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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Raivavae: The Setting

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

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

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

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

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

Kinship, Caregiving, and Adoption on Raivavae

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adoption on Raivavae

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grandparent-Initiated Adoptions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Patterns of Grandparent Caregiving and Adoption on Raivavae in 1994

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Changing Contexts for Grandparent Caregiving

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Patterns of Grandparent Caregiving and Adoption in 2004

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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