

**THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN APPLICANTS AND OFFICERS  
IN INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION:  
A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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## ABSTRACT

In modernity the welfare of children is provided for at the institutional 'intersection' of the family and the state. Where kinship structures are diffuse, nuclear hardship leads to increased state dependence. The institutional relationship between the state and the family is marked by divided responsibility and competition for control over the welfare of the individual. In late capitalism, citizenship has expanded to include the rights of the child and the child has emerged as a social personality, protected by the emotional bonds of the family and by the political rights afforded by the state.

In modern capitalist societies like Australia, the well-being of the child is recognised as important by both the family and the state. Paradoxically, there is potential for tension and even conflict where the claims of autonomy and the assertion of private property rights in children by the family cut across the notions of responsibility and public accountability espoused by government. The strain between parental autonomy and state responsibility is often unresolved.

Intercountry adoption is a social phenomenon that removes structurally-isolated children from the socially marginalised and economically deprived conditions of orphanages in order to relocate them, for their benefit, as members of caring, well-to-do families. Support for intercountry adoption can therefore be expected from all people who are committed to the well-being of children and who see the nuclear family as the most desirable social setting for the raising of children. Since those values are almost universally supported in modernity, it might be thought that officials who process adoptions applications will have an harmonious relationship with prospective adoptive parents. Intercountry adoption services might also be expected to run smoothly since all participating parties ostensibly work in concert to achieve shared goals. These expectations are not borne out. While the two groups share many fundamental values, the relationship between officers and applicants in intercountry adoption is often contested and

tension-ridden as is evidenced by an Ombudsman's report and academic research. This thesis explores that relationship sociologically in order to identify these tensions and antagonisms and their sources.

This research explains the persistent tension in the relationship between applicants and officers in the Tasmanian intercountry adoption service. It argues that the tensions between officers and applicants reflect the normative and institutionalised tensions between the family and the state. This thesis is examined by analysing the extent to which shared social values and attendant patterns of behaviour, ideology and expectation underpin the tensions that affect the interaction between the Intercountry Adoption Service officers and applicants.

The analysis shows that the competing attitudes and behaviours displayed by Intercountry Adoption Service applicants and officers are 'predictable' because of the constraining effects of social institutions on both sides. More specifically, the thesis demonstrates that uncertainty and contingency are institutionalised features of the relationship between applicants and officers since the social actors interact in terms of their roles as representatives of their various, competing positions within a broad social framework, as well as pursuing individual interests, and that the resulting tension takes on some highly predictable forms.

Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for gaining the qualitative data that enable the tension in the relationship between applicants and officers to be analysed and explained.

The interviews were used to gain information on the relationship between officers and applicants. First, anxiety and tension are explored as reflections of the institutionalised tension between the family and the state. Anxiety is depicted as an essential characteristic of the politically unequal relationship between applicants and officers. Secondly, the thesis explores ways in which motivations become an issue around which applicants and officers express



anxiety. Thirdly, the thesis analyses the way in which the service is rationed and the manner in which rationing contributes to tension. Fourthly, the compartmentalisation of parenting roles, and the manner in which responsibility for the child is divided among officers and adopting parents, are analysed by examining the views of the participating parties on appropriate procedural pace. Waiting periods are recognised as major points of tension. Fifthly, the values shared by applicants and officers are identified to show that the relationship is not totally hostile. On the contrary, the tension in the relationship is shown to be attributable to competing agendas more than to conflicting value systems. Sixthly, and finally, the thesis analyses the management of the dissatisfaction, identifying it as an important element in the interaction between applicants and officers but as only one aspect of that complex relationship.

In addressing these six issues, this research provides an analysis of intercountry adoption that is of value to applicants and officers in intercountry adoption services in Australia and other receiving countries and to many children in relinquishing countries. By investigating sociologically the relationship between the family and the state in Western modernity it explains the manner in which strain is managed at the intersection of two key social institutions.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

Intercountry adoption, in its ideal form, involves relocating children from the economically deprived conditions of orphanages in one country to caring, well-to-do families in another. Support for intercountry adoption can therefore be expected from all people who are committed to the well-being of children and who see the nuclear family as the most desirable social setting for the raising of children. Since those values are almost universally supported in modernity, it is to be expected that social workers who process adoptions applications will have an harmonious relationship with prospective adoptive parents. Despite the fact that the two groups share many fundamental values, the relationship between officers and applicants in intercountry adoption is often contested and tension-ridden as is evidenced by an Ombudsman's report (Willee 1986) and academic research (Boss and Edwards 1992). This thesis explores that relationship sociologically in order to identify these tensions and antagonisms and their sources.

It is argued that the structural strain between the institutions of the family and the state in modernity produces the tensions that characterise the interaction between officers and applicants. At the individual level this tension finds expression as institutionalised anxiety. The thesis analyses the strained interdependence of the family and the state in contemporary Australian society in relation to intercountry adoption. It asserts that established social values and attendant patterns of behaviour, ideology and expectation generate and structure the tensions that colour the interaction between intercountry adoption service officers and applicants.

The chapters that follow show that the tensions that exist between applicants and officers are 'predictable'. The thesis asserts that uncertainty and contingency are institutionalised features of the relationship between applicants and officers. These social actors interact in terms of their roles as

representatives of their various, competing positions within a broad social framework. The resulting tensions take on some highly predictable forms. Nevertheless, as Wrong (1980) and Berger (1977) observe, individual people are not pre-programmed robots. Influenced in their attitudes and interaction by social forces, they remain social actors in principle capable of idiosyncratic thought and action.

First, in order to discern and explain these tensions a theory of the state and the family in modernity is outlined. Strain between the family and the state generates boundary contests. Such contests are typical of modernisation processes and increase with the expansion of citizenship and state welfare. Secondly, a sociological analysis is offered of interaction between the family and the state in the more narrowly circumscribed context of intercountry adoption structures and processes in Tasmania, one of the states of Australia. In short, the project uses intercountry adoption to show how specific patterns of interaction are affected and can be explained by general institutional arrangements and processes of social change.

This chapter briefly outlines the history, forms and functions of intercountry adoption in Australia. It considers the social context of intercountry adoption services in Australia and identifies the nature of the tensions between clients and officials, and suggests their systemic sources.

### **Intercountry Adoption in Australia**

Intercountry Adoption Programs are protocols for the management of intercountry adoption between the Australian states and 'relinquishing' or 'sending' countries. Intercountry Adoption Services are the services established within each state for the management of the Australian component of the programs. There are eight Australian intercountry adoption services, one for each jurisdiction in the Commonwealth. Independently, each has established adoption programs with various other countries.

In Australia, the adoption of children from overseas became a matter for

public discussion in about 1975, towards the end of the Vietnam War. Distressing images of orphans and other destitute children in Saigon evoked emotional responses among many Australians, some of whom rushed to 'rescue' the children by way of largely unregulated adoption. Subsequently, the state's regulatory role increased and led to the development of Intercountry Adoptions Service agencies within larger community services departments.

Intercountry adoption in Australia is characterised by a steady trickle of applications, swamped by waves of heightened and sometimes short-lived interest following media portrayals of unhappy, institutionalised children in developing countries. The vocabulary surrounding intercountry adoption takes on certain rhetorical forms. Chief among these is the commonly expressed view that orphaned or abandoned children in some developing countries will not be cared for adequately by their governments or by intermediate institutions such as orphanages. The expressed motivations of prospective adoptive parents commonly take the form of an amalgam of altruism and the desire to parent. The motivations typical of people wishing to adopt are explored more fully in Chapter Six.

Each Australian State and Territory has implemented the power, granted at the time of Federation, to legislate in the area of adoption. Claims by Newell (1988) that the problems with intercountry adoption services in Australia, including irregular procedures, have been overcome with nationally uniform intercountry adoption procedures are not supported. His assertion flies in the face of the earlier research by Goriawalla (1982: 55) and Picton and Calder (1982: 13). Subsequently, the three separate legislative overviews of Boss and Edwards (1992), Charlesworth et al. (1990: 129) and Harper (1985a: 18) provide further evidence of a continued lack of uniformity among the various Adoption Acts and Regulations. More broadly, Toft and McIntyre (1992: 84) observe that in the United States, too, adoption remains decentralised with 'no overarching federal agency'.



As Boss and Edwards (1992: 14) assert, the Commonwealth Government of Australia has a 'vital' interest in intercountry adoption. The *Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946* allows for the legitimate entry into Australia of non-citizen children where that entry has been arranged under the supervision of an adoption agency that is officially recognised by the government and where the child passes the compulsory medical examination.

There are also other parties that have a vital interest in intercountry adoption. Cox (1986: 1-6) lists the participating parties and includes the prospective adoptive parents and the natural or birth parents. He also recognises as parties to decision making the Government of the child's country of origin, or sending country, and 'middle persons and organisations'. Middle persons and organisations are usually referred to as 'support groups', a term that is often used indiscriminately to denote parental support groups and 'non-government organisations'. Parental support groups provide information and other forms of support for adoptive parents within receiving countries. Non-government organisations have direct contact with government officials and managers of orphanages in relinquishing countries. They are able to facilitate and expedite adoptions, for example, by advising Australian intercountry adoption service managers of children who have become available for placement, or by alerting officers in sending countries of applicants' files that are to be expected or that seem to have become 'lost' between departments.

Group help for adoptive parents rests on informal social support and shared identity. Some authors, such as Hoksbergen (1988a: 4) and Newell (1988: 18), argue that such voluntary groups help parents cope with the many racial, cultural, religious and territorial issues that arise during the intercountry adoption process. Smith and Sherwen (1984: 46) rate the informal support gained from fellow adopters as 'particularly important' in light of the contraction of state welfare services. The groups provide practical support based on the experiences of members. The pragmatic advice that new

applicants receive in the support group setting helps them to move beyond the unrealistic images and expectations that sometimes appear in parental phantasies (see Krause Eheart and Power 1995). Moreover, support groups can provide emotional support in the form of a reference group for non-fecund adopters (Aitken 1983: 26). A somewhat different perspective is put by Harper (1985a: 19) who argues that support groups help adoptive parents by playing an informal intermediary role that facilitates the adoption process.

Support groups are also of value to adopted children. They are a social context within which children can develop cultural, racial and personal identity. Transracially adopted children's self esteem depends principally upon parental acknowledgement of racial and cultural difference (Hoksbergen 1988a and 1988b: 70; Winkler et al. (1988: 110-11). However, emphasising the difference between the parents and the child may interfere with the bonding process (Howe 1992: 10-11). Relationships with other adoptive children in support groups is often difficult. Kim (1980: 221) suggests that children's reluctance to meet with other intercountry adoptive children of the same race as themselves is a function of the 'painful affects associated with their preadoption' experiences.

Some commentators say that support groups have too much power. The 'tremendous power' that support groups have over adoptive parents is seen by Hoksbergen (1988a: 3) and Triseliotis (1988: 21) as a reason for strengthening the state's capacity to regulate and supervise. Effective state control is seen as the best way to prevent child trafficking and to reduce the incidence of placement disruption (Hoksbergen 1988a, Ngabonziza 1988, Harper 1985b, Fopp 1982a, Goriawalla 1982 and Calder 1982). This view is also held by Bates (1988: 3) who traces the marketing of children back to nineteenth century England, and by Mangold (1978), Scheper-Hughes (1990), Cauchi (1987b), Triseliotis (1988: 25-6), Charlesworth et al. (1990: 129), Kligman (1992), United Nations (1994: Article 4) and O'Shaughnessy (1994: 124-29). Pilotti (1985) argues that a balance must be found between 'a minimum of red tape' on the one hand and adequate state regulation to provide a 'maximum

of safeguards' for the child on the other.

Effective state control also minimizes the dangers of 'openness' in adoption systems (Hoksbergen 1988b: 58-9; Boss and Edwards 1992: 19-21; Clare 1991: 11) as is the case where the privacy of parties is breached by unregulated contact.

On the basis of arguments such as these the role of the state has expanded. This expansion has produced structured strain between the institutions of the family and the state that generates tension between officers and applicants. The growth of state power also threatens organisations in the voluntary sector and, consequently, produces tensions, too, in the relations between state officials and representatives of support groups. Those tensions contribute to applicants' anxieties about their relationship with state officials.

### **The social context**

In modern Australia there is a tacit understanding that under normal circumstances no individual person should be allowed to die an avoidable death or even suffer preventable misery. Australia is not unique in this regard (see Laslett 1988: 170). Where extended kinship units are reduced in scale and attenuated by the structural isolation of the nuclear family and by neo-local marriage practices, the institution of the state becomes more prominent among those that develop to meet human need.

In systems where the nuclear family is the pre-eminent form, alternative sources of welfare exist in the form of private and community-level services. Rose and Shiratori (1986), for example, observe that private welfare services include personal economic wealth that allows access to market sources of welfare. Community-level welfare services are of the kind provided by churches and service organisations. The modern Western state contributes to both sources of welfare insofar as private economic wealth may be regulated by industrial legislation and supplemented by state benefits while community services may be underwritten by government or assisted through the provision of tax deductibility for donations.

Australia has inherited from England a system of state provision of welfare services for those individual citizens who do not have access to effective kin relations and whose access to market and community sources of welfare fails to meet their welfare needs. In societies where the welfare of individual citizens is valued, where neo-local marriage practices continue to isolate nuclear families domestically, and where kinship structures are diffuse, state welfare provision predictably expands as a consequence of the ineffectiveness of the kinship arrangements and the inadequacy of intermediate welfare structures. This, in essence, is Laslett's (1988) nuclear hardship hypothesis.

The tenets of the nuclear hardship hypothesis are particularly useful to this study of acquisitive adoption as a family-formation strategy for two reasons. First, they draw attention to the way in which family-formation strategies that involve adoption are an issue for kinship systems based on the nuclear family. Given normative neo-local marriage practices and the associated weakening of effective wider kin units, extended families are not recognised as legitimate sources of adoptive children (see Goody 1981: 84). In this regard Australia is in contrast with many other societies, including traditional Sub-Saharan (Shimkin, Shimkin and Frate 1978: 190-94, O'Shaughnessy 1988: 242-43), Chinese (Goody, 1981: 76) and Australian Aboriginal (Boss and Edwards 1992: 17) structures, where a strong sense of communal ownership of children is inconsistent with a view of adoption as a private, nuclear family issue, but facilitates intra-group fostering as the mechanism for providing care for children otherwise in need of support. Conversely, strong kin group structures militate against the relinquishing of children for extra-familial or extra-tribal adoption.

In modern Western societies, extended family members may be approached by parents seeking to deposit their children in fosterage arrangements. Holloman and Lewis (1978) and Ladner (1977) observe that depositive adoption is common in some United States black communities. Extended-family fosterage may occur as a function of the existence of strong wider

kinship units that can be approached in times of economic hardship. Such fosterage is, therefore, clearly a different phenomenon from the acquisitive, family-formation strategy that is the object of this study. Kinship adoption does occur in Australia as a result of 'blending' families following divorce. According to Boss and Edwards (1992: 18), this practice accounts for more than half of all adoption applications. Here, the adoption is neither an acquisitive nor a depositive strategy, but a reconstructive process characteristic of post-divorce, neo-local marriage practices.

Secondly, the nuclear hardship hypothesis accounts for the expansion of state intervention as a provider of welfare for nuclear families. The welfare of individuals is a matter for both the state and the family, but the division of responsibility for the provision of this welfare is problematic. The nuclear hardship hypothesis emphasises the symbiotic relationship between the family and the state, recognised by van Krieken (1992), but runs counter to the social control theories of the state proposed, for example, by Meyer (1983) and Donzelot (1979). Nevertheless, as Pinker (1973) explains, the provision of some kinds of state welfare for families is usually accompanied by stigma and tension owing to the tacit understanding that welfare is primarily a private, family problem that only becomes a public issue when the family fails to provide adequate support.

As we saw above, families are diversely constructed according to cultural and economic circumstances. Furthermore, families change according to the life-stages of their members. In this study, the 'family' is constructed in its nuclear form, that is, a discrete residential unit consisting of the conjugal dyad and associated children. In contemporary Australia, that is the dominant kinship arrangement. Gilding (1991: 115-6), for example, argues that more recently in Australia, major post-war factors contributing to individuation, such as suburbanisation that served to isolate nuclear families from the wider kin group and neighbourhood networks, promoted the notion of the private family and emphasised affectionate relations between parents and children.

By contrast, the state is that set of authoritative institutions that confers socially legitimate, if limited, decision-making power onto individual officers who are themselves constrained by bureaucratic and broader social structures. Beyond the state bureaucratic department, the political power of officers is further constrained by the competing or conflicting powers of other bureaucracies, not to mention accountability to elected members of parliament. Elected state-officials, in turn, require social legitimation from the electorate, a requirement that acts as a constraint on their behaviour. Simultaneously, state politicians are caught up in the demands of reciprocity in a community of international peers, and must acknowledge the autonomy and legitimacy of the political power of these peers. This principle has bearing on the way in which politicians and their nominal subordinates conduct programs of international significance and sensitivity such as intercountry adoption.

#### **The general problem: tension where we might expect harmony**

In late capitalism, citizenship has expanded to include the rights of the child. Turner (1986: 93) observes that, with the coming of modernity, the child has emerged as a social personality, protected by the emotional bonds of the family as well as the political rights afforded by the state. In modern capitalist societies like Australia, the well-being of the child is recognised as important by both the family and the state. Paradoxically, there is potential for tension and even conflict where the claims of autonomy and the assertion of private property rights in children by the family cut across the notions of responsibility and public accountability espoused by government. The strain between parental autonomy and state responsibility is often unresolved, especially now that low fertility levels call into question what were, formerly, socially normal styles of family building.

How then do interactions occur at the intersection of these two institutions? In light of estimations that there are thirty-eight million abandoned children in India alone (Cook 1989: 11), it might be thought that intercountry adoption is in the interests of adoptees as well as adopters, would be approved by all

Australian governments, and would enjoy universal support within Australian society. Intercountry adoption services might also be expected to run smoothly since all participating parties ostensibly work in concert to achieve shared goals. These expectations are not borne out. Boss and Edwards (1992: 13) show, for example, that support for the notion of intercountry adoption is not shared by all parties, especially not by social workers, and that the process is not always happy (see also Wilson 1989). Close (1977: 31) also asserts that prospective adoptive parents are the party 'most often denied adequate attention' by social workers. Furthermore, in a critique of Australian adoption services, she writes of the 'trauma of being processed', where clients have to conform to 'idealized standards not even found in natural families' (1977: 32).

Even broad claims about intercountry adoption being in the best interest of the child have been questioned. Chimezie (1975) bases his opposition to transracial adoption on ideological support for familial apartheid along cultural and racial lines. Others, such as Macaulay and Macaulay (1978: 286-88), Jones and Else (1979: 374), Feigelman and Silverman (1984: 589), Hogan and Siu (1988: 496), McRoy (1989: 150), Toft and McIntyre (1992: 100) and O'Shaughnessy (1994: 129) note a groundswell of opposition among social workers themselves to transracial adoption, which some in the United States redefine as racial and cultural genocide. Howard et al.'s (1977) survey of 150 black households found that on this issue the opposition by black social workers to transracial adoption was out of step with majority opinion in the U.S. black community. Reporting on a survey of 117 social workers in Bavaria, Textor (1992: 560) observes that two-thirds of respondents rejected the statement that intercountry adoptions should be increased to help some of the starving children in the Third World.

Intercountry adoption does have its supporters, some of whom are critical of the stance taken by social workers. Whaley and Wong (1987: 80) assert that special-needs children, including children from other countries, are increasingly finding adoptive families in the United States, and that often the

view that white adoptive parents only want healthy, white children is propagated by adoption workers in ignorance of the more open-minded or accepting intentions of prospective adoptive parents. McRoy (1989: 153) observes that social workers' opposition to transracial adoption has been disallowed by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Kennedy (1994: 42-3) reports on U.S. Supreme Court support for transracial adoption. While Tizard (1978: 240-1) writes of colour prejudice among British social workers, Dickey (1990: 590) records that in the case of *Re N. (A Minor)* ([1990] 1 Fam LR (Eng) 58) the proposition put by the British Agencies for Fostering and Adoption that black children should never be placed with white adoptive parents was rejected by the Judge, Bush J.

