Adopting an Obligation: moral reasoning about Bougainvillan children’s access to social services in New Ireland

Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer

Citation for published version (APA):

Published in:
The Anthropology of Moralities

Citing this paper
Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester’s Takedown Procedures [http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.
Chapter 9

ADOPTING AN OBLIGATION: MORAL REASONING ABOUT BOUGAINVILEAN CHILDREN’S ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES IN NEW IRELAND

Karen Sykes

This chapter elaborates a case study in the various negotiations over the moral value of obligation, whereby people justify and challenge the state’s responsibility to provide social services for children in Papua New Guinea (PNG) after a decade of violent political conflict within Bougainville Island. Just as Gluckman (1955, 1963) used the ethnographic case study to illuminate how a person’s actions could seem unreasonable in the eyes of state courts but be reasonable within the detailed description of the paradoxes of their specific situation, I use this case study to show that apparently difficult reasoning about obligations is actually sensible when the PNG state meets responsibilities to citizens. Gluckman demonstrated the universal presence of the ‘reasonable man’ in his careful ethnography, thereby toppling assumptions about the impossibility of self-government in the post-colonial nation. Like Gluckman, I argue that the moral value of obligation for the ‘reasonable man’ is not grounded in cultural relativism or Western rationality, but is firmly situated in detailed
ethnographic description that describes how that value informs the social actions of reasonable people.

As a subject of enquiry, the moral obligation is not new. This contemporary case study elucidates a single instance of the more general theory of obligation, which early anthropologists at the start of the twentieth century had advocated for the political issues of their own times. Durkheim and Mauss had argued that obligation, rather than need or utility, should be a value by which the state delivered social services to its citizenry (Durkheim 1973; Gane 1992; Fournier 2005). The two social scientists recognised very well that the impetus to meet moral obligations was embedded in social life, so they proposed to consider the value of obligation to social relations with the state in some depth. Durkheim argued that the cultivation of a sense of obligation was a cornerstone of modern education, as it was in socialisation processes in many other societies. Mauss aimed to make a general theory of obligation pertinent to France in his day, by comparing specific cases of gift exchange across cultures. Fournier (2005) discusses how Durkheim and Mauss advocated the value of meeting obligations against the abstract concept of rights in the utilitarian trends of their day, as exemplified by the thought of Leon Bourgeois, the Nobel economist distinguished for his theory of social democracy, which awarded social services on the basis of human need. Gane (1992) argued that their theory of morality based in obligations enabled, rather than disenabled social democratic policies of the French state at the turn of the century. This is not news to many anthropologists: Mauss argued against the concept of 'need' as a social value, as readers of The Gift (1990 [1925]) recall of Mauss's discussion of the state and moral obligation in its last chapter.

My aim for this chapter about obligation as a moral value in the Islands Region of PNG is very modest, and simply accepts the insight of Mauss's splendid general comparative theory that people feel obliged to reciprocate out of interest in their common good (see Godelier 1999). I share Mauss's critical project by showing that obligation is one possible moral value amongst others. He interrogated the utilitarian motivation underlining the contemporary French state's work in providing services by elaborating the different cases in which obligation was a moral value. I propose, by way of interrogation of a specific case in which some Papua New Guineans debate the delivery of social services, that Durkheim's and Mauss's concept of moral obligation aids anthropological understanding of lived experience in its totality in contemporary PNG post-colonial politics, where the negotiation of obligation is as much in the midst of villager lives as it is in the centre of state politics. The contemporary liberal era differs in so far as states are charged to show their viability and
legitimacy by putting the responsibility to provide social services into the hands of private business; meanwhile, international regulatory organisations, groups such as the ILO, Amnesty International and Transparency International, appeal to the new international social mores to monitor the provision.2

There is a more provocative aim in treating obligation as a moral value in a liberal democratic state, namely that it contrasts with human rights as a moral value. In the first section of this chapter, I describe how obligation contrasts with rights as a moral value in an unusual grass-roots attempt to access social services on behalf of children caught in the peace processes following the crisis of civil war in Bougainville. I discuss the detailed example of New Irelanders’ successful inter-provincial legal adoption of Bougainvillean children in the aftermath of civil war in the North Solomons as a specific social action in the progress towards peace, which they perceived to be part of the wider effort to ameliorate the delivery of social services to citizens in Bougainville and to establish a new morality of obligation to inform and shape Bougainville and PNG politics. My analysis of inter-provincial adoptions, as a way of negotiating access to social services in the aftermath of civil strife in Bougainville,3 demonstrates the potential for Mauss’s study of obligation in the contemporary concerns raised by indigenous sovereign states or Fourth World political constituencies.4 I show that moral obligation is known best through negotiations of social action whether in Mauss’s analysis of tribal or state life. In the present case, negotiations of the value of obligation become an instrumental step towards peace, a means to nurture the future of PNG citizens and a collective claim on the PNG State to provide social services for children across the country.

**The Bougainville Case: From Right to Obligation as a Moral Value**

This case study from the equatorial Islands Region of PNG5 demonstrates how people kept obligations to provide children access to social services by making inter-provincial legal adoption6 and thereby exposed the possibility of charging the state with its obligation to provide services of health care and education for its citizens. I shall examine here how some Bougainvillean children were surrendered for adoption from a crisis-torn province of the North Solomons and legally adopted by a number of New Ireland matrilineal clans in PNG throughout the late 1990s during the political crisis in the region. It is not clear at first glance why clans and individuals legally adopt refugee children, while fostering relations
would provide them with the same access to service. However, I show through a detailed case study that reasonable judgement about social service provision is underpinned by ‘obligation’ to care for others as a moral value. By interrogating how different clans and the state in the wider Islands Region of PNG legally adopt children in order to rescue them from the conflict and provide them with social services, I show how this legal action is reasonable on the basis of obligation as a moral value, which people also expect of the state.

