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 matrilines 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 elabo-
rate 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 par-
ticularly widespread in areas where matriliny 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 con-
cludes that matriliny "is more likely to stimulate the development of autono-
mous political institutions than is patriliny" (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
patriliny 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 patriliny easily incor-
porates new people whereas matriliny 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 biological[3] 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 geo-graphically 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 adop-tive 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 discus-sion, 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 con-ceived 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 hus-band 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 father[10] 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 Velicitas 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 (*malamala*) and not a child (*mwera*) 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 patrilateral use rights in his tarañiu's land.

Part II: Changes

The most common reasons for adopting a child have already been men-tioned. Childlessness or having only either boys or girls is a typical motiva-tion, 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 *Suqe* 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 virtu-
ally 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 seri-
ously challenged during the past five decades. In earlier days, the punish-
ment 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, gar-
dens, 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 charm-
ing 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 conse-
quently 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 occur-
rence 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 ideo-
logical 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 matriliny 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 matrilateral or patrilateral 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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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 vatñōreag*) 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 matri-lineages. 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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