In explanation, Tizard suggests that social worker prejudice against all forms of adoption may result from '...the fact that the adopted children whom psychiatrists and social workers see are the tiny minority who are transferred to clinics' (1978: 240). Others (Triseliotis 1988: 22-3) explain the opposition to adoption by reference to social workers' 'unwarranted extensions' from research such as the report by Brockhaus and Brockhaus (1982) that early maternal deprivation leads to major crises in the adoption of older children. Discussion of implications of early maternal deprivation has indeed swung away from Bowlby's (1951) theory of permanent damage. Triseliotis (1988: 23) and Rutter (1981), for example, reassess early maternal deprivation to show that '...children can overcome many early negative experiences'. Moreover, Tizard and Rees (1977) provide evidence that when compared with 'institutional children', previously institutionalised children who had subsequently been adopted have significantly fewer problems. Raynor (1980: 149), Lawder, Lower and Andrews (1969), Cunningham, Cadoret, Loftus et al. (1977: 251) and Bohman (1972: 96) find no higher incidence of poor outcome among placement of older children. Harper (1986) reports on a longitudinal study of older-age placements in Australia. She concludes that the adoptions were 'successful'. Finally, Harvey (1983: 67) indicates an eighty percent success rate among the placements of Vietnamese children aged eight and over in New South Wales.



Officialdom's opposition to intercountry adoption may be attributed to awareness among social workers of the problems of deregulated adoption of Vietnamese children in 1975 when it was subsequently discovered, as Weil (1984: 289) observes, that many of the children had been placed in orphanages for protection from fighting and not as a tacit relinquishment for adoption. The view that intercountry adoption amounts to the exploitation of women and children, as expressed for example by Herrmann and Kasper (1992), may be shared by some officers. Following Toft and McIntyre (1992: 83), it appears that social worker opposition to adoption results from the view among social workers that adoption is not a life-or-death issue, or an issue that influences the lives of many individuals.

Finally, social workers may be aware of the argument that intercountry adoption programs mask the inactivity of governments in relinquishing countries who should instead be supported internationally to develop their own child and family support services (Ngabonziza 1988: 35 and Goriawalla 1982: 49-57). Such arguments are countered, however, by discussion of the principles of permanency planning and of relevant cultural values (Mangold 1978: 37; Charlesworth et al. 1990: 129; Triseliotis 1988: 24; Maluccio et al. 1980: 552 and Swain 1984: 293). They are also countered by the view of commentators in donor countries, such as Chun (1989), who argues in favour of intercountry adoption on the grounds that many abandoned or orphaned children are never going to be adopted in their country of origin because of perceived stigma.

### **The research question: intercountry adoption in Tasmania, Australia**

In this thesis, the sociological analysis of intercountry adoption in Australia focuses on the interaction between parents, parent groups and state officials. It has regard for Turner's (1984: 37) sharp cultural contrast between the formal, impersonal, neutral and universal public domain, and the informal, particularistic, and affective domestic world of the family. While the study considers structures relevant to all Australian intercountry adoption services,

as well as many that operate overseas, special attention is paid to the Tasmanian situation where tension between the two groups underpinned a group complaint in 1986 to the Ombudsman whose subsequent recommendations to the intercountry adoption service were ignored.

Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for gaining the qualitative data that enable us to explain the tension in the relationship between applicants and officers. Following Collins' (1981), the aim of the research was one of 'situational reductionism' or 'micro-translation', that is, the reduction of macro-strain identified in the analysis of social context, to the level of tension in the interaction between applicants and officers.

#### **Structural strain, tension in interaction and individual anxiety**

Following Smelser (1962: 47-66) structural strain between institutions is a feature of social systems in modernity. In intercountry adoption this strain surfaces as tension in interaction between public officials and prospective adoptive parents, even though they share a commitment to the welfare of the child. The analysis of these tensions and their origins in institutional strain form the focus of this study. This tension is manifest for individuals as general or institutionalised anxiety and is explored in this thesis by reference to the motivations of officers and applicants, the rationing of the service, the division of parenting roles, the values that are shared, and the management of dissatisfaction.

*Institutionalised anxiety* In a relationship of unequal and varied political power, anxiety predictably emerges as each party considers or anticipates the consequences of error or failure (see, for example, Hartland 1985-6; Ham and Hill 1984). The relationship between the family and the state is distinguished by latent powers of state coercion. The social contract on the institutional level is not free. Clients of state services understand that officials have the power, though limited, to make and enforce compliance with decisions and directions with which, as clients, they may not concur. The dimension of political power thus provides for clients an inherent element of anxiety that

the roles of individual officials may either increase or ease, but not dispel. Levels of anxiety predictably increase as the consequences of error become more significant. In intercountry adoption errors may have serious implications for officers' career paths or result, for example, in applicants' failure to gain approval-to-adopt.

The state official will anticipate anxiety on the part of the client whose personal project is submitted for assessment to a universalistic value system. Clients are excluded from the codified political power available to the official, but can exert political leverage through several formal and informal but potentially effective mechanisms. These include access to the mass media, an arena in which the journalist's agenda often coincides with that of the disaffected client. The formation of client support groups for the purposes of co-ordinating superregional expression of vocabularies of complaint is another form of political leverage available to the client. Such mechanisms empower clients politically and therefore provide cause for latent anxiety among state officials.

Anxiety among state officials will predictably foster the professionalisation of services. Professionalisation, in turn, consolidates the existing political power structures that underpin persistently high levels of anxiety and tension. The key elements of professionalisation, as identified by Turner (1993), are therefore important to this thesis. They include the establishment and constant reification of a hierarchy of competence (Turner 1993: 20), 'boundary maintenance' of occupational monopoly (Turner 1988: 131) and the mobilisation of bias through the creation of a professional epistemology with attendant agenda control as recognised by Ham and Hill (1984: 174-79). Professionalisation institutionalises the role of power and prestige enjoyed by professional bodies and conversely institutionalises client dependency (Turner 1988: 135). Moreover, Wilding (1982: 17) explains that political implications of professional epistemology include the mystification of professional work that appears as a function of what Turner (1988: 136) calls the 'indetermination of knowledge', not to mention claims of technical

expertise.

Alternatively, tension in the relationship between officers and applicants can be attributed in part to bureaucratisation (see, for example, Andreski 1972, Turner 1993, Matthews 1988) where the demands of accountability significantly constrain, among other things, officers' ability to apply the normal rules of sociability.

The power of professionals in bureaucracies has its limits. Turner (1988: 137) argues that these limiting processes include first, challenges from new professional and para-professional groups such as non-government organisations; secondly, fragmentation through specialisation and thirdly, the growth of bureaucracy, that is, the introduction of rules and hierarchical authority structures that undermine professional autonomy. However in high trust situations there are substantial parallels between bureaucratisation and professionalisation (Hill and Bramley 1986: 164-67).

*Motivations* When applicants and state officials who have disparate and structurally-derived motivations arrive at the interactive arena from different directions tension characterises their interactions. Where the object of negotiation has implications for the status of the client's family, adult representatives of the family will seek to secure that object as quickly as possible. Moreover, they will want to maintain as much familial autonomy as possible and to gain acknowledgement or social legitimation from state officials that the family's particularistic goals are respectable and deserving of support. Conversely, the motivation of state officials is to apply universalistic standards and procedures that underpin official authority rather than the particularistic foundation of clients' assumptions, perspectives and claims. Officials' actions are carried out against a backdrop of procedural rules, compliance with which is the basis for performance assessments by superiors.

Intercountry adoption applicants will notice the contrast between the privacy

and self-determination of natural reproduction on the one hand and the politically compromising status of welfare-client on the other. Motivated as they are by family-formation plans and/or altruism, applicants will predictably resent official intervention unless they are convinced that it is in the best interests of the child.

*Rationing of the service* Tension is also to be expected as a result of the various views, held by applicants and officers, on what constitutes appropriate levels of service provision. Therefore, implications of service rationing for the relationship are examined. The provision of a new social service raises the expectations of the citizenry, leading to a rapid rise in demand for the new service. Given that primary welfare of individuals is provided for them normally by the family, and given that most people at any one time are healthy, state welfare services usually cater for the needs of relatively few people at any one time. Those services are funded indirectly by all taxpayers. That arrangement provides for a high level of social security for all citizens since they are either currently dependent on state welfare or anticipate that one day they may well be. Conversely, that arrangement also informs a limitation of the political will in modern democracies. In an age of universalism, expensive services, that provide welfare for relatively few citizens, predictably face legitimization crises. Consequently, bureaucratic managers euphemistically redefine the limitation of funding with the attendant diminution of service provision as *rationalism*. The term is appropriate because it conveys notions of *rationing* and of *rational* behaviour. In a universalistic value system, it is rational to ration. Wright Mills (1977: 186-88) argues, however, that rationality sometimes contradicts reason. For example, from the point of view of officers, rationing may conflict with the ideals of service provision. From the point of view of clients, rationing may seem unreasonable if it delays or defeats their personal projects.

*The division of parenting roles* This thesis traces the implications of the parenting roles of applicants and officers for their various views on what

constitutes appropriate procedural pace and argues that the differing perceptions on how long the process should take, and the timing of the stages associated with the transfer of responsibility, become major sources of tension in the relationship. Given the stigmatisation of many social services provided by the state, clients will seek access to such services only if the object desired cannot be gained by them from private or market sources of welfare. Clients thus approach state welfare services with a degree of reluctance. That reluctance may delay their approach to services with the result that clients' sense of urgency is heightened by the time of their initial meeting with service providers.

Even where there has been no delay on the part of the client, the stigmatisation associated with state services predictably limits requests for such welfare to objects that clients feel are essential or at least very important. Exceptions to that pattern of behaviour may be demonstrated by clients who develop a state-welfare or hand-out mentality. All clients predictably seek to manage the embarrassment that emerges as a result of stigmatisation. Management techniques may include a consolidation of the view that the details of the client's case are extraordinary, such that the approach to state welfare is justified and stigmatisation is not. A perspective such as this would underpin a strengthened commitment on the part of the client to the particularistic orientation that is already predictable. If state services are approached only under exceptional circumstances, then the object desired is clearly needed urgently by the client. Were the object not needed urgently, the client would, where possible, seek access to private sources of welfare. The sense of urgency predictably results in tension when applicants have to submit to the careful, considered and therefore 'slow' processes of official protocol.

Officer views on procedural pace are informed by a very different agenda. It is to be expected that the interacting parties will both seek to secure the best interests of the child as they see them. Tension and conflict can be anticipated, however, as functions of the varying orientations that provide participants

with significantly different perspectives. For example, the officer must be satisfied that prospective adoptive parents will provide a suitable home and family for the child. For this reason the approach of officers is likely to be 'measured'. Child psychiatrist Blackburn, for example, advises intercountry adoption service workers to insist on a waiting period for adoptive parents (cited in Evatt et al. 1978: 120).

Applicants have a broader perspective on intercountry adoption than do officers. Applicants often assume a parenting attitude even before a formal application is lodged. For officers, in contrast, the child is socially invisible prior to placement. Allowing the child to linger in wretched circumstances in orphanages in relinquishing countries (Duffy (1992) is seen by applicants but not by officers as inconsistent with the principle of the 'paramountcy of the interests of the child' (see, for example, Department of Community and Health Services 1995: 5; Mizgalski 1992; Toft and McIntyre 1992: 100). For officers, the welfare of the child is *post-placement* welfare (Fellner 1968: 93).

While applicants will agree with what English (1990) calls the 'tacit recognition' of every adult's right to parenthood, officers will be predisposed to accept Picton's (1984: 2) assertion that no-one has a right to a child.

Officers' and clients' views on procedural pace continue to differ after placement of the child. By law, the official retains ex-officio responsibility for the welfare of the child until formal adoption is completed in a magistrate's court. Adequate supervision of placement requires a longitudinal study of the child in the new family setting. Eisen (1979: 199) and Simon and Senturia (1966: 864), for example, observe that prospective adoptive parents are therefore required to make a full emotional commitment to a child who may be taken away from them by officialdom. The adoptive parents, therefore, will seek to adopt the child formally as soon as possible. Views on procedural pace are clearly informed by divergent notions of parenting responsibility for the child.

*Shared values* The study of tension in a relationship should not obscure the underlying value consensus without which a relationship would be impossible. This study does not examine a phenomenon of open hostility, unrestrained antagonism or total war, but elements of tension in a relationship of shared values. This research project, therefore, examines the paradox of empathy in a strained relationship. Following Parsons, Farrell and Swigert (1982: 139-44) define a strained relationship as one where alter is seen not to comply with normative rules of sociability. Those rules include cultural rules or norms, 'mutually agreed-upon expectations of conduct' that underpin the reciprocity that is 'essential to persistent relationships', and 'cathexis or personal attachment' (Farrell and Swigert 1982: 139).

Most clients will agree in principle with the need for state officials to adopt a universalistic orientation to their work because they accept that the legitimacy of the state depends upon it treating all its citizens as equals. State officials, conversely, will have personally experienced the primary socialisation of the family and, therefore, understand the normative value of autonomous and private familial decision-making. Tension emerges, despite shared understandings, when applicants mount particularistic arguments in support of their application and officers respond with reference to universalistic criteria.

The element of empathy between the client and the officer has implications for their relationship. Work by Timms (1973) and van Krieken (1992: 135-37) suggests that acceptance of the need for official universalism or fairness will encourage intercountry adoption service applicants to comply with state regulations and official directions. They will, nevertheless, with reference to the institutional status of the family, question the notion of complete state authority over the lives of individuals.

*The management of dissatisfaction* Tension between officers and applicants also surfaces as expressions of applicant dissatisfaction. Pinker (1973) and Mauss (1954) both observe that the decision to apply for welfare from state



authorities is stigmatised in modernity. According to Pinker, acceptance of state welfare connotes failure. This stigmatisation is usually understood and shared by clients themselves. Given the stigmatisation associated with many state services, clients can be expected to experience fundamental dissatisfaction as a result of their need to access those services. Dissatisfaction emerges in part as a result of the dominant social view of state welfare and welfare recipients, and is, therefore, *a separate issue from the quality of the service offered*. In addition, applicants must save face when confronted by a 'critical audience' and may, therefore, find much of their interaction with officers to be very uncomfortable. In extreme circumstances they may seek to apply political pressure. Following Goffman (1980), this thesis explores the management by applicants and officers of client dissatisfaction as a source of sustained tension in the relationship.

Client dissatisfaction may also emerge as a function of substantial loss of social rights such as the rights to pursue personal, private projects. Intercountry adoption service applicants, for example, are denied the right to pursue projects such as invitro-fertilisation or even natural attempts at human reproduction. Non-fecund applicants, therefore, are denied the most efficient method, namely, simultaneous access to various resources for family-building.

Client dissatisfaction will be highest when the object of the service sought is fundamental to the client's self esteem. If client self-esteem is associated with normative autonomy, then the most threatening and simultaneously the most needed services for those clients are the services that can provide objects of fundamental importance to individuals' social sense of belonging to dominant cultures or norms.

The management of dissatisfaction by officials is undertaken not primarily for the benefit of the client but to protect the operations or processes from which they have become disaffected. Without management, aggrieved clients could conceivably seek to destroy, expose, or embarrass the bureaucratic process, if

not its operators, that had caused them to suffer. Jordan (1985: 133), for example, notes the power of clients, local communities and broader public opinion to influence official policy and practice.

The universalistic orientation of state bureaucracies precludes the option of protective face games as defined by Lyman and Scott (1970: 42). The relationship between official and client is not equal and reciprocal in social terms. Therefore, protective face games predictably do not appear in interaction between officials and clients, though they can be expected to emerge in meetings of clients' support groups where they have the same purpose as do the defensive games played by clients themselves, that is, to save the social face of the client in light of failure to gain the desired object(s) from the officer. Tension is raised among clients because of the universalistic, objectivist orientation required of officers. State officials constitute a critical audience. In interaction with clients, the official purpose is not to make clients feel better, but to seek information that will provide substantiation for subsequent assessments, evaluations, judgements and recommendations.

The management of dissatisfaction, as well as dissatisfaction itself, emerges as a function of the structural arrangements that define the arena in which state officials and their clients interact. While Timms (1973) shows that clients are in a weak position to challenge expectations of themselves as welfare recipients, officers predictably nevertheless seek to manage client dissatisfaction. The management of client dissatisfaction by officers emerges as a function of the anxiety experienced by officers in the face of client access to formal and informal mechanisms for complaint and redress as discussed earlier with reference to the management of anxiety. Those mechanisms include the use of administrative appeals tribunals, review committees, the offices of the Ombudsman and of members of Parliament, the mass media, and client-support groups.

The political power of support groups is limited by their lack of official status. Nevertheless, access to sources of political leverage provides all clients with

the latent power to affect negatively officials' reputation or standing within and beyond professional boundaries. Serious negative influences may weaken promotion chances for individual officers.

### Summary

This thesis seeks to identify and explain tensions in the relationship between officers and applicants in the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service. The thesis analyses the social context of the service, focusing in Chapter Two on emergent strains between the institutions of the family and the state, and in Chapter Three on the role of the intermediate institutions of the media and adoption support groups in structuring everyday conceptions of the adoption process. The structural strains identified on the institutional level of analysis are then analysed as tensions at the interactional level. The thesis addresses six areas in which that tension is evident. They include institutionalised anxiety, the motivations of officers and applicants, the rationing of the service, the division of parenting roles, the sharing of values and the management of dissatisfaction. These areas formed the points of focus for interviews and are discussed in Chapters Five to Ten.

By addressing these six areas, this thesis provides an analysis of intercountry adoption that is of value to applicants and officers in Australia and other receiving countries and to those investigating sociologically the relationship between the family and the state in Western modernity and, it is hoped, to those children in relinquishing countries whose only escape from social, economic and political marginalisation is intercountry adoption.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FAMILY AND THE STATE

#### Introduction

In societies that have experienced a rise of individualism, and are characterised by the structural isolation of the nuclear family, and where wider kinship structures are diffuse, state welfare provisions typically expand especially where intermediate welfare structures are inadequate. Long-term processes of social change have brought the institutions of the family and the state into a relationship that is characterised by both cooperation and competition as each provides in its own discrete way for the welfare of the individual. In modernity the family provides for the welfare of individuals in ways that are for the most part traditional, emotional and particularistic. In contrast, the state's provisions for individual welfare are expressed in legal, rational and universalistic terms. The state has expanded its sphere of influence into areas of welfare, including that of adoptive children, that previously were the exclusive domain of the family. Today, where the institutional responsibilities of the family and the state overlap and compete, their relationship is marked by strain (Smelser 1962). In general, this strain is the source of the tension that is institutionalised in the interaction between state officials and their clients. This chapter reviews current literature on the family and the state in order to identify the ways in which conceptions of the state and its role and of the family and its rights shape the meaning that applicants and officers give to their own and each other's behaviour in social interaction.

This thesis analyses the relationship between the applicant and the officer as an 'episode of situated interaction' (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 19) within this arena of institutional 'overlap'. Structural arrangements in intercountry adoption are subject to a slow but more or less continuous process of renegotiation and are paradoxically characterised in social interaction between applicants and officers by value consensus and institutional interdependence (where all parties want the child's best interests to be served) on the one hand, and by

competition and hostility (where 'ownership' and control are contested) on the other.

In everyday interactions, people use conceptions of the social order to make sense of their world. These conceptions are not clearly defined, nor learned as catechisms. Rather, they are part of the tacit understanding of society that everyday actors have. These conceptions are widely shared but not universally held. This thesis investigates the way in which socially-derived conceptualisations of 'the state' and 'the family' have a powerful influence on the behaviour of applicants and officers in interaction. In intercountry adoption, it is predictable that applicants' and officers' expectations of their mutual social interaction will be shaped by their tacit understandings of 'the family' and 'the state'.