The case shows that New Irelanders decided consciously to meet the obligation to provide access to education and health services for Bougainvillean children, and thus they precipitated discussions of the obligations of the state. The Islands Region first intitiated direct action for children’s access to state services as a form of protest, then as part of a means to secure peace and finally as an instrument of establishing rights of citizens in the long-term process of social reconstruction. The PNG customary adoption process, working with national laws, was predisposed to encompass the changes to the delivery of education and health services precipitated by the Bougainville crisis.

It should be noted that New Irelanders did not petition the state to confer abstract rights for children, the usual rights of citizens. But in pegging obligation as a moral value they succeeded in turning a bad into a good situation. Access to social services emerged as a central concern of the Bougainvillean crisis, and international attention was drawn to watch over the management of the crisis. International delegations enquired into the claims that Bougainvillean children suffered abuses of civil rights to access health care and education and asked for the reinstatement of these in 1994. In the process towards accomplishing peaceful social order, the government aimed to prove its legitimacy by fulfilling its duty to provide health and education for all citizens, and yet it faltered. In its wake, citizens from elsewhere in the New Guinea Islands Region took control. The case is exemplary for current concerns: children’s vulnerabilities in the restructuring of global capital that precipitates shifts of social milieux in the post-colony when changes in socialisation entail changing social needs for children of transnational communities (Appadurai 1996, Ong 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) had asked governments and non-government organisations to demonstrate protection of children’s human rights. Ethnographers have asked if this a matter of a universal humanitarian principle (Sargent and Scheper-Hughes 1998). Or should the UNCRC result in better international law (Stephens 1995)? As I show, New Irelanders and Bougainvillean children were concerned with state obligations, rather than statements of children’s rights or international recognition of human rights.
It is clear, despite the contemporary concern with state obligations, that a history of international concern for Bougainvilleans’ rights can be understood as a background to the present effort to call upon the state to meet its responsibility. The story begins before the world’s attention turned to Bougainville Island, of North Solomons Province (NSP), after the Bougainvilleans’ call for international assistance in confronting the PNG Defense Force, which the PNG state had sent to quell a local movement for compensation and autonomy when it exploded in 1989. For over twenty years before, Bougainvilleans had sought compensation from Bougainvillean Copper (a subsidiary of the British-based multinational company, Rio-Tinto), which operated one of the world’s largest open-pit copper mines in the southern region of their province, for damages to society, land and environment caused by the operations. They also called for compensation from the PNG government, an investment partner in the mine, because it had used mining profits to support the independent state. The situation came to crisis point when the company shut down its operation after Bougainvilleans destroyed mining machinery. In what appeared to be punitive actions, the PNG state embargoed trade and withdrew education and health services from residents.

Amnesty International had petitioned the PNG government about NSP citizens’ rights to social services. Health care and education were partly restored with the help of PNG teachers, nurses, doctors, and clergy from other Islands Region provinces. In particular, people from nearby New Ireland had come to Bougainville as government employees and as volunteers to make the peace, along with a small international corps of unarmed peace monitors overseeing the delivery of social services. When the PNG government failed to pay wages to the government employees (which was an indirect result of the period of capital restructuring in the 1990s) the peace workers from across PNG came to depend upon the people of South Bougainville to feed and house them. The real work of restoring infrastructure was impeded while PNG workers depended upon the South Bougainvillian population. Nevertheless, new relationships of mutual trust and interdependence grew between Bougainvilleans and New Irelonders as they struggled to find ways to give children access to modern services. They found an unusual solution by considering the complex web of obligations that could be woven in social actions in which obligation was valued.

Bougainvillean clans chose to use innovative PNG adoption laws, which allowed another clan within PNG to adopt their children within a wider understanding of obligation to care for others’ children. In PNG, post-colonial legal adoptions are new, in so far as the legal paperwork
for such arrangements had not been a part of village life until the 1990s, some twenty years after the possibility existed in the nation’s constitution. Notably, Luluaki (1990) asks that PNG law must also address the transformation of kinship values as part of adoption processes if it is to aspire to be fair-minded in the work of jurisprudence. In the case of the legal agreements between New Ireland clans and Bougainvillean clans, which I shall describe here, the legal adoption does not negate the claims of natal clans but affirms a complex web of connections across the provinces that obligated all three clans involved in the act: the birth clan, the adoptive mother’s clan and the adoptive father’s clan. Clans in Bougainville arranged to send their children out of the province for adoption, with the help of Bougainvillean lawyers who were resident across the Islands Region. Children found homes with the Islands Region men and women who had come to restore social services to Bougainville. Bougainvilleans reasoned that away from NSP the children would have access to health care, which they would not have in the event of illness in their home province. In cases I have studied from New Ireland, a man footed the legal bill as an adoptive father. His financial support will make the Bougainvillean child a member of his New Ireland wife’s matrilineal clan (rather than a child of a nuclear family). New Irelanders and North Solomons people recognised that formal adoption was an opportunity to use legal adoption to open pathways of kinship in claiming rights as citizens in relation to the state, the clan and their children. At the same time, by using legal adoption, PNG Islanders protected children’s well being, not through establishing children’s rights as abstract concepts, but by enjoining each party in mutual obligations of the state and respective clans to protect the child’s well-being. Lawyers’ many reports to me on the adoption process confirmed that courts normally approved the adoption of Bougainvillean children by New Irelanders because the children were surrendered by caring clans, who could not provide health and education because the PNG state had prevented them from doing so during and after the embargo on these social services. Further, the court recorded the Bougainville clans’ surrender to the New Ireland adoptive clans, and thereby established the whereabouts of the children and their social identity in New Ireland so that they would never lose their Bougainvillean identity. Moral reasoning about obligation had a very social and human face, which did not reside in the abstractions of legal rights.

