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 phrase[2]), 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 Hawaiʻi 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 turns 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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