In their 'lived world', people reify the institutions by associating themselves and others with the institutions they represent. That process of reification confers added social status onto individuals (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 37-8) - the bureaucrat becomes 'the state' and the applicant parents become 'the family'. The analysis of these institutions in modernity can, therefore, shed light on how applicants and officers make sense of their interaction in the intercountry adoption 'field of struggle' (Bourdieu 1981: 308).

The analysis of the relationship between officers and applicants in intercountry adoption begins with a review of current literature on the modern family and the modern democratic state. Elements of change and of constancy appear as salient features of academic discussion on the family. Some authors argue that the family is a 'natural' or an 'evolutionary' social phenomenon. Others recognise the contingency of family-formation strategies on political, cultural, economic and social conditions. Discussion on the state includes debate on citizenship, deregulation, and the distinction between the state, nation and society. Finally, theories of state/family interaction are examined with special attention to the notions of compulsion, value consensus and institutional interdependence.

## The family

What is meant by 'the family', has been an enduring subject for academic and political debates. In the discipline, two mutually related 'debates' have dominated the discussion over the last three or four decades. One debate explores elements of constancy and change in the nuclear family structure and its functions. The other considers the value-laden question of the merits of the nuclear family. Some seek to fortify their entrenched positions, but most acknowledge that the nuclear family arrangement is good for some people and bad for others. These debates are explored here as they contribute to our understanding of the ways in which 'the family' is understood by applicants and officers.

Following Barnes (1979) and Malinowski (1966) the family is defined, for the purposes of this study, as essentially a social rather than a biological arrangement. With the exception of single-parent families, the definition used here is borrowed from Turner (1969: 110), that is, a co-residential conjugal dyad and parent/children dyads, in short, the ego, the spouse and their children. Following Whaley and Wong (1987: 59), the definition of 'family' here includes fictive relationships within nuclear family structures such as adoptive, blended, single-parent and step-parent relationships. Unless otherwise indicated, the notion of family in this chapter is not restricted to O' Driscoll's (1986: 83) definition of the consanguine or biological relationships between parent and child and the affinal relationships between adults that define the terms in some of the works discussed. The term does not extend to co-residential but non-related groups that, according to Mintz (1989: 400), may also be defined as families for legal purposes. Neither is the term used to refer to the familial relationships between discrete households observed by Laslett (1972: ix), or to such non-Western kinship arrangements as the bond of brotherhood established in Eskimo society through delivery by the same midwife (Pitt-Rivers 1979: 94).

Applicants who see the family as a primary institution that has changed little over the centuries and the state as a recent invention might be expected to

assert that the role of the family should take precedence over the role of the state in the care, support and nurturance of the child. Conversely, state officers who see the family as a malleable institution that is contingent on economic, social and political circumstances, and that on occasions allows for the abuse and neglect of children, might be expected to use their position to assert a role for the state in the regulation of family life.

Turning first to the debate on familial constancy and change, demographic evidence of the historical persistence of the nuclear family structure in England appears in the seminal work of Laslett (1972 and 1973). He refutes the claim that the monogamous nuclear family of North-Western Europe is the end-stage of an evolutionary line of development traced from primitive tribal groupings through pre-nineteenth century extended kinship forms. Evolutionary theories of the family are also challenged, for example, by Berger and Berger (1983: 87), Ariès (1973: 385) and Chandler (1963: 16-17).

Most recent authors writing about the family recognise that family-formation strategies are contingent upon the social environment. Cass (1990), Ariès (1973), Levine (1987), Young and Willmott (1973), Bottomley (1983a), Bachrach et al. (1991), Poster (1978) and Gilding (1991) all contradict Murdock's (1949) assertion that the nuclear family structure is universal. They accept, however, the notion of the 'constancy' of the nuclear family structure. Laslett's work, for example, demonstrates the constancy of the nuclear family but allows for exceptions and for changes during the life cycle of the family. The notion of 'constancy', where the durability of the nuclear family structure is demonstrated through the careful examination of demographic records is distinct from what may be called, 'inflexibility', where the 'family-of-origin' image of parents and their children obscures insight into the many other types of family arrangements, not to forget the contributions of non-kin to primary group systems of mutual support.

The debate on constancy and change merges with the debate on the merits of the nuclear family structure when authors identify positive and negative

changes. In terms of the positive changes to the family, Parsons (1955: 19) has been pre-eminent in identifying the increased emotional intensity and social exclusiveness of family life as a function of the expansion of the state and other non-kinship structures, and of the isolation of the conjugal dyad from extended kinship systems. His notion of the specialisation of the family has since been taken up by many commentators, including Poulson (1986: 74). A similar argument appears in the work of Young and Willmott (1973) and Giddens (1992) who have drawn attention to desegregation of sex roles and increasing democratisation within the spousal relationship. Vandenheuve (1991: 21) reports that recent National Social Science Surveys found that in the United States, Great Britain and Australia at '...least 78 per cent [of respondents, in Australia N = 4511] concurred that watching children grow up is life's greatest joy'. The popularity of the nuclear family structure has been attributed to the particularism, privacy and intimacy of kinship. In addition, Young and Willmott (1973: 268) contend that the 'less transitory' relationships enshrined in the family system are essential to the human condition. Finally, Poggi (1978: 126-7) points to the paradox that, with social isolation and the end of economic self-sufficiency, elements of increased privacy and growing deprivatisation of the family have emerged simultaneously.

Other authors point to negative changes such as elements of disorganisation and dysfunction. From the mid-twentieth century, high divorce rates, changes in sex morality, and declining birth rates have been identified by some social scientists as symptoms of the general disorganisation of the family (see, for example, Zimmerman 1947; Whyte 1956; Goode 1964; Barrett and McIntosh 1982). Evidence of continuing dysfunctional pressures on the family is presented, for example by Noller and Callan (1992).

The disorganisation of the nuclear family structure would be welcomed by those authors who portray the family as a private, unregulated social microcosm of 'potential hate, envy, fear and mutual self-destruction' (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 23). A major contributor to such depictions of the family is R. D.



Laing (1956) who saw the nuclear family as a setting within which women and children were often exploited. In addition, many feminists identify the functions of the family as the sexual, social and economic suppression of women and children, the exploitation of women's labour, and the political disempowerment of women through residential and therefore social isolation (see, for example, Bottomley 1983b; Miller and Swift 1976; Millet 1971). Bottomley (1983b) furthermore asserts that for many women who once were important economic partners in familial units of production in feudalism or early industrialisation, the advent of the role of unpaid housewife was attended by a substantial decline in social status with serious implications for family relations. Problems attendant to the redefinition of sex roles in the postmodern family setting are recognised also in Gilding's (1991) analysis of constructive and dysfunctional forces in the history of the Australian family. Turner (1993: 5) notes that even Parsons recognised some negative consequences for women of the social isolation of the nuclear family.

Part of the debate on the ethics of the family structure focuses on implications of the intra-familial distribution of wealth. The assertion that familial inheritance is a 'natural' and 'good' system for the redistribution of economic wealth is put by Baumgarth (1986). Conversely, Marx and Engels saw the family as the 'embryo of slavery', the basic unit of capitalist society that protects the institution of private property (cited in Bottomley 1983a: 17). Their criticism points to the essential element of deregulation. The family structure underpins the unregulated redistribution of wealth and the particularism of family formation strategies, of ascription rather than state-assessed achievement, of personal loyalties, and of the welfare of individual adults and children.

By illustrating the consequences of unregulated family life for many women and children, critical theories of the family lend moral support to arguments for increased state intervention. Conversely, recognition of the values of the family as a stable social environment for the development of healthy

personalities and as an institution that is of benefit to the state lends credence to calls for the deregulation of family life. It is the deregulation of family life that makes it simultaneously so attractive to most citizens and so disturbing to those concerned with the welfare of women and children who are the most economically and socially vulnerable groups in unregulated settings. The ongoing debate on what constitutes appropriate state and family responsibility for the welfare of the child emerges from the contradictory evaluations of the family and spills over into everyday conceptions held by applicants and officers.

### **The state**

Tension in the relationship between applicants and officers may also be explained by the actors' views on the state. This review of the development of the state in modernity alerts us to predictable points of tension between 'the state' and 'the family' in the conceptualisation of citizens. If the state is seen by applicants in intercountry adoption as a differentiated set of institutions whose inconsistent relations with society include the desubordination of the citizenry, then applicants will tolerate and even support state involvement. Conversely, if the state is personified as a unitary social 'monster' that tramples on the rights of people and devours the role of the family, then applicants will resent state involvement.

The state is essentially the modern, territory-wide and socially legitimate system of rule. Since the state in modernity requires legitimation from society, the state, as a set of institutions, has to be seen to be supportive of individuals, the market, and intermediate structures such as the family. State institutions must also be seen to uphold such key abstract values as natural justice, universalism and the rule of law. Thus the state is a source of social welfare as well as a system of rule. As such, the state can be expected to attract universal support from the citizenry. However, as a legacy of the relatively recent expansion of state intervention into the lives of individual citizens and their families, the roles of state institutions remain socially controversial.

The rapid expansion of state activities has taken the form of structural fusion as many of the functions of the family, the church, seigneurie, suzerainty and other intermediary institutions such as Stände and Parlements have been subsumed by the state. However, the state itself is a differentiated entity. Its intervention in arenas that in pre-modern times were the domain of non-state institutions is rarely, if ever, complete and unproblematic. An essential feature of the state in modernity is that, if it is to retain social legitimation, it must be seen to be able to provide for the individual better than other institutions can. State services that are of poor quality call into question the propriety of state involvement, not just the standard of the service in question.

Apart from feminist and other critical theory, such association of the macro-structure with micro-situational analysis is not usually seen with regard to the family. On the contrary, dysfunctional families are more likely to be seen as aberrations that do not call into question the broader issue of familial involvement in care for the individual. In modernity, the main institution in competition with the state for socially legitimised intervention in the lives of individuals is the family. Both the family and the state provide for the individual in socially normative ways.

Just as there are various theories of the family, so there are contrasting views on the modern state. As Boudon and Bourricaud (1989) suggest, defining the state is a difficult task. The complexity of the notion of the state is illustrated by the wide variety of comment on the subject. For example, some writers' analysis of the state is ideologically driven (for example, Meyer 1983; Mount 1982; Baumgarth 1986; Miliband 1969) insofar as their work is noticeably influenced in part by their political views. Others such as Poggi (1978: 93, 135) and Evans et al. (1985: 347) personify the state to represent it as a social actor with a will of its own, a unity of purpose, and a high level of operational organisation or solidarity. As Poggi himself (1978: 67-71 and 161) shows, such metaphors of the state may have some merit in reference to monarchical absolutism in seventeenth-century France but are inappropriate in

association with the modern state that is a complex set of institutions often involved in simultaneous political cooperation and contest. Finally, while Mintz (1989: 393) implies that states should be distinguished from courts, Poggi (1978: 117) redefines the law as the language of the state.

The state has been described by some, such as Bottomore (1993: 2) and Barbalet (1988: 109), as the principal expression of organised political power in national societies, and as a network of power relations of distinct institutions to do with the law. That basic description serves in this thesis as the point of departure for an examination of the relationship between the state and other institutions including the market and the family.

The argument that the state is an autonomous institution, accountable only to itself, is explained by Bottomore (1993: 7) and is asserted by Baumgarth (1986). The notion that the state is autonomous is put, for example, by Evans et al. (1985). The evidence they give for this autonomy is the capacity of state officials to exercise their powers of coercion and administration in the pursuance of goals that are at 'variance with dominant classes or any other social group' (Evans et al. 1985: 350-51). Furthermore, Andreski (1972: 178) points to the phenomenon of state bureaucracies that operate unto and for themselves.

Others reject the notion of state autonomy and choose to argue that the state is the guardian of dominant economic interests but equally subject to control by those interests. This neo-Marxist perspective appears in the work of Miliband (1969), Dunleavy and O'Leary (1987: 254), Poggi (1978: 119) and Davis et al. (1992: 27). Marxists are not the only ones who have recognised the influence wielded by dominant groups over state bureaucracies, however. Matthews (1988), for example, shows in the Australian context that the influence on state officials by powerful groups such as commercial enterprises or other states is normally stronger than pressure from any other source. In addition, others including Bryson (1992) alert us to gender biases of state welfare provision.

So far this review of academic literature on the state has identified several perspectives that could be combined to form a negative image of the state as a powerful social actor that is either autonomously dominant or the 'guardian' or 'instrument' of dominant social elites. Such conceptualisations would predispose applicants to resent state official involvement in their private adoption projects.

Definitions of the state as only the guardian or servant of market forces and other dominant groups fail to account for the state's contribution to the 'welfare mix' described by Rose (1986). Conversely, many views of the 'welfare state' (see Rose and Shiratori 1986) fail to acknowledge the non-welfare operations of the state. The simultaneous dependence of the state on widespread social legitimacy as well as on economic and political support from elite groups has been recognised by Frankel (1978a and 1978b), Turner (1986), Barbalet (1988), Shiratori (1986), Baldock (1994) and Bottomore (1993) as the basis for the 'inconsistency' of state relations with society. The inconsistency appears in simultaneous state support for sustained social domination by elites, and for the desubordination of the citizenry.

Further insight into the inconsistencies of the state in modernity is provided by those authors who identify the tension that emerges from the co-existence of forces of disunity with forces of unity. They all challenge the notion of the unitary state. For example, Poggi (1978: 94-5), Frankel (1978b), Turner (1988: 97-8) and Pateman (1988) recognise the autonomous and potentially conflicting traditions of political action in the army, the police, the diplomatic service and the various ministries, not to mention the unequal power relations among citizens in patristic, capitalist societies that deny the establishment of power-free, contractual relations. That is not to deny the existence of important forces of unity in the state. Poggi (1978: 93), for example, lists currency, territory, language and the legal system as elements of social life that draw people together by forging common bonds.

Further positive aspects of the nature of the modern state become evident in comparison and contrast with earlier systems of territory-wide rule. An historical overview reveals the legacies of previous embryonic forms of the state as well as identifying what the modern state is not. These positive aspects include disinterested objectivity, universalism, value consensus, social and political legitimation, the rule of law and the expansion of citizenship.

The state in modernity has been compared and contrasted with pre-modern systems of rule including *Gefolgschaft*, *seigneurie*, feudal anarchy, suzerainty, the *Ständestaat* and absolutism. The distinction between the ideal of disinterested objectivity and universalism in the modern state on the one hand, and the mutual loyalty and personal affection of *Gefolgschaft* on the other is made by Poggi (1978). However, others, such as Matthews (1988: 159), Herr and Woollard (1980: 125), observe that the political significance of personal relationships in the form of the 'old school tie', corporatism and clientelism persists. Moreover, the importance of personal relationships within and among elite groups was central to the debate between Miliband (1969) and Poulantzas (1969).

In contrast to the coercion and economic dependency that underpinned the unequal relationships between vassals and their dependents in *seigneurie*, the modern state depends on broadly-based legitimacy. The expansion of citizenship and the introduction of universal adult suffrage are redefined as elements of desubordination that underpin value consensus between the state and society and that explain the state's dependence on social legitimation. That theoretical orientation appears, for example, in the work of Poggi (1978: 23), Turner (1986) and van Krieken (1992).

The modern state has also been distinguished from feudalism. Feudal anarchy or the fragmentation of feudal authority was a function of the attenuated lines of legitimation that emerged from a system of multi-directional political loyalty. Dessler (1986: 292), for example, observes that

feudal anarchy may have been avoided or lessened if all parties in power relationships had recognised the political legitimacy or authority of a sovereign state. The modern state is a nationally sovereign system of rule, universally recognised as such.

Both the modern state and the Ständestaat are characterised by the rule of law, that is, the recognition of prerogatives and obligations of office rather than of the person as was the case in feudalism. An important contrast between the Ständestaat and the modern state, however, is the expansion of citizenship to include the majority of the population. Most people in the Ständestaat were still merely objects of rule, not participants in the system of rule. Poggi (1978: 51) records that their interests could be expressed only in so far as they coincided with those of one or another of the privileged Stände. The requirements for social legitimation in the modern state, therefore, are far greater than in the Ständestaat.

The rule of law in the modern state more closely approximates the rule of law developed in eighteenth-century Prussia. Previously, in France, under absolutism, the law was regarded as an instrument of the will of the territorial ruler (see Poggi 1978: 75). In Prussia the power of the state ideally was depersonalised and objectified and the state was clearly distinguished from the larger society. A further similarity between the Prussian model and the modern state is state involvement in the regulation and promotion of economic activity. Crook et al. (1992: 234) and Rose (1986: 28-9) argue that such involvement makes the modern state vulnerable to criticism and therefore to a legitimation crisis in times of economic recession.

Another perspective on how the state may be seen by applicants and officers is gained from comparisons and contrasts of the notions of 'state' and 'nation'. The terms 'state' on the one hand and 'nation' or 'society' on the other are used interchangeably in colloquial usage. Some authors suggest that the distinction between the state and society has been virtually obliterated (see, for example, Poggi 1978: 131). The distinction has become blurred for others,

including Mintz (1989: 395). Still others argue that the distinction is clear. A strong proponent of that view is Frankel (1978a: 29).

The distinction should be kept clear. Only the state is faced with the contradictory role of fostering capitalist accumulation while also maintaining social legitimacy. Furthermore, the state has political sovereignty over a limited geographical and social territory. Political boundaries need not, and often do not, coincide with the emotional, cultural and linguistic associations that more accurately define the term 'nationality'. Thus it is that nationality, such as the Jewish and Palestinian, can continue to exist in diaspora after the demise of the state.

The difference between the 'nation' and the 'state' is also illustrated by sub- and supra-state assertions of cultural, linguistic and political affiliation. Examples of sub-state, or regional, nationalism are the emergence in 1977 of the Bureau of Unrepresented Nations and the 1978 foundation of the Free European Alliance. These expressions of regionalism in modern Europe emerged simultaneously with the development of the supra-state European Parliament to which some regionally national groups, as well as many state governments, send delegates. Evidence of stateless national affinities appears, for example, in the work of Daltrop (1990: 119), Bostock (1986) and Poulson (1986: 63).

While it is clear that the 'state' and the 'nation' are not synonymous, it is nevertheless predictable that state officials will use the terms as if they were synonyms. Redefinition of the state as the nation is a tool used by state officials to manage anticipated or experienced legitimation problems. Since the definition is lost in colloquial usage and is blurred even by some academic commentators, we may expect that many applicants and officers in intercountry adoption will associate 'the state' directly with 'the nation'. For those who make that association, submission to the requirements of state officers takes on an element of patriotism or at least loyalty to the central unifying structures that are seen to hold the society together and thus to



define the nation.

'Society' is a broad concept that in common usage incorporates both the state and the market as well as the citizenry. A more refined and questionable definition of 'society' associates it with the citizenry, a group to which the state, and occasionally the market, is answerable. The state is an institution that is (re)created by the citizenry and that confers authority, that is, a unique level of social and political status, onto state officials. Following Janowitz's (1980) argument that the status of citizenship rests on an interaction of rights and obligations, the high status or extraordinary rights enjoyed by state officials implies a correspondingly high level of social obligation. In an age of postmodernity with its critique of hierarchy and of 'unitary notions of authority, or the bureaucratic imposition of values' (Turner 1990: 11; see also Easthope 1993), the distinction between the state and society will predictably become ever clearer as state bureaucracies face more and more legitimisation crises. For those applicants and officers who see the distinction clearly, the added social status of the association of officers' views and demands with the status of the whole society will be lost.

### **Institutional interdependence and strain**

On the basis of the foregoing analysis of institutional strain we can expect there to be a 'contest' over which institution, the 'family' or the 'state', has primacy in the welfare of the child. We can also expect substantial tension on the interactional level where state officials and their clients interact. Since this tension is often anticipated by both officials and their clients, and can be expected to develop further during interaction, their approach to interaction is characterised by institutionalised anxiety.

