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

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

Introduction

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

Pacific Studies, Vol. 31, Nos. 3/4—Sept./Dec. 2008

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

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

Historical Review of Adoption in Chuuk

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

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

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

Initial Encounters with Adoption

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Solidifying the Data

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Problem of Expressed and Unexpressed Emotions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peacemaker

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

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

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

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

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

> "The real burden is on me and my sister. We are caught in between emotionally. At times, when I am alone, I would just cry, cry, cry."
> "Because of this burden?"
> "Yes."
> "Have you talked to your sister about this?"
> "Yes. She complains: How come these people always tell us these problems and always bring their problems to us? They are just thinking of themselves and not thinking of how hard it is on us!" (Sam)

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

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

Problem of Residency

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

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

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

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

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

Problem of Secrecy

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

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

Grandparents and Adoption

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

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

Cinderella Overtones in Adoption

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

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

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

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

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

Adoption and Child Abuse

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

Brief Look beyond Chuuk

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

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

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

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

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

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