

CHANGING CONTEXTS FOR GRANDPARENT ADOPTION ON RAIVAVAE, FRENCH POLYNESIA

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This paper examines change in grandparent adoption and care of grandchildren on the Austral island of Raivavae in French Polynesia. The focus is on how Raivavaens have utilized the flexible, negotiable, and contingent institution of grandparent adoption as a strategy for coping with changing global/local linkages, out-migration for employment, and introduction of nonindigenous institutions and processes. The inherent flexibility of the adoptive relationship is apparently enabling Raivavaens to mold it in ways that serve a new set of needs and circumstances, most of which reside with the grandchild's parents rather than the grandparents. Grandparents appear to have extended and otherwise altered their adoption roles and responsibilities in large part to meet the needs and aspirations of the grandchild's parents, their adult children. This represents a significant shift in Raivavaen attitudes and values.

IN RECENT YEARS the caregiving roles that grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren have been a focus of research in a wide variety of cultural contexts (Bahr 1994; Burton, Dilworth-Anderson, and Merriwether-deVries 1995; Cattell 1989, 1994; Hirshorn 1998; Ikels 1998; Jendrek 1993; Shomaker 1989; Weibel-Orlando 1997). Diana Shomaker (1989), for example, explores changing patterns in the adoption or fosterage of Navajo grandchildren by their grandparents. In the past, grandchildren would be "given" to grandparents to show respect and to provide the grandparents with a source of help. Grandchildren would be expected to live with their grandparents until they reached adulthood. More recently, it is the changed life circumstances of the adult children (biological parents), not the needs of the parents

(adopting parents), that have triggered the fosterage or adoption of grandchildren by grandparents. A similar shift in context also impacts the care that grandparents give to grandchildren on the French Polynesian island of Raivavae.

Although the grandparent/grandchild relationship has not been extensively explored by Polynesian researchers, grandparents in all Polynesian societies provide a continuum of both temporary and long-term care to grandchildren in a variety of contexts and relationships (see e.g., Brooks 1976; Hooper 1970). One particularly well-documented type of extended caregiving is created when grandparents adopt the children of their biological and/or adopted children. Grandparent adoption is part of a geographically specific social process in which the adoptive relationship is flexible, contingent, and informal (Baddeley 1982; Donner 1987; Elliston 1997; Firth 1957; Howard and Kirkpatrick 1989; Huntsman 1971; Modell 1995; Shore 1976).

It has been suggested that the flexible and contingent nature of Polynesian adoption has offered these Pacific islanders some advantage in dealing with changing global/local linkages, high levels of out-migration for employment (Brooks 1976; Hooper 1970; Ottino 1970), and the introduction of nonindigenous institutions and processes (Baddeley 1982; Modell 1995). In this paper, I review the existing ethnography of grandparent adoption in diverse French Polynesian groups as a way to contextualize and provide a comparative framework for my analysis of how people living on the Austral island of Raivavae have utilized the fluid and contingent social institution of grandparent adoption as a strategy for adapting to changing patterns of out-migration.

Grandparent Adoption in French Polynesia

Residents of all five archipelagoes (Society, Tuamotus, Marquesas, Gambier, and Austral) in French Polynesia learn and understand the contemporary Tahitian language. Most Tahitian dictionaries include two words for adoption: *tavai*, which means to adopt in a formal and legal way, and *fa'a'amu*, which means to informally (nonlegally) adopt a "feeding child." Throughout this paper, I use the term adoption to refer to the informal relationship that is created through the feeding of and caring for a child. It is generally agreed that adoption is one type of caregiving relationship that exists between relatives, including grandchildren and grandparents (Brooks 1976; Hooper 1970; Levy 1970).