The growth of the state has led to crises of legitimacy as its ability to provide for the individual better than other institutions comes under question from individuals and groups who are unhappy with state services and functions. Nevertheless, state institutions have demonstrated their ability to provide social services well enough to have general social legitimacy. Structural

isolation and mobility of the family underpin what Laslett (1988) calls 'nuclear hardship'. Where kinship structures are diffuse, nuclear hardship leads to increased state dependence. The institutional relationship between the state and the family is marked by shared responsibility for, and competition for control over, the welfare of the individual.

There are three points of departure in the analysis of the relationship between the family and the state: institutional interdependence, competition and value consensus.

*Institutional interdependence* As a system for the reproduction of human labour, and as a unit of consumption, the nuclear family contributes efficiently to state economies. That view of the institutional relationship is evident, for example, in the work of Berger and Berger (1983: 92), Levine (1987), Young and Willmott (1973: 28-31), and Shiratori (1986). In addition, the family has been redefined by some, such as Geiger (1970), Tizard (1978: 244), Rose (1986), Poulson (1986) and Gittins (1985: 138), as an efficient and cheap welfare system that relieves the state of an otherwise unmanageable social burden. Finally, feminists such as Cox (1990: 191), Cass (1990: 189), Stretton (1974: 39), Cass et al. (1994: 27-59) identify the unpaid domestic work of women as a key feature of the family's institutional contribution to state economy.

The family is seen by some as politically important to the self-legitimation activities of state governments. For example, the deflection of responsibility for the welfare of individuals from the state to the family in times of economic contraction is noted by Cass (1990), Jordan (1985: 135), Baldock (1994) and Luke (1994). Others recognise political benefits of the family for the state in the atomisation of society into nuclear kinship units that are easy to regulate (see, for example, Dingwall et al. 1984).

Finally, the family has been seen as a system that contributes to the stability of society by preparing individuals for normative acceptance of state

authority. That perspective begins with Parsons (1955: 32) and reappears, for example, in the work of Frankel (1987a: 17), Maze (1974), Gittins (1985: 138 - 54) and Dingwall et al. (1974: 212). Parsons (1955) also redefines the family as a 'personality system' that provides for the psychological well-being of most individual citizens. Institutionally, then, the family is of value to the state economically, socially and politically.

The converse notion of state support for the family is explored more critically in the literature. For example, while some argue that state officialdom is normally reluctant to intervene in family life for the purposes of protecting the rights of women (see, for example, Jordan 1985: 130; Barker 1978: 257), evidence of state intervention on the part of women is provided by others including Mintz (1989) and Gittins (1985: 135-6).

The most familiar aspect of state support for the family is the provision of state welfare benefits. Some redefine state welfare as symbolic of state-awarded citizenship status. Thus Marshall (1950: 24) and Rose (1986: 35) argue that universal citizenship rights are underpinned by state provision of welfare services. This theory redefines the notion of political equality among citizens as a function of state universalism, that is, state benefits are provided systemically and dispassionately to all who meet the eligibility criteria. The theory does not, however, account for the stigmatisation of welfare service recipients. Critical theory of state welfare is developed, for example, by Pinker (1973) and Roche (1987).

Other contributors to discussion on state support for the family point to the structure of welfare benefits. Since the first Poor Laws in England, the relief of poverty was seen by state officials, in this case the Poor Law Commissioners, as first a kinship responsibility. Only when kinship systems have failed does welfare become a community and state responsibility. That structure provides for a powerful rationing mechanism for state social-service delivery. It is discussed and illustrated, for example, in the work of Benet (1976: 124-5), Maluccio et al. (1980), Gittins (1985: 137), Gould (1988: 177-

78) and Cass (1990: 169).

Further, critical theory of state support for the family in terms of welfare provision points to systemic gender and class biases that, along with the work on stigmatisation, identifies the differences in citizenship rights as they are enjoyed by welfare recipients on the one hand and non-recipients on the other. For example, the poverty traps associated with long-term welfare receipt may deny claimants the right to pursue personal projects such as increasing household income or furthering formal education (see Jordan 1985: 334). Awareness of the negative implications of state welfare underpins the use of the phrase 'elfare' instead of 'welfare' by some authors including Bryson (1992: 30) and Baldock (1994).

The interdependent relationship is also discussed in terms of social contract between the family and the state, with some authors focusing on interdependence and others emphasising the importance of powers of coercion. Petersen (1991), for example, suggests that the family engages in a social contract with the state, whereby the family is subject to state regulation in return for protection of the rights of the individual. In contrast, Poulson (1986: 71-2) explains that the contractual relationship between these two institutions is distinguished by the element of latent state coercion that precludes the option of familial withdrawal and therefore does not allow for contractual freedom.

*Competition* The argument that state intervention in family life is characterised by compulsion, is based on the view that most people are dissatisfied with the ascent of achievement values over ascription, and with state limitation of parental authority. That dissatisfaction informs a critical analysis of state social-service delivery.

Theories that emphasise the compulsive role of the state focus on a fundamental element of dissatisfaction with the 'heartless' disinterested universalism of the state. That view, initiated by Weber (1990: 15), reappears,

for example, in the work of Turner (1990: 7) and Crouch and Manderson (1993: 67). Universalism can, of course, be defended with reference to objectivity and fairness. Those aspects of state operations are not points of tension. Rather, dissatisfaction arises over the perceived impersonality of state officialdom. Some authors note the 'emotive gap' between the state and the family, the implication being that since most individuals form their typifications of appropriate behaviour in the particularistic family setting, they perceive the disinterested approach of state officialdom as deviant and unacceptable. Authors who discuss the tension that emerges from the difference between state universalism and familial particularism include Gilding (1991: 8), Turner (1986: 79), Eastman (1989: 217), Kline and Overstreet (1972: 161).

Authors, such as Game and Pringle (1983: 100), Petersen (1991: 93) and Mason (1989: 4) who emphasise state compulsion, redefine the state as an autonomous institution that continues to gain greater control over the family. The limitation of parental authority, that is illustrated, for example, by O'Driscoll (1986: 96-101) and Mintz (1989: 404), is redefined by some authors as an institutional competition over the regulation of individuals (see, for example, Peden and Glahe 1986).

Awareness of coercive state powers and dissatisfaction with the ways in which those powers are exercised thus underpin a view of the institutional relationship between the family and the state that emphasises the state's compulsive role. From that perspective some authors, including Meyer (1983), Lasch (cited in Gittins (1985: 134), Mount (1982), Yeatman (1990), Berger (1986), Murphy (1977), Brous, Green and Jaggs (1980: 36), Lewis et al. (1977), Charles and Kerr (1986) develop a critical view of state 'intervention'.

*Value consensus* In contrast, some authors point to the centrality of value consensus and identify shared values, rather than the coercive powers of the state, as the foundation of social stability. Four aspects of value consensus in this context have been identified. First, the family and the state are redefined

as institutions that share responsibility for the welfare of the child (see, for example, Le Sueur 1990: 26; Harper 1992: 13 and 1990: 11). Next, given the high levels of institutional value consensus, the shared responsibility leads to tension only in isolated cases. That observation appears, for example, in van Krieken's (1992) critical analysis of social control theory, and is implied by Laslett's (1973: 249) demonstration of the durability of the nuclear family structure.

Third, in response to those who emphasise the importance of state compulsion and point to instances of inappropriate and incompetent state regulation of the family, much evidence is provided to illustrate the dangers of deregulation. The major work on the implications for children of deregulation or the absence of state regulation of family life was produced by de Mause (1974). Others who observe that the privacy of the family setting places many children at risk include van Krieken (1992: 143-4), Berger and Berger (1976: 110), Donzelot (1979), Durran (1993), and Tissier (1993). The deregulation of adoption in the form of baby-farming appears in dramatised form in Scott's (1990) recent novel.

Finally, in recognition of the dangers of deregulation for the individual, some authors redefine the expansion of state influence over the family in terms of state support rather than of state control, coercion or compulsion. For example, Mintz (1989), Donzelot (1979), van Krieken (1992), Peterson (1993), Taylor (1987), Twose (1987), and Dingwall et al. (1984) are aware of the poor standards of much state regulation, but call for improved state services, not for deregulation.

## Conclusion

The distinguishing features in the development of Western societies can be broadly classified in terms of cultural, economic, social and political modernisation. Cultural modernisation denotes advanced processes of secularisation and nationalist (rather than feudal, social-class or parochial) hegemony. Economic modernisation involves increased levels of

commodification, mechanisation and automation (with attendant implications for employment and the natural environment), the commercial dominance of capitalist enterprises, some of which are multinational firms, and the increasing specialisation or division of labour. Social modernisation is characterised by urbanisation, the decline of traditional forms of authority (such as the family, the church and community organisations), the attendant rise in socio-legal status of the individual, and expanding formal education systems that produce near-universal literacy. Political modernisation is indicated by increasing participation in, and the emergence of institutional mechanisms for, the conduct of organised democratic processes. Such mechanisms include the parliament, political parties, franchise and secret ballots (Lerner 1958). Equally important to the definition of political modernisation is the growth of state bureaucracies, that is, the executive arm of government. Increased structural differentiation has been recognised in state involvement in what were previously regarded as exclusively familial matters.

The kinship and state systems increasingly enter into competition over control of familial matters. Both institutions are associated with socially legitimate claims to the care and control of children, one based on tradition, another on rational principles. Normally, those claims are in harmony with each other and with socially accepted values. Disputes may, however, arise when individuals and groups argue that certain decisions with regard to the welfare of children properly require attention at only the familial or only the state level of authority. Disputes are normally between adults and are essentially political in nature. Proponents of the notion of deregulation of family life, that is, of state withdrawal from family matters, normally contend that decision-making on family matters should remain exclusively with parents (if sometimes also in negotiation with adult children). Conversely, proponents of state supervision of, and intervention in, family life may argue that the disinterested universalism represented by state authorities confers legitimacy on state-level involvement in family matters.

The two views appear as a function of the differentiation and expansion of the activities of the state in modernity and of the emergence of the individual child as a social entity, where the child has achieved citizenship status. Furthermore, the appearance of the debate is also a function of the weakened social power of the extended family and the community network. In short, the atomisation of society that has reduced the number of effective intermediate structures between the individual and the state, has magnified both state- and family-level attention on the individual.

The conceptual framework outlined in this chapter alerts us to six points of tension that appear as predictable characteristics of the relationship between the family and the state. The first of these is the anxiety that is central to the relationship and that appears as a result of the other five points of tension, namely, disagreement on the motivations of participating parties, implications of service rationing, contested parenting roles, opposing inferences drawn from shared values or principles and, finally, the management of dissatisfaction.

As the modern state and family are mutually reliant, it is to be expected that state officials and individual citizens, who are almost without exception all members of families, will interact amicably and efficiently. At the very least, it is to be expected that high levels of congruence will underpin socially legitimised and institutionally interdependent typifications of the state and the family. It is also predictable, however, that the universalistic orientation of state officials and the particularistic orientation of clients will provide for different agendas that lead to a relationship marked by tension. Even on a highly abstract level of analysis, therefore, it would be surprising if the status-derived or ex-officio views of appropriate forms of interaction did not give rise to episodic conflict. The conceptual framework outlined in this chapter, therefore, allows us sociologically to account for the inconsistencies that characterise the relationship between families and state officials in modernity and to redefine that relationship in terms of cooperation as well as contest.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MEDIA AND ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUPS

#### Introduction

The strain between the family and the modern state is reflected in the tension affecting the relationship between applicants and officers in intercountry adoption in Tasmania. This tension can be accounted for in part by the existence of socially contested views on the appropriate rights and responsibilities that people associate with the macro-institutions of the family and the state.

The intermediate institutions of the mass media and adoption support groups also contribute to applicants' and officers' 'creation of meaning' in ways that generate tension in the relationship and, among individuals, institutionalise patterns of anxiety. This chapter reviews the literature produced by journalists, the news media, and adoption support groups in order to assess the direction, nature and strength of the influence of the media and support groups on the motivations, expectations, emotions and conceptualisations of applicants and officers. Since the issues raised by the media and the support groups are discussed also in official reports, we might expect those issues to influence the thinking of applicants and officers.

#### Media Portrayals

The media produce emotive material about frustrated prospective adoptive parents and poor children on the one hand and about scandals of baby-buying on the other. That material provides 'ammunition' for applicants and officers in their respective struggles for control and dominance. The media present a wide range of issues with regard to intercountry adoption services. The issues discussed here could be grouped differently but do reveal the three main topics of interest to journalists. The quality of intercountry adoption services, the need for state regulation and supervision, and ethical arguments for and against intercountry adoption allow journalists flexibility in the production of topical articles and programs from various perspectives. For

example, emotive expression of outrage at baby trafficking can be expected to attract public attention as strongly as do sentimental evocations of compassion for desperate children kept apart from frustrated applicants by heartless bureaucrats.

Intercountry adoption makes good copy for the press. Given that the nuclear family is an institution that is socially attributed in modernity with responsibility for the care of children, it is predictable that headlines and emotionally charged stories that imply that the authority of the family is being usurped by the state will attract public interest and attention. Such stories can be expected to contribute to increased sales of newspapers that often do not juxtapose opposing views. Less colourful responses from state officials who in any case are constrained by considerations of client confidentiality, not to mention regulatory and bureaucratic protocol, are usually buried in later editions or relegated to 'Letters to the Editor'. Such responses do not correspond with the journalist's aim of gaining public attention.

Intercountry adoption stories about unfortunate children and dissatisfied applicants are of value to the journalist for two reasons. They are human-interest tales and they deal thematically, although often implicitly, with one of the most fundamental points of contention regarding modern Western social arrangements, namely, the constant structural redistribution, between the family and the state, of authority and responsibility for the welfare of the child. Clearly, significant change in those arrangements would have major social implications.

In order to attract public attention, some journalists write about intercountry adoption policy considerations and developments. Others publicise substantial negative criticism of perceived and alleged mismanagement in the area. Of the fifty articles that appeared in the period during which this research was carried out, twenty-three convey overt and/or implied criticism of intercountry adoption services. Due to the poetic (some would say

'sensationalist') language used to criticise intercountry adoption services and the substantiation of those assertions, media comment on intercountry adoption evokes emotional responses from applicants and officers.

Since applicants see children in desperate circumstances, they approach the Intercountry Adoption Service with a *sense of urgency*. They are motivated to adopt not only for the sake of the child, but also to manage their own discomfort at seeing children in distress. Conversely, emotional responses from officers are aroused by media comment on the dangers of unregulated adoption. Images of wealthy Westerners standing, cash in hand, on the streets of (say) Bucharest predictably reinforce officers' *sense of caution* and commitment to the consolidation of state regulation of intercountry adoption processes. Media comment thus contributes to the tension in the relationship by presenting graphic images and anecdotes of the undesirable consequences of the commodification of the child (in unregulated adoption) on the one hand, and of the bureaucratisation of the child (in official processes) on the other.

This review of fifty recent articles and several electronic media programs on intercountry adoption found that the major topics of interest to journalists were the ethics of intercountry adoption, the quality of intercountry adoption services and, finally, state regulation and supervision.

*Intercountry adoption: ethical considerations* Media comment on the ethics of intercountry adoption includes several points of contention such as the number of children available for intercountry adoption, the temporary closure to new clients of the Tasmanian service and the significance of ethnicity, racial and cultural identity and national pride. In contrast, the living conditions in third-world orphanages appear as a major uncontroversial feature of the discussion on the ethics of intercountry adoption.

The most emotionally charged and best-known form of media comment on intercountry adoption is the portrayal of living conditions for children in overseas orphanages. For example, one parent, who had just returned from a trip to Romania, spoke of two kinds of orphanages. A kind of triage operation, as defined by Kirby (1986), sends comparatively healthy children to 'educational' orphanages, the others to 'throw-away' orphanages (Fyfe 1991a). The 2.5 year-old child adopted in that case had allegedly '...spent most of her life confined to a cot' (Fyfe 1991c) and could, as a result, not walk properly. Nevertheless, media reports indicate that intercountry adoption remains a controversial topic. For example, Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is criticised by Opposition Foreign Affairs Spokesman, Senator Hill (Examiner 19 December 1990). In contradiction, Armstrong M.H.A. (Examiner 22 November 1990), Rollings (3 May 1990), Vice-President Adoptive Parents Association, and Duffy and Orr (30 April 1990), Principal Officer Australians Aiding Children, support the ratification and cite it in their opposition to existing and proposed restrictions to intercountry adoption services in Australia.

A major point of contention in the debate on the propriety of intercountry adoption is the number of children available. Media reports frequently assert that the number of children who could benefit from transnational placement is enormous. Three articles were found that publish Tasmanian Community Services Minister Jackson's assertion that there are only few children available overseas for adoption. In other articles, the Minister's claim is disputed by three applicants and a Tasmanian Member of Parliament. The debate seems to hinge on the various points of departure. For some journalists, such as Hedgcock (1991) and Maxwell et. al. (1991: 41), it is enough to cite figures of tens of thousands of children in Third World orphanages. From a bureaucratic perspective, some academics including Harper (1985b: 4) and Goriawalla (1982: 57) calculate the number available in terms of the capacity of official processes rather than in terms of the raw number of institutionalised children in need.

Criticism of the Western media for their emotional portrayals that feed the international demand for adoptive children and therefore subvert the development of appropriate child care in Asia is expressed by Goriawalla (1982: 56). From another perspective, the Western media are criticised by Hoksbergen for their simplistic portrayals of intercountry adoption that underpin the naive conceptual frameworks in the minds of some prospective intercountry adoptive parents. Intercountry adoption is seen by some academics not only as a subordinate option to domestic placement, but also as a potentially subversive activity that inverts the structure of permanency planning. Transnational adoption is seen as a mechanism for the exploitation of economic, and therefore political, inequalities that enable wealthy adopters to contribute to the sustained implementation of placement options that militate against the viability of familial cohesiveness among the poor. That view is put by Goriawalla (1982) and Ngabonziza (1988: 38).

While only one article was found that merely informs the public of the 'temporary closure' of Tasmania's intercountry adoption register, six articles present that information in the context of focusing on community opposition to the closure.

Some articles report on the views of relinquishing-country politicians who regard intercountry adoption services as a threat to their national or cultural pride. Moreover, Tasmanian Community Services Minister Jackson said in an interview broadcast on ABC Radio on 19 March 1991 that, '...there is a lot of pressure, an increasing pressure, in many, many countries for them not to adopt their children overseas'. A contradictory view is put by Cohen (1990) who redefines concerns about intercountry adoptive children losing their cultural and national identity as ideological inhumanity based on sensitivity to the charge that some governments are incapable of providing care for their own children.

The mass media report also on views from officialdom that mixed-race adoption should be banned. In the material reviewed here, that view is

opposed by several Opposition parliamentarians, several support-group representatives and one journalist.

*The quality of intercountry adoption services* The quality of intercountry adoption services is regarded as topical and is approached from various angles, including Australia's proactive adoptions policy, waiting periods, the relationship between officers and applicants, bureaucratic procedures and financial costs.

Several articles report on the implementation of Australia's policy to initiate discussions with other countries regarding adoption programs. Most warn that the new policy will not release a 'flood' of overseas babies for adoption in Australia, but Thomas (1991) hopes that the new policy will accelerate the intercountry adoption process. The negative connotations of the *flood* metaphor convey the official view that a rapid increase in the number of intercountry adoptive children placed in Australia would be undesirable. Use of the metaphor raises the question of who or what might be inundated. Perhaps the intercountry adoption services themselves are at risk.

Waiting periods are usually redefined as delays. The public is informed that prior to the 25 March 1991 agreement by Australia's welfare ministers on the new, proactive intercountry adoption policy, clients of intercountry adoption services often had to wait up to seven years. Warnings, such as Mickelburgh's (1990) about the persistence of lengthy waiting periods, may therefore still apply. The media report also on prospective adoptive parents who try to circumvent official procedures and delays. Milburn (1991a,b,c), for example, explains the domicile clause in Australian legislation, that requires prospective residential adopters to have been resident in the child's country of origin at least twelve months prior to adoption of a child in that country.