Legal decisions of this kind were possible because in the New Guinea Islands Region clanship and citizenship are not conceptualised by people at the grass roots as oppositional forms of society with divergent conflictive rights, but as complementary and related forms of social life.
Clanship, with its associated notions of moral obligation and responsibility, is articulated through idioms of nurturance and mutuality transcending generations and is also a key modality through which citizenship is accessed. This was particularly the case in the context of trans-provincial adoption, whereby those communities excluded from full participation in state-defined citizenship utilised the institution of clanship to access what they saw as their children’s rights to an education as citizens of the PNG state. In New Ireland, especially where moieties structured daily interactions, fathers met their obligations across clans. The adoptive clan exercised their moral and legal authority over children and adopted children became the responsibility not of their adoptive parents but of their adoptive clan.

The case of New Irelanders’ adoption of Bougainvillean children presents a chance to examine how changing family and kin relationships make citizens who are prepared to fulfil their obligations to their kin, as an aspect of a critically engaged citizenship. At the same time, New Irelanders’ efforts to re-establish social services for Bougainvilleans at the grassroots clarified at least one demand: namely, that the State fulfil its obligations to provide these. Obligation as a felt moral value was an aspect of the complexity of social life and open to negotiation. In the rest of this chapter I describe the negotiation of divergent obligations to the peace process, to nurture young citizens and to restore social services.

Adopting an Obligation as a Moral Value in the Bougainvillean Peace

Before I discuss how New Ireland fathers reasoned about their obligations to adopt Bougainvillean children, it helps to know a little about the fluidity of the adoption process involved in these cases. Legal adoptions of Bougainvillean children involved three ‘groups’: the Bougainvillean child’s matrilineal clan (the birth mother’s clan), the New Ireland mother’s matrilineal clan (the adoptive mother’s clan), and the New Ireland father’s matrilineal clan (the adoptive father’s clan). I am most able to speak about the eight adoptions that I observed of the nearly fifty that I know of directly and indirectly amongst the 5,000 Mandak speakers in central New Ireland. It is claimed that several hundred Bougainvillean children and young people live in the New Guinea Islands Region as if they were the children of other clans there. Such numbers are hard to confirm as not all legal adoptions are completed for public record, and those who are not relatives find adoption court records difficult to access. Thus, my knowledge of
adoption is most full with regard to the New Ireland clans I know best. I have personal accounts from New Ireland clans about how they were given children by the Bougainvillean clans, but I did not witness how children left the North Solomons province after negotiations made on Bougainvillean soil.

Adoption was an extremely familiar customary practice in New Ireland and contemporary legal adoption entrenched the customary adoption, which had always been a three-party affair in New Ireland from the earliest memories of the residents there. Both processes of adoption included the matrilineal clans of both the adoptive father and mother with the matrilineal clan of the adopted child as well. In peaceful times, people also use fosterage for the process of transferring responsibilities for children between adults, as when a child would choose to live with a mother’s sister or a father’s brother just because the child and adult liked each other. The reasons for adoption are several. Most usually adoptions are made because children desire the recognition as child of a clan, rather than cousin or even niece or nephew. At other times it is done to nurture the membership of a dwindling clan or to mark peace between clans after periods of violent conflict.

Child-rearing so often includes care for the children in permanent adoption and long-term fosterage that it is usual to care for children born to other clans. Parents aim to expose children to the many clans who participate in the person’s social life, and socialisation entails teaching the child to recognise his different kin by connecting him or her into the everyday transactions in which they meet the obligations of social life. At the very least, the child learns to address his different kin by names that acknowledge his connection to them—as his father’s or mother’s clansmen, or even his mother’s father’s clansmen. Adoption in the Islands Region reorders these relatives so that the names are re-identified and adopted children will remember the alternative kin terms they might use to address the same people.

Now, consider the examples of the adoption of Bougainvillean children by New Irelanders during that period of conflict. The local head teacher, a middle-aged man whose work has taken him around the Islands Region, said the arrival of the Bougainvillean newcomers had been a widespread and well-known development in village life. Like many ‘new’ children who lived in the village with matrilineal clan relatives, the Bougainvillean children were adopted into the matrilineal clan of the adoptive mother. For example, Roland, a Bougainvillean boy of ten had been born after the embargo of 1988. People reported the story that his devout Protestant mother had said many times in Bougainville that he had survived ‘through divine providence’. When I knew him, he lived with the minister in charge of
the smaller area of central New Ireland, known as the Kimidan Circuit of the United Church. The minister had brought him back from Bougainville, at the request of the child’s parents. They said that the crisis restricted the boy’s access to schools and hospitals and stopped him from learning his responsibilities both as a citizen and as a clansperson in his home village. The minister paid the solicitor’s fees for the adoption of the boy into his wife’s clan, taking him away from his Bougainvillean parents, who could not provide for him in their home province during the military occupation. Also the minister customarily adopted the boy with a number of small gifts, and began to nurture him into recognising adult responsibilities.