Today, as in the past, adoption is a highly significant process in the formation of social relationships in French Polynesia (Brooks 1976; Elliston

1997; Levy 1973). In fact, in some communities, adopted children can be found in over 40 percent of island households. Most regional ethnographers agree on the key characteristics of the adoptive relationship. First, adoption is a situational, negotiable, and contingent social process that defies precise definition. Elliston (1997), Levy (1970), and Oliver (1974, 1981) document a continuum of situations and contexts involving adoptive children in households. The biological parents, the adoptive parents, and the child negotiate and define the residential and inheritance options of the child, the nature of the interaction between the child and his/her adoptive and biological parents, the transfer of jural responsibility from the biological to the adoptive parents, and the duration of the relationship.

Second, the adoption of children should be initiated by close family members such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles because these members share in the ownership of such resources as land, personal names, and children (Hooper 1970). It is also expected that close family members would not harm a child of the family (Elliston 1997). In fact, it is a child's filial obligation to "give" their offspring to their parents (Brooks 1976; Elliston 1997; Finney 1973; Hanson 1970; Hooper 1970; Kay 1963; Kirkpatrick 1983; Langevin 1990; Levy 1970, 1973; Lockwood 1993; Oliver 1981; Ottino 1970).

Third, it is culturally accepted that grandparents have a special affection for grandchildren, and that special bonds exist between grandparents and grandchildren. In fact, higher status is given to children who are adopted by their grandparents (Hooper 1970). In the future grandchildren should care for the grandparents to repay them for their selfless love, care, and *arofa* (charity).

Researchers have suggested various reasons for why grandparents adopt grandchildren. Grandparents are often motivated to adopt a grandchild if they believe that the child's parents are not able or willing to nurture the infant. Quality-of-life issues are especially compelling when adult children have migrated and are trying to support their families in urban areas (Brooks 1976). Adoption can also ensure that one will have a caregiver in old age (Danielsson 1955; Elliston 1997).

And finally, the adoption of grandchildren by grandparents provides a mechanism to replace the lost household labor of children who have migrated elsewhere. Grandparents and grandchildren, as resident members, maintain family connections and control over both land and other resources (Hooper 1970; Ottino 1970).

The above discussion provides a context for understanding how the character of grandparent adoption on the Austral island of Raivavae in French Polynesia has been shaped by both shifting patterns of local/global linkages

and the motivations of parents to help their children and grandchildren maximize their opportunities.

Raivavae: The Setting

I conducted research on Raivavae in 1994, 2002, and 2004 as part of a longitudinal study of the impact on island residents of an airport constructed between 1999 and 2003. Data collection in 1994 focused on a sample of 152 out of a total of 182 households. Ninety-two of these households were revisited in 2002. In 2004, one area of my research effort focused on interviews with residents who were involved in grandparent adoption.

Raivavae is one of the five Austral Islands included in the French Overseas Territory of French Polynesia. It is a six-square-mile volcanic island that is almost completely encircled by a series of twenty-five coral atolls. The 1,049 residents of Raivavae in 2004 lived in a total of 206 households.

The Evangelical Church of French Polynesia remains the only social institution on the island, and 95 percent of adults spend all day Sunday and two or three evenings a week involved in church-related activities. Islanders receive education in both French and Tahitian and speak Tahitian at home. In some older adults households Raivavae is also spoken. A cargo ship that visits about once a month has been serving the island since the 1960s. Social welfare benefits such as free medical care, educational allocations, and retirement benefits were also extended to residents of French Polynesia in the 1960s.

Because of Raivavae's limited educational and employment opportunities, the out-migration of young people and young couples in their late teens and twenties is a routine but temporary part of the life-course of most residents, as it is throughout the island Pacific (e.g., Flinn 1992; Graves and Graves 1974; Lockwood 1993). The circulatory migration of residents (especially between Raivavae and the capital of Papeete) is also motivated by medical needs, the need to attend church meetings, and the desire to visit friends and relatives. Although circulatory migration is a routine part of life, most Raivavae residents feel that Papeete is not a good place and that life there is far inferior to life on Raivavae.

Changing Contexts for Grandparent Caregiving

During the 1990s, a series of environmental events brought a great deal of change to island life. A very damaging cyclone hit the island in 1994 and led to the poisoning and subsequent banning of the fish in the lagoon (until 2009) as a source of food. Later, a fruit fly infestation made its way to Raivavae on

a New Zealand yacht, and there were no local tree crops available for local consumption or export.