The relationship between officers and their clients is a major aspect of media comment on the quality of intercountry adoption services in Australia. Unreserved sympathy for clients of intercountry adoption services is

regarded as good copy by many journalists. Emotive headlines are common, with some journalists choosing metaphors such as 'nightmare', 'victim', 'heartbreak' and 'closed doors' to imply compassion. Furthermore, intercountry adoption service agencies within governmental Community Services departments are often the target of criticism for alleged incompetence, insensitivity and immorality. In order to sustain the human-interest element, criticism of bureaucrats is usually couched in discussions of individual case studies. Again, emotive language is used, for example, Bailey's (1988) 'baby stealing', 'blunder' and a bureaucratic 'faceless panel playing God'.

Perceived excessive levels of attention to formal procedures by bureaucrats attracts much criticism in the press. While there is some criticism of overseas red tape, most of the criticism found in this regard is aimed at Australian intercountry adoption service officials. Emotive language is often used to express dismay and dissatisfaction with official protocols. Conversely, Hopgood, Chairman of the Council of Social Welfare Ministers, defends the need for adoption protocols to prevent child trafficking (Thomas 26 March 1991). Redefinition of child trafficking as an ironic function of the measures officialdom take to prevent it appeared on the *Sixty Minutes* program broadcast in Tasmania on *Southern Cross Television* on 28 April, 1991.

Finally, three different perspectives on the financial costs involved in intercountry adoption were found. First, various figures are published as indications of the costs to clients, namely \$5,000, \$8,000, \$12,000 and \$18,000 per child. Costs associated with the adoption of children from South America are reported as higher than normal. Second, one parent argues that children who come to live in Australia through intercountry adoption services '...cost the government nothing...' (Eaves 3 January 1991). Third, the court custody battle following a disrupted placement in Victoria is estimated to have '...cost taxpayers more than \$250,000' (Grimmer and Chipperfield 1989).

*Need for state regulation and supervision* The third topic identified in this review of the media is the need for state regulation and supervision of intercountry adoption. This theme appears less frequently than the first discussed here, and features two aspects, redefinition of intercountry adoption service as a service for the child, and attendant arguments for proper protocols to prevent child trafficking. Press reports recognise the legitimacy of both family and state institutional intervention on behalf of the child. Nevertheless, respect for bureaucratic procedures is not universal. Some articles report on isolated and topical stories about applicant awareness of and support for legal loopholes.

*Media and tension* Discussion of intercountry adoption services in the media is charged on the one hand with a *sense of urgency* by the media portrayal of poor living conditions in overseas orphanages, and on the other with a *sense of caution* informed by widespread revulsion at the notion of child trafficking. Some journalists seek to exploit the emotional element in intercountry adoption for commercial or professional gain. Paradoxically, their agenda is served by evocation from opposite directions of the intended audience's emotional response. While some articles seek to evoke outrage at state usurpation of the rights of individuals, others seek to evoke outrage at individuals who disregard the appropriate authority of the state.

Juxtaposition of these contradictory views in the media does not constitute an analysis of intercountry adoption, but does provide graphic evidence of the undesirable consequences of inefficient adoption services on the one hand, and of unregulated intercountry adoption on the other. Thus media contributions to public debate on intercountry adoption can be selectively cited by applicants and officers to substantiate their competing assertions on how applications should be processed.

### **Support Group Portrayal of Australian Intercountry Adoption Services**

A distinction needs to be drawn between parental 'support groups' such as Accepting Children Everywhere, that provide information and support for



adoptive parents in receiving countries, and 'non-government organisations' such as the Intercountry Adoption Resource Network, that have direct contact with government officials and managers of orphanages in relinquishing countries. Non-government organisations facilitate the process once the applicants' file has reached the relinquishing country. On request, the organisations can advise state adoption service managers of children who have become available for placement. As the work of these two kinds of special interest groups often overlaps (for example, they both act as political pressure groups), the following discussion refers to both kinds of organisation as 'support groups'.

The major topics in support group newsletters are the role of support groups and criticism of state agencies, of service rationing and of the quality of intercountry adoption services.

Not all groups are represented in the literature reviewed here and, as with any organisation, the documents that are considered should not be regarded as an accurate reflection of the views and wishes of all group members. The purpose of the discussion is not to conduct an exhaustive examination of parental support group literature, but to gain an indication of what those groups regard as the key issues in intercountry adoption.

*The role of support groups* Support groups defend intercountry adoption and participation by the groups in the adoption process. The groups are redefined as valuable in themselves and for the systemic contributions they can make in cooperation with state agencies.

Intercountry adoption is defended, for example, in the mission statement of the Australian Society for Intercountry Aid (Children), where it is supported as a corollary to the principle that every child has a right to a family. It is frequently asserted that many children are in need of intercountry adoption. Intercountry adoption is redefined as a conduit to overseas aid, a catalyst for the development of indigenous social services abroad, and a manifestation of

multiculturalism. Nason (1990), Calder et al. (1988) and Kirton (1990) express pride in group contribution to the preparation of applicants for adoptive parenting. The 'scandal-free' reputation of intercountry adoption in Australia is celebrated, despite Cook's (1989) evidence of Australian connivance at baby-farming. The literature also contains information on group aid and sponsorship programs, and explicit support for state regulation.

*Criticism of state agencies* Despite the desire to cooperate with government, group members frequently use their newsletters to express criticism of state agencies. Relationship tension is evident in applicant frustration at administrative delays, and complaints about officials' alleged unwillingness to initiate the development of new programs. Applicants' anxiety over jeopardising their chances of adopting a child, by criticising the state service is expressed along with redefinition of Australia as a restrictive and uncooperative adoption system. Australian processes are seen as offensive to relinquishing countries who therefore prefer to send their children to other receiving countries. In Tasmania, criticism of the state service focuses on the temporary closure of the applicant list, the alleged 'low' administrative skills of officers, the agency's 'refusal' to cooperate procedurally with non-government agencies, the inconsistency and vagueness of service information, and the monopolisation of decision-making authority.

State rationing of intercountry adoption services is opposed. Services have been flexible and imaginative in their choice of rationing strategies. For example, while Boss and Edwards (1992: 12) observe that in New South Wales and Queensland non-fecundity is an eligibility criterion for applicants, ASIAC's (1991: 2) Winter newsletter observes conversely that childless couples are not accepted for assessment in Victoria. While there is criticism in support group literature of the rationing of services by state officialdom, Calder et al. (1988: 3) provide evidence of rationing mechanisms used by ASIAC.

In summary, the support group literature mounts a defence of intercountry adoption that includes the observations that the child's right to a family should take priority over considerations of race, culture or ethnicity, and that where no suitable family can be found in the child's country of origin, intercountry adoption is preferable to long-term in-country institutionalisation.

### **Published Reports on Intercountry Adoption**

Intercountry adoption has been the subject of several official investigations. The subsequent reports, published since 1983, show that the issues raised by support groups and the media become matters for official concern. Analysis of the content of these reports shows that they focus on the issues of state regulation and supervision, service rationing, the quality of Australian intercountry adoption services, the relationship between officers and applicants and the role of support groups.

*State regulation and supervision* State regulation and supervision of intercountry adoption are supported in all the reports reviewed here (Bowers 1984; Cox 1986; Inter-Departmental Committee 1986; Willee 1986; Fogarty et al. 1989; Newby et al. 1991 and Bayes 1993). Bowers conducted a review of intercountry adoption services in New South Wales. Cox and Fogarty et al. conducted reviews of the Victorian intercountry adoption service. Willee, as the Tasmanian Ombudsman, investigated complaints against the Intercountry Adoption Service from eleven applicants. Newby chaired a review into the Western Australian Intercountry Adoption Service. The Tasmanian Inter-Departmental Committee and Bayes reviewed the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service.

The discussion on state regulation and supervision distinguishes between guardianship and residential adoptions. Guardianship adoptions allow for prospective adoptive parents to apply with their State or Territory intercountry adoption service for approval-to-adopt, to have their applications processed and, if successful, to travel to the sending country in

order to accompany the allocated child back to Australia. Once in Australia, the adoptive child remains under the legal guardianship of the Director of Community Services for a period of twelve months to allow for government supervision of the child's welfare. Then, supported by official approval, the adoptive parents may apply for an Adoption Order (Tasmanian Adoption Act 1988: Sections 46-7; see also Willee 1986: 6).

Residential adoptions, that allow adoptive parents to return to Australia with the child they have adopted while residing overseas, are subject to state regulation and supervision by means of the 'domicile clause'. The *Final Report A New Approach to Adoption*, prepared by the Adoption Legislative Review Committee of Western Australia, defines the 'domicile clause' as:

'...a minimum period of twelve months' genuine residence in the country concerned, as a condition for the recognition in Australia of an Adoption Order obtained overseas' (Newby et al. 1991: 125; see also Inter-Departmental Committee 1986: 154).

Fogarty et al. (1989: 60) observe that where the clause does not apply, some prospective adoptive parents have managed to circumvent state regulatory procedures by short-term residence in the relinquishing country.

State regulation is also supported as the only social arrangement that ensures the best interests of the child (Inter-Departmental Committee 1986: 148-9; Cox 1986: 5-6), and the proper educational preparation of applicants (Inter-Departmental Committee: 148-9; Newby et al. 1991: 132). In addition, state regulation is redefined as symbolic of protection of the health of Australians from contagious diseases, respect for the rights of relinquishing countries and parents, (Inter-Departmental Committee 1986: 148-9), and respect for the priorities of permanency planning (Newby et al. 1991: 130).

*Rationing of the service* Rationing can be achieved in several ways. The option of restricting intercountry adoption to intra-ethnic placement is discussed by Cox (1986: 13) and Newby et al. (1991: 133). That restrictive perspective on intercountry adoption is traced back to 1954 in the United

States setting by Simon and Alstein (1987: 12). Other forms of rationing include the temporary closure of the Tasmanian intercountry adoption registration list discussed in the Ombudsman's report (Willee 1986: 6). In addition, Willee (1986: 7-8) and Fogarty et al. (1989: 6) focus on the underfunding and understaffing of Tasmanian and Victorian Intercountry Adoption Services. Furthermore, Fogarty et al. (1989: 6) note intercountry adoption service marginalisation within the larger Department of Community Services in Victoria. Finally, Bayes (1993: 27-8) supports Tasmanian restrictive applicant-eligibility criteria with regard to upper age limits, pregnancy and treatment for infertility.

*The quality of Australian intercountry adoption services* In the reports of investigations into both national and state-based services and policies several observations are consistently made on the quality of Australian intercountry adoption services. They concern the continued lack of uniformity among Australian services despite consensus on matters of principle. This lack of uniformity, poor communication, and the poor conditions of employment of state officials working in this part of the state service are seen by some as the major defining characteristics of intercountry adoption services in Australia (Cox 1986: 28; Newby et al. 1991: 124 and Fogarty et al. 1989: 49).

The quality of the services is seen to be compromised by poor communication. Communication inefficiencies among the departments of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and the Victorian Intercountry Adoption Service, and poor communication from the Victorian Intercountry Adoption Service to its clients are exposed by Fogarty et al. (1989: 63-72). Poor communication from the New South Wales adoption agency to its clients is noted by Bowers (1984: 19).

Other complaints about the quality of the services include discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of employment of 'sessional' or contract workers, who increase service flexibility but are difficult to supervise (Fogarty et al. 1989: 68-9) and Bayes' (1993: 40-41) assertion without supportive

argument that the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service would improve with privatisation. She makes that assertion without reflection on past privatisation problems in Victoria that Cox (1986) discusses, or on the nature of an intercountry adoption service run by Tasmania's only current private adoption agency, Centacare. Centacare, as a Roman Catholic institution, may be influenced by the Roman Catholic Discussion Paper on Intercountry Adoption (1991: 17) that questioned the propriety of intercountry adoption as a form of permanent placement for socially isolated children.

*The relationship between officers and applicants* State regulation, service rationing and the quality of intercountry adoption services have bearing on the nature of the relationship between officers and applicants. This review of the reports identifies points of tension as well as shared values. Points of tension include official demonisation of applicant motivation, social-worker opposition to or ideological reservations about intercountry adoption, and social-worker emphasis on transracial adjustment problems. Conversely, from the perspective of applicants, points of tensions include support-group resentment of governmental involvement, applicant frustration with administrative delays, applicant attempts to circumvent state regulation and supervision, applicant perceptions of officers who 'act like God', and officer insensitivity. For these reasons, Willee (1986), Fogarty et al. (1989: 74-86) and Bayes (1993: 2) all describe the relationship between applicants and officers as 'strained' or 'uneasy'.

The uneasy relationship predictably leads not only to circumvention, but also to opposing views on applicant right of appeal. The Inter-Departmental Committee and Bayes oppose applicant appeal rights. The Inter-Departmental Committee (1986: 158-9) asserts baldly that they are not in the best interests of the child. Bayes (1993: 20) argues incorrectly that appeal rights have not usually been provided in Australia. In contrast, Mr. Justice Fogarty et al. (1989: 61) recommend that applicants be given the right to appeal to the Family Court of Australia.

*The role of support groups* While the uneasy nature of the relationship is reflected in the reports, there is also evidence of compliance and cooperation. Cox (1986: 45-7), Fogarty et al. (1989: 73) and Bayes (1993: 38, 162) call for the recognition of support-group expertise. Evidence of increased levels of applicant compliance with state intercountry adoption service requirements, and of state reliance on parent groups to facilitate the process once the application file has left Australia, is supplied by Cox (1986: 47) and Bowers (1984: 19). It seems that some of the key figures in support groups assume the role of the 'boss'. Merton (1968: 126-130) defines the role of the pragmatic, street-wise boss or precinct captain as one that informally fills the administrative gap created by 'structural context' or constraint.

The reports reviewed here describe aspects of intercountry adoption services in Australia. They do not attempt to explore the social structures that underpin many of the entrenched attitudes and behaviours. Failure to address the social foundations of the elements of tension in the relationship between officers and clients seems to imply that the tension can be understood as a matter of personality clash. The reports describe the problem and construct alternative models of service delivery and the client-role. In contrast to that approach, this thesis is designed to contribute to a better understanding of the social arrangements that underpin the institutionalised tension in the relationship.

## Conclusion

This review of mass media and support-group contributions to public debate on intercountry adoption has identified several sources of tension in the relationship between applicants and officers. At the same time, the existence of shared values has been recognised. Those values explain how the relationship survives the strain. For example, support groups do not call for the deregulation of intercountry adoption in Australia. This review shows that criticism of the quality of intercountry adoption services should not be confused with ideological opposition to state regulation and supervision.

There is a debate on how state involvement in intercountry adoption should be arranged, not on whether there should be any state involvement at all. On the basis of this brief review it is clear that legitimization of state involvement as an expression of state responsibility for the child is normative.

The role of support groups remains a matter for contention. It is widely discussed in support group literature, official reports and academic papers. The social legitimization of support group involvement, including political lobbying, faces challenge on three grounds. Support groups are unofficial and therefore unaccountable. Moreover, since support-group experience and expertise often exceed that of state officials, the groups form an institutional threat to the authority of state services. Finally, the groups are often critical of state intercountry adoption services. On a more abstract level of analysis, state official disapproval of support groups can be understood in terms of institutional rivalry, that is, an unwillingness on the part of some officials to acknowledge ex-officio that responsibility for the welfare of children in modernity is institutionally ascribed not only to the state but also to the family. Individual officers may, as private citizens, recognise the social legitimacy of the family in this context, without realising the inconsistency of their views. Parsons explains:

'...the concrete individual actor never acts in one role only, but in a plurality of roles and situations, with complex possibilities of variation in the expectations and tensions to which they subject the actor' (1951: 251).

In media comment there is material that can be used to show the dangers for children of inefficient bureaucratic processes and of unregulated adoption. Applicants' notions of 'bureaucrats without spirit' is predictably informed by their access to emotional reports in the media and is subsequently consolidated by the criticism of state agencies published in support groups literature. Conversely, officers' conceptualisations of determined prospective adoptive parents, for whom the broader implications of the commodification of the child have been obscured by single-minded concentration on



particularistic projects, is reinforced by media portrayals of baby-trafficking.

In the chapters that follow, the interaction of state officials and applicants in the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service is explored as an illustration of the effect of structural arrangements on the life-world, socio-political consciousness, expectations, attitudes and behaviour of individuals. The analysis examines the extent to which dissatisfaction and the management thereof in the Intercountry Adoption Service should be seen as a result of institutional arrangements rather than as a consequence of the accidental meeting of mutually hostile personalities. Informed by abstract analysis, and examined empirically, are several points of tension, that despite high levels of congruence, to many individuals constitute the salient features of intercountry adoption services, even though they do not fit snugly into their ideal image of the intercountry adoption process. The elements of tension are analysed in light of data gathered in a series of interviews on the structure of motivations, rationing of the Intercountry Adoption Service in Tasmania, the management of anxiety, the compartmentalisation of parenting roles, shared values, and the management of dissatisfaction.

Chapter Four tells how the research was done. Chapter Five focuses on various issues related to the management of anxiety for the light they will shine on the tensions felt by applicants and officers. These issues include implications of a politically unequal relationship, implications of the unintended consequences of error, professionalisation, deprofessionalisation, and bureaucratisation.

Chapter Six, explores the motivations of the participating parties in order to identify the seriousness with which they approach intercountry adoption. The chapter examines universalistic and particularistic orientations, family representation in modernity, motivation for parenthood, parental goals, sex-typing, childlessness, motivation for adoptive parenthood, adoptive bonding, adoption problems, and implications for intercountry adoption service procedures.

Chapter Seven focuses on the notion of rationing. Deterrent functions of various rationing mechanisms are analysed before turning to the implications of rationing for intercountry adoption service processes.

Chapter Eight analyses the contest over parenting roles with reference to notions of exclusive and shared parenting, time tracks, stigmatisation of clients and officers, and prognostication.

Chapter Nine identifies the shared values and 'empathy' between applicants and officers and thus debunks descriptions of the relationship as 'adversative' or 'hostile'. The relationship is shown to be tense but not antagonistic. Empirical data juxtapose evidence of shared values with evidence of tension. In some cases, tension is seen to emerge from shared moral principles that are variously interpreted.

Chapter Ten explores the elements of dissatisfaction identified by officials and clients in the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service. Structurally-derived sources of dissatisfaction are distinguished from problems arising from psychological aspects of official roles and individual idiosyncrasies. The study identifies the institutional nature of much dissatisfaction, thereby providing participants in intercountry adoption with a conceptual framework that recognises the structural constraints to behaviour, while remaining alert to the ways in which behaviour is interpreted and understood by the social actors themselves.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand why tension characterises the relationship between applicants for intercountry adoption and departmental officers. The strains that emerge as the family and the state provide for the welfare of individual citizens have been identified and the contribution to public discussion on intercountry adoption from official investigations, the news media and support groups has been explored. This chapter provides details of the research undertaken to establish the sources and nature of the anxiety experienced by officers and applicants and thereby explain the tension that is typical of their interaction.

The social events experienced by applicants and officers in intercountry adoption are not only related to each other but also to the socially dominant conceptualisations of 'the family' and 'the state' that influence participants' 'creation of meaning'. Those conceptualisations are not simply aggregations of all the micro-social interactions that amount to social reality. Such aggregates, that are labelled 'taxonomic collectives' by Harré (1981: 147), are so complex that they are essentially unknowable. Collins' (1981) 'aggregation hypothesis' is thus rejected in favour of a theoretical model that 'addresses the *interrelation* between situated social events' (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 28, Harré 1981: 144). Thus the approach taken in this thesis is a form of 'theoretically informed empiricism' (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 15) for which 'hard data' can only be gathered from interviews that allow for the sensitive and careful appraisal of participants' responses.