Bougainvillean children quickly became clan relatives with New Irelanders because they normally integrated newcomers immediately into the clan system, making them kin. They were addressed as relatives in order to make them into relatives because ‘that is the way to make social relations work’. As Larson, who cares for a Bougainvillean child in his home, said, ‘He is my child. He calls me father, and I call him child. I clothe and feed him, and pay for his education.’ Significantly Larson’s speech did not effectively create comparisons or analogies for his relationship to the child. He did not say that he treated him ‘as if’ he were his own child because, as far as Larson and the boy are concerned, he became the father, claiming the responsibility to act as one. Fatherly actions should express care and nurture, (especially when addressing the child as a person of a different clan). Larson assured me that his wife’s and her clan’s concern for the Bougainvillean children matched his own affection and care for the child. Larson’s wife’s matrilineage adopted the child, as one of its own members, seeking to formalise the adoption via state law when it was already a social fact.

As matrilineages affiliated individual Bougainvillean children into them, New Ireland men became active fathers to the adoptive children’s entire matrilineage, simply by showing their care for the children. The father’s care created the agency of the child’s matrilineal clan, rather than of the individual child. This is true within the acts of normal child-rearing, as well as the exceptional circumstances of the adoption of children in the Bougainvillean crisis. A father makes the capacity of his children’s clan into a social agent in contemporary matters. Melanesians claimed that the man aims to make the clan effective, not only the child of the clan. The gift made to the child’s clan had to be acknowledged by the clan, but only at the time of the man’s death. Then, the clan of the child would enhance the man’s renown at the time of his funeral feast, and enable him to find prestige, fame and, more importantly, respect. Ironically, in the funeral feast the man’s individual agency found public expression, entirely through the
largesse of the clan of his children. By making the clan the collective agency, a father won back his own agency. His children’s clan can proclaimed his prestige after his death.

In the exceptional times of crisis, a New Ireland man, Loren, married to a Bougainvillean woman, Ellen, undertook to protect and enable the best interests of his wife’s Bougainvillean matrilineal clan, opening the door for himself to future recognition from the Bougainvilleans. Loren and Ellen kept contact with Ellen’s clansmen in Bougainville, and chose to care for two of her junior clansmen. In this case, there was no need for adoption as the children already belonged to her clan. By ensuring that the Bougainvillean children reached adulthood, the New Ireland couple believed they acted to enable the best interests of the wife’s clan and of Bougainvilleans more generally. In addition to this considerable accomplishment, Loren enabled the social agency of the children’s matrilineal clan, and he provided reason for them later to reflect on his own efficacious role in fostering their agency. Other villagers acknowledged that his actions might contribute to future prestige and honour at the time of his funeral, as the father of a distant Bougainvillean clan and a virtuous and generous man of New Ireland.

Some New Ireland fathers and matrilineal clans nurtured Bougainvillean children into readiness ‘to make a new Bougainville’. Their vision for a Bougainville in the future was sometimes expressed in accounts about the possible connections that might have existed in the past. At times, New Irelanders spoke of how they imagined an early history of trade and migration throughout the region, and said that they had the same ‘grandfathers’ as the Bougainvilleans. A few insisted that the new independent state, as well as the colonial state, acted to undermine and restrict the historical relations between the New Ireland and Bougainvillean clans. Others argued that, whatever their past or present problems, the inter-provincial adoptions of children made Bougainvilleans kin, with whom they would rebuild it as a new country.

Other New Ireland villagers had more modest aims to simply recruit members to matrilineal clans in their province. They adopted Bougainvilleans into the obligations of the kinship system and the work of customary life, as well as into state-sponsored education and health care services. The New Ireland adoptive fathers took responsibility for accessing education and health services on behalf of the Bougainvillean child by legally adopting them, and thereby recruited the children as new members into the wife’s matrilineal clan. Typically, a man’s prestige and honour grow with his contributions to the matrilineal clan of his wife, and conversely he is shamed for failing to contribute. Men’s contribution to the clan, especially to the rearing
of children of the matrilineal clan, is often referred to as ‘paternal nurture’ by ethnographers because it enables the children’s and wife’s matrilineal clan, who reciprocate it out of a sense of obligation to the father and his clan (Clay 1977, 1986; Wagner 1986; but see also Strathern 1988). As such, it seemed fitting that a New Ireland man recruited Bougainvillean children and cared for them as members of his wife’s clan. He won social respect far and wide because the Bougainvillean child could call him father.

New Irelanders said that their obligations to Bougainvillean children would flourish into their adulthood, finding their fullest expression in the activities undertaken by the child’s adoptive matrilineal clan in his or her name. For example, as an adult grieving his dead father, the child would keep his or her obligations to the man who had adopted and cared for him, by encouraging his clan to work collectively at the ceremony, recalling that all should recognise the gifts of the deceased father. The clansmen of the now grown-up children would then carry gifts of pigs, prepare a dance presentation or present a funeral sculpture to honour the dead man. Foster (1995) writes of the matrilineal clan as a social agent: ‘It is an instance of deliberate collective action through which agents define relations of similarity amongst themselves – bind themselves as a group – by differentiating themselves from other persons likewise grouped as similar to each other’ (1995: 14). He argues that fathers aim to create the social agency of the wife’s matrilineal clan, especially as displayed in the ritual process. Seen as reproductive acts, a father’s many actions and gifts can nurture the agency of entire clans acting in concert, sometimes to honour him. New Ireland clans – and potentially Bougainvillean clans – would flourish with the gifts of New Ireland fathers.