Men's subsistence production of taro and fish has always been the mainstay of most households. The importance of men's fishing has declined since the fish contamination. Although the local marine life should be free from contamination by 2009, frozen fish and chicken, carried to the island by the cargo ship, continue to replace fresh fish in the local diet.

The opportunity to gain work on the construction of the airport brought more part-time jobs to resident households and also drew a small number of skilled workers who had migrated back to the island. The availability of these jobs resulted in a decline in the subsistence production of taro. For the first time, households were selling taro to each other. In many households, rice was more common than taro. New stores, stocked with Western processed foods, were created to serve the tastes of the workers brought in to work on the airstrip. The lack of potable water also became a problem. Those households that could afford it either bought bottled water or installed filtration systems in their homes. In a short period of time, the local diet had changed from one based on taro, fish, and fruit to one based on frozen fish or chicken and rice. Fresh water was now replaced by bottled water.

In the minds of older village residents, the effects of these changes on the local quality of life led to the increased emigration of their children and grandchildren. An examination of Census figures for 1996 and 2002 (Iles Australes Ministère des Archipels 1998, 2002) supports this impression. Although the out-migration of young people in their late teens and twenties is an established demographic pattern, during the period 1988–2002, Raivavae lost about 20 percent of its population. Much of this change can be attributed to the combined impact of a declining birth rate and the emigration of persons in the fifteen- to thirty-year-old age group.

When I asked residents in 2002 about the impact of the 1990s changes outlined above, a common response was that the poisoning and contamination of food resources on Raivavae had driven more young people away. Many residents feared that their relocation would be permanent. Some couples with good income-earning opportunities and family support in Papeete took their children with them. The majority of couples, however, left one or more children behind with their parents. How have Raivavaens utilized the flexible nature of grandparent adoption as a means to adapt to a unique wave of out-migration stimulated by environmental change?

Being a Grandparent on Raivavae

As Flinn (2007) and Torsch (2007) describe for Pollapese and Chamorros in Micronesia, on Raivavae, the aging process is closely interconnected with

being a grandparent. Although most Raivavaens become grandparents in their forties, they are placed in two life-course categories depending on their social engagement and physical health (see also Levy 1973; Oliver 1974, 1981). Younger grandparents, those in their forties and fifties, would be considered adults or *ta'ata pa'ari*. Islanders told me that people in this life-course category are considered wise and mature human beings who have settled down with one partner to raise a family and perform their culturally appropriate gender roles. They receive respect and have authority and influence both within and outside their households because of their skillful role performance, maturity, and experience. In 1996, about 28 percent of Raivavaens were at least forty years of age and so could potentially be members of this life-course category.

The secondary category, *ta'ata ru'au* (old person), applies to older grandparents. Raivavaens told me that people who are at least sixty years of age, stay at home a lot, and withdraw from work are considered to be in this category. This can be a positive experience; some older grandparents now look forward to spending their newly acquired leisure time in the company of their grandchildren. As in many societies (Ikels 1998), contemporary elders on Raivavae control a number of valuable resources, and older people continue to maintain control of the most important household resource on a small volcanic island—land. After the age of fifty-five, all older adults are also eligible to receive monthly retirement benefits, which on an island with few income-earning opportunities can be an important contribution to their households. Knowledge of the past is not really a contemporary resource of consequence because most young people have little interest in these memories. Today, older people may not have much voice and impact on community affairs because of their physical and mental decline. Some, however, who have been active and respected in the Evangelical Church, can maintain their social importance for a longer period of time. In 1996, about 9 percent of Raivavaens were at least sixty years of age and so potentially would be considered members of this life-course category.

Although people on Raivavae did not mention a third life-course category of “decrepit,” a distinction between decrepit and intact old people is widespread throughout Polynesia. Both Levy (1973) and Oliver (1981) noted that old Tahitians who become chronically weak, feeble, senile, and helpless are called *'aru'aru* (decrepit) and both authors describe other Tahitians as contemptuous of those considered decrepit. Barker (1997) documents the same practice on the western Polynesian island of Niue.

