A TRANSACTION IN AMBIVALENCE: ADOPTION IN CONTEMPORARY HIGHLANDS PAPUA

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reproduction in a Frontier Culture

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

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

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

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

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

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

These values pertaining to marriage and parenting retain much of their ideological clout among second-generation urban dwellers, many of whom are pursuing novel opportunities afforded them by the incorporation of the province into Indonesia and the implementation of broad state policies of development. In particular, Dani views of successful parenting and childrearing are increasingly being challenged by their observations of the lifestyle practices of the approximately 15,000 Indonesian migrants[3] who have relocated to Wamena from other parts of Indonesia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adoption Stories

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

Case 1: Ivan Adopts a Daughter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Case 2: A "Bad Girl" Gets Pregnant

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Transaction in Ambivalence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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