**Obligation as a Moral Value of Future Bougainvillean and PNG Citizens**

New Irelanders nurtured Bougainvillean children as future citizens when they ‘legalised’ adoptions, and thereby enabled their education. As I have shown, legalising adoptions made social relations even more fluid because the children and parents could call on yet another round of relatives by invoking specific clan names. I think this is why New Irelanders and Bougainvilleanes gave many reasons for adoptions. Some clans reasoned that the future was unknowable; Bougainvillean children might never be able to return home and they needed kin in New Ireland. Some reasoned that someone had to step in for the present because the state had made it impossible for the child’s natal
clan to wield authority over the behaviour of the child, as it normally would in modern PNG. For the present, the New Ireland matrilineal clan adopted the child to correct the errors of the PNG government. New Irelanders reasoned that the government had jeopardised the Bougainvillean child’s future by thwarting the normal care and responsibilities of parents’ clans living amidst strife, and simply by shrugging off the duty to provide social services. New Irelanders augmented the father’s customary gifts with the gift of legal fees for the adoption of the Bougainvillean child into his wife’s New Ireland matrilineal clan, who would be empowered with legal responsibility for the child’s well-being. Ultimately, with the finalising of the legal adoption in New Ireland, they felt also that the PNG government would recognise its duty to provide care for children.

Children were adopted legally to both augment and distinguish the customary obligations of the matriline to the child and honour the care given by the father’s own clan and the rest of the community. Richards (1936) showed a long time ago that there was nothing natural about membership within matrilineal clans, but that people always created kinship ties. In contemporary PNG, matrilineal affiliations at a great distance succeeded when people used legal mechanisms to adopt children to underline and enhance the customary power of clan membership, based on the obligations of the matrilineage to attend to the deportment of its children and youth, and on the belief that the supervision of the matrilineage would enable the child to grow up properly. In all of these legal debates, parental natal obligations to nurture the child disappeared under the shadow of the larger claim made on the child’s right to grow up as a member of a clan in modern Papua New Guinea.

The Bougainvillean adoptions arranged across the region creatively used relationships between fathers, the matrilineal clan and the government, first to alter the difficult limits placed on daily life initiated by the crisis, and then to stimulate the peace process. Throughout that decade, two processes complemented each other. As fathers stretched and multiplied the number of their relationships beyond the village to rise to the challenges from the state, everyday kin politics in the village established the obligations of adults, and even of the state, to children as clanspersons and future citizens. Fathers in the villages thereby reproduced social values that enabled children’s rights, first by helping others to realise the capacity of social relations, and then by enabling them to keep their obligations to each other, even if this meant seeking legal provisions of the state for their adoption.

In many respects, the changes in the work of giving paternal care in New Ireland certainly did not arise simply because of the crisis. The
situation of Bougainvillean children in New Ireland highlights a widely felt change in the region. Indeed, requirements for men to be fathers in New Ireland have changed with the restructuring of international aid and its effects on the state’s budget after the financial losses of the Bougainville crisis. In the contemporary period when the state aimed to reorganise social services and meet the variable flow of funds from the national coffers to social services, fathers planned to donate their own work to the development of schools, health care and government offices, or in setting up their own bisnis (private ‘companies’). In this flurry of activity, the vast number of connections spread each father’s work a bit more widely and thinly than before. This effect of structural adjustment on ‘paternal nurture’ spun fathers into rapid activity as they took on more social obligations than the day permits in order to plan for their children. Fathers had to find ways of linking that child’s future up to new groups in order to enable the child and the child’s clan in the future. The typical father networked and thereby extended his functions as an adult man. He joined regional government, paid school fees to the village school, supported the village aid post by fixing its roof, went to church and repaired the minister’s water tank, or associated with national politicians in order ‘to make connections’. He thought he was opening relationships, communications or pathways of exchange between those new groups and his child’s clan, so as to enable the child’s clan to call upon those new social groups and services in the future.

In the midst of this intense contemporary activity, New Ireland fathers scrutinised the ability of a national government to keep up with them. Could government provide social services in return equal to the scale of practical work that they have given to the government, the school and the health centres? Since independence in 1975, parents have measured the government’s credibility in terms of its record of shouldering the burden of providing social services. At meetings of the village, where adults consulted together weekly about the implementation of new policies for the community, senior men and women openly argued that a lawful democratic government must provide for modern citizens, who, in turn, undertook their duties to care for children. They said that providing health care and schooling for children would be a first step towards legitimating the state’s existence (Sykes 2001). They extended their general argument that the government is a partner in the work of social reproduction by pointing to the particulars of the circumstances of the crisis facing Bougainvillean children in the region, and argued that reciprocal nurture should be given by the government, the father and the matrilineal clans.
It is remarkable that adoptions in these years, when money and services seemed hard to find, were completed, but it was not only out of concern for Bougainvillean children. Joshua and Betty made a more complex series of decisions to seek legal adoption of Bougainvillean children into Betty’s clan. Because Betty’s own clan lacked many young men in it, they looked forward to strengthening it with the addition of the two little boys. In the past it often occurred that a matrilineal clan might adopt children, especially girls, in order to add to its numbers over a generation when few clanswomen bore children, and so they sought to do the same. In this case, the courts supported the adoption of the boys by Betty’s matrilineal clan on the grounds that it facilitated both the boys’ longer-term residence in New Ireland and Betty’s clan power of customary legal authority in the everyday life of the boys, thereby supervising the boys’ moral life. The legal decision supported the rule of customary law in the matrilineal society of the village, which Joshua and Betty reported as a good solution.