Observation of daily life on Raivavae confirms that both older and younger grandparents experience great joy when they are in the company of their grandchildren. On Raivavae, as on the island of Rapa (Hanson 1970),

grandmothers are very often given more affection and authority than grandfathers. During my conversations with local women, many grandmothers referred to their grandchildren as their pearls.

Raivavaen children can and do receive care from a wide variety of relatives including grandparents. It is common for grandmothers to help their children by looking after grandchildren while parents work or attend school or church meetings. Grandparents can also step in to assist their children when they experience an illness or life crisis. Since most Raivavaen grandparents live in independent households in either a family compound or in close proximity to their children, grandchildren either move in with grandparents, or grandmothers help with childcare and food preparation, and return to their own homes to sleep at night.

Flinn (2007) suggests that on Pollap in Micronesia the grandparent role is seen as an extension of the parental role and focuses equally on both adult children and grandchildren. The care grandparents give to grandchildren is motivated by their desire to help their adult children as well as the grandchildren themselves. While caregiving to grandchildren by grandparents on Raivavae can also be seen as an extension of the care given to adult children, Raivavaens seem to recognize that there is a qualitative difference between the care given to children and grandchildren because there are special and unique bonds of affection that link grandparents and grandchildren.

Grandparent Adoption on Raivavae, 1994–2004

Although Raivavaens do not use the Tahitian word *tavai* (to adopt in a formal and legal way) to refer to Western forms of legal adoption, they are aware that there is a difference between *tavai* adoption and *fa'a'amu*, the informal feeding form of adoption. Like other Polynesians, people on Raivavae recognize grandparent adoption as part of a social process in which the adoptive relationship is flexible, negotiated, contingent, and informal.

The initiation of adoptive relationships has increased since I have been working on the island. In 1994, 56 percent of the sampled households had at least one adopted child; by 2002, 65 percent of households included at least one adopted child. My conversations with residents involved in grandparent adoptions helped me to identify patterns in the structure of and motivations for these relationships. In what follows I will describe these patterns and highlight variations that I have observed in the patterns during my ten years of work on the island.

First, the adoption of grandchildren by grandparents is the most common form of adoptive relationship on Raivavae. Residents prefer grandparent

adoption because they feel that the special bonds of love and affection that connect the two generations ensure that the child will receive quality care. Grandparent adoption also ensures that valuable resources will remain under the control of closely related kin. The adoption of grandchildren by grandparents has increased through time. In 1994, grandparent adoptions accounted for 74 percent of all adoptions; by 2002, 78 percent of all adoptions involved grandparents.

A second pattern is that most adoptions created before 1994 were initiated by paternal grandparents before or shortly after the birth of the child. In fact, it is a child's filial obligation to give an offspring to their parents if they request one. Although children are obligated to meet the demands of their parents, many couples have difficulty parting with a newborn. Peni, a thirty-five-year-old woman, had such an experience. Peni's mother-in-law had permanently relocated to Papeete in the 1980s because of chronic medical problems. Shortly after this move, Peni gave birth to her first-born son. Her mother-in-law immediately claimed the child based on her belief that caring for a newborn would bring her the energy and motivation to regain her health. Peni and her husband wanted to keep the child but they did not feel able to say no to Peni's mother-in-law. Now, Peni feels that it was a good decision because her son has a close family member to care for him while he attends school in Papeete.

In 2002 and 2004, a number of grandparents told me they think that more grandchildren are being adopted now, and that more of these adoptions are being initiated by children than before. Sometimes in the past, parents of a child would ask one of the grandmothers (usually the husband's mother) if an adoptive relationship could be created with their child when they migrated to Papeete or elsewhere in search of greater opportunities. In the past, migration was seen as more of a temporary stage in the life course and most couples did return to Raivavae after they had earned enough money to build their own home. The story of Gerard and Tahukaarei provides a good example of this new pattern in the initiation of adoptive relationships.