Some commentators, such as Pierce (1990), Ngabonziza (1988: 35-40), Calder (1984: 1) and Harper (1985a) complain about the shortage of research on intercountry adoption. However, a body of research does indeed exist. For example, quantitative research has been undertaken by Hoksbergen (1988a and b) and Bagley and Young (1979), who used the Ziller self-esteem test, the

Rutter anxiety scale and Durojaiye's sociometric tests. Longitudinal approaches to the study of adoption outcomes, that compared the academic, social and 'general' adjustment of adopted children with non-adopted children, have been used by Gill and Jackson (1983). They used such objective indicators as school performance. In contrast, adoptive parents' perceptions of children's adjustment after placement have been explored by researchers such as Feigelman and Silverman (1984), Ahlijah (1990) and Kim (1978) using questionnaires. That method allowed for nationwide comparisons of respondents' answers over time, but did not allow for further examination of respondents' intended meanings. Only unambiguous responses to straightforward questions could be tallied.

Researchers such as Jaffee and Fanshel (1970) chose interviews as the method of enquiry in their retrospective study of parents' perceptions. That approach allowed for the recording of issues raised by adoptive parents. Moreover, interviewers could ask for clarification from parents as required. In Jaffee and Fanshel's own assessment of their methodology, they assert that the interviews provided 'the opportunity to develop a fairly definitive picture of the adoptee's overall life adjustment' (1970: 303). However, they acknowledge that their methodology had limitations, including the absence of a control group for comparison with non-adopted children, the fact that many parents had been required to comment on adoption experiences of up to thirty years ago, and the fact that adoptees themselves were not interviewed. From that research project we can ascertain that where control groups are not required and where the objects of investigation themselves are interviewed shortly after the relevant adoption experience, the interview method is appropriate.

Better use of the interview method was made by Shireman and Johnson (1986), Costin and Wattenberg (1979) and Dalen and Saetersdal (1987), who interviewed adoptees as well as adoptive parents in order to gauge the views of adoptees. The reliability of Shireman and Johnson's data can be challenged however, since they taped only about twenty per cent of the interviews.

Interviews were also used by McRoy, et al. (1982) in their study of self-esteem and racial identity in trans-racial and same race adoptees. They used the pre-existing Tennessee Self Concept Scale and the Family Adaptability and Cohesiveness Evaluation Scale. Thus we can see that pre-existing scales and tests have been used in both quantitative and qualitative research on intercountry and transracial adoption. No such tests were found that could be used in this study

Interviews with 'adult adopted persons' and their adoptive parents were combined with the data gathered from official case records in Raynor's (1980) study on adoption outcomes. In Tasmania, official case records are confidential and are not made available to researchers by the Department of Community and Health Services. Therefore, this thesis rests only on the data gained from interviews.

Although the literature on intercountry adoption is not vast there is a solid base upon which to build. The existing empirical research establishes the utility of the interview method in investigating an emotionally charged and largely private area of social life.

### **Intercountry adoptions as a field for study**

Few children have been adopted from overseas into Tasmania, the smallest Australian state with a total population of just under 500,000. Since identification of adoptive children and their families is therefore easy, great care had to be taken to maintain the anonymity of those who participated in the study. A chart tabled at the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Consultative Committee meeting held at 34 Davey Street, Hobart on 3 March, 1995 shows the following intercountry adoption service placement figures. These are shown in Table 1 below.

The state service has to maintain client confidentiality and may not, therefore, supply researchers with lists of applicants who might be approached for participation in the study. The names and addresses of

applicants had to be obtained informally and without the help of the state service. Since the intercountry adoption community in Tasmania is small, its members are usually aware of how to contact local support groups. The groups were of invaluable assistance in the location of respondents. Where groups are not listed in public telephone directories, therefore, informal social networks serve to advertise them.

**Table 1: Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Placements**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Placements</b>
1982	6
1983	6
1984	15
1985	24
1986	36
1987	43
1988	27
1989	17
1990	12
1991	13
1992	13
1993	9
1994	2
1995	6

Group meetings are usually attended by successful applicants or those who hope to succeed. Unsuccessful applicants tend to avoid the meetings and are, therefore, more difficult to locate. The study was discussed with several applicants who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to adopt children. Given the sensitivity of intercountry adoption issues for these applicants, the decision was made not to press people in this category to participate in the study.

### **The choice of method**

Data collection in this study of intercountry adoption was difficult because of the ambivalent attitudes of officers and applicants. Respondents were expected to be ambivalent because the responsibilities of the institutions of the family and the state overlap. How responsibility for the welfare of the child should be divided and implemented remains controversial since socially legitimate claims to decision-making authority can be made for both institutions. It was anticipated, therefore, that responses to survey questions would often seem to be paradoxical and would consequently require clarification.

'Face to face' interviews were judged to be the best method for gathering data on the ambivalence that characterises applicants' and officers' assessments of their mutual social interaction and for the resolution of ambiguous responses. Confidential interviews were also judged to be an appropriate context for data gathering within which study participants could be assured that their identity would not be revealed. They could also be assured that they need not answer every question and that they could terminate the process at any time should they feel uncomfortable with the interview (Polgar and Thomas 1995: 139). As a result, participants felt relaxed enough to discuss freely the emotionally-charged, private and personal issues that are the topics of enquiry for this thesis. All officers and applicants invited to participate in the study agreed to take part. Most interviewees expressed their gratitude for having been given the opportunity to speak freely on a topic that is very close to their hearts.

The 'in-depth' interviews were 'guided' (Moser and Kalton 1973: 298), 'focused' (Merton 1946) or 'semi-structured' (Minichiello et al. 1990: 92-3) by means of a schedule of questions that appears in the appendix to this thesis. Those questions were designed to keep the interview within the framework of the sociological analysis of the tense relationship between applicants and officers. The guided approach has been criticised for undermining the validity

of the data by telling us more about the views of the researcher than the views of the interviewees (Madge 1975: 177). The danger is that the interviewer will guide the discussion to areas that are of interest to the researcher, but not necessarily to the interviewee. Aware of that danger, 'control' of the discussion was given to interviewees by allowing them to talk freely. For example, in response to initial questions, some interviewees spoke at length and in doing so answered many of the questions that appeared later in the schedule. When those later questions were subsequently reached, as the researcher worked through the list, interviewees were asked to confirm that they had already been covered. Some then took the opportunity to expand upon their earlier comments. Moreover, the final question put in each case was an invitation for interviewees to comment on any other aspect of their adoption experience that had not yet been discussed or that they felt required elaboration.

The value of the in-depth, guided interview lay in the opportunity that it provided for interviewees to describe, in their own terms, their opinions and experiences with regard to intercountry adoption. The intention was that this method would allow interviewees to concentrate on the matters perceived by them to be of greatest concern.

### **Locating respondents**

Adoption support groups were very helpful initially in the location of respondents. Many potential respondents were met at Christmas parties organised by support groups in each of the three regions. Once interviews were underway, respondents suggested the names of other applicants.

Interviews with officers were arranged formally. The nature and purpose of the study was explained in a letter to the Secretary of the Tasmanian Department of Community and Health Services. Permission was gained in writing from the Secretary before the initial approach to the adoptions service was made. Then a meeting was arranged with the Manager of the service. She agreed to circulate among her officers a letter that described the proposed



study. Individual officers were thus alerted to the nature of the study prior to their being approached for interview.

The demands of confidentiality preclude the inclusion in the thesis of a detailed table of placement dates that would identify respondents. However, broad indications can be given. Twenty-eight of the applicants had adopted more than one child from overseas. Altogether, the sixty applicants had adopted eighty-one children, thirty since 1990. The study population thus includes fifty-five per cent of intercountry adoption placements in Tasmania since 1990 and sixty-seven per cent of the placements since 1992.

### **The scope of the data gathered**

Interview questions focused on the roots of anxiety and on how applicants and officers respond to it. In order to avoid influencing the interviewee with the researcher's own biases and preconceptions, questions were as open-ended as possible. Many questions appear in identical form in the interview schedules for officers and applicants (see Appendices A and B) so that comparisons and contrasts could be made between these two groups. The broad range of questions also allowed for comparisons and contrasts between discrete groups of applicants. The topics covered are those listed in Chapter Two.

### **The conduct of the interviews**

Every effort was made to maximise interviewees' sense of comfort and 'safety' so that they would be able to speak freely of their experiences. Confidential interviews in socially 'safe' settings such as respondents' homes allowed the researcher to gain respondents' trust. For example, respondents could request that the tape-recorder be switched off until they had gathered their thoughts. Moreover, in order to confirm that data had been accurately recorded, interviewees were asked to participate in the encapsulation of their comments. Finally, many anecdotes were recorded that had little or no relevance to the immediate concerns of this thesis. Those anecdotes were nevertheless interesting in themselves and were important parts of the lived

experience of applicants and officers. By allowing interviewees to tell their stories without interruption, the researcher was able to 'establish rapport' or 'set the tone' that was invaluable when interviewees were invited to focus on aspects of the relationship that is the object of this study (Minichiello 1990: 141-43).

Fifty-seven applicants were interviewed in their homes. One was interviewed at a community centre and two at the researcher's home. Three officers were interviewed at their homes, another one at the researcher's home, and eight at departmental offices. Nine interviews were held in the North-West of Tasmania, eighteen in the North, and nineteen in the South.

All responses were recorded anonymously on cassette tape, with study participants being assured that their responses would be treated in confidence. That undertaking included the anonymity of the interviewee population in total. Participants' identity was not disclosed within or beyond the study population. Nearly all interviews took longer than three hours to complete. Electronic recordings were transcribed so that themes could be abstracted for analysis.

Transcribed data were tallied and cross-tabulated to identify group responses that, in turn, reveal the influence of structural arrangements on participants' perceptions.

### **The characteristics of interviewees**

This thesis reports on the research outcomes of interviews in 1995 with twelve Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service officers and sixty applicants. All the officers were female, there being no male intercountry adoptions officers in Tasmania at present. Thirty-three female and twenty-seven male applicants were interviewed. Fifty-two applicants were interviewed as married couples, with a further seven couples represented by the wife. Only one couple was represented in interview by the husband. In order to protect the anonymity of applicant interviewees, their occupations

were not recorded. Broadly speaking the social class of the applicants interviewed can be tallied as thirty urban middle class, fourteen urban working class, thirteen rural middle class and three rural working class.

### **Processing the interview material**

Interview material was recorded on tape anonymously. The tape-recordings were later transcribed and each cassette was given a code number to conceal the identity of the interviewees. Under the same code numbers, the recordings were transcribed. Intermittently, analytical and personal comments, that pointed for example to relevant information about the interviewee or to similar or contrasting responses from others or to pertinent theory, were included in upper case to distinguish them from the text of the transcription. Thus the transcripts and analytical and personal logs were combined (Minichiello et al. 1990: 253-82).

The content of the transcriptions was then analysed to reveal the results of triangulation. Responses to some questions were often found, as expected, to illuminate analytical interpretation of responses given to other questions by the same interviewee. The data were then encoded in summary form so that they could be used as column titles in tabulated form that, in turn, allowed for the efficient tallying of the various responses. Great care was taken to record one answer for each interviewee. That required careful transcription where spouses gave mutually differing responses on the one hand, and the careful distinction in the tabulation process of code numbers that indicated single respondents from those that indicated the transcriptions of interviews with couples.

The data gathered on applicants' and officers' views on their mutual relationship and social interaction have been organised under six broad topics. First, the question schedule focused on participants' motivations. The intention was to collect enough data to be able to identify the motivations of the participating parties and to compare the motivations of applicants with those of officers. A subsequent objective was to ascertain applicants' opinions

about what motivates officers to work in the intercountry adoption arena and, conversely, to identify officers' views on, and assessments of, what motivates people to adopt from overseas. Data on motivations were expected to deliver insights into the levels of respect that each party affords the other.

Secondly, questions were asked about the ways in which the service is rationed. It was intended that data collected on rationing would provide some insight into the ways in which structural constraints, whether they be familial or bureaucratic, variously influence the symbolic meaning that participants give to social phenomena. For example, if emphasis on the 'small number of children' available for intercountry adoption could be identified as a way of limiting the number of applications to bureaucratically manageable proportions, then an 'unintended consequence' (Harré 1981 and Giddens 1981) of that strategy might be that it further alienates those applicants who are convinced that there are millions of children available.

Thirdly, the interview schedule focused on the roots of, and responses to, anxiety. It was anticipated that some interviewees might be reluctant to admit to anxiety, or that some might not even conceptualise their feelings in terms of anxiety. Triangulation of questions was therefore used to approach the topic from several directions that allowed respondents to talk about their anxiety without having to label it as such. For example, applicants were asked whether all applications were successful and whether they felt that there were any implications for the relationship between applicants and officers of criticism of the service by applicants. Responses to those questions were intended to indicate applicants' levels of awareness of the possibility of failure and their association, if any, of success with the notion of keeping the officers onside. Further triangulation was intended to reveal association between the levels of anxiety of applicants on the one hand, and whether or not the applicants were preferential adopters.

Fourthly, data were sought on the association, if any, between levels of anxiety among applicants and length of wait for placement. Length of process

was tested by many questions, including those that sought responses on who controls the pace at which applications are processed.

Fifthly, data on the extent to which applicants and officers shared relevant values were collected. It was intended that the information would give an indication of the levels of consensus or adversity that help us to identify the relationship either as tense or as antagonistic. Typical questions relevant to this purpose were the ones that sought responses on the matters of the propriety of state regulation and on post-placement supervision.

Sixthly, applicants and officers were asked to indicate what, in their opinions, were the roots of (any) dissatisfaction and how they responded to that problem. Those questions were intended to reveal not only the sources of dissatisfaction, but also the ways in which participants manage it. It was expected that management strategies themselves might be redefined by competing parties and thus become sources of further dissatisfaction.

The open-ended nature of many of the questions allowed for the resolution of apparent contradictions. For example, some participants indicated that there were plenty of children available for intercountry adoption. Others said that there were not enough. Those apparently contradictory positions in some cases concealed consensus. For example, some participants who said that there were plenty of children available thought that the limited service provision was inadequate to meet the needs of countless children in need of families. Others, who said that there were not enough available, agreed with the view that there were countless children in need of families but sought to indicate that few of them were being processed bureaucratically for adoption. Such consensus emerged from participants' lengthy and unconstrained narratives. As an explorative study, this project sought to identify various important agendas and issues that can be examined more closely with more narrowly targeted research instruments in the future.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### INSTITUTIONALISED ANXIETY IN INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

#### Introduction

Anxiety, principally in the form of fear of failure, is institutionalised in the intercountry adoption process for applicants and officers. Since failure has serious consequences for all parties and since officers and applicants cannot fully control outcomes, the relationship between people who want to adopt on the one hand and adoption officers or social workers on the other is often characterised by tension (Macaulay and Macaulay 1978, Jones and Else 1979, Feigelman and Silverman 1984, Hogan and Siu 1988, McRoy 1989, O'Shaughnessy 1994, Toft and McIntyre 1992). Manifest dissatisfaction of applicants with the service (Boss and Edwards 1992; Willee 1986) and of officers with the parenting provided by adoptive parents (Pilotti 1985: 30) are expressions of their anxiety. The dissatisfactions of applicants and the systemic concerns of officers are commonly the subject of media attention.

Media depictions of large numbers of children living in wretched circumstances have the capacity to evoke emotional responses in applicants who adopt the role of rescuer. In response to such images, some prospective adoptive parents approach intercountry adoption services with a heightened sense of urgency and with the belief that there are many children available for adoption. Tension is the result when their sense of urgency is confronted by the caution of officers that is fostered by media images of prospective adoptive parents jumping the queue and operating outside the system, and by the caution of officers that springs from their concern to see placements succeed. A satisfactory account of the tension present in the interaction between officers and applicants for intercountry adoption must acknowledge the contribution of the media. However, this tension, and its individual manifestations as anxiety, cannot be reduced to the media's twin factors of the apparent reluctance of officers in the face of the needs of large numbers of children on the one hand and the alleged self-seeking of applicants who

attempt to circumvent the system, potentially to the detriment of the child, on the other.

In the United States tension in the relationship between officers and applicants has been associated with opposition among some social workers to transracial adoption (Chimezie 1975; Howard et al. 1977), in particular black children to white parents. In contemporary Australia, the fate of Aboriginal children who were removed from their parents and relocated with white adoptive parents is a current issue. One legacy is that those involved with adoption have a heightened sensitivity about the connotations and risks of racial exploitation and that these concerns flow over into the analogous situation of intercountry adoption since race is involved there too. However, explanations of social worker opposition to intercountry adoption cannot be reduced to considerations of intra-ethnic and intra-racial adoption, although those considerations were indeed at the heart of the major controversial recommendation of the report produced by Newby et al. (1991) in Western Australia, because the evidence suggests that adoption workers have reservations about intercountry adoption for reasons other than considerations of race (Boss and Edwards 1992: 13, Close 1977: 31-2). This is consistent with evidence of social worker views in Britain (Tizard 1978) and Germany (Textor 1992). Since there is evidence of support for intercountry adoption from other professional groups, particularly lawyers (Kennedy 1994, Dickey 1990, Harrison 1990, Charlesworth et al. 1990, Bates 1988), it is clear that there may be something about the social worker role that creates among the incumbents the view that transracial adoption should be approached with extreme caution. This chapter identifies the sources of social worker anxiety that are integral to the social work role.

This thesis argues that tension, while in part attributable to media comment and concerns over trans-racial placement, is integral to the interaction of officers and applicants for intercountry adoption. For both parties the tension is attributable to fear of failure. Applicants fear that they will not gain a child for adoption and that their claim to parenthood status will be rejected.

Applicants are aware that they are constantly undergoing assessment as to their suitability as adoptive parents. They wish to present themselves in the best light. This involves choices about what to conceal and what to reveal. However applicants are uncertain of the standards against which officers will assess their application. Under such circumstances individuals will experience anxiety. Officers, for their part, fear the consequences of placing a child with inappropriate parents. Officers are aware of the possibility that applicants will present themselves in the best possible, rather than most accurate, light. Insofar as suitable and unsuitable applicants will use the same strategies in pursuit of their application, officers face the task of trying to discern the appropriate from the inappropriate in a context where a mistake is costly to the child, the service generally, and to officers' careers. As individuals, officers will experience anxiety too.

This discussion of tension in the relationship between officers and their clients has three parts. First the structural arrangements that underpin participant anxiety are explained. The social distance between the two parties is explored with reference to state powers of coercion on the one hand, and applicant powers of 'political leverage' (Subramaniam 1985: 204, Matthews 1976: 333) on the other. In that context, officials' fear of occupational error is associated with officer professionalisation that, in turn, is analytically reconciled with the bureaucratisation of service delivery. Strategies designed to secure officer dominance are contrasted with forces of deprofessionalisation in order to develop a clear image of the conjuncture that underpins anxiety on both sides of the relationship. In the second part, the analysis turns to a theoretical discussion of the anxieties of officers and applicants. The intersection of universalistic and particularistic orientations is discussed in terms of culture shock and political consciousness. Anxiety is metaphorically associated with stage fright, social game theory and accounts theory. Finally, the chapter reports on the empirical data on anxiety, gained in interviews.



### Structural bases for anxiety

This part of the chapter identifies the roots of anxiety and the concomitant tensions and dissatisfaction. First, family representation in contemporary Western societies provides a strong, normative motivation for parenthood (Luke 1994, Chombart de Louwe 1970). Normative typifications of parenthood include the attractions of privacy, intimacy and self-determination (Richards 1978: 183-84). The assumption that adults will 'naturally' make good parents remains largely unchallenged despite growing awareness of the rates of child abuse. That assumption is not, however, extended to people seeking to adopt. Their suitability for parenthood has to be established beyond reasonable doubt and to the satisfaction of officers who represent the state. Contrary to normal legal procedures, therefore, the burden of proof is placed on the applicants whose socialisation has left them unprepared for the load. Anxiety is therefore an institutionalised feature of the experience of applicants as individuals in intercountry adoption.

Secondly, the relationship between the family and the state is distinguished by latent powers of state coercion. Clients of state services understand that officers have the power, though limited, to make and enforce compliance with decisions and directions with which clients do not concur. The dimension of political power within relationships between officers and clients provides for clients an inherent element of structurally derived anxiety that the roles of individual officers may either increase or ease, but not dispel. Clients must either meet the universalistic state criteria or persuade officers that their case is exceptional and that, therefore, departure from conventional procedures is warranted.