The contemporary problem was how to enforce the reciprocal practice of honouring paternal care and thereby to effect transformations of that norm of social behaviour to transcending actions of father and children, but also their clans, and even hopefully the national government. The children’s clan acknowledges the ethical action of a man, most commonly at the time of his funeral. Conventionally, at a funeral for a mature man, his children gave shell wealth and pigs and organised ritual dances in order to publicly honour his name and history. Affectionate memories moved children to make funerals for the father, but the most important work of the funeral ritual aimed to publicly recognise the role that a father played in the life of the children’s clan, as well as in the personal life of the child. A child should remember the father’s gifts at the time of his death, and mobilise his or her clan to show respect for the dead man who was the father of them all. A question remained: how would a Bougainvillean matrilineal clan be moved to remember the New Ireland man who made extraordinary gifts to the clan, such as the payment for legal adoption of a Bougainvillean child into it? This is a matter for future research.

The Obligation to Restore Social Services and Citizens’ Rights to Access Them

The historical record shows that the PNG government initially moved slowly to restore services to Bougainville after 1994, when the international delegations first recommended they do so, after which progress accelerated towards peace. The PNG government’s response
(Kaputin 1999) came after the exposure of human rights abuses (Taleo-Havini 1995, 1996); after international organisations had chided the government for failing in its democratic duty to its citizens (Amnesty International 1994); and after the report of a visiting delegation asked what the PNG government planned to do in order to build peace in Bougainville (UNDP 1993, 1998). However, lobbying and argument about human rights did not succeed in fully restoring services. Instead, Bougainvilleans accessed social services in two ways: first, by becoming generous hosts to the Papua New Guineans who came to fulfil the state's obligation to rebuild schools and hospitals; and, secondly, by entering into legal adoptions, a social action that acknowledged the value of meeting obligations.

By upholding obligation as a moral value, some New Irelanders and Bougainvilleans demonstrated that, by taking responsibility into their own hands that they had shamed the government for its failure to meet obligations to reopen hospitals and schools, and had thereby provoked them to speed up the work in restitution of services. Local leaders and villagers in New Ireland stepped into the government's place and claimed responsibility for the failed leadership they had once supported, saying that they 'pitied' the national government in its time of weakness. Individual men and matrilineal clans shouldered the burden of responsibility to provide the Bougainvillean children with access to education and health care in their own province, in an attempt to rectify the problems that Chan as a New Ireland-born leader had created. Although no one worked collectively or organised the effort, New Irelanders repeated the process of adopting Bougainvillean children many times across the villages of the province. While eschewing state paternalism, New Irelanders argued that a legitimate state, like a good father, should raise citizens by setting up new schools and hospitals. Although the government led by Chan had failed them, some New Ireland village leaders said that they would legitimate with votes any government that could meet obligations to raise the clans and their children.

New Irelanders acted directly within the existing structures of both kinship and democratic politics by holding obligation to be a moral value. They mobilised regional political structures in sympathy for the Bougainvilleans and in the attempt to repair inter-provincial relationships. The Bougainvilleans' businesses had closed down, their trade had been embargoed, their social services cut and local development plans thwarted. Initially Bougainvilleans worked alone to recover the loss of finances, jobs and commercial services with the closure of the mine in the NSP, but failed. Subsequently, throughout the 1990s the restructuring of international aid budgets magnified their
struggle to secure access to services for their children because the region already lacked the private resources to fill the occasional budget shortfall. For some time, children, fathers and mothers within their clans tried to fulfil what were once State social services of education and health. Later, in 1997, when New Irelanders arrived in Bougainville as the first PNG civil servants – the teachers, doctors and nurses – to step forward for the reconstruction of health and education, the state failed to support their work; resources did not arrive, salaries were never paid. Without state support, individual New Irelanders met the obligations with a human face and rescued the state from its embarrassment by carrying on with the help of individual Bougainvilleans, who fed the New Irelanders while they rebuilt schools and hospitals. Sadly, the few provisions made by the government to support Bougainvilleans with services depended on the individual goodwill of the civic employees to carry on, while their pay materialised much later than did the services they provided on behalf of the state.

Bougainvilleans’ commitment to inter-provincial adoption of their children is an example of direct political action, in which they sustained access to state health and education by meeting obligations to each other, whether as clanspersons or as citizens of region, province or nation. Across the region, the earlier expressions of anger, tension and disagreement, so much a part of the Bougainville crisis, changed to active commitment to meet obligations within and across the matrilineal clans and the state as a peaceful ‘pathway to the future’. Bougainvilleans demonstrated commitments to children’s well-being, but in an apparently unfamiliar way. Elders grieved that some of the older youth remain in jungle retreats because they are still at odds with the mining company and the PNG government. Mature Bougainvilleans sent some children away to relatives in other provinces in the Islands Region. Here I have described how some Bougainvilleans reasoned that it was necessary to give their children for adoption so that they would come back to participate in the reconstruction of Bougainville.