Gerard (age fifty-seven) and his wife Tahukaarei (age sixty-three) adopted two of their grandchildren. Unlike other households, both grandparents were very involved in the caregiving relationship. All of the couple's children were grown. One of their couple's daughters had married a man from the Austral island of Rapa, and they moved to Rapa to establish their own household because the man had a job there. When the couple's children came of school age, they asked the wife's parents to look after and care for these grandchildren on Raivavae because the primary school on Raivavae was far superior to the school on Rapa. The grandparents were expected to look after these grandchildren until they were ready to attend secondary school

off-island. Although the children returned to live with their parents on Rapa during school vacations, daily responsibility and expenses for the grandchildren fell to their grandparents. When I talked with the grandparents in 2004, they told me that they were happy to help their daughter provide the best for their grandchildren, and that they wanted to take the burden off of the parents so that the parents could take advantage of their opportunities. The pattern illustrated in this case is an important change from the past when grandparent adoptions were initiated by and meant to benefit the adopting grandparent couple.

While many grandparents want to help their children and insure the welfare of the grandchildren, they may not feel that this greater provision of care is the best thing for the grandchildren. This was certainly the sentiment portrayed to me by one grandmother. Tehina, aged sixty-six in 1994, lived in a family compound surrounded by the homes of her three married sons and their families. Her youngest son, Emile, had migrated to Papeete to find work in 1991, and in the process had met a woman and fathered a child. When the relationship fell apart shortly thereafter, Emile returned to Raivavae with his young daughter and moved in with his parents. Emile spent most of his time on Raivavae fishing and producing taro for the family. While he worked, his daughter, Heina, was left in the care of her grandmother Tehina. This was not easy for Tehina. Heina was an extremely active child so that her grandmother spent most of the day chasing after her. At least in the evening, Emile did take care of his daughter after he returned from the taro farm. One day in 1994, however, Emile got word that a long-term construction job awaited him in Papeete, so he left on the next cargo ship, asking his mother to take Heina as her adopted child. Although she was not thrilled at her age to be the primary caregiver to a young and very active child, she felt that she could not say no to her son's requests. Tehina told me she would not have minded taking the child as a *fa'a'amu* if the child had been old enough to help her around the house. She agreed to the request, however, because she knew how difficult it was to find employment and she didn't want to stand in the way of her son's opportunity. In 2002, Emile returned to Raivavae to build a house for himself and his daughter, and to help his mother, but Heina is still considered a *fa'a'amu* of Tehina.

A third pattern from the past was that parents had the right to ask to adopt a first-born grandchild. Although always difficult, older Raivavaens told me that children rarely turned down this request. Today, the fact that more adoptions are now being initiated by children does not mean that grandparents no longer demand grandchildren for adoption. Changing social and environmental contexts including the monetization of the economy also seem to empower some young couples to refuse the request for grandparent

adoption. According to Peni, the giving of first-born children especially to the paternal grandmothers has declined since 1994 because contemporary mothers want to be close to their children. Peni herself had refused the demands of her father for her last-born child. When Peni became pregnant with her last child in 1996, her father asked to adopt the child. After talking it over with her husband, Peni decided not to allow the adoption largely because her father's new wife showed little kindness to his five children. Nor had she allowed Peni's father to send Peni money for school supplies when she was at secondary school on another island, so that Peni had to "borrow" money to buy them. Peni told me in 2004 that if her father had been on his own, she would have allowed him to adopt his grandchild. She also told me that none of her siblings had allowed their father to adopt any of their children. In short, she was not alone in her rejection of a parent's request for adoption.

A fourth pattern from the past was that the timing of the actual adoption was influenced by the age, physical state, and needs of the grandparents. Younger and healthier grandparents usually adopted grandchildren shortly after birth so that the child would bond with the adoptive parents as soon as possible. Older, less healthy grandparents often adopted an older grandchild (seven or older) who would be able to help them. Most of the new *fa'a'mu* relationships initiated between 1994 and 2004 involved the adoption of children of at least five years of age by both younger and older grandparents. Thus, today it is more likely that the timing of an adoption will be influenced by the needs of the children and not the needs and capabilities of the grandparents.

Fifth, various motivating factors lead grandparents to initiate the adoption of grandchildren. Some grandmothers (and especially paternal grandmothers) exercised their right to adopt a grandchild and especially the first-born grandchild of each child (see also Danielsson 1955; Levy 1970). Many Raivavaen women told me that mothers become lonely when their adult children leave home, and this motivates them to ask their children for a grandchild who will bring life and joy back into the household (see also Brooks 1976; Hanson 1970; Oliver 1981).

This certainly was the motivation of a grandmother named Ina. In 1994, Ina and her husband were in their sixties. Although they had five biological children, they had also adopted numerous children throughout their married lives. Ina adored babies, so when her biological and adopted children (which included grandchildren, nieces, and nephews) became older, she sought to adopt a first-born grandchild to make her home complete. I was living in Ina's compound in 1994 when she demanded and received the first-born child of her youngest son. Today this *fa'a'mu* is especially important to Ina.

She lost the baby's father (her son) in a fishing accident only a few years later. Since the baby's mother is absent as well and living with another man on her home island elsewhere in the Australs, the grandson will remain with his grandmother for the rest of her life.

Grandmothers may also want to adopt their grandchildren if they feel that the parents lack either the resources or skills for caregiving. This is particularly true when the parents are adolescents since this is a period of the life course where young Raivavaens are not expected to act responsibly. My assistant Ronda is a case example. Her mother-in-law demanded her first-born child (a son) when he was born in 1984 because the marriage was unstable and Ronda was very young. The mother-in-law asked for the child because she was worried about the welfare of her grandson. Ronda, her husband, and her mother-in-law agreed that the boy would be returned to his biological parents after he finished his education. As it happened, however, the mother-in-law died in 2003 while the boy was still in school. Ronda had hoped that on her death bed her mother-in-law would release the boy so he could come back and live with Ronda and her family. Instead the mother-in-law asked the boy to care for his aunt, her daughter, who would be lonely after the death of her mother.

As others have reported for Manihi in the Tuamotus (Brooks 1976) and Raroia (Danielsson 1955), it is possible that on Raivavae the adoption of the grandchildren prior to 1994 was motivated by the need to replace the lost labor of children or a desire to maintain the strength and continuity of the localized descent group, and as a form of social security for the future. On the Austral island of Rapa, Hanson (1970) found that adopting grandchildren had a special economic value because it ensured that grandparents would be cared for in the event that that grandparents outlived their children.

Different motivations create a new pattern whereby children ask parents to adopt one or more of their children. Young couples I talked with in 2002 were concerned that recent changes affecting the quality of life on Raivavae had further reduced the number of economic opportunities on Raivavae, and many of these couples anticipated that living away from Raivavae would be a more permanent stage in the life course. It seems that the perception of migration as a permanent rather than temporary condition intensifies the motivation of parents to initiate an adoptive relationship between their children and a grandparent. Some young couples explained to me that they wanted their children to learn about their local language and culture; once they were established in Papeete they may ask one of the grandmothers to come to the city and claim an infant to be raised as an adoptive child in the grandparent household on Raivavae.

Other young couples had asked one of the grandmothers to adopt a young child before they left for Papeete because of concern that it would be too expensive to feed and educate a child in the city. These accounts suggest that the increase in the number of grandparent adoptions of the offspring of nonresident children could be the outcome of the motivations and initiatives of children.

Grandparent adoption as practiced on Raivavae in the 2000s provides an interesting contrast to the style of grandparent caregiving described by Flinn (2007) on Pollap in Micronesia. In both contexts circulatory migration is a fact of life. On Pollap, grandmothers follow their migrating adult children to help these children by raising their grandchildren. On Raivavae, however, adult migrating children are leaving their children on the island to be raised by grandparents.

