoid any racial speak and even are designed to be inclusive of non-Chamorros who could be inhabitants of Guam or “persons born on the island of Guam.” Leland Bettis, the Chairman of the Commission on Decolonization¹⁹ at the time, explained to me in a 1998 interview that the definition of Chamorro was tweaked to avoid connotations of racial exclusion. He stated,

We don’t see [defining Chamorro as stated above] as a political move, more so as a racial move. There are so many people of so many different races that make up a Chamorro population. As if pure races exist anyway, but that this really is a political group. It’s not like the Hawai‘i example, or the situation on reservations where it’s some quotient of blood you must measure to determine whether or not you qualify as a person entitled to vote. This is clearly based in a point of time, directly relating to the colonial relationship between Guam and the United States.²⁰

This nonracial definition of Chamorro allowed supporters of the Chamorro-only vote to contend that even those immigrants defined as

non-Chamorro could potentially participate in this plebiscite, if they had ancestors living on Guam before the 1899 census.

A few of the public speakers—mainly those who identify as Chamorro, some scheduled speakers, some serendipitous—employed the format of the Chamorro registry to dispute any “outsider”/U.S. colonial attempt to define Chamorros. One Chamorro woman—someone I later learned was linked to Independence—indignantly testified, “A Chamorro is more than that [the definitions provided by GovGuam]. A Chamorro is a person who has a common lineage with an ancestor who was indigenous. It is not just residence that makes someone a Chamorro.” Another Chamorro woman, also a supporter of Independence, donning a T-shirt that pronounced “*Taotaomona* Descendants—I Own Guam,” passionately asserted that Chamorros did not become a people because of the Organic Act or any other colonial document; hence, the mere fact that they were trying to define themselves based on what “foreigners from Spain, Japan, and the U.S.” claim was ridiculous. “They [the foreigners] came in and put guns to our heads. We should not include their definitions. We should go by family clan name; those people are accepted in the heart as Chamorro.”

It is not surprising to hear family clan name as a way to define Chamorro peoplehood. However, it is a particular aspect of Chamorro family, when linked to decolonization processes, that I found quite illuminating at this meeting. Poksai, or indigenous forms of nurturing or rearing children to whom one did not give birth, became one of the more enticing contestations voiced by audience members at the hearing to the proposed legal definition of Chamorro. Joe Garrido of the Free Association task force first brought up poksai as a potential problem for the Chamorro registry. He astutely noted that, according to how the current rules were written by the Chamorro registry, if a person is adopted, they will not be considered Chamorro by the registration process. According to the Chamorro Registry Regulations (Guam Election Commission, January 19, 2000: 2–3), “descendants or lineal descendants” of those defined as Chamorro “do not include adopted children or grandchildren through adoption,” and “a blood tie must be established rather than the connection be through adoption.” Garrido argued that he knows of adopted people, white folks who grew up in Chamorro families, speak Chamorro and have a Chamorro last name, which indeed makes them Chamorro. Furthermore, some Chamorros who were adopted by whites should not be considered “really Chamorro” because they have a different culture. These issues, he noted, should be investigated by the committee.

A middle-aged Chamorro woman then took this topic further by maintaining that some children who are adopted do not know they are adopted, and they might inadvertently find out through the registry, which would

“strip them of who they are.” She also warned, “We need to have a more careful process for this.” Mark Forbes reassured her that, if the person doesn’t know that he or she is adopted, then the process will not expose the secrecy. As far as the Chamorro Registry is concerned, they would be Chamorro; the registry would never reveal the reality of their adoption if the records are sealed by the court. (Exactly how poksai/adoption would be safe-guarded was not specified at the time). He stated that it may be obvious by looking at a “real dark-skinned or white-skinned person²¹ that they are adopted,” but besides that, there will be no way to tell. Mark Forbes said “the Chamorro culture that I am familiar with says ‘that which you raise, it is yours.’ *Adoption is blood*” [emphasis in original].

Authentication of Chamorro through Poksai in the Context of Colonization/Decolonization

The central question debated within decolonization processes either implicitly or explicitly is: Who is Chamorro? Is it family/clan, is it land, is it ancestry, is it cultural practices, or is it blood? Of course, this question cannot be definitively answered; however, identity politics, in general, and the U.S. legal system, more specifically, within which decolonization processes are constrained, do and will answer these questions. In other words, if and when a Chamorro-only political status plebiscite does occur, it will be required to be enunciated within international and U.S. colonially and racially imposed legal regulations. Hawaiians, Native American, and other minorities of the U.S. empire operate within the constraints of similar racial definitions. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui maintains, “This blood quantum rule, and the processes of identification that follow from it, impacts contemporary Hawaiian claims to sovereignty and self-determination” (1999, 123). The benchmark process of referring to a certain date to legally denote who is Chamorro is one way of circumscribing Chamorros as a knowable, quantifiable group, thereby quantifying their identity. In this context, Chamorros are racialized and, thereby, de-legitimized as mestizo, as invisible, as Pacific Islander, as minority, as part-citizen, as in between, as something other than American.

The U.S. legal system has been categorizing people based on race since its inception (Lopez 1996). As Ian Haney Lopez writes, it is in the business of both reiterating definitions of race held by the culture at large and constructing racial categories (1996, 10). He continues, “it defines...the spectrum of domination and subordination that constitutes race relations” while also defining and affirming racial identity, racial privilege, and racial entitlements, such as property, or “translating” racial ideas into “material

societal conditions” (Lopez 1996, 9). Indeed racial constructions in the United States are about biological similarities of a group (i.e., biological relatedness [Schneider 1980 {1968}]). In other words, notions of race intersect with and stem from notions of family or kinship biological relatedness; relatedness of any sort implies a biological connection.

GovGuam is constrained by racial definitions of Chamorro but in different ways within different contexts. The Chamorro dominant GovGuam, in certain contexts, is “constitutionally” forced to “avoid” seeming racial definitions of Chamorro to move further in decolonization for those defined as Chamorro. Concurrently, in other ways, GovGuam is also restricted by these legal notions of race because Chamorro definitions hinge on notions of American relatedness as envisioned through blood descendants, rather than capacious Chamorro notions of relatedness, which includes poksai. Kauanui asserts a similar racial conundrum specific to Hawaiians in the *Rice v. Cayetano* case; “This place [the legal/racial defining of Hawaiians] is contradictory because it relies on racialized identity imposed through a blood quantum criterion, yet when these mechanics are applied in the interest of Hawaiian body-politic, they are alleged to be racially discriminatory” (2002, 10).

In the above described meeting, discourses surrounding poksai posed questions for legal definitions of Chamorro. These questions need to be contextualized within the last statement of my presented portion of the meeting, “Adoption is blood.” To middle-class, white, colonial United States, adoption is not blood. Adoption may be just like biological family, just like blood, may be tight as tight can be, but it is not considered blood, no matter how close the emotions of connection (Modell 1994, 223). As Judith Modell explains about American adoptive relationships, “For people whose kinship is fictive, however, blood also represents what is missing. It is this dimension of ‘non-reality’ that makes an adoptive relationship different, paradoxical, and in need of work—a self-conscious relationship” (1994, 226). In very general terms, U.S. notions of kinship or relatedness rely on a specific articulation between the biological and social; in short, family relatedness is premised on a perceived biological relationship, rather than a social one (Schneider 1980 [1968]; Carsten 2000; Parkin and Stone 2000).²²

In everyday practice in the early twenty-first century, as authors such as Judith Modell (1994) and Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern (2000) have affirmed, the United States and British relationship between the biological and the social may not be so conceptually rigid, as described above. Indeed as the examples of fertilization technology, surrogate motherhood, and gay couples building families exhibit, Western concepts of biological

relatedness are continually challenged. Nevertheless, adoption in white, middle-class America (from which colonial culture on Guam stems) still discursively maintains a certain distance from blood relationships. Modell (1994, 226) states, “The symbolism of blood . . . lends the transaction a fatal flaw—an inevitable comparison with ‘real’ blood ties. Blood is a reminder that adoption is a *paper* kinship” [emphasis in original]. This is a clue that in the United States blood is different than water—although experientially may not be thicker.

As mentioned above, Chamorro discourse on relatedness and on group identity membership is articulating something that is simultaneously racial and not racial, biological and not biological, about notions of purity and notions of hybridity. Being Chamorro has to do with belonging to a certain type of familia, which is expansive, as demonstrated in their conception and practice of poksai, and governed by things both biological and social. In other words, the narrative strategy of certain Chamorros at these meetings contests the concrete, American forging of blood with identity. As Schneider states, “A blood relationship is a relationship of identity, and those who share a blood relationship share a common identity” (1977, 65). Rather, Chamorro-ness is about blood, AND it is about familia, which is embedded in forms of relatedness that are not limited to biology, in certain forms of reciprocity, in certain ways of networking within extended families, and in the adherence to certain values in *I Kustumbren Chamoru*. Thus, Chamorros turn the Spanish/U.S. racial conflation of identity and purity on its head, arguing instead for forms of political identity that render pure types nonsensical to their experience.

Conclusion

Calling forth notions of poksai as a quintessential example of the ethos grounding Chamorro familia in decolonizing discourses authenticates Chamorros in several ways. First, it defines them as something other than American. By putting some distance between themselves and the U.S. hegemonic norm, Chamorros are strategically drawing distinctions between that which is American/colonial and that which is Chamorro—a process that aligns them more closely to a sense of indigeneity. Within the legal-political spaces of U.S. decolonization processes, it is “indigeneity” that is valued and not a sense of Chamorro American-ness, which is certainly valued within other contexts. Second, following from the first, it is Chamorro familia that cements their group identity as indigenous identity. No other group can legitimately claim that their families are tied to the island of Guam with such historical and cultural depth as the Chamorro. Third, by placing Chamorro

familia at the heart of decolonization, it is a way of highlighting a specific form of indigeneity—their *mestizo* indigeneity, a form of indigenous identity that is not premised on racial notions of purity (Diaz 2006).

NOTES

1. According to the 2000 census of Guam (the last full census on Guam), self-identified Chamorros comprise 37.0% of Guam's population. Filipinos (classified under the "Asian" group) make up the second largest population at 26.3%. "White," mainly American whites, comprise 6.8%, other "Asian" groups amount to 6.2%, and other Micronesian groups making up another 7.6%. Other groups accounted for in the 2000 census were "Black or African American" at 1.0%, other "race or ethnic group" at 1.2%, and "two or more races or ethnic groups" at 13.9%."

2. Michel Foucault is the inspirational seed of my theoretical trajectory.

3. Also defined as "mixed," *mestizo* is a Chamorro concept, albeit borrowed from the Western concept but thoroughly appropriated and adapted within Chamorro culture. It is explained in more detail later in the paper.

4. There are also branch clans called *ramas* with which people can be affiliated. These were described to me as clans that have fragmented.