After the crisis, New Guinea Islanders continued to value citizens’ obligations to each other. Papua New Guineans of the Islands Region met obligations by completing adoption processes within customary relations during structural adjustments to the PNG economy, and even after the violent conflict. The values sustaining matrilineal clans of Bougainville persisted from times before the crises amongst those who moved to town or went to work on either copra or oil palm plantations across the islands of New Ireland and New Britain or in copper mining on Bougainville Island. Relatives had regularly consulted over affairs of their extended in kin in either place.
A recent documentary (Chamberlain 1999) proposes a more radical perspective on obligation as valued in social action. Francis Ona, leader of the Bougainvillean revolutionary separatist movement, asks: ‘Just what obliges people to recognise the PNG State, and thereby justify its existence?’ His companions argued that a state that does not provide social services has no reason to exist. Other Bougainvilleans often said that they would have been better off without the establishment of the government, given that budgets fluctuated and the state’s capacity to provide services for its citizens has been severely limited. The leaders of the independence movement lead by the Bougainvillean Revolutionary Army (BRA) argued that they did not seek to make a new state in Bougainville, but did seek recognition from the state for the integrity of their life ways and the chance to live a life of self-sufficiency.28 These men and women argued that, when the state facilitates the erosion of indigenous resources in favour of mining companies with international partners sharing in the profits, the state exists only for shadowy reasons.

New Irelanders’ involvement in the Bougainvillean peace process showed that by meeting obligations to sustain a social life (as opposed to what they say and write in contracts and agreements), people across the region could enjoy moral politics and achieve the constitutional ideal of good government, if the government met its own obligations to citizens. When lobbying by human rights groups failed, direct political action by Papua New Guineans sustained the peace process.29 If these actions – including actions towards the living, the unborn and dead relatives – spoke louder than tricky words,30 then eventually the state did meet its obligations to Bougainvilleans when drafting a constitution for Bougainvillean autonomy (UNPO 2004), freeing Bougainvilleans to meet their obligations to each other by a referendum in June 2005.

**Obligation as a Moral Value**

Mauss made clear that people created moral order by clarifying a shared concept of peace, harmony and well-being in meeting obligations (Mauss 1931). As I commented in the introduction, Mauss added that the concept of harmonious social life, the social good, could be taught to the younger generation by discussion and negotiation, not simply by inculcation. In this case, Bougainvilleans and New Irelanders focused on the value of obligation in determining who should provide care for the children, as exemplified by the father’s nurturing care and gifts for his child. With their direct actions to provide Bougainvillean children with social services where the state failed, New Guinea Islanders reminded state politicians, mining company officials and civil
servants that the government could keep to its obligations to the citizenry.

I showed that the Bougainvilleans’ concern that the state should keep its obligations to citizens, including the future generation of Papua New Guineans, had spread to New Ireland with their adoptions of Bougainvillean children. New Irelanders learned that good government must have a human face. The state cannot meet its obligations to citizens through the established government offices, institutions and civil servants. Criticism of the failure of men and women to meet obligations does not expose corruption so much as humiliate some politicians as bad fathers or failed big men (see Clark 1997 for different variations on this). Public disapproval does not show a loss of trust in government, as some have argued (Foster 2002; Giddens 1991). Instead, condemnations provoke people to achieve good government, by asking the New Ireland people who fill bureaucratic and political offices to meet their obligations to other Papua New Guineans with a human and personal face. In the case described in this chapter, New Irelanders and Bougainvilleans made claims on the government. Now, can the PNG government legitimate its existence by acting as a nurturing father, by providing basic social services and by enabling Papua New Guineans to keep their obligations to their relatives, friends and, in this case particularly, the next generation?31

I have described the different forms of obligation that enjoined New Guinea Islanders to participate in the Bougainvillean peace process whereby their moral reasoning enabled their nurturing acts. Adopting an obligation, which is an action expressing a person’s moral reasoning, can be seen in the reciprocal cultivation of social life amongst Papua New Guineans of the Islands Region. Notably, social life entrenches moral reasoning about how to keep obligations, and presents this value as a capacity of social action. It becomes more apparent from the perspective of the triad of partners keeping the obligations. In overseeing the legal adoption processes, the state clarifies within the law those services that it offers to children of clans. It stands in relation to the child as if it were a partner to the father’s nurturing role in the life of his wife’s matrilineal clan. Making adoption a legal process puts the government as the provider of social services into the lives of Papua New Guineans as a provider of the means of access to modern lifestyles in a contemporary world. The legitimate government should see that the child’s health care and schooling are available if that child is to grow through its relationships and cultivate adult responsibilities. Sometimes government fails; and sometimes clans take up the work of governance. If children grow to adulthood through keeping obligations as kin, as friends and as citizens, then the state may be said to have met its obligation to enable children to grow up.
Notes

Acknowledgements. I thank members of UCL Social Anthropology Departmental Seminar, the EHESS Séminaire des Anthropologies des Systèmes Mondiaux and the Max Planck Institute Workshop, ‘Rethinking Morality’ for suggestions on written drafts. As ever, I err in misusing their advice. I thank the people of the villages of the Lelet Plateau with whom I have lived, and the students and teachers in New Ireland secondary schools for their help.

1. In earlier years liberals debated standardising financial currency in order to free trade from political regulations and socialists argued that states should protect the basic needs of their citizens within an international market society.

2. I thank my colleagues in our discussions with Chris Gregory, and acknowledge that the idea that morality could become a new gold standard draws deeply on his use of the concept of value and standards of value in his book Savage Money (Gregory 2004).

3. The PNG customary adoption process, working with national laws, was predisposed to encompass the changes to the delivery of education and health services precipitated by the Bougainville crisis. The case is exemplary to current concerns.

4. Mauss had argued that the moral basis of ‘tribal’ society (a society comprised of the interrelations of many clans), like modern society (an equally complex organisation), coheres when members foster, discuss and adapt social relationships, such as the parental/filial relation, to the work of social regeneration. I am grateful to Susanna Narotzky for pointing out this feature of Mauss’s work. Mauss’s short essay ‘Cohesion Sociale dans les Sociétés Polysegmentaires’ is not translated. Misunderstandings are my own.