Sixth, as in the past, the nature and duration of the adoptive relationship continues to be negotiated and contingent upon the desires of the parents, grandparents, and child. These aspects of the adoptive relationship can be renegotiated as the circumstances of all parties change. Peni, and her husband, for example, plan to renegotiate for an early return of their first-born son. At the time of the adoption in the 1980s, all parties (Peni, her husband, and Peni's mother-in-law) agreed that the child would stay with the mother-in-law until she died. Peni and her husband now want to renegotiate the relationship so that their son will be returned to them when he finishes his formal education in Papeete. They want to "call him home" sooner because they feel that the mother-in-law is not teaching their son to respect his biological parents.

Recent events in the life of a forty-year-old Raivavaen woman named Eleanore provided me with another good example of the contingent nature of the fa'a'amu relationship. Eleanore's youngest child was adopted by her parents when he was about one year old. One day, seven years later, he woke up, left his grandparents house and told his mother that he now wanted to live with her. No questions were asked and no explanation was ever given.

Seventh, the nature and intensity of care given in the context of grandparent adoption was importantly affected by whether or not the parents of the child were living on the island. In 1994, 93 percent of the parents of adopted grandchildren were living on Raivavae. Most of these adopted children maintained relations with both their parents and grandparents. In a small number of families, grandparents had full responsibility for the care and discipline of their adopted grandchild because their adult children lived off-island.

The intensity of grandparent caregiving on Raivavae is increasing through time. By 2002, 78 percent of the parents of adopted children were living on

Raivavae. When parents of the adopted child are off-island, all of the care and responsibility of the grandchildren falls to the grandparents and especially the grandmother. The increased emigration of children also means that some parents have lost the security and support of having their adult children living close by.

A final pattern in adoptive relationships evident in 1994 was that the care that children received from biological and/or adoptive parents should be reciprocated in the future. While some grandparents still believe this, many others do not. Gerard and Tahukaarei, for example, told me in 2004 that they are caring for their grandchildren out of love and they do not expect any reciprocal care from their grandchildren in the future.

Conclusion

On Raivavae, the institution of adoption and particularly grandparent adoption is flexible, contingent, and negotiated. It appears that the flexibility of this process has enabled residents to mold the adoptive relationship in ways that serve their current needs, as previous studies have reported for Rarotonga (Baddeley 1982) and Hawai'i (Modell 1995). In the past, the practice of grandparent adoption was closely tied to the motivations and needs of parents. Grandparents demanded grandchildren for a variety of reasons including the need for household help and a desire to have a special relationship with a grandchild.

Needs shifted in the 1990s. Various dramatic social and environmental changes saw an increased emigration of younger people and created a new context for the practice of grandparent adoption. New patterns have not replaced the old but reflect the efforts of Raivavaens to adapt the institution to a different set of needs. In contrast to the earlier pattern, many of the grandparent adoptions negotiated since the mid-1990s were requested by the adult child. Parents agreed to extend their grandchild caregiving to adoption in part because they wanted to help their adult children.

More recent changes also seem to have led some adult children to question the role that familial obligation plays in their decision making. In 1994, Raivavaens told me that individuals were expected to reciprocate the care that they received as a child. One way adult children could do this was by meeting the demands of their parents to adopt a grandchild. By 2002, some adult children were questioning and even refusing the demands of their parents to adopt grandchildren.

As noted earlier, some of the Raivavaen patterns of grandparent adoption recur throughout Polynesia and elsewhere in the Pacific. Interestingly, some of the same patterns in grandparent adoption have been identified by Shomaker (1989) among the Navajo people of Arizona. Although she uses

the term fosterage and I use the term adoption, the motivations behind the creation of these flexible relationships are very similar. In the past, children responded to the authority of parents and especially mothers by agreeing to their demands to foster a grandchild. More recently, it is often the needs and life circumstances of children that trigger the creation of foster relationships between the grandmother and grandchildren.

Figures from the most recent 2002 census on Raivavae reveal a continued decline in population, and this could increase the number of older people involved in this new pattern of grandchild adoption. It is hoped that research concerning the changing contexts and motivations for grandparent adoption can positively contribute to the development of social, economic, and other support services for the growing number of grandmothers throughout the Pacific and around the world who are being asked to become the primary caregivers to grandchildren.

NOTES

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