5. A Chamorro friend, John Benavente, advised me early in my fieldwork that I would not make much headway in understanding Chamorro culture unless I was "let into the circle, and without that you won't understand anything." He went on to say that many researchers who come to Guam can't see past the U.S. influences to grasp "the inner circles" within which Chamorros are operating. Indeed, he mused in a very Duboisian or Fanonian way, Chamorros are forced to negotiate two worlds—the U.S. and the Chamorro.

6. Interview with John Benavente, October 3, 2002.

7. His mother, Tan Elena Benavente, was something of a Guamanian institution. The subject of numerous paintings and other artistic renderings, not to mention some media exposure, she often represented that tie to an authentic past. She was a master basket weaver, spoke little English, and wore a *mestizo* dress (a style of dress influenced by both the Spanish and Filipinos, which was common in the years prior to World War II) until she died in 2005 at the age of ninety-nine.

8. Naming of clans is a whole subject in and of itself, which I will not pursue here at length. In short, naming could stem from an ancestor's nickname or some other distinguishing feature of an ancestor or family group. For example, John Benavente told me of a second cousin of his who belongs to the Aragon clan. Aragon is from her great, great grandfather who was from Aragon, Spain.

9. The process of death requires probably the most familial organization and cooperation. When a death occurs, there are nine days of rosaries (*nubena, lisayon matai*) in which

prayer sessions are lead by a *techa*, usually a Chamorro-fluent woman with experience in leading prayers. (These women are often respected *manamko* [elderly] in the community.) The rosaries are open to the public and take place at the *difunto's/difunta's* (deceased man/woman) home, or most often, church. "Very light refreshments," as John Benavente said, or some drinks and a little bit to eat, are served to guests who attend the rosary. These refreshments are furnished by extended family and friends; the immediate relations of the *difunto/difunta* are not responsible for providing anything. After the *bela*, or the wake, there is another nine-day period of rosaries (*lisayon familia*), which are attended only by close family. A year after the death, there is another rosary called *lisayon komple'anos*. Each anniversary of the death of close family is commemorated, if even in the smallest way.

10. The *patlinus* and *matlinus* are participants in a host of rituals related to the baptism, confirmation, and marriage of their *hada* or *hadu*. (Godparents are *matlina*, godmother, and *patlinu*, godfather, in Chamorro. A child would call their godparents *ninu*, godfather, or *nina*, godmother, and the *ninu* or *nina* call their godchildren *hada*, goddaughter, and *hadu*, godson. The parents and godparents call each other *pari* [male] and *malle'* [females]).

11. Saipan in an island in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, which is an island north of Guam in the Mariana Island chain. All of the Mariana Islands were populated with Chamorros; however, because of outside colonial maneuvers, Guam has been politically separated from its island neighbors to the north.

12. My research places the complexity of mestizo racial identity formation within the Pacific. Of course, the Philippines are well known for its mestizo ideology.

13. Like many other complex, polysemic concepts, the Chamorro concept of mestizu has other meanings that often are uncomfortably juxtaposed. First, mestizu can be a way to denote and identify individuals of a mixed parentage. For example, a person who is half Chamorro and half American (*mestizu amerikano*) would be said to be mestizu by supposedly "full" Chamorros. This categorization can also carry stinging pronouncements of delegitimization—separating those full, true, and authentic Chamorros from those with "watered-down" ancestry—presumably classifying mestizus as less Chamorro. It is this aspect that is rooted in Spanish-American colonial notions of racial purity and impurity that contrasted historical understandings of Chamorro as a racial group with pure beginnings as opposed to the mixed "neo-Chamorros" of today. Second, another facet of mestizu can be coded as the elevation and privilege of those elite Chamorros as those who come from Spanish blood above their more pure counterparts. In other words, mestizu Chamorro (without a descriptor in back of the word such as *amerikano*) were often to be understood as those elite Chamorros with more Spanish blood who benefited from their associations with the Spanish administration. Third, in the experiential everyday, mestizu individuals can be judged based on interpretations of political realities of the moment. During World War II when Japan was terrorizing Guam, it was less deleterious within many Chamorro circles to be *mestizu amerikano* than *mestizu hapones*, because the Chamorros of Guam overall supported the United States rather than their World War II Japanese colonizers. Finally, Chamorros overall are perceived as a people whose genealogical representations are scattered with non-Chamorros. Thus, mestizu, on one hand, means a very particular and specific way of pigeon-holing, and often de-authenticating, mixed Chamorros. However, it is a way to talk about Chamorros as a group, a way to racialize Chamorros as a

whole: Chamorros all as mestizo. And it is this aspect of mestizo, that I discuss in this paper.

14. Interview with Ron Teehan, the then-director of the Chamorro Land Trust, December 4, 2000. Teehan is a long-time Chamorro rights activist, and during an interview, he explained immigration of non-Chamorros to Guam in these terms.

15. According the United Nations “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960), “dependent” peoples under colonial influences are guaranteed a right to self-determination. This right should not be obfuscated or deterred through any colonial measures, including immigration to change the demographic composition of the region, economic conditions that aggravate dependence, military installations and bases that shift power away from dependent peoples, and alienation of resources away from dependent peoples that furthers their vulnerability to the powers of the colonizer.

16. These three “decolonization” task forces were organized by GovGuam to educate the public about the three United Nations political status options available for a colony—namely, Statehood, Free Association, and Independence. These task forces were the cultural sites I chose to hone in on for my dissertation research because they were sites uniquely suited to explore how Chamorros negotiate identity and race within the contexts of decolonization and colonization. These task forces were made up of volunteers from the community at large, volunteers who were passionate about supporting a particular political status.

17. According to the Guam Election Commission regulations for the Chamorro Registry, “Chamorro means a person fitting the following descriptions and his or her descendents”: “All inhabitants of [or all persons born on] the island of Guam on April 11, 1899 including those temporarily absent from the island on that date, who were Spanish subjects, who after that date continued to reside in Guam or other territory over which the United States exercises sovereignty, and have taken no affirmative steps to preserve or acquire foreign nationality.” In other instances, GovGuam has defined “the native inhabitants of Guam” as “those persons who became U.S. citizens by virtue of the authority and enactment of the 1950 Organic Act of Guam and descendents of those persons,” as quoted from the Guam Legislature Bill No. 391, which created the “Guam Decolonization Registry for Native Inhabitants on Guam Self-Determination.”

18. In this U.S. Supreme Court decision of February 23, 2000, *Rice v. Cayetano* voted in favor of Harold F. Rice, a white fourth generation resident of Hawai‘i, who attempted to vote in the Hawai‘i statewide elections for Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) trustees. Because he was not native Hawaiian or Hawaiian, he was ineligible to vote. As J. Kēhaulani Kauanui describes, the Supreme Court ruled that the OHA election of trustees violated the Fifteenth Amendment which secures all citizens the right to vote regardless of race or color (2002, also 1999). However, Kauanui explains that it is a racialized colonial history that established definitions of “Hawaiian-ness” based on blood quantum (or blood percentages) and, thereby, instituted all Hawaiian entitlements, such as the ability to qualify for Hawaiian lands, based on these definitions.

19. The Commission on Decolonization was the organization established by GovGuam to oversee and pursue decolonization activities for Chamorros. This agency was

responsible for keeping tabs on the three political status task forces—Statehood, Free Association, and Independence.

20. Interview with Leland Bettis, July 28, 1998.

21. Mark Forbes's reference to skin color brings up another dimension of race in Guam, that of the salience of phenotype as markers for racial understandings of group belonging. Phenotypically, Chamorros come in all shades of brown, from dark to light-skinned, often even within the same family, a reality that highlights to Chamorros their mestizo ancestries. However, Forbes is presenting an assumption in his statement that a person who is very dark-skinned may be African-American or a person who is very light-skinned may be a white American and not Chamorro, who are usually brown. In reality, this may or may not be the case, but his statement speaks to the codes immersed in things such as skin-color. Historically, lighter-skinned Chamorro individuals had privileges over their darker-skinned friends and relatives.

22. Over the decades since Schneider's groundbreaking work on American kinship (1980 [1968], 1984), he has been criticized for his analysis (e.g., Carsten 2000; Parkin and Stone 2000). The most obvious critique was his assumption of a homogeneous sense of "American" family, and his analytical blindness to the diversity within American kinship. However, his analysis of essentially white, middle-class American kinship works well for my comparison between Chamorro and American notions of relatedness. It is the white, middle-class normative kinship narratives that Chamorros find themselves confronting and being judged against. Although colonial power is far from homogeneous, the legal and cultural colonial hegemonic tendencies tend to be white and middle class American.

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**“A RELATIONSHIP ENDEARED TO THE PEOPLE”:
ADOPTION IN HAWAIIAN CUSTOM AND LAW**

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My paper explores intersections between American state institutions and constructions of family and kinship among native Hawaiians in terms of the following: expressions of affection and of loyalty across and within generations; continuity and content of the relationships between individuals; and claims to property and resources in a day-to-day context and after a crisis, such as a death. I focus on the tensions between American law and customary concepts of “having children” in a contemporary Hawaiian context. I also raise the question of how what I am calling “entry” into a family influences the definition of rights, duties, obligations, and feelings by the individuals who experience these different modes of entry. I explore the question in a historical framework, tracing the changes over the past half century both in terms of the individuals in the ‘ohana and in terms of social and cultural developments in the state of Hawai‘i.

ONE AFTERNOON, Sam Mentona brought out an armful of photograph albums. We were sitting in the garage of his Waimanalo house, talking and drinking cold soda. He went inside and came out with a multicolored pile of albums and put them down on the table nearby. “I have one album for each child,” he announced. There were fourteen albums in all.

The afternoon was in 1992, and I had known Sam for three years. He had already told me stories about meeting his wife Lydia, beginning a family, adding to the family, moving from Manoa to the homestead area in Waimanalo, and watching the children grow up. This was only the third or fourth time I had visited the house, though we had talked at the beach and

in restaurants, and I realized that the display of photos was one step in the process of incorporating me into the Mentona *‘ohana*.

Sam and Lydia “had” children in the range of ways possible in Hawai‘i in the second half of the twentieth century. When Sam met Lydia in 1950, she had two children from her first marriage. He took them into the household and raised them “as my own.” Together they had four biological children, two boys and two girls. In the 1950s, Sam and Lydia became foster parents of two children they later adopted. Not too many years later, his sister gave him her three children to take care of, and a few years after that he and Lydia adopted two infants from a cousin. In the mid-1960s, the family added another child, Lihua, the child Sam called his *hanai* child, the first daughter of one of his sons. Asserting a customary prerogative, Sam and Lydia took the first child of Keona, promising a more stable household than could the infant’s as-yet unsettled parents.

The stories I heard about *coming in* to the family of Sam and Lydia contain inconsistencies, silences, and anecdotal digressions that reveal the ongoing dialogue between “custom” and “law” that emerges from and shapes the choices individuals make. In the time I knew Sam and in my conversations with members of the extended family, the stories grew more complicated and penetrated more deeply into the peculiar experience of American colonialism for individuals who identify themselves, as Sam did, as “Native Hawaiian.”¹

My paper focuses on the shifting practices and ideologies of re delegating parenthood in Hawai‘i over two centuries. The customary and the legal mode of transferring a child share features: a designated parent replaces a biological parent as primary caretaker of the child, and the arrangement is presumed to be permanent.² The two modes also differ in the mechanisms that establish a new relationship and in the institutionalization of permanence. Comparable on the one hand, contrasting on the other, the two modes do not divide into Hawaiian versus non-Hawaiian or indigenous versus foreign. Customary and legal strategies for incorporating a child into a family intertwine in practice and in ideology, while not entirely losing their distinguishing features. Going to court to legalize a transfer of parenthood is not the same as moving a child from one household to another according to customary procedures. Yet both create a parent-child relationship with behavioral entailments and emotional content. The perception of court and custom as alternative ways of constructing kinship opens options for individuals like Sam, who then bear the burden of choice. These perceived alternatives have persisted from the earliest arrival of *haole* “strangers,” their differences accentuated by pragmatic concerns and their similarities offering a framework for interpreting kinship.

Law and Custom Intersect

Sam's decisions about parenthood demonstrate the freedom of choice available to a Native Hawaiian in an American state. But of course freedom is not quite that simple: Sam's choices are constrained by a history of changing relationships between custom and law. The history is long in terms of events, short in terms of chronology: in a century and a half, Hawai'i lost its status as an independent monarchy and became an American state. Sam's choices respond to cultural and political forces that continue to evolve and, at the same time, individual choices like his own shape these forces.

Sam recognized the value of adoption, with its legal prescription for the duties of a parent, and he chose that mode twice, for two sibling sets. He also recognized the value of custom, and the demonstration of love that characterized his "taking in" of Lihua and his designation of her as *keiki hanai*. Adoption made everything clear: the rights he and Lydia acquired superseded the claims of the biological parent, whether mother or father, stranger or kin. Sam considered the hanai arrangement equally unambiguous, defined and sanctioned by customary norms that had been in existence for centuries. Sam's interpretation of his choices, in talking with me, constitutes a kind of identity politics—though he would not have used the phrase. When he speaks as a self-proclaimed Native Hawaiian, he meshes adoption and hanai: both are expressions of love—*aloha*—and of Hawaiian values. For him, at those moments, there was no difference between adopting four children and hanai-ing another child. Yet Sam was also a citizen of an American state with access to its legal system. In going to court to adopt, he exploited the principles of law and the policies of an American child welfare system.

The decisions in the Mentona 'ohana are not unique, either in the past or in the present. One hundred years before Sam and Lydia went to court, residents of the islands took their pleas before judges, using the law to regulate kinship. From the moment that laws were introduced by haole, the native Hawaiian population regarded the legal system as a resource for making and unmaking relationships. The decisions Sam and Lydia made exemplify a long-term process: when individuals treat alternative ways of building a family as strategies that serve their personal interests, both law and custom bend to individual actions. Sam's story of fatherhood, then, provides a tool for analyzing the broader implications of adoption practices in Hawai'i. His story shows how the particular, intimate, and daily decisions people make eradicate the dichotomy between law and custom, and expose the heterogeneity of both systems.

The explanation Sam offered and the practices he followed in building a family argue against the assumption that law is hegemonic, inevitably eroding custom. Furthermore, the example of the Mentona 'ohana argues for the *situational* quality of both law and custom. Sam chose custom when it served one purpose, law when it served another purpose. Likewise, judges cited legal precedents when those pointed to a decision and turned to custom when "ancient ways" constituted a clearer path to the resolution of a conflict. Never separate, law and custom collide with particular force when it comes to issues of kinship, family, and parenthood. Structurally central and emotionally diffuse, kinship consists equally of stricture and of sentiment. In a courtroom dispute over a parent-child relationship, references to commitment and caring collide with a strict interpretation of rule. The collision is further amplified in Hawai'i by the contrast between Western (Christian) notions of the family, based on blood and contract, and Polynesian notions of the family, based on trust and conduct.

Sam's account of family building was embedded in cultural politics. The decisions he made about parenthood constituted a negotiation of identity and demonstrate the ongoing nature of this negotiation. From first to last, his role as father represented his assessment of the sociopolitical context in which he lived. When he talked with me about the contract he signed in court and the loving commitment he made in hanai, he did not construct a dichotomy. He juxtaposed the two, and revealed the ambiguities in concepts like contract and commitment when they apply to parenthood. Those ambiguities persist in the history of Western legal adoption, which never totally escapes the sinews of custom. At the same time, Sam discriminated between legal and customary adoption, with an acute sense of the components of his identity. Sam's identity as a Native Hawaiian integrated the American citizen who honored the power of impersonal law with the *kanaka maoli* (person of Hawaiian descent) who respected the force of custom.

Sam's choices at the end of the twentieth century reflect one hundred years in which the virtues of custom and the advantages of law engage in complicated choreography. His choices tell of the shifting practices and ideologies of delegating parenthood that began with the nineteenth century imposition of a rule of law on marriage and the family in Hawai'i. The emotions of individuals and the erudition of lawyers drove the evolution of the legal system, and so did the persistence of customs that lay outside the shadow of the law.

Precedents in the Past

In 1840, American (*haole*) advisors convinced King Kamehameha III to accept a constitution. Modeled on the American constitution, this new

government document proclaimed a Christian kingdom and established a polity that had divine backing. "God must be our aid, for it is His province alone to give perfect protection and prosperity."³ While the constitution does not discuss domestic relations, statutes immediately following upon its acceptance most assuredly did. Marriage and family, as well as expressions of sexuality and of love, were not to be the same again in the Hawaiian Islands.

Haole advisors to the king perpetuated the Christian doctrine that, by 1840, had already influenced members of the royal family. Arriving in the 1820s, the missionaries found much to horrify them, perhaps most of all the apparent laxness of ties between husbands and wives and between parents and children. And apparent the laxness was, as the missionaries witnessed the public enjoyment of sexuality and the easy freedom with which children moved from household to household. With a strong conviction that sex ought to be private and marital, and an equally strong conviction that children ought to stay with one set of parents, missionaries set about putting order to the Hawaiian family. While marriage came under scrutiny first, parent-child relationships were not far behind. By 1841, Hawai'i had a law of adoption—fifteen years before the United States passed an adoption law.⁴ The imperative to "civilize" the savages by regulating domestic relations put Hawai'i ahead of the curve, so to speak, in developing laws of adoption and interpreting their meaning.

The 1841 law responded to a perceived random and unsupervised movement of children from one household to another. Missionary wives despaired of knowing who a native child's "real" parents were and persuaded their husbands to take the matter on. Like their wives, the missionaries-turned-government-advisors agreed that a clear ascription of parenthood contributes to a stable civil society. Laws regulating marriage also implicated the relationship between parent and child, basing legitimate parenthood on biological procreation within marriage. A grounding of parenthood in biology (birth) framed the social relationship and brought in its wake the strict regulation of nonbiological parent-child relationships. Governing authorities in nineteenth-century Hawai'i recognized the significance of transactions in parenthood (possibly because such transactions prevailed in the royal family) and brought these transactions into the purview of the state.

According to the 1841 law, every transfer of a child had to be recorded in writing and signed before a judge in Honolulu in order to have status as an adoption. "It shall be competent to parents to consent in writing, and in the presence of a judge, to the adoption of their children by any suitable third party, but in that case the terms of the adoption must be definitely stipulated in the agreement, and must not be a beneficial consideration to the parents,

but to the child, satisfactory to the judicial officer acknowledging the adoption.”⁵ Twenty years later, the importance of a written record (on *pepa*) received further emphasis when the right of approval was extended to all judges in the kingdom.

Officially promulgated to protect children, adoption laws supplemented marriage laws to inscribe the nuclear family on the Hawaiian landscape. Yet the individuals who initially used adoption law were not interested in making a family. The individuals who turned to the law did so in order to gain a legitimate adoptive status that would serve their interests. The demands of law for specificity compelled an analogous examination of the entailments of customary adoption and the rights that arrangement granted. To discover the basis for a claim to adoptive status, judges inquired into the motivations for “taking” a child. Custom, like the young law, underwent microscopic analysis when individuals petitioned for adoptive status. The reasons for a petition varied, but most often they involved a dispute over the inheritance of property.

The property most often under dispute was land, newly privatized by the Great Mahele Act of 1848. From the start, adoption cases in court reflected differences in status: those with claims to acreage used the law to ensure their rights. When Prince Liholiho brought his case to court in 1864, the judge decided that King Kamehameha had intended this hanai child to be heir to royal lands. He also expressed a caution: “an adopted child did not inherit from its adopted parents, unless given the right specifically in the agreement of adoption.”⁶

Rights to inherit plagued interpretations of customary and of legal adoption throughout the nineteenth century. Adoption law did not offer a clearer solution than did the testimonies of witnesses to the entailments of hanai. Judges worried endlessly about whether adoptive or hanai status placed a child in the position of heir when a parent had the misfortune to die intestate.⁷

Judges found themselves in philosophical and linguistic debates. Not just property but parenthood entered judicial deliberations; not just the terms of the arrangement but also the nature of attachment between adult and child came into consideration. Judges in Hawai‘i’s courts delved into the meaning of *child*, the significance of *blood*, and the indicators of a *civilized people*—and inscribed the connections.

Defining the “Real” Child

Opinions in inheritance cases brought concepts of biological and social, nature and culture, real and constructed into discussions of adoption,

dichotomies that persist into the twenty-first century. Lacking precedent in Anglo-American law or clarity in customary arrangements regarding the transmission of property, judges regarded the relationship given by birth as a guide to the relationship created by adoption. In doing so, they confronted the key dilemma of adoption: did an arranged parent-child relationship have the same prerogatives as a genetic parent-child relationship? Hawai'i's legal experts did not agree with one another. Some lawyers and judges equated both legal and customary arrangements to the ties of blood. Others distinguished customary from legal arrangements, claiming equivalence only for the contracted (written) arrangement. Still other jurists considered the motives of the adult and the well-being of the child the true test of parenthood.

In an 1869 inheritance dispute, the lawyer for the petitioners asked what point adoption would serve if it did not replicate the biological bond. He argued the adoptee's claim to property on the basis of this replication: "The law of adoption would be worse than a dead letter, if adopted children did not inherit." The judge, First Associate Justice Hartwell, ruled against the petitioners and dismissed the case. He did not disagree that as a replication of the biological bond adoption ought to grant a right of inheritance. He disagreed with the claim that customary forms were the same as legal forms of adoption in this regard. "But no one would claim that every relation of *keiki hanai* carried the inheritance." Only legal adoption could be equated with blood kinship.

Hartwell further asserted that custom was generally haphazard on the rules of relationship. "If the usages in regard to the force and meaning of adoption prior to 1841, had been uniform, so as to establish a custom having the force of law, in all cases of adoption, this case would present a different aspect," he crankily chided the courtroom.⁸

True to his training, Hartwell considered law superior to the caprice he saw in custom. From his perspective, natives assumed parenthood at whim and without regard for continuity and clarity. Whether intentionally or not, by emphasizing the chaos of custom Hartwell drew attention away from the inconsistencies regarding inheritance in Western law.⁹ His strongest suit lay in the symbolic importance of birth, core of the nuclear family and represented by the orderly transmission of property from one generation to the next. Such order was, in Hartwell's view, the mark of civilization, a pinnacle the native had yet to reach.

During the same July 1869 term, as if to taunt him with the inconsistencies of the natives, Hartwell had to rule on the authenticity of an adoption based on ancient custom. The opposing lawyer introduced a new consideration into interpretations of adoption. He argued that treatment in her

childhood proved the falsity of a claimed keiki hanai status. The claimant had, he stated, been shuffled back and forth between households, knowing no permanence or security. Against this several persons testified to having witnessed an oral agreement, which established a hanai relationship whatever the personal outcome. Happy to ignore questions of personal outcome, and noting that nothing material was at stake, Hartwell ruled in favor of the petitioner. His court deemed Kaoaopa the keiki hanai of Nakuapa and Puhalahua.¹⁰

Three years later Kaoaopa was back in his courtroom, claiming her right as hanai to inherit property. Chief Justice Allen defended her claim by referring to custom. “As adoption was recognized by the ancient customs and has continued to be by the laws of the Kingdom, it is evident that it was a relationship endeared to the people, and regarded by them of the highest importance. Is it reasonable to suppose then, that it imparted no rights—that it was the relationship of a day, and for a comparatively unimportant purpose?” Chief Justice Hartwell disagreed, once more claiming a keiki hanai did not have as-if-begotten status. Lacking a contractual basis, hanai was not a facsimile of the blood relationship and therefore did not possess the statutory inheritance rights that adoption had. Kaoaopa’s claim failed.

This did not mean Kaoaopa lost her inheritance. There was another twist to the case. Hartwell concluded: “On the fact that the appellant is cousin of the blood of the intestate and her next of kin rests the statute which makes her the heir at law of the intestate, and I cannot say that she is not the heir at law.” Kaoaopa inherited as the closest blood relative of the deceased.

In re Estate of Nakuapa underlined the equivalence of contract and blood, the link between concepts of property and definitions of the child, and the role of the court in “civilizing” the savage.

Hartwell articulated the connections in his opinion. He claimed that the statute making adoption a facsimile of the biological relationship, with rights to inherit, represented a stage in the civilizing of the Hawaiian people. He further noted, through the eyes of his culture, that Hawai‘i would join “modern” nations in recognizing that only law—a written contract—gives adoptive kinship the force of a blood relationship. “The Hawaiian native leaders, trusting the good sense and wisdom of their foreign friends domesticated here, caused the enactment of a code of laws that in many respects were radically at variance with former national customs, and in advance of the usages of the people at large.” A benign imperialist, Hartwell assumed custom would simply (and rationally) vanish. “This country presents a remarkable instance of a change in the laws antedating a change in the general usages and convictions of the race.”¹¹

Custom, Law, and the Best Interests of the Child

With Koaopa, a new element crept into the courtroom. Judges considered the treatment of the child in determining adoptive status and opened the way to discussions of well-being, care, and love.

Koaopa could not have been adopted, Judge Allen claimed, inasmuch as she had been shuttled back and forth between households. In his view she was not a true hanai child. Hartwell doubted the entailments of hanai, and insisted that only adoption by law guaranteed the performance of parental roles. Adoption, he wrote, “is an agreement whereby the adopters agree with the parents to take the child to treat as their own in all respects; including nurture and education, and with the further understanding that if they do not otherwise dispose of their property by will, the child at their death shall inherit it.” While still primarily concerned with inheritance, Hartwell also anticipated a principle of American adoption law: the child is *as if one’s own*. Although neither Judge Allen nor Judge Hartwell used the phrase, both framed adoption in terms of the best interests of the child.

“The welfare of the infant is the polar star by which the discretion of the court is to be guided.” The opinion in an 1883 case turned adoption into a matter of securing the child’s future rather than of perpetuating rights to property.¹² At the same time, on the mainland representatives of what became known as the Progressive Era emphasized the importance of the child in decisions about placement. The principle of “the best interests of the child” entered courtroom decisions, where it remains to this day. Territorial status reinforced the dependency of Hawai‘i’s judges on American legal strictures but did not erase the equally significant reference to customary modes of transferring a child that had been present in Hawai‘i’s courts for six decades.

Judge Hartwell reduced confusion by choosing one word to represent adoption by custom. “The term *hanai*, as a verb, means ‘to feed,’” he proceeded to explain, for his fellow jurists. “As a noun it refers to the provider or to a person for whom one provides food.” Further to clarify, he compared the term to a familiar concept. “The English equivalent of hanai is a ‘foster child’ or ‘ward’. The word ‘hanai’ in the older [Hawaiian] dictionary is given the meaning of ‘to feed, to nourish, to support those in need; to entertain, as strangers, etc.; also, one fed or sustained by another; a foster child or a ward’.” His next sentences grant the term a privileged status in the courtroom. “The ‘keiki hanai’ relationship supplies the reason why the courts required that oral evidence, supporting an ancient adoption must be clear and concise so that it could be definitely distinguished from a mere foster child or ward relationship.”¹³ Keiki hanai was no longer “mere” fosterage, but as close to legal adoption as custom got.

Intersecting with best interests in the early part of the twentieth century, hanai acquired a positive cast. Beyond Hartwell's linguistic definition lay an understanding of the meanings given by native Hawaiians—the special love and attention the hanai child received. Rooted in notions of nurture and caring-for, fosterage reinforced the significance of hanai in legal placement decisions in Hawai'i's courts. For legislators and experts new to the principle of best interests the connotations of fosterage, like the meanings of hanai, provided a guideline for determining the well-being of a child. In the turns that history makes, fosterage and legal adoption became interchangeable concepts, as if best interests had pushed nurture and caring-for forward to include all modes of transferring a child from one adult to another.¹⁴ Judge Hartwell might have noted that law followed custom in this instance.

Parenthood, Fitness, and Love

American law prescribed best interests and pointed the principle toward the child. Yet the principle left judges, lawyers, and social workers with the problem of discovering the environment in which a child's interests would be served. The problem led officials to evaluate the adults who claimed parenthood and to develop tests of parental *fitness* that continue to evolve. In North American discourse, the transfer was premised on denying an unfit and granting a fit parent rights to the child. Under this rubric, adults did not *exchange* a child; one person lost parenthood to another through the offices of the court. Under American law, the adults remained anonymous to one another, strangers for the whole of the child's life.¹⁵ Agreements between adults, the form hanai took, fell into the shadows, leaving a residue in law in references to love, commitment, and nurture.

When Sam and Lydia went to court to adopt their children in the 1960s, they met the criteria for good parenthood. Married for over fifteen years, with a steady income, and a reliable residence, the two fulfilled the demands of the court for adoptive parenthood. The court transaction, however, represented only a slice of the understanding Sam and Lydia had of bringing a child fully into the family. Sam told me the narrative, at various times and in various versions. I never knew Lydia and learned of the nature of her parenthood from Sam and from the children they raised to adulthood.

Episodic and anecdotal, Sam's narrative painted a picture of parenthood framed by the choices he made in building his family. When he met Lydia, she had two children and "I took them as my own," Sam told me. Together they had four biological children and they adopted four more children, two sibling sets. In addition to a keiki hanai, they also took permanent care of three children, given to them by Sam's sister. Behind these instances lies an

account of the decisions that for Sam and Lydia juxtaposed Hawaiian identity with American citizenship. In making a family, Sam and Lydia created relationships that transcended their origins in biology, in nature, in law, or in custom.

In talking with me, Sam distinguished the ways in which he assumed parenthood. He did not prioritize or imply that one way was easier or less intentional than another. The echo of legal adoption's "as if one's own" in his decision to take Lydia's children suggests the significance of the decision—and its implications. More than ten years later, he and Lydia went to court together to adopt two children according to American law. These children, too, became their *own*.

In the late 1950s, Sam told me, a friend from military days dropped by with his two children. The man left the children and went drinking, not returning for days. After a while, Sam and Lydia decided to search for the father. They put the youngsters into a car and drove off looking for Sam's friend. As they drove around, Sam recalled for me, "On the radio I heard my license plate number being called by the police." A cop car followed his, and when Sam stopped, the police accused him and Lydia of kidnapping two children. The father had reported that his children were missing and claimed his rights to them as biological father. Under these circumstances, battle lines drawn, Sam and Lydia turned to state social services. In court, Sam and Lydia were deemed the "fit" parents according to the impersonal standards of an American child welfare system, and they received permanent custody.

The decision did not end the situation. Nine or ten years later, the biological parents, father and mother, returned to ask for the children back. Once again Sam and Lydia protested, and after failing to settle the case through mutual agreement, took the case to court. This time they petitioned for a legal adoption and an absolute transfer of parenthood. Once again the decision went in their favor, and they became full parents of the near-adolescent siblings. Just as Judge Hartwell predicted, the written contract removed any ambiguity from parenthood, creating an as-if-begotten kinship between Sam and Lydia and the children.

Sam's second adoption story differed in content and in implication from the first. A young cousin, Sam told me, gave birth to a baby boy and then, a year later, to a baby girl. Fifteen years old, she was unable to care for the children and her household did not have the resources to support her growing family. In this instance, the larger kin group, the 'ohana, met and discussed the problem. In Sam's memory, the young cousin willingly gave the children to him and Lydia, trusting them as "good" parents. The decision was mutual, and echoed traditional customs of child exchange. Over time, the little girl became Lydia's pet, her favorite child. Sam was not the only one

who told me that part of the story. He did, however, elide a bit on the next step: the decision to legalize the arrangement in an American court. There are several possible explanations for the decision, but they are my own and not Sam's.

By all reports, Lydia was a person who knew her own mind, and she may have worried that the cousin would change her mind and reclaim the children. The cousin remained part of the 'ohana, in contact with the children, and she might have posed a threat to Lydia. Having once turned to the American legal system to ensure the continuity of parenthood, Lydia and Sam may have seen the advantages again. At any rate, when Nina and Nick were six and seven years old, Sam and Lydia took the case to court. Abiding by American law, the judge deemed them the fit, proper, and best parents of the children. Both children continued to have contact with the biological mother, though neither regarded her as a parent.

Sam offered a perspective on, if not the details of the decision to adopt. Phrased in terms of his love for Lydia and her love for the little girl, he justified the (remembered) decision by citing the "better" environment his household provided. The cousin, he said, never established a stable life. Some twenty-five years after the adoption, Sam designated the girl heir to his Homestead property.¹⁶ I do not think he brought the case to court earlier in order to facilitate this decision. Nina had remained with Sam after Lydia died, raising her own four children in his household. He explained his choice of her as heir in terms of the loyalty and love she had always shown him. State adoption law ensured the inheritance rights of an adopted child, and Nina met the criterion for owning Homestead property: she had 50 percent Hawaiian blood. In Sam's narrative, Homestead policy and American law reinforced a decision to legalize parenthood he had made on quite other grounds.

Through the 1960s Sam and Lydia continued to expand the family, choosing the options available to them. Some years after Nina and Nick entered the family, Sam and Lydia acquired an infant girl. The firstborn child of one of their sons, Lihua fit perfectly the traditional role of *keiki hanai*—a gift of one generation to another.¹⁷ Sam referred to her as "my hanai" in his conversations, a designation that served several purposes. For one, in the context of his self-presentation, the designation reiterated his Hawaiian identity, his choice to follow Hawaiian custom. Another interpretation is possible: Sam may have reinforced the *hanai* designation to assert the terms of agreement with his son and daughter-in-law. In my experience with the family, the relationships between the three generations proceeded smoothly, and Lihua referred to Sam and Lydia as "Mama" and "Papa." So did her biological parents.

There is a further element in the story that would have disturbed a nineteenth-century judge and might have influenced Sam's references to the arrangement in the late twentieth century. The biological father of Lihua, the son of Sam and Lydia, had himself been given to the household.

Sam's sister Elena was unable to maintain a stable household because her partner was alcoholic and abusive. She worried about the safety of her three children, and eventually brought them "home" to her brother in Hawai'i. Elena asked Sam to take the adolescents in, and he did. His attachment to Elena, the youngest of his sisters, was intense and threaded through with sympathy for her plight. The three siblings lived with him and Lydia until adulthood, as much their "own" children as the other eleven in the household. The exchange of a child in hanai testified to the substance of the kinship, as did the presence of all three siblings at family celebrations and events.

And so by the time I arrived on the scene in the late 1980s, fourteen photograph albums indicated the equivalence of the fourteen children in practice and in representation. As we pored over the pictures, Sam talked of his involvement as a parent and of the respect and the commitment he extended to each child. He talked of aloha, of a generosity and nurturing that amalgamated the ways the children had come into the family. Yet the diverse ways, ranging from birth to "keeping," tell the more elaborate story of Sam and Lydia's negotiation of custom and of law. The strategies they used to build a family, and the retrospective accounts Sam provided to me of those strategies, continue the larger historical story that began with the arrival of missionaries in the early nineteenth century and continues in Hawai'i in the early twenty-first century.

Aloha, Kinship, and Culture

Sam and Lydia took advantage of the options available in a late twentieth century context for building a family. They went to the law when contract served the interests of the child and they followed custom when that arrangement promised the child a secure parenthood. They "kept" children, three permanently and others for brief periods of time. In the eyes of a haole court and child welfare system, Sam and Lydia were biological, adoptive, foster, and custodial parents. In their own eyes they erased the boundaries between kinds of parenthood, honoring the Hawaiian value of aloha. In my eyes, those of an anthropologist, their decisions (as I heard them from Sam and his children) evoke a process that is as old as the clash of cultures: the process by which individuals use, bend, and rewrite both law and custom. Sam's narrative points to the role of individuals in maintaining a dynamic, complex relation between law and custom.

Like officers of the court, Sam was alert to the lawful nature of custom and to the customary aspects of law, and he applied the rules as needed. Sam appreciated the similarities and the differences between law and custom, recognizing his agency in determining which mode would best serve his interests. Unlike the judges, whose decisions built on and added to legal precedent, Sam could manipulate the components of law and of custom to establish his identity and his role as a parent. In a court, by contrast, the choice between law and custom has a public face that renders the negotiation of both realms more difficult and, perhaps, more consequential.

A judge whose court I observed in 1989 revealed another side of the story, his own balance of “American” and “Hawaiian” more problematic than Sam’s. As we sat in his office one afternoon, he illustrated Hawaiian custom for me by saying, “If we were Hawaiian and I said I liked your earrings, you would give them to me. It’s the same with children.” The remark was multileveled: a test of my reaction to a comparison between earrings and children, and a revelation of his dilemma, caught between the strictures of law and the spontaneity of gift. The analogy also revealed his impartiality. From his point of view, the difference between American calculations of fitness and Hawaiian emphasis on generosity was moot when it came to the best interests of a child. He implied that the law’s criteria might be as capricious, whimsical, and personalized as gift exchange. In the decisions I witnessed, he adjusted legal precedent and custom to the particulars of the case. Not unlike Sam, the judge made choices that destabilized the relationship between law and custom, according neither a permanent superiority.

When Sam went to court in the 1960s and when I interviewed the judge at the end of the 1980s, the parallel presence of law and of custom offered individuals options for transferring parenthood. Sam’s decision to legalize his relationship to four children he had taken in would have given Hartwell satisfaction: a Native Hawaiian man had embraced modern law. The decision, however, tells less about the triumph of American law than about the choices an individual can make among alternative forms of having children. These choices constitute a version of identity politics and demonstrate the heterogeneity of sources of identity in a colonial setting like that of present-day Hawai‘i. Sam’s story of becoming a parent also demonstrates the extent to which the conflict between regimes can be redressed through the actions of individuals, exploiting different systems for their own ends. His story underlines the central role of kinship to asserting cultural and personal identities.

Sam and Lydia chose legal adoption in two instances in order to remove any ambiguity about their rights to the children. With its impersonal standards of judgment, the law overrode personal entanglements in determining

parenthood. Occurring over one hundred years after the first adoption law had been passed in Hawai'i, the actions of Sam and Lydia belie assumptions of legal hegemony and of law's suppression of individual autonomy. The decisions about becoming a parent that Sam described to me indicate the resource that law can be for its subjects.

The passage of an adoption law forced a consideration of customary adoption practices. Customary exchanges of children continued through the codification of adoption law, contributing to the explication of the rights and duties of parenthood. Analogously, the opportunity to legalize a transaction and to specify its entailments on *pepa* influenced the customary practice of child exchange. The alternation persisted, evident in the opinions of the judge I mentioned above and in Sam's account of his family-building strategies.

The compromises in colonial rule are particularly notable in parent-child relationships, where matters of emotion muddy the strict reading of precedent. One hundred years of decision-making leaves the final determination of best interests still in the hands of individuals who variously interpret cultural assumptions. In the end, the practices of creating kinship resist both the hegemony of law and the force of custom. The existence of diverse strategies for having children gives the meaning of kinship to those who construct relationships.

Identity Politics

Sam and Lydia used adoption law instrumentally, to gain permanent parental rights to four children. They did not succumb to the law's discrimination among parent-child relationships. Looking at his photograph albums, Sam described the obligations and emotions of fatherhood without regard to how a child had entered the family. In an important sense for Sam the difference between *hanai* and legal adoption—and, for that matter, birth—was structural and not substantive. The love and commitment he attached to parenthood remained the same for the fourteen children he had gathered into the 'ohana. In insisting on a parenthood that transcended the origins of the relationship, Sam presented me with his face as a Native Hawaiian. He further underlined the resonance with Hawaiian values when he stressed the incorporative nature of his family building.

Law allowed him to implement his image as a Native Hawaiian. For Sam, American law proved crucial to fulfilling his goals as the patriarch of an extended family. Like the *hanai* arrangement, which followed tradition, legal adoption served a purpose under a particular circumstance. Different as

strategies, law and custom did not differ in the outcome for his understandings of kinship. Like individuals generations before him, Sam appraised custom and law through the intimate decisions he made about his family and through the day-to-day behaviors that accorded the family permanence. In this respect he was freer than the officials who wrote and executed laws and freer than those who set themselves up as arbiters of custom. Sam combined aspects of custom and of law in his own interests and he shunned the ideological debates that plague legislators, lawyers, and experts.

Sam's narrative of parenthood conveys an identity politics he did not explicitly outline. He talked to me about the advantages of haole law and about the value of custom for counteracting the impersonality of law. He did not put this in terms of haole versus Hawaiian, or stranger versus native, but in terms of diverse alternatives for accomplishing his ends. His reminiscent references to the fourteen children he raised illuminated his ability to combine haole and Hawaiian, American and indigenous into a labile, composite identity. While he talked about "tradition" and "modern," Sam did not construe these as any more dichotomous than custom and law. Differing modes of organizing life allowed him to combine his role as head of an 'ohana with that of citizen in an American state.

Sam's strategic use of custom and of law was not unique. Nor was his emphasis on the incorporativeness represented by hanai and by adoption (as well as foster care and "taking in") as a mark of Hawaiian identity. When I began my fieldwork in the mid-1980s, I was surprised at the widespread claim of hanai in families divergent in class, location, and politics. People I talked with used the term hanai as if it covered all permanent transfers of parenthood, but in the end they distinguished hanai from going to court.¹⁸ Like Sam, many considered the decision to legalize a relationship necessary for pragmatic reasons, either to void the claim of a biological parent or to ensure that the child be recognized as the heir to property. Like Sam, too, many of the people I knew talked of hanai as a primary indication of Hawaiian-style family, an enactment of the generosity and openness evoked by the concept of aloha. As a concept that in the contemporary setting includes diverse manifestations, hanai can be an assertion of Hawaiian identity even for those individuals who reject the politics of cultural autonomy and consider the sovereignty movement elitist or misguided. For them, hanai was a way of taking care of children through the framework of generosity and love.¹⁹ The framework also marks a rejection of the American child welfare policy that assumes transfers of parenthood must occur in court in order to be reliable.

When Sam and Lydia went to court in the 1960s, the principle of best interests ruled placement decisions. Always a difficult a principle to apply,

best interests demands an interpretation of parenthood by those in charge of placement decisions. The interpretation inevitably reflects a cultural context, at a moment in time. Sam and Lydia chose the option of legal adoption during a period that saw the resurgence of Hawaiian values and an adjustment of the Americanized family to Hawaiian concepts of kinship.²⁰ With best interests guiding North American policy, courts look for evidence of caring and for signs of love. In a Hawaiian court, once love enters the discussion, custom is not far behind. With its emphasis on generosity and incorporation, *hanai* brings the ideology of *‘ohana* in its stead. In turn, the ideology of *‘ohana* expands the designation of parent-child kinship.

The doorway to diverse forms of family was further opened by changes in adoption policy on the mainland at the end of the twentieth century. Child welfare experts, legislators, and participants in adoption reviewed best interests and concluded that exclusive dyadic parenting might not best serve the child's interests. Protests against the secrecy and confidentiality of North American adoption, with its complement in the strict separation of birth and adopting parent, shifted the terms of adoption law. In my fieldwork, I met social workers and lawyers who, in an echo of the mid-nineteenth century, recognized the virtue of Polynesian customs, seeing in those a model for opening legal adoption and expanding the meaning of family. In Hawai'i, advocates of change in adoption law considered *hanai* the best example of loving concern for a child's well-being. *Aloha* might, as Sam and Lydia exemplified, determine placement decisions in an American courtroom.

Appealing in its references to care and generosity, *aloha* pervades the discourse on the best interests of a child. At the same time, in response to bids for the recognition of Hawaiian cultural practices, the concept of *aloha* has entered other judicial and legislative debates, including land claims and environmental issues.²¹ Insertion of the concept into a variety of decisions, from the placement of a child to protection of the seabed, runs the risk of instrumentalizing the concept and eroding its original meaning. While *aloha* may enhance decisions in a child placement case, its role in the politics of cultural identity predicts a vaster turn in the intersection of law and custom.

In 1986, the concept of *aloha* became part of Hawaiian state law. "In exercising their power on behalf of the people and in fulfillment of their responsibilities, obligations and service to the people, ... [officials] may contemplate and reside with the life force and give consideration to the 'Aloha Spirit'."²² The inclusion of the concept seems to recognize native custom, to compensate for long years of Americanized language in Hawai'i's statutes, and to acknowledge the indigenous population of the islands. Adding the concept to state law can also be seen as a way of diffusing demands for

cultural autonomy and sovereignty by the appropriation of a key lever in those demands. Once codified, aloha risks losing its cultural resonances and becoming trivialized, as happened in the tourist industry. So alien is the idea of “the life force” and the “aloha spirit” to the exercise of Anglo-American law that one wonders how it can be enacted or if it should be enacted.

The history of adoption and hanai offers one possible answer. The codification of hanai in the process of developing and implementing laws of adoption did not destroy either the behaviors or the ideologies behind the customary form of adopting children. Rather hanai persisted, a thorn in the side of judges and a practice in the shadow of the leviathan for subjects in kingdom, territory, and state. Individuals, like Sam and Lydia, brought custom to law when they petitioned for parenthood. These petitions, recurring for more than two centuries, demonstrate the difficulty of applying a strict construction to parent-child kinship and argue for the intertwining that eventually introduced aloha into the calculation of best interests in Hawaiian courts.

Consonant with commitment and with caring-for, the concept of aloha legitimizes the social construction of kinship by emphasizing the motives for making kin. In Hawai'i, the social construction of kinship enacts an ideology of incorporativeness that merges family with assertions of cultural identity. Sam and Lydia represent a historical process that began as soon as North Americans reconstructed the laws and the governance of the Hawaiian Islands. The decisions they made about their family, incorporating children into the 'ohana in multiple ways, constitutes an interpretation of *belonging* that connects intimately with contemporary Hawaiian notions of nationhood.

Adoption in all its forms is a reminder, in practice as well as in interpretation, of the flexibility built into a concept of belonging, so that being a citizen of Hawai'i, belonging to the land, does not reduce to fealty to the United States or to an independent Hawaiian nation. Rather, the synonymy of aloha with incorporating, as hanai practice and ideology exemplify, expands the notion of citizenship from nation to a community of residents in which kinship is not an artifact but a founding feature.

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NOTES

1. “Native Hawaiian with an upper case ‘N’ refers to all persons of Hawaiian ancestry regardless of blood quantum.” *Native Hawaiian Data Book*, Office of Hawaiian Affairs (1998).

2. See Carroll [ed.] (1970) and Brady [ed.] (1976).

3. “It is our design to regulate our kingdom according to the above principles and thus seek the greatest prosperity both of all the chiefs and all of the people of these Hawaiian Islands. But we are aware that we cannot ourselves alone accomplish such an object—God must be our aid, for it is His province alone to give perfect protection and prosperity.—Wherefore we first present our supplication to HIM, that he will guide us to right measures and sustain us in our work.”

4. On the mainland, what is considered the first American law—in the state of Massachusetts—was passed in 1855.

5. *Statutes of Kamehameha III*. Chapter 1, “Of the Parental duties.” Section III: 198 (Honolulu, HI 1846).

6. *In re Kamehameha IV Estate*, 2 Haw. 715.

7. The implication of adoption for rights of inheritance was a problem on the mainland as well, unresolved by the laws of adoption passed state by state at the end of the nineteenth century. Inheritance is still a sticking point in adoption law, handled differently in the fifty states.

8. *In re Mellish*, 3 Haw. 123 (1869).

9. See Jack Goody (1969), a valuable overview of adoption custom and law in Western societies.

10. *In re Estate of Nakuapa*, 3 Haw. 143 (1869).

11. *In re Estate of Kakuapa, Deceased*, 3 Haw. 342 (1872).

12. *In re Kamarawa*, 6 Haw. 386.

13. 7 Haw. 544 (1889).

14. See Modell [Schachter] (2000).

15. For a full and detailed account of American laws of anonymity and confidentiality, see Carp (1998).

16. Land granted to the Hawaiian people by a Congressional Act of 1921. Sam had owned Homestead property since the early 1970s.

17. See Pukui, Haertig, and Lee (1972).

18. See Howard (1970).

19. For people I met in economically disadvantaged homestead communities, hanai was a crucial method for circulating resources: an adult providing resources to a child whose parent cannot offer the same opportunities. Hanai also stands in for foster care, in a state where the need for foster care homes has been growing and the number of foster parents approved by the state not growing enough.

20. The Hawaiian “renaissance” has been described in, among others, Davenport (1969); Kanahele (1986); Merry (2000).

21. See, for instance, Sullivan (2002) on the difficulty of applying aloha in disputes over land.

22. Hawai'i (Revised) Const. (1986).

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AFTERWORD: ADOPTIVE RELATIONS IN THEORIES OF KINSHIP AND MODERNITY

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WHILE MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about adoption over the past decades (Carroll 1970; Brady 1976; Modell 1994, 1998; Volkman and Katz 2003; Bowie 2004; Howell 2006), *Relative Power* is unique in the extent to which it places adoption in the context of larger historical and contemporary issues, including colonialism and sovereignty movements; development and social change; migration and global capitalism; and violence, trauma, and sexual abuse. This special issue of *Pacific Studies* provides an opportunity to reflect on the place of adoption not only in the context of historical and contemporary events in Oceania but also in the history of kinship theory in anthropology.¹

In the comments that follow, I tack back and forth between the unfolding histories of adoption in Oceania and of kinship studies in anthropology and point to some of their past entanglements and contemporary possibilities. I first consider the place of adoption in nineteenth-century narratives of the evolution of civilization and twentieth-century ideas of development, modernization, and progress. A number of papers in this volume prompt reflection upon the ways in which these narrative frameworks (both anthropological and cultural) inform colonial and anticolonial treatments of adoption. They also speak to key tropes in narratives of modernization that concern the relationship between the domains of kinship and economy as well as the entanglements of kinship and private property. Second, in several papers, the specifics of the processes by which children are transferred inspire

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a reexamination of the relationship between adoption and larger systems of exchange. Consequently, I query our understanding of what counts as adoption in light of recent developments in kinship studies concerning exchange and differing ideas of relatedness. And, finally, spurred by the papers that explore the relation between adoption and trauma, violence, and sexual abuse, I contemplate both the reasons why such topics have been absent from the history of kinship studies and the range of criteria that we must address in any future comparative research on these important issues.

I. Adoption and the Signs of Modernity

From at least the nineteenth century on, different forms of kinship and marriage have been used to signify stages of development and progress—whether these be in nineteenth-century narratives of evolution or twentieth- and twenty-first-century accounts of development and modernization. Nineteenth-century evolutionary narratives such as Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1974) understood civilization to be marked by four interrelated events that bear on kinship and marriage: (1) the *institution of monogamous marriage* (in contrast to plural marriages and sexual relations outside of marriage), which was seen to be the requirement for (2) the *establishment of paternity* (and the assertion of its importance over maternity), which was associated with (3) the *creation of private property* (in contrast to communal property) and (4) the *establishment of the restricted nuclear family* (in contrast to open and extended family) (McKinnon 2001). These kinship correlates of “civilization” in nineteenth-century narratives continue to shape twentieth- and twenty-first-century understandings of what counts as “developed” or “modern.” Consequently, the associated characteristics of kinship and family relations that serve as markers of development, modernity, and progress are those that are exclusive not inclusive; nuclear not extended; bounded not open or flexible; defined and restricted to narrow lines of “being,” biology, and blood, not flexible and open networks of “doing,” care, and nurturance. The contrasts have delineated what is reckoned as savage as well as civilized, traditional as well as modern, backward as well as developed, and gift economies and so-called kin-based societies as well as capitalist and market-based societies. How then has adoption served as a signifier, and of what, in these narrative frameworks?

Colonial Regimes and Sovereignty Movements

A number of papers in this volume make it clear that the colonial powers—whether these be the Americans in Hawai'i and Guam, the French in New

Caledonia, or the Indonesians in Irian Jaya—actively supported, valorized, and legalized certain forms of family making (nuclear, bounded, biological, and marital) as civilized and modern while they vigorously penalized and stigmatized, if they did not make outright illegal, certain local forms of family making (particularly those that were extended, open, nonbiological, and nonmarital) as backward, if not savage.

Thus, Leslie Butt observes that unwed motherhood and illegitimacy are stigmatized by non-Papuan Indonesians who have recently settled in urban Wamena (as part of the internal colonization of Irian Jaya), whereas the birth of a child (whether the mother is married or not) is celebrated among indigenous Dani in their rural villages. The French educational system in New Caledonia, Christine Salomon and Christine Hamelin report,

puts forward parenting standards that, in accordance with Western views, implicitly consider that only birth parents can be good parents. The new norms are reinforced by economic measures that encourage couples to keep their children with them and caregivers or foster parents to become adoptive parents or legal guardians. For example, foster or temporary parents cannot receive the family allowances available to birth parents and to legally recognized guardians or adoptive parents. Nor can they receive other social services, such as scholarships (unless they produce evidence of a court-approved transfer of parental rights). (139)

Stigmatization of nonbiological and nonmarital forms of family making is, in this way, backed by economic sanctions that penalize people whose forms of relatedness do not conform to the French colonial standard.

The suppression of certain forms of kinship and marriage as an intimate means of colonial subordination is evident in the papers by Laurel Monnig and Judith Schachter. In the context of debates surrounding decolonization in Guam, the discourse of the American colonial government validates racial, cultural, and linguistic purity and, conversely, stigmatizes *mestizo* relations and the forms of Chamorro *familia*—which are “more expansive and less conceptually rigid than U.S. notions of ‘biological’ relatedness”—as inauthentic grounds for “political legitimacy” (Monnig, this issue, 183). By contrast, at least some Chamorro supporters of sovereignty highlight these more expansive and flexible forms of family making (symbolized by a form of adoption called *poksai*) and “mixed-race” families (revalued positively as *mestizu*) as the proper grounds for authentic postcolonial political legitimacy (Monnig, this issue, 184).

Similarly, in Hawai'i, Schachter shows how the imposed United States legal system in the nineteenth century sanctioned adoptions that were established through written contract, involved nuclear and (monogamously) marital families, and "as-if-biological" relations as the (civilized) grounds for inheritance of property. In an earlier work (Modell 1998), Schachter reveals how native Hawaiians have struggled, in the context of this legal system, to gain recognition for indigenous forms of family (*ohana*) and fostering (*hanai*) that the courts saw as uncivilized, since they depended on unwritten agreements and stressed care and nurturance over biology, inclusive and extended forms of relatedness over the exclusive relations of the nuclear and (monogamous) marital family, and chiefly held common lands over privately inherited land. In the earlier work as well as the chapter in this volume, she shows how these heretofore suppressed indigenous forms of relatedness reemerge as one of the primary grounds for political legitimacy in the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

It is evident, then, that in Hawai'i and Guam, if not in New Caledonia or Irian Jaya, it is exactly the forms of relatedness that were stigmatized under colonial rule as backward—including adoption, extended and open families, and mixed-race relations—that become valorized as the sign of new sovereignty and decolonization movements. Indeed, these forms of family making become the intimate means of the restoration of indigenous cultural integrity and sovereignty and serve to affirm an alternative vision of what it means to be "civilized" and modern.

Schachter makes a further point, however, that there is a complexity in the ways in which individuals create kin in the context of this kind of oppositional framework—in Hawai'i, between indigenous "custom" and colonial "law." While indigenous Hawaiian forms of family making and those validated by the colonial-imposed legal system are clearly differentially weighted in the contexts of the sovereignty movement and of the law courts and social services offices, people are nonetheless often able to use both frameworks to weave together the various strands of relatedness that constitute contemporary native Hawaiian families.

Kinship and Economy: Rethinking the Domains

Like particular forms of kinship and marriage, the domain of kinship itself (relative to other social domains, particularly economics) has been central to the narratives of evolution that have animated the colonial enterprise and continue to motivate accounts of development and modernization. On the one hand, in capitalist market-based societies, in contrast to so-called traditional "kin-based societies," it is presumed that kinship is relegated to

the domestic domain, which is separate from and subordinate to the economic domain. W. H. R. Rivers articulated this critical difference in the opening passages of *The History of Melanesian Societies*:

In civilized culture we are accustomed to distinguish certain definite departments of social life which can to a large extent be kept apart, but among those people we usually speak of as primitive, these departments are inextricably interwoven and interdependent so that it is hopeless to expect to obtain a complete account of any one department without covering the whole field. (1914, 1)

On the other hand, it is thought that the form of family that arose out of the industrial revolution—one that is restricted, bounded, nuclear, if not also biological—is somehow required for development and necessary to the workings of capitalism. Laurence M. Carucci's work in this special issue joins the work of others who argue against these assumptions, pointing both to the nonnecessary relation between the forms of kinship and those of development and capitalism and to the centrality of kinship in the workings of the global capitalist economy.

Recent work on migration has demonstrated that kinship and marriage constitute the structural relations and the means through which migration is accomplished and migrants crisscross national borders (e.g., Schiller and Fouron 1999; Constable 2005). In this special issue, Carucci analyzes how Marshallese migration and participation in the global capitalist order depend upon and are shaped by their large open, flexible family structures—with a range of more and less formal adoptive and fostering relationships. In a similar vein, Aihwa Ong (1999) notes how the extended patriarchal family is at the center of Chinese capitalist overseas expansion, and Sylvia Yanagisako (2002) analyzes the connection between kinship and capital among Italian silk merchants. It would be interesting to track the modalities of Marshallese kinship formations both across time and taking class mobility into account, in order to determine whether they remain open, flexible, and nonrestrictive as migrant groups move up in class status, and, conversely, to understand to what extent adoption might feature in the maintenance of family firms and capitalist networks.

These works suggest that we ought not to be blinded by the stories of modernization that we have been telling ourselves inside and outside of anthropology for the last 150 years and by the assumptions we have made about the role of kinship in modern economies and about the kinds of families required by the capitalist order. Instead we should be tracing the ways in which a wide range of family formations intersect with contemporary economic structures and processes.

Adoptive Relations and Rights over Private Property

In many of the papers in this volume, it is striking how questions regarding the inheritance of private property have become the ultimate arbitrator of what will count as “real” kinship as opposed to social, adoptive, or “fictive” kinship. Contests over inheritance between differently constituted kin (adoptive vs. nonadoptive) are reported, for instance, in Hawai‘i, the Marshall Islands, and Chuuk state, and they appear to be exacerbated in places like Mota, where Manuel Rauchholz notes there is rapid population growth and cash-cropping that ties up matrilineal land rights in patrilineal tree rights.

It would be easy to assume that such contests arise because people “naturally” wish to transmit property to their “real” biological kin over their social and “fictive” kin (see Bodenhorn 2000 for an account of Iñupiaq assumptions to the contrary). Since at least the nineteenth century, narratives of the rise of civilization and modernization have centered on the development of private property and on the narrowing of kin relations to the nuclear family, such that the channels of transmission of property follow an increasingly restricted line of blood (preferably through male links) (McKinnon 2001). Such narratives articulated precisely what, according to Schachter, colonial judges in Hawaiian courts expressed—that the passage from “savagery” to “civilization” required a clear determination of both the lines of kinship and those of property (this issue, 218).

Historically, in Hawai‘i, land was not held individually but by chiefs. Americans not only privatized land holdings in the Great Mahele of 1848 but, Schachter tells us, they also attempted legally to mandate marriage, prohibit sexual liaisons, and establish biological procreation as the basis of parenthood. Given the various forms of adoption and the open and fluid nature of Hawaiian family formations, Schachter observes, United States colonial judges struggled to determine on what grounds nonbiological kin relations could be granted rights of inheritance. Ultimately, the only adoptive relations that were recognized as suitable to be granted inheritance rights were those that had been formalized through written legal contract and that constituted the parties to the adoption “as-if-biological” kin within marital families. Of course, in the eyes of the legal system, in the absence of a will to the contrary, this effectively disinherited those who were related through indigenous forms of adoption and family making.

In the end, it was the legal hegemony of *this* set of associations—that “real” kin and rights to inheritance are established through blood relations that follow from monogamous marital relations—that has subordinated other indigenous understandings of the relation between relatedness and property and made them legally vulnerable. Under this formulation,

adoptive relations could entail inheritance only to the extent that they approximated blood relations through legal contract. At least in Hawai'i, if not across Oceania, the vulnerability of adoptees with regard to inheritance has been a precipitate not of indigenous understandings of kinship and property but rather of the colonial imposition of Western understandings.

Given the hegemony of the colonial and Western legal system in the past 100 years, we need to ask a number of questions if we are to untangle the complex histories and contemporary understandings of kinship and property in Oceania and elsewhere. First, how have indigenous peoples understood the relationship between various forms of relatedness and various forms of property? Second, as Schachter has begun to ask in the case of Hawai'i, how have indigenous understandings of the relation between property and kinship intersected with, been subordinated to and transformed by—or become a challenge to—the understandings that have been formalized in colonial and national legal systems? Third, again following Schachter, how do people strategically use both legal and customary ideas about the connection between relatedness and property in their efforts to create enduring families and familial estates?

II. Adoption, Exchange, and Differing Presuppositions of Relation

In several papers in this volume, what is read as adoption appears to emerge as a consequence of bride-wealth or other life-cycle exchanges, or their failure. In light of work that has been done over the past several decades on exchange and affiliation, this apparent blurring suggests that it would be profitable to explore the relation between what we are calling adoption and larger systems of life-cycle exchanges. How do the presuppositions embedded in Western understandings of adoption mesh with those embedded in various cultural understandings of exchange?

Underlying Western understandings of adoption is the assumption that a child naturally “belongs” to individuals, specifically those individuals who are biologically linked to the child through conception and birth. Moreover, the child belongs to any larger kinship group—such as a family, house, lineage, or clan—by virtue of its inherent biological connection to those individuals who engendered it. Beginning from such an assumption, adoption is, in a rough and ready definition, “any customary and optional procedure for taking as one’s own a child of other parents” (Carroll 1970, 3; see also Bowie 2004, 5). Adoption is a transfer from individuals who are seen as the biological parents of the child to those who will become the social (and “as-if-biological”) parents of the child (Modell 1994); and the child becomes a member of a new social group by reference to its relation to the adopting individuals.

Yet the cases presented by Leslie Butt, Christine Salomon and Christine Hamelin, Thorgeir Kolshus, and Jeanette Dickerson-Putman intimate (although the authors do not necessarily make this point) that another logic of relatedness may be at work. Over the past several decades, analysis of various exchange systems compelled a reconceptualization of the relationship between ideas about person, descent group formation, affiliation, and exchange (e.g., Roy Wagner 1967, 1977; Strathern 1988; McKinnon 1991, 2000). The general assumption underlying kinship studies had previously been that persons and descent groups were defined by birth and biology and that the role of exchange was to establish social relations between them. This shifted with the perception that certain societies seemed to presuppose a prior, diffuse relationality (which may or may not be seen in terms of physiological substance) and that exchange functions not to relate but to differentiate and define individuals and groups. Thus affiliation to groups is accomplished through exchange rather than through birth. Lines of relationality—which often follow maternal links—are the ground against which the workings of bride-wealth exchange, or its absence, assign children to the group of the father or the mother. To what group a child will belong, therefore, is not simply a biological given (following from birth) but rather something to be established through the presence or absence of exchange. What might look like adoption, in the first sense outlined above, involves, in this second sense, a very different understanding of the nature of persons and the means of establishing and changing forms of relatedness.

Thus, in Leslie Butt's account of the Dani in this special issue, what is at stake is not only women's lack of agency and men's control of women's reproductive processes—that is, men wield power to break the biological bond between mothers and their children and transfer authority over children to other individuals, including themselves. There is also a different idea of the grounds of relatedness and of the means for establishing parental claims over children and for attaching children to groups. Butt makes it clear that an "unwed mother" is not simply an unmarried woman; she is a woman for whom bride-wealth has not been paid by her lover or husband. This has consequences not only for her own status (designating her as "unmarried") but also, and especially, for the status of her child—who "belongs" *de facto*, in the absence of bride-wealth, to the clan of the mother's father (not the child's father). For the Dani, the absence of bride-wealth determines the affiliation of the child and appears to remove social parentage from the biological mother and reassign it to other members of her father's clan—her own parents or siblings, or those who make an effort to "build" up the child through nurturing it. One could call this adoption, in the first sense of the term, since it results in the transference of authority over children from the

birth mother to other individuals in her natal clan. But the adoptive process involved follows a different logic of relatedness. Children do not inherently “belong” to their birth mothers and fathers (and get subsequently transferred to other social parents). Rather they find their place of “belonging” through a process of exchange, or its absence. It is also a process in which the rights of clans supersede those of individuals, and individuals within a clan negotiate who, among them, will establish a sufficiently nurturing relationship with the child to assume the role of parent. That fathers, who strive to build up the membership of their clan, exert their power over their daughters is another story, which is the focus of Butt’s work, but my point here is that they do so within a logic of relatedness that hinges on bride-wealth payments as the arbiter of a child’s “belonging,” not a sense of individual proprietorship based solely on biology and birth. The tensions between young unwed mothers and their parents over the allocation of their children currently hinges precisely on this difference in a moment of historical change in which biologically-based individual proprietorship has emerged as a competing cultural value in relation to exchange-based clan proprietorship.

In New Caledonia, aside from informal adoptions between close relatives and formal adoptions to ensure the continuity of a lineage that lacks a male heir, most of what Salomon and Hamelin classify as “adoption” entails the assignment of children resulting from marriage exchanges (or their absence). Salomon and Hamelin note that, in “reciprocal marital exchanges, when there is no woman available to be given back in marriage, an infant girl can be offered instead” (this issue, 134). Additionally, more than half of those they classify as “adoptees” are born to (highly stigmatized) unwed mothers and “adopted” by their maternal grandfather or uncle. This transfer of the child results from the absence of bride-wealth payments, in which case, a Kanak “child is . . . de facto appropriated by the birth mother’s patrilineage, sometimes against her will. . . . the relative chosen by the mother’s parents to adopt the child may not be prepared and may also be somewhat reluctant” (this issue, 138). Salomon and Hamelin suggest that these “[c]ontemporary forms of grandparental caregiving and adoption may differ from traditional adoption patterns” (this issue, 138); however, they seem to follow from a logic of bride-wealth exchange that may not be so new—one in which the child “belongs” to the maternal relatives and in which the latter are obligated, whether they so desire or not, to care for the children of daughters for whom bride-wealth has not been paid.

It should also be noted that what ends up being called adoption may be a result of other life-cycle exchanges besides bride-wealth. Thorgeir Kolshus notes, for instance, that in Mota Island, Vanuatu, the parents of a child were those who made the birth payments to the midwife assistant to the birth

mother. Jeanette Dickerson-Putman details how, among the many forms of adoption and fosterage in the Austral Islands of French Polynesia, one form entails the adoption of a first-born grandchild by its paternal grandparents. She observes that “[i]t was a child’s filial obligation to ‘give’ an offspring to their parents if they demanded one to show respect, to reciprocate for past care, and to provide them with assistance in the future” (this issue, 92). Dickerson-Putman suggests that this is considered a relationship of reciprocal exchange rather than simply an extension of the care given to adult children.

Two points are relevant here. First, systems of adoption need to be contextualized within the larger system of life-cycle exchanges within any given society—including not only bride-wealth, but also child-wealth, and birth and death payments. Second, in discussing the forms of adoption and affiliation of children, it is critical to attend to the underlying cultural understandings about person, parentage, and relatedness and to the ways in which these are established without presuming that these are given at birth.

III. Amity and Abuse in Adoptive Relations

In the history of kinship studies, the domain of kinship has often been distinguished from other analytic domains—such as politics and economics—by reference to a core animating sentiment deemed to be inherent and fundamental to the forms of relationship in this domain. For Fortes (1969), if not for all those in the British tradition, this was “amity”; for Schneider (1980, 1984), in the American tradition, this was love and “diffuse enduring solidarity”; and for those in the tradition of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology (e.g., Wilson 1975; Wright 1994), this has been “altruism” and “kin selection.” To the extent that such sentiments have been seen as the most fundamental characteristics of kinship (indeed, often presumed to follow naturally from biological/genetic links), it has been difficult to make a space to talk about the actual existence of incest and sexual abuse, about emotional and physical abuse (particularly against women and children), and about plain old ambivalence. Yet, it is important to make a space to analyze the existence of violence, abuse, trauma, and ambivalence in the context of kinship—whether biological or any other kind of kinship—since these forms of violence are at the heart of kinship as much as love and diffuse, enduring solidarity (Gordon 1988; McKinnon 1995; Delaney 1998, 2001; Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Peletz 2001).

Because adoptive relations have been seen as relations of choice which, in the absence of biological bonds, are created solely from the will to care and

nurture, and because they have been part of more open and flexible family structures, they have not often been associated with abuse, violence, and trauma. Yet, the papers by Christine Salomon and Christine Hamelin, Manuel Rauchholz, Thorgeir Kolshus, Leslie Butt, and Jeanette Dickerson-Putman—which explore varying degrees of emotional trauma, violence, and/or sexual abuse associated with adoption—certainly call into question the more positive picture we have had of these nonbiological family formations.

However, in light of this new evidence linking adoption and various forms of trauma, violence, and abuse, it is crucial not to jump automatically to the opposite conclusion that, because adoptions involve nonbiological relations, they are inherently prone to violence and abuse in ways that biological relations are not. First of all, many of the adoptions considered here *do* involve people who are biologically related. Second, my guess would be that it is not adoption *as such* that is the problem, but rather the particular circumstances and practices that surround and give shape to it. We need to undertake a comparative analysis to understand what circumstances and practices create the conditions for various emotional responses to adoption—both positive ones of care, safety, and nurture as well as negative ones of violence, abuse, and trauma. In the process, it is important to clarify the significance of the differences between the various forms of adoption and fosterage we are considering and to analyze carefully the range of psychological as well as political, economic, and cultural issues that are integral to the differential effects of adoption and fosterage on the children and adults involved.

At the outset, then, as we attempt to analyze the nature and impact of adoption within a particular society or make comparisons between societies, it is critical that we do not conflate different forms of child transfer. Numerous forms of relation making go under the term “adoption” and other terms such as “fosterage.” Yet, the differences between them are important in terms of understanding their meaning, significance, and consequences for the people and societies involved. This is even more the case when the analyst moves outside a single society and compares adoption cross-culturally. Some of the relevant differences we ought to attend to are outlined below.

The papers in this volume suggest that there are a number of psychological and psychosocial criteria that ought to be taken into account in any comparative analysis. These would include, for instance, the kinship categories involved, the age of adoption, whose needs and rights are being served, whether the adoption is secret or open, and the spatial distance between families. Are the relevant parties strangers or relatives, and are they creating a parental, sibling, or spousal relationship? Is the adoption carried out at birth, during childhood, or in adulthood? Is the adoption undertaken in

response to needs of the adoptee, the birth parents, the adoptive parents, or larger social groups? Do rights in children belong to individuals or extended families, houses, or clans? If secret, how does the adoptee come to learn of the “truth”? Often, both Kolshus and Rauchholz tell us, this seems to occur in the heat of a fight and as a mode of revenge, as someone blurts out the “truth” to a totally unsuspecting child. It does not take much imagination to understand the breach of trust—the “rope torn” (to use the Chuuk phrase) and the sudden upending of the world—that such an event must engender. If the adoption is open, does a child have easy access to both sets of parents, as is often the case in the Austral Islands, or is the child forcibly separated and/or beaten if he or she attempts to return to biological parents, as was noted for Chuuk society? Do birth families and adoptive families live in the same immediate social space, or are they separated by considerable distance? While many of these questions are significant on a purely psychological level, they also articulate in significant ways with the cultural and political economy of the specific societies and their relation to the hegemonies of the postcolonial and global orders.

In exploring the relation between psychological issues and the larger political economy, it is imperative to understand the importance of structures of gender, class, racial, and age hierarchies. How do these contribute to the rates of sexual, emotional, and physical abuse in the population at large relative to the adoptive population? How are unplanned pregnancies and unmarried mothers understood and valued? Are children of unmarried mothers highly stigmatized (as in New Caledonia), or are they accepted and accommodated (as among the Dani or the Austral Islanders)? How are different ideas of property and inheritance linked to different forms of kinship relation such that adoptees’ rights of inheritance are ensured or contested?

Looking more broadly, there are a number of economic, political, and cultural issues that must be addressed in any comparative analysis of adoption. Most basically, what is the purpose of adoption? Is it part of a system of open gift exchange or is it a means to secure household labor and service? Is it an expression of nurturance and care of dependents (as in the Marshall Islands) or a means to resolve tensions and disputes between hierarchically ranked siblings (as in Chuuk society)? Is adoption seen as an unwanted burden of an additional child in the context of economic and social privation (as in New Caledonia); or is it seen as a “highly desirable addition” of a child and the means to expand the lineage in a context of high infant mortality (as among the Dani)? How is adoption valued relative to other forms of kin making? Is it a way of constituting chiefly and royal lines (as it was,

historically, in Hawai'i); a means of creating or perpetuating alliances; or a way of producing despised and stigmatized subordinates? Is adoption taking place in the context of social collapse (as it seems to be in New Caledonia) or of population explosion and land scarcity (as recently in Mota Island); or is it a means of cultural revival and retreat from the brink of extinction (as it has been in the Marshall and Austral Islands). Has adoption been stigmatized by the particular cultural understandings that inform ideas of what counts as modernization, development, and civilization that are central to colonial, missionary, and legal efforts in many parts of the world; or has it become a signifier of indigenous understandings and rights in the context of anticolonial and sovereignty movements (as in Hawai'i and Guam)?

It is essential that we undertake a nuanced analysis of the relation between adoption and the manifestations of abuse, violence, and trauma and not automatically presume that (particularly nonbiological) adoptive relations entail higher risks of violence. Rather, we should ask how the incidence of abuse, violence, and trauma increases or decreases when *specific* forms of adoption are carried out *in specific ways, within specific historical contexts, and shaped by specific hierarchies of cultural valuation and power*. Nonbiological and flexible forms of kinship in places like Oceania have historically been devalued, marginalized, and stigmatized by missionary and colonial regimes, as noted above. Our work should seek to understand the subtleties of forms of kin making that do not accord with our own at the same time that we seek to discover the causes of trauma, abuse, and violence that may attend *any* form of relatedness.

Conclusion

It is a sign of the productivity of this special issue that it has generated as many new questions as it has answered. The strength of *Relative Power* is that it has placed issues relating to the transfer of children in the context of the power inequalities that have shaped both the specific relations of gender and kinship in Oceania and the histories of colonization, sovereignty movements, and the forces of contemporary globalization in the Pacific. And, in drawing upon recent innovations in the study of kinship, gender, and culture, the essays in this special issue have shown that the study of child transfer illuminates much not only about the intimate particularities of diverse forms of family making but also about the ways in which these diverse forms have been critical players in the grander narratives and larger realities of colonization, development, globalization, and sovereignty movements. The special issue's strength thus also lies in the ways in which it places adoption squarely

at the center of the entangled histories of anthropological theories of kinship and modernization. It has revealed much about these entanglements and, in the process, compels us to probe further into the knotty issues that have come to light in the process.

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