5. The island provinces of Manus, New Ireland, East New Britain, West New Britain, and the North Solomons comprise the geopolitical region.

6. People of the PNG Islands Regions successfully used the established national law as it was intended. PNG family law was adopted largely from Australia, and then adjusted to meet the conditions of social life in clans, as is common across the country (Luluaki 1990). A striking contrast exists between legal adoption, in which the court acts to sever the child from birth parents in the interest of securing the legal claims of the adoptive parents, and inter-provincial adoption in PNG, where legal agreements between clans do not sever ties between natal clans and children, but simply record them.

7. The different parties to any adoption in post-colonial nations – the state, the clans, the child and the birth parents – all face the difficulties of defining the child’s interests, especially after the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Ethnographers show that the key issues in establishing children’s rights include: first, the recognition of children’s dependence on families to protect them as citizens (Stephens 1995; Sargent and Scheper-Hughes 1998; Gailey 1999a, b; Helleiner 2003; Sharp 2003); secondly, that the comparison of customary forms of adoption falters on definitions of Euro-American categories of jurisprudence (Bodenhorn 1988; Carsten 1991; see also McKinnon and Franklin 2001; Bowie 2004); and, thirdly, that Euro-American legal adoption focuses on the rights of parents (Goody, J. 1969; Goody, E. 1982; Zelizer 1985), in contrast with customary forms of adoption, which focus on children’s interests in keeping kin (Carroll 1970; Brady 1976). Modell (1994, 1998), Gailey (1999a), Stoler (2002) and Gershon (2003) argued that governmentality reshapes kinspersons into citizens. In contrast,
Demian (2001, 2004a,b) asks how Pacific people understand children’s rights as post-colonial citizens.

8. Protests in Bougainville continued until the 2005 vote on autonomy.

9. The peacekeeping initiative (New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Vanuatu) was successful for individuals involved. In comparison, see the personal account of the unsuccessful Canadian-led UN peacekeeping mission in Rwanda (Dallaire 2003).

10. Bougainvillean decisions echo habits of social mobilisation in other matrilineal societies. In Milne Bay women got married spouses and adopted children, and thus maximised access to the use of land and traditional wealth (Weiner 1976).

11. A father pays for a legal adoption in New Ireland because he also wishes for conventional results under PNG family law for his and his wife’s matrilineal clan. Adoption affiliates the child to the wife’s matrilineal clan, in whose care the child resides. He or she has an appropriate clan name and also addresses all of his mother’s kin from the particular calculus of his or her position in the mother’s matriliney. Fathers say that the payment of legal fees is a gift to the matriline of the wife and mother of their adoptive child.

12. The father’s gift of the payment of legal adoption costs does more than simply affect traditional social relations, largely because adoptions are made as part of the peace process. By using the mechanisms of the state as if it were only a new idiom of kinship, rather than an institution, New Ireladers were consciously engaging the complexity of social relations as the locus of moral action. Because of the legal adoption, it would be possible to find the children who left Bougainville and to hold the New Ireland clans accountable for their well-being.

13. I argue that clanship is a modality of sociality that people use to get access to citizens’ rights, which they believe the state must provide out of moral and political obligations to citizens. I do not think that clanship is a latent form of citizenship.

14. This stands in contrast to societies where rights of inheritance are conferred across or within households.

15. Some new children were the offspring of marriages to women from outside NIP, who were brought back by their fathers so that they would grow up in the village and have access to land there.

16. Mandak make strangers into kin by asking them to participate in simple exchanges of small goods (Clay 1977).

17. Biological relations are never ‘more real’ than adoptive ones (Clay 1977).

18. A contemporary Islands Region rock song belittled the man who leaves his wife’s children, wandering like a dog in the streets. The refrain asked who would remember him when he died.


20. Senior clansmen are legally accountable for children’s behavior.

21. Richards (1936) described youth claims on ‘mother rights’ from the matrilineal clan.

22. Malinowski argued that reciprocity by the affinal clan, as carried out by the next generation, constituted a form of customary law (Malinowski 1935; Weiner 1992). According to that law, fathers should care selflessly for their children by looking after them with mapula, lanavolo, nat-lo (as different Austronesian languages name the ethos in which fathers use small gifts to express affection and paternity). According to Godelier (1999), neither Malinowski nor Weiner (1992) fully understood mapula. Mosko (2000) calls for a revision of the anthropological uses of the Trobriand concepts of personhood in order to address the issue.

23. Parent, clan and government kept mutual obligations to arrange school fees (see Sykes 2001).

25. The BRA seeks compensation for damages to the matrilineal clan grounds, and injury to clan members.


27. Zambian men left villages for wage work in mines and urban lifestyles, severing connections with their clan, both as a significant social unit and as a point of reference for moral deliberation (Ferguson 1999). In Sierra Leone, an entire generation has entered into violent struggle across their home region (Richards 1996).

28. Francis Ona, BRA leader, refused to participate in the work of forming an interim government (Chamberlain 2001).

29. Ultimately, obligation rather than human rights led to the success of the peace process. Throughout the 1990s, delegations of international visitors inspected the human rights record and supported the Bougainvilleans in their actions to see the restoration of social services (Amnesty International 1993, 1997a,b; UN Development Programme 1995, 1998; Australian Parliamentary Delegation 1994). No single delegation could enforce the delivery of state services; yet, each insisted that the state meet its obligations to provide these, even during the course of Bougainvillean deliberations with PNG government over their island’s independence.


31. Schools do not simply teach provincial children modern rights in the nation (Reed-Danahay 1986; Stambach 2000).