Thirdly, officers know that applicants are not without some power - even if it is only the power to sway public opinion. The lower status of the client is illustrated by lack of access to the state-sanctioned, legal coercive mechanisms of the officer. While clients may be excluded from the codified political power available to the officer, however, they can maximise their powers of political leverage through a number of formal and informal but potentially effective

mechanisms. In New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, for example, disgruntled clients can appeal to various kinds of administrative appeals tribunals. In South Australia and Tasmania, where such appeals bodies have not been provided, weaker dispute-resolution procedures are available through such offices as internal bureaucratic and departmental administrative review committees (see Boss and Edwards 1992). In addition, and external to state bureaucracies, are the offices of elected members of parliament and the Ombudsman. Informal mechanisms for the expression of dissatisfaction include access to the mass media, an arena in which the journalist's agenda coincides structurally with that of the disaffected client. In addition, clients can form support groups for the purposes of co-ordinating super-regional expression of vocabularies of complaint (see, for example, Cassella 1973: 225).

Fourthly, state officers are also confronted with the institutionalised anxiety that emerges from the anticipated and/or experienced consequences for clients of official error. Anxiety from this source will vary in intensity according to the nature of the consequences. Officers who provide family services will realise that occupational errors may cause serious injury to, or the death of, clients. Thurnham (1993: 143), for example, observes that intercountry adoption officers tend to panic because the process and its outcome are 'not wholly within their control'. As no public officer can reasonably expect to maintain an error-free professional record, the notion of inadvertent official injury to clients must be recognised as structurally derived. So, too, are the mechanisms whereby officers seek to manage the attendant anxiety. They can construct a professional mythology according to which officers are incapable of error. Officers will be structurally predisposed to redefining themselves as professionally omniscient, objective, disinterested, altruistic and expert. Such self-definition is not evidence of hubris. On the contrary, the strategy that Elster (1987: 1-2) calls officer 'hyperrationality' is a result of the anxiety that attends their accurate awareness of the consequences of worker fallibility for clients' well-being and officers' professional reputations.

Fifthly, officers' attempts to manage their institutionalised anxiety may have the unintended consequence of creating further sources of anxiety for applicants. 'Hyperrationality' is a sociological term that denotes officers' exaggerated claims to knowledge, insight and powers of judgement. To make those claims acceptable and thereby to consolidate the exclusiveness of official decision making, officers often resort to the strategy of 'professionalisation', especially where workers' traditional lines of authority and expertise begin to be questioned by rival or competing occupational groups and/or by clients (Naftalin 1973: 236; Hartland 1985/86; Turner 1988: 142; Wilding 1982: 17). Examples of deprofessionalisation in the form of the demystification of professionalism are provided, for example, by Odent (1984) and in Thompson's historical novel, *The Cry and the Covenant*. Professionalisation sustains a 'hierarchical relationship between the professional expert and the lay client' (Turner 1993: 20). It emerges as a result of political contest and is therefore not merely the British imperial legacy referred to idiographically by Roche (1987) and Flanagan (1990).

Maintenance of professional boundaries against the desubordinating and deskilling effects of organised client groups is all the more likely when evidence of turf defence is already available. Protection of existing occupational and decision-making areas from 'encroachment' (Easthope 1993) by competing professional groups is well-known. For example, despite the 1976 Constitutional Convention recommendation that adoption legislation be referred from the States to the Commonwealth of Australia, a recommendation that was supported by the 1977 Royal Commission on Human Relationships (Evatt et al. 1978: 98), the States have maintained their authority in adoption matters and have continued to diversify their legislation and regulations (see Boss and Edwards 1992; Hennessy 1993: 25, 73).

Professional boundaries can be maintained in various ways. Reformulation or change of systems and procedures in order to address areas of major client concern, and incorporation at various levels of authority of alternative groups into decision-making processes or even into the arena of service

delivery are discussed by some, such as Easthope (1993), Moe (1980: 1) and Matthews (1976: 348). In addition, Smith and Weller (1976: 84) give an example of official exclusion of interest-group involvement. Furthermore, the mobilisation of bias, the creation of professional epistemology and agenda control are identified, for example, by Ham and Hill (1984: 174-79) as elements of boundary maintenance that underpin what Mueller (1970) calls the 'depoliticisation' of communication between officers and their clients in situations where decision-making powers and arrangements are not open to discussion.

Professionalisation of services is a formalisation of the tacit hyperrationality that emerges from officer anxiety over the consequences of occupational failure. In intercountry adoption, for example, the elements of professionalisation discussed above underpin the myth that officers can make accurate assessments of applicants' parenting ability. That myth, in turn, serves the purpose of allaying officer anxiety over the consequences of placing a child with unsuitable adoptive parents.

Sixthly, officers work in a structure of divided accountability. They are responsible for the child, must act in socially legitimate ways in interaction with applicants, and are accountable to their peers and superordinates. Any theory about the professionalisation of adoptions services has to reconcile the notions of 'professionalisation' and 'bureaucratisation'. If professionalisation is characterised by autonomous collegiate control, and if bureaucracy normally features high levels of supervision and control of workers by superordinates, then the notions of professional and bureaucratic occupational structures would seem to be mutually incompatible. State officers may, however, maintain a corporate professional self-identity while working within a bureaucratic organisation. Hill and Bramley (1986: 166), for example, observe that the hierarchical authority structure does not undermine professionalisation in high-trust situations where unsupervised policy implementation by street-level bureaucrats is recognised and legitimised by superordinates as appropriate administrative discretion rather

than as idiosyncratic rule-breaking. Bureaucrats as well as professionals may, therefore, subscribe to Andreski's (1972: 14) 'dog-does-not-eat-dog principle' of occupational solidarity in the 'quest for collective advantage'.

Turner (1993: 138) suggests that bureaucratic organisational systems produce proletarian conditions of work that involve four elements: first, the division of labour in which the worker performs a limited number of tasks; second, the determination of tasks and conditions by superordinates; third, the wage as the principal source of income that is determined by the market place rather than through individual negotiation; and, fourth, the formation of unions by workers who seek to protect themselves through the development of political leverage in the industrial setting. He (1988: 138) does not distinguish between high-trust and low-trust situations within bureaucracies, but he does conclude that all professions have a duality of contradictory forces that simultaneously push them towards proletarianism and professionalisation.

With regard to Turner's first two elements, in high-trust situations, the tasks of individual workers may not be specialised. On the contrary, tasks may be arranged in holistic units of service-delivery that are determined in negotiation with superordinates. The third and fourth elements identified by Turner do apply to both high- and low-trust situations and serve to distinguish high-trust bureaucratic arrangements from professionalism. Nevertheless, professionalisation can be identified within state bureaucracies and is to be expected where strategies of occupational control are needed to manage the anxiety that arises from the fear of failure or error on the one hand and from political competition from client groups on the other - especially where those groups may be able to provide a better quality of service.

In intercountry adoption, managers control the criteria for selection and rejection of applicants. Moreover, as Toft and McIntyre (1992: 96-7) observe, officers have the discretionary power to recommend for approval. In their

efforts to achieve parenthood status, therefore, applicants are in the hands of the officers. In the social world of intercountry adoption, the status of officers is thus substantially higher than that of the applicants. The difference in status between the participating parties underpins the social distance between them and is enhanced by the fact that the rewards and sanctions that officers are empowered to administer are of major significance to applicants.

Finally, anxiety may be activated by the nature of the social power held by intercountry adoption service officers. Their power is 'integral':

'...in which decision making and initiatives to action are centralized and monopolized by one party alone' (Wrong 1969: 47).

Effective attempts to limit such power, and thereby possibly lessen the cause for anxiety, depend upon '...sources of power independent of the integral power holder that can be mobilized to enforce them' (Wrong 1969: 48). Where such independent sources of power are not readily available to applicants, as is the case for example in Tasmania, high incidences and levels of acute and chronic tension in interaction with bureaucrats whose word is law are likely to persist.

### Anxiety and the process

In order to be able to arrive at an informed judgement about the suitability or otherwise of applicants to intercountry adoption services, officers organise several interviews that allow them to meet with prospective adoptive parents face-to-face. Some of these interviews are held in departmental offices, others in applicants' homes, but in every case applicants as well as agents know that the meetings have been called to allow an assessment to be made of applicants' latent or demonstrated ability to parent. Where meetings in private homes may normally seem to confer some kind of social advantage on the home-owners, this does not apply in intercountry adoption service cases because the home is also under scrutiny as a symbolic representation of the parenting ability of the applicant.

*Perception of the risk of failure* The anxiety that applicants predictably experience at these interviews can affect their behaviour in ways detrimental to their perceived chances of success. Because of the fear of making a poor impression on the officer, with the attendant implications of rejection from the program and failure to gain a child, applicants intuitively understand that their projected identities as parents are being subjected to close scrutiny. Close (1977: 31) observes that to be rejected is to feel 'socially condemned as inferior to accepted norms'. The perception that every behaviour must be congruent with the projected identity, and that any digression may be taken as evidence that the claimed identity is false, places the intercountry adoption service applicant in a social situation similar to that of the actor who, by assuming a character and a role on the stage, must consistently behave in ways congruent with the assumed identity or lose credibility. It is appropriate, therefore, to associate the acute anxiety experienced by the actor with that of the intercountry adoption service applicant. Both are players in social games and both are prone metaphorically to stage fright that:

'...is generated in one of two ways: knowing in advance that a situation will open one to total inspection of self, or anticipating that a slip or flaw will suddenly thrust one into a position that invites challenges to a claimed identity, or both' (Lyman and Scott 1970: 160).

Stage fright as experienced by actors is nevertheless significantly different from that faced by other kinds of social actors. Actors have to memorise lines, and rehearse delivery, gesture, timing and movement. After frequent careful rehearsal, perhaps including choreography, the play is performed for the intended audience. Conversely, intercountry adoption service applicants have no opportunity for practice or rehearsal of the 'role' of interviewee or parenthood. They do, through socialisation, have models that provide them with a typification of the 'status' of parenthood. Furthermore, they will predictably seek help and support from more experienced applicants in the hope of preparing themselves for the anxious process of second-guessing officers in interview, but that is distinct from the preparation of the actor whose rehearsal is directly aimed at mastery of the pre-existing

characterisation created by a playwright.

To clarify the distinction, a sociological definition of the terms 'status' and 'role' is required. Cicourel (1970: 7) observes that status is socially given, that is, it is institutionalised. In contrast:

'...How an individual actually performs in a given position, as distinct from how he is supposed to perform, we call his *role*' (Kingsley Davis cited in Cicourel 1970: 42).

That distinction helps to explain how individuals of the same social status may behave very differently from each other; their statuses are the same, but their roles are not. For Cicourel, the metaphor of transformational grammar is more effective than the metaphor of the stage in explaining the phenomenon of individual innovation within socially prescribed boundaries:

'...The dramaturgical metaphor of the stage is defective in explaining how [social] actors are capable of imitation and *innovation* with little or no prior rehearsal just as a child is capable of producing grammatically correct utterances that he has never heard and is capable of understanding utterances that have never been heard before' (1970: 28).

Some actors are, however, capable of playing well-known parts in innovative ways, despite the pre-recorded lines and stage directions. If innovation is possible in the largely prescribed world of the stage, and if linguistic innovation is possible despite the myriad of grammatical rules and the dictates of idiom, how much more scope for innovation and imagination must there not be for the intending adoptive parent who, without helpful reference to a social manual, grammar or script, must communicate a credible performance to a critical audience. If, therefore, experienced actors, who presumably do not have to fear that they will forget their lines or stage instructions, nevertheless experience stage fright, it is predictable that intercountry adoption service applicants as social actors, without the benefits



of scripts or choreographers, will also suffer from anxiety, particularly as the scope for imaginative and innovative role playing is wide and unrehearsed and the expectations of the critical audience are largely unknown to the actor.

Furthermore, in contrast to actors who, at the conclusion of the performance can relax because their behaviour from that moment on will be regarded as 'game-exclusive' (outside the frame of reference of the game) (Lyman and Scott 1970: 32), intercountry adoption service applicants' behaviour in social interaction with officers is consistently 'game-inclusive'. The likelihood and level of anxiety are predictably increased where evaluation of the role performance is indefinite.

Finally, a distinction must be made between the predictable levels of stage fright experienced by well-rehearsed actors and the levels of anxiety experienced by applicants who face evaluation in what Lyman and Scott (1970: 180) call a 'first time situation'.

*Social games without rules* The relationship between officer and applicant in intercountry adoption can be further understood by considering the notion of social games. Lyman and Scott (1970: 37) discuss the notion of 'face games' where players may seek to 'defend' their own or claimed identities against challenge, or to 'protect' the claimed identity of the other player(s). Intercountry adoption service applicants, who experience anxiety, play defensive face games in terms of that theoretical framework. Of more interest to the purpose of this chapter, however, is the concept of 'protective face games'.

In protective face games, the aim of ego is to restore the social face of alter or alters. Davis and Schmidt (1980: 287) explain that if an 'untoward act' by ego may be understood as a temporary loss of status, then in normal, pleasant, that is, 'nice', social interaction, alter will play down or pretend not to have noticed the identity-betraying behaviour. Such protective face-saving behaviour is not only nice, but is also indirectly defensive. The protection of

alter's social face can be seen as a gift that is given in the tacit understanding that, should the unhappy situation arise, alter would reciprocate by acting restoratively in response to a loss of face by ego (See Levi-Strauss 1980).

Neither the stage-actor nor the intercountry adoption service applicant however, can reasonably expect such niceness from their critical audiences. That is not to say that theatrical audiences and intercountry adoption service officers are necessarily obnoxious. Rather, in those social environments the normal rules of protective face-saving do not apply.

Thus in intercountry adoption services, applicants' attempts to play defensive face games are complicated by officers' refusal to play protective face games. After all, officers attend interviews not to make applicants feel socially at ease, but to determine their capacity for sound parenting behaviours. The well-being of the child is at stake. Furthermore, officers have their own social games to play.

The metaphorical association of interaction between officers and clients with games should not be taken to imply that interviews are usually conducted in an atmosphere of frivolity. On the contrary, the atmosphere is predictably filled with tension as a consequence of the anxiety of the applicant and the serious dedication of the officer. For the applicant what is at stake is the claimed identity of being able to parent well (with all the attendant implications for future self-identity in a strongly pronatalist society). For intercountry adoption service officers, what is at stake is nominally the interests of children (with possible tacit concerns about the effects of official conduct on career prospects). Ultimately, both the behaviour of officers as well as of clients in intercountry adoption services is subject to evaluation. However, the purpose of official interviews is to evaluate only the applicant.

From a diathetic perspective, it could be argued that because some individuals are of a more nervous disposition than others, the propensity for anxiety is a matter of psychological rather than sociological interest. In

response, Abramson (1980: 199), Coyne and Downey (1991: 403) observe that the diathetic approach does indeed provide a theoretical account for the various responses to stress among people, but go on to point out that its focus on the constitutional predisposition of individuals obscures the relevance of environmental factors. An important aspect of those environmental factors is the notion of orientations.

In the interaction of the two orientations of disinterested fairness on the one hand and private projects on the other, the ethnocentrism of each party may emerge. The anxiety that results from the impact of divergent traditions can be identified as a form of culture shock, where the individual has to adjust to unfamiliar language, values, perspectives and expectations. As a consequence, officers and applicants can be expected to use management mechanisms that may include respectful and obsequious behaviour as each seeks to keep the other party on side.

*Anxiety as a result of communication problems* Applicants may also experience anxiety as a result of not knowing what to expect from officers:

'...The "stability" of the world of contemporaries for the actor refers to the typifications employed by him .... the typical is rendered homogeneous, nonproblematical and, therefore, taken for granted' (Cicourel 1970: 38).

Without typifications, the world becomes unstable; an ideal basis for the activation of anxiety.

Cicourel nominates 'reciprocity of perspectives' as the first rule of social interaction where:

'...Both participants must presume that each will generate recognizable and intelligible utterances as a necessary condition for the interaction to even occur, and each must reconstruct the other's intentions (deep structure) if there is to be coordinated social interaction' (1970: 34).

In intercountry adoption interviews, applicants and officers speak the same language sufficiently well to be able to communicate. However, the applicant

is incapable of knowing the agent's intentions. They can only be guessed at. The communication, therefore, is not equal and reciprocal. On the contrary, it is one-sided, with the applicant obliged to divulge hitherto private information and the officer privileged to keep selection criteria a secret. Such a communicative framework is clearly conducive to anxiety.

*Strategies for the management of anxiety* How, then, do individuals cope with anxiety? Lyman and Scott (1970: 182-5) identify three kinds of coping strategies: those that 'prevent' stage fright from emerging, those that 'contain' it and those that rescue performers or help them save face. None of these strategies is likely to apply in intercountry adoption, because applicants, unlike actors, do not know how or when they might betray their claimed identity. If bureaucratic selection criteria are not divulged to applicants, it is impossible for applicants to be certain about how their performances are to be assessed. Withdrawal from programs is possible at any stage, but as it is not commensurate with the goal of acquiring a child, it does not constitute a coping strategy. On the contrary, withdrawal may be considered as an option only after coping strategies have failed.

Applicants can attempt to cope with their indeterminate anxiety by developing a linguistic code that will allow them to defend their claimed identities. The formation of group consciousness, that Wrong (1969: 57) identifies as an elementary step in political organisation, is impossible without the linguistic articulation of group concerns. Political organisation may enable applicants to hold officers to account.

By virtue of their superior social status, officers may not feel obliged to explain their behaviour. When explanations are given, they may be expressed in formal or frozen linguistic styles that indicate that '...speaker and auditor are in rigidly defined statuses' or that '...an irremovable barrier exists between the two parties' (Lyman and Scott 1970: 132).

Alternatively, the giving of account can be avoided by 'mystification' that suggests:

'...that alter is not aware of certain facts - facts that are secret - which, if known, would explain the untoward action' (Lyman and Scott 1970: 134).

Thus anxiety may be enhanced by the lack of an account for, say, failure to grant approval-to-adopt. Applicants may be left wondering about what they might have done wrong. In stark contrast to this, applicants are seriously required to give accounts for their desire to parent.

### **The pervasiveness of anxiety and the fear of failure**

The predictions of anxiety for applicants and officers in intercountry adoption and the responses to that anxiety were borne out in interviews. The reality of anxiety was evident in the responses that officers and applicants gave to questions about the success rates of applications and placements. The intention of these questions was to see if awareness of the possibility of failure and disruption can be associated with anxiety. Applicants were also asked about the criteria used for eligibility and suitability screening. Finally, applicants were asked to indicate their views on applicant criticism of the service. Officers were asked to express their views on the level of difficulty of assessment. Subsequent questions to officers focused on professional implications of disrupted placement, and anxiety over the possibility of disruption. Finally, officers were asked about the quality of pre- and in-service training programs and of education programs for applicants.

High levels of anxiety were found among applicants and officers. Fifty applicants said that applications are not always successful. Only five said that they always are successful. The other five did not know. Thirty-six said they discussed those concerns with other applicants. Twenty-seven said that they did not discuss the concerns with officers. Only eight applicants said that they did discuss those concerns with officers. Conversely, six officers said that applicants do discuss those concerns with them. Four said that applicants do not.

Forty-four applicants, all of whom were aware that not all applicants eventually adopt a child, indicated that they had worried about the possibility of failure to gain a child for adoption. Only six indicated that they had not worried about the possibility of failure. Another five, who did not know whether all applications are successful or not, also indicated anxiety over the possibility of failure. In addition, forty-nine applicants and all twelve officers said that placements are sometimes disrupted. These results show that there is substantial fear of failure and widespread awareness of the possibility of failure among the people interviewed.

The high level of anxiety over the possibility of failure to gain a child for adoption is associated with awareness of the possibility of unsuccessful application, but not with the view that there are too few children available for adoption. Thirty-seven applicants, who thought that there were enough children available to meet intercountry adoption demands in Australia, were aware that applications do not always succeed. They all expressed anxiety about the possibility of failure to gain a child for adoption. Conversely, of the nine who said that there were not enough children available and that applications do not always succeed, only five had nevertheless *not* worried about the possibility of failure to gain a child for adoption.

For most applicants, the anticipation of success or failure was associated with the quality of their relationship with the officers, not with the number of children available. The fact that they were not keen to discuss those concerns with officers is indicative of the social distance identified in the introduction to this chapter. The social distance may be underpinned by applicant perceptions of officers as a 'critical audience'. For example, twenty-one applicants said that they did not know what the suitability criteria were and that they received no encouragement from officers. Sixteen said they had to 'second-guess' the officers in order, as several put it, to 'tell them what they wanted to hear'.

The social distance is further illustrated by the reluctance of applicants to express their strong criticism of the intercountry adoption service to officers for fear of jeopardising their applications. Lack of criticism should not be misconceived as an indication of tacit support for the process. Forty-three applicants said that they were hesitant to criticise the service since criticism jeopardises the application. For example, when asked whether applicant criticism of the service held any implications, one said,

'Yes, you would think it might prejudice your chances of adopting'.

Another replied,

'Yes, you get the feeling that if you criticise too much you mightn't be successful'.

Only one applicant in that group had not worried about the possibility of application failure. In contrast, thirty-four of them said that they had experienced anxiety about the possibility of failure to achieve their adoption goals. Only ten applicants said that they had successfully criticised the service.

It is not surprising, therefore, that applicants feel they need encouragement. Fifty-two said they needed encouragement to continue with their applications. Only four said that they did not need it. Also expected was the finding that applicants do not seek encouragement from officers. Twenty-eight said that they did not receive encouragement from officers. Rather, their seeking encouragement from other applicants in preference to family and friends suggests that the shared experience of structurally-derived anxiety underpins a sense of anxious community that, in turn, predictably reinforces group attitudes. Forty-three received encouragement from other applicants. Sixteen did so from friends and fifteen from family members. Only twelve gained encouragement from officers.

It is in this context that Smith and Sherwen (1984: 47) recommend the provision of a politically 'neutral' counsellor for adoptive families. Bishop seems intuitively to sense the social distance between the institutions of the state and the family: '...It is critical to help mothers find positive support systems that are *not* professional' (1976: 1787). Unless state agencies meet what Bane (1983) calls the 'challenge' of providing the personal care and concern that individuals require, it seems likely that support groups will continue to fill that role informally.

Officers also experience anxiety, although of a different kind. Assessment of applicant suitability is rated as 'very difficult' by three officers and as 'difficult' by another five. For example, as one officer put it,

'A lot of it has to be subjective. I'm very aware of the responsibility. If it doesn't work, the child is left a non-person'.

Another said,

'Very difficult. Everyone cleans the house before you arrive anyway - do you know what I mean? It's frightening. What if I put a child with a paedophile?'

Only one officer said it was 'easy'. Moreover, it is clear that the normative or 'responsible' perspective for officers is to adopt a pro-parenting role with regard to their relationship with the prospective adoptive child. Goody identifies five role elements in the dyadic relationship where the child grows to maturity with the care of the biological parents:

'...genitor/genetrix; source of status identity (pater/mater); nurse; tutor in moral and technical skills; and sponsor in the assumption of adult status' (1971: 332).

The intercountry adoption service officer may assume abstract and vicarious pro-parenthood responsibility for the last four of these elements. One of her



concerns is to ensure that the intercountry adoptive child gains full Australian citizenship status as well as family-member status. The difficulty in remaining emotionally detached from the child was expressed frankly by several officers, one of whom commented,

'It's difficult to remain detached because of the legal position the child is placed in on placement disruption. It is a non-citizen child. I've got to the point where I think, "My God, I'll have to adopt this kid myself because there's nobody to do it". The professional me says I can't do that'.

Her other concerns include the desire to guarantee (or indirectly provide) for the child access to long-term, high-quality health care and education that would underpin the future assumption of adult status.

In that context it is interesting that thirty-one applicants identified financial security as a key element in the assessment process. In modernity, material wealth provides a sound basis for prediction of future life-chances. Perhaps officers are more comfortable with the relinquishment of children to wealthy families. Officers, who see themselves as solely responsible for the welfare of the child, unwittingly assume pro-parenthood status. The role of the assessing officer may therefore be redefined as that of a relinquishing pro-parent. That perspective allows us to expect that officers will relinquish pro-parenting responsibility for the child very reluctantly in societies that feature neo-local marriage practices and the attendant atomisation and isolation of the nuclear family. In short, officers' socialisation does not prepare them for the role of relinquishing parent.

That theory is supported by the findings that ten officers associated placement disruptions with negative implications for officers' occupational status, and that all twelve officers expressed awareness of the possibility of failure to achieve the goals of securing happy placements for children. The anxiety of officers here, as with applicant concern over failure to gain a child for

adoption, is ultimately based on the fact that success is largely determined by the behaviours and decisions of alters whom ego cannot control.

Officer anxiety over the notion of disruption is also rooted in the low levels of pre- and in-service training and the low levels of specialisation that obstruct the development of professional expertise. Pre-service training lasts one day. In-service training occurs four days per year, not counting on-the-job induction. Officer visits to sending countries are virtually unheard of. It comes as no surprise then that officers could make only vague, and sometimes very inaccurate, estimates of disruption rates. Eleven said that they did not know the national rate. One guessed incorrectly that it was 10 per cent. Five estimated correctly that it is 'very low'. All twelve said that they did not know the international disruption rate. One officer said she did not know whether it was greater or smaller than fifty per cent.

Those estimates can be compared with published research outcomes. For example, Harper (1985b: 6), in a review of statistical surveys conducted by Harvey (1983), Kadushin and Seidl (1971) and Kim (1978), puts the disruption rate between one and three per cent. Since they have inflated perceptions of the risks of disruption, those officers, who think that the rate of disruption is much higher than it actually is, will experience added tension and anxiety.

Nevertheless, turf defence mechanisms are evident in their discussion of providing a 'professional service' for which their *professional* training and intuition are invaluable. For example, mystification of the evaluation process was illustrated by the officer who said,

'It's a difficult, long, tedious, highly-involved process. You can't take responses at face value. You have to get to know your family really well to be able to satisfy yourself that they are OK. I use my intuition and professional skills of following issues through'.

Despite their low levels of training, therefore, most officers did not express a desire to draw from the resources of support groups. However, one officer expressed frustration with the department's policies on liaison with support groups,

'Sometimes I don't get all the information. I'm not passing on right information to applicants. I'll ring up and ask something and my supervisor will say "Oh, yes, I got that information yesterday". And I know darn well that my applicants have already got that information from self-help groups on the mainland - and we, the officers, don't get it till later. I feel that my supervisor could be a little bit more congenial or approachable with sending countries. Other states (of the Australian Commonwealth) do it. Sending countries may feel more comfortable in dealing with a state if they have a good rapport with the supervisor. I can't see why we can't work with, say, ASIAC as they do in Melbourne. If you mention ASIAC here it's like a dirty word. Applicants complain it takes too long or why weren't they told about the paperwork needed'.

Finally, exclusion mechanisms are also evident within the intercountry adoption service that allows officers little discretionary power. The service is tightly controlled from a corporate office that is reluctant to disrupt placements. Only four officers said that other officers discuss concerns about the possibility of placement disruption with them. While the risk of placing a child with unsuitable adoptive parents is a source of chronic anxiety for officers, exercise of the authority to disrupt placements also causes anxiety. Though rare, disruption against the wishes of the adoptive parents and/or the child is predictably traumatic, whether the process severs familial bonds (in happy placements) or causes loss of face for adoptive parents (in unsuitable placements). Disruption of placements may serve the pro

-parenting agenda of individual officers, but might lead to the eventual disruption of programs with sending countries. One officer commented,

'I felt that the Department was saving face with the sending country - so I was told to keep the child in placement. Anybody could pick up the warning signs in the case of a child who had been in placement for two years and still not adopted. When I got there she was moved. I would have moved her a lot earlier'.

Another said,

'I was told to counsel the family and keep the child there. When I visit I see a dysfunctional family - the mother about to have a nervous breakdown and the other child caught in the middle. I feel the Department was ... The applicants were intelligent adults but that child was not meant for them and they were certainly not meant for her. The applicants told me as soon as they saw the child they knew she was not for them. Now the child is really happy in another placement'.

If sending countries notice a high disruption rate among Tasmanian intercountry adoption service placements, they may choose to send no more children for adoption. The Intercountry Adoption Service could therefore, become obsolete, leaving street-level operatives with the option of secondment to other agencies within the Department of Community and Health Services.

Implications for the Manager position would be more serious. Managerial involvement with intercountry adoption, at the level of agency co-ordinator,

is specialised. The intercountry adoption service is a marginalised, structurally peripheral (for example, the only non-regionalised) service within the Department. Most intercountry adoption service officers spend most of their working time on fostering or other out-of-home-care services. For them, involvement with intercountry adoption is part of a comprehensive curriculum vitae that allows for flexibility of placement within the Department. The Manager of a redundant agency, in contrast, can only present an obsolete curriculum vitae. Another structural element that underpins placement maintenance policies is the financial cost of disruption, estimated by O'Neill (1991: 84) as \$19,738.22. Disruption of intercountry adoptive placements is, therefore, structurally not in the interests of the Manager, even though it may be in the interests of the child and the case officer.

It is clear then that placements can not be disrupted easily. Since substantial social pressure is placed on officers to recommend wisely, they experience institutionalised anxiety, particularly at the points of recommendation for approval-to-adopt and recommendation to the court for the granting of an adoption order. The weight of responsibility in this regard was captured by the officer who said,

'This whole child's life is now going to be dictated  
by my recommendation'.

## Conclusion

Anxiety is thus integral to the intercountry adoption experience of applicants and officers. Awareness of the possibility of undesirable outcomes is a matter for concern for both parties. Fear of jeopardising the application is a major obstacle that prevents many applicants from discussing their anxiety with officers. Conversely, officers' notions of 'professional detachment' maintain the social distance that reduces the effectiveness of communication with applicants. The next chapter explores the implications of the institutionalised anxiety for the motivations of the participating parties.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MOTIVATIONS

#### Introduction

Motivations are drawn in to the relationship between officers and applicants for intercountry adoption in several ways. In the first place, parental motivations are central to the criteria by which officers decide on the appropriateness of applicant parents. Secondly, applicants' judgements about officers' motivations are integral to applicants' judgements about officers' performance of their professional role and play a large part in applicants' assessments of the degree to which the whole process of adoption is seen as satisfactory. Any perception that officers are motivated by considerations other than 'the best interest of the child' will result in officers, their performance or the service generally, being negatively evaluated by applicants. Thirdly, the strength of the applicants' motivations impels the applicants to continue to participate in a system where screening mechanisms are designed to test their very commitment. Fourthly, the content of the motivational structure, in the form of the desire of applicants to secure a child and the desire of officers to achieve an enduring placement dictate what may be conflicting views about an appropriate pace for the adoption process. Finally, motivations become part of the vocabulary of complaint that each party constructs against the other or, conversely, become part of the vocabulary of affirmation or approval.

The previous chapter explored the institutionalised anxiety experienced by applicants and officers in the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service and showed that fear of failure and the limits to the control of the process were key sources of anxiety that introduced tension into the relationship between officers and applicants. In the chapters that follow, selected aspects or manifestations of that tension are considered. This chapter analyses the role played by motivations of the participating parties and the manner in which motivations of the competing parties become a source of tension. This focus should not, however, obscure the fact that social constraints, shared values

and typifications also sustain the relationship between officers and applicants despite the, sometimes, dysfunctional pressures. For this reason, this chapter identifies shared as well as conflicting motivations.

First, the benefits of the family for the state on the institutional level are identified. Those benefits give us reason to expect that state officers will support the family within the wider institutional order, including adoptive family-formation strategies. Secondly, three aspects of modern society are identified that substantially contribute to the strength of applicants' motivation to adopt. These three aspects are the positive representations of parenthood in the media and in marketing, the concomitant social disapproval of voluntary childlessness and the gender-specific social rewards for parenting. Thirdly, the chapter turns to points of tension by showing how service restrictions are misconceived by some applicants as evidence of opposition to intercountry adoption from officers. Fourthly, officers' power of coercion is also identified as a source of misconception among applicants over the motivations of officers. Finally, officers' need to legitimise their critical role and their powers of coercion is seen to contribute to their demonisation of applicants' motivations.

### **Motivations**

*Official support for intercountry adoption* As we saw in chapter two, the family is of enormous economic benefit to the state. For this reason alone governments continue to provide support for the family as an institution. For example, in the 1940s, Australian population policies were designed to encourage adults to have more children and took the form of child endowment payments or family allowances. The government of the day was keen to effect a substantial increase in the size of the Australian population. Nevertheless, 'illegitimate' births were frowned upon (see, for example, Cass 1990: 178). Only children born to de jure married couples were wanted. The assumption was that children born and raised in secure kinship settings would predictably not only develop psychological well-being and respect for authority, but also have most of the parenting costs met by the family.

Since the 1940s, increasingly social service provision has been made for single parents. Children born to single mothers are labelled 'illegitimate', that is, they are not legitimised by state officialdom. An important reason for that label is the economic consideration that illegitimate children are officially 'unacceptable' because they place greater financial impost on the state as a result of lower family income. Since they place the entire economic burden of parenting on the state, experiments at raising children outside the nuclear family setting, such as the 1920s Leninist innovations in the Soviet Union, are still rejected (Geiger 1970). The nuclear family system of parenting-cost displacement and distribution remains the most cost-efficient setting for social reproduction. It is, therefore, supported by state officialdom and we can recognise that support, for example, in state funding for the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service.

*Applicants' support for intercountry adoption* Some authors report critically on psychoanalytic assumptions that motivation for parenthood is based on a 'biologically given reproductive drive' (see, for example, Flapan 1969: 406). The idiographic nature of psychoanalysis that ignores the implications of social environments is also recognised by some authors, such as Benatar (1995). Authors with an eye for social motivators for parenthood observe along with Whaley and Wong (1987: 72) that universally there is little, if any, evidence to substantiate the notion of a 'parental instinct'.

Applicant motivation is thus not driven by instinct but is informed by normative expectations of parenthood status that are derived from primary socialisation in the nuclear family setting and from child and family representation in the popular media and in marketing. Parenthood is associated with maturity, for example, in the work of Whaley and Wong (1987: 59-62) where children are identified as indicators of six of the eight developmental stages of the family. In addition, Berger and Kellner (1970: 57) reconstruct parenthood as the 'objectification', that is the consolidation, of the conjugal relationship. In other words, parenthood is redefined as a signifier of conjugal health, happiness and strength. Furthermore, the normative



expectation that the autonomy of consanguine families will be protected in court is illustrated, for example, in Liss' (1988) analysis of family law cases.

Positive expectations about parenthood underpin typifications of parenthood as an iconic signifier of personal and familial maturity. Those expectations are themselves underpinned by the positive representation of parenthood in popular culture in modernity (see, for example, Chombart de Lauwe 1970: 257-8 and Luke 1994). Luke (1994) observes, however, that images of transracial parenting rarely appear in popular literature. As we saw in chapter three of this thesis, however, the mass media frequently convey images of socially isolated children in desperate circumstances in overseas orphanages. Nevertheless, it is predictable that biological family-formation strategies will be preferred over domestic and transracial adoptive parenting.

The empirical data gathered in interviews give some insight into applicants' preferred family-formation strategy. Forty-one applicants, the vast majority, indicated that their structure of motivations began with biological parenting. The second option for this group was intercountry adoption, with domestic adoption a third choice. Not all applicants who indicated that biological parenting was their first choice had children 'of their own'. For example, six applicants indicated that they were not interested in IVF treatment. Some had tried it, others had not,

'We would never consider IVF again'.

'We didn't want intrusive medical procedures'.

Only four applicants indicated that their preferred options went from biological parenting to domestic adoption to intercountry adoption,

'Having problems conceiving and local adoptions are a very long wait'.

'Local adoption was not viable. We wanted a family. We would have gone for local first, but having one

intercountry adopted child, we wanted another. We would never consider IVF again'.

Three applicants said that intercountry adoption was their first choice. These results suggest that for most, if not all, applicants the typification of parenting is based on their conceptual or experiential familiarity with the intimacy, privacy and self-determination of biological reproduction. Moreover, the data show that applicant commitment to intercountry adoption is very high. For most, it is the second option.

Careful interpretation of these results requires us to distinguish between the chronological order of preference and the motivational order or structure of preferences. These retrospective data indicate which option was considered first by the respondents. The fact that intercountry adoption was a subsequent option should not be misinterpreted to mean that applicants were only weakly committed to the idea. Once applicants have made the decision to adopt from overseas, and particularly once they have met their adoptive children, the notion of intercountry adoption becomes reified in the child and in some cases the attendant new parenthood status. Intercountry adoption may, therefore, not have been their first choice, but, in light of failed attempts to conceive, it may well be their strongest chance of achieving parenthood status.

In addition to the positive representations of parenthood in the media and in marketing, an analysis of applicants' motivations to adopt must also consider the significance of conformist social pressures. Whaley and Wong (1987: 71) and Miller (1988: 582), for example, identify powerfully conformist social pressures for adults to have children. In contrast, political and economic conditions that sometimes militate against fertility among the poor are identified by some authors, including Cass (1990: 181) and Miller (1988: 584). However, as voluntary childlessness is still a deviant social phenomenon (see Callan 1986: 85), it is clear that social adversity has not yet defeated the strength of most women's internalised desire to parent. Indeed, the desire to

parent is redefined by some as a function of economic hardship, effective kinship relations providing individuals with a source of welfare. Authors in this group include Shimkin, Shimkin and Frate (1978), Meyer and Singarimbun (1977) and Twose (1987: 13). Finally, Morton Thompson's historical novel *The Cry and the Covenant* illustrates the irrepressibility of the desire to parent despite horrific associated health risks.

Explanations other than economic and health considerations have therefore been sought for voluntary childlessness. For some women the answer may lie in 'success avoidance' and 'marital satisfaction'. Some women, it is argued (see, for example, Callan 1984: 211 and Miller 1988: 584), are motivated towards motherhood as a mechanism for avoidance of the risk to the conjugal relationship of their competing successfully with the male spouses in the labour marketplace. It is also asserted that the perceived value of children declines when alternatives are found that meet the 'needs associated with children'. It is in this sense that voluntarily childless wives tend to have higher levels of marital satisfaction than do mothers.

Negative conformist pressures for parenthood also help to explain the attraction of parenthood status. Such pressures include 'culturally-derived punishments' for non-fecund women, reprobation from spouses of non-fecund adults, and social labelling of voluntary childlessness as deviant, taboo, selfish, immature and foolish (see, for example, Taylor 1987: 4; Aitken 1983: 21; Houseknecht 1988: 385-6 and Miller 1988: 585). Moreover, Callan (1985) concludes from his study of 24 single and 21 married students that stigmatisation is equally strong for voluntarily childless men and women.

If the desire to parent is a universally powerful social force, then parenthood is predictably associated with sex- or gender-specific rewards. Research evidence points to gender differences with regard to parenthood. Luke, for example, observes that in English, the term 'mothering' is associated with childcare while *fathering* denotes the male 'biological function of producing a child' (1994: 298). Furthermore, it is suggested by some authors that with the

advent of parenthood women 'feel more feminine and exhibit more feminine behaviours'. Men do not conversely show more traditionally masculine behaviour. On the contrary, their self-concept is said to become 'less masculine' (see, for example, Whaley and Wong 1987: 73).

Anticipated partial loss of masculinity would not motivate most men to become fathers. Rather, the emasculative effect of parenthood on sex-typing would be a disincentive for them. Feldman and Aschenbrenner (1983: 286), however, observe that men's enactment of feminine roles is not at the expense of their well-established masculinity. Parenthood allows most men to gain socially acceptable access to some traditionally feminine role-behaviour patterns, thereby adding to, rather than subtracting from, their pre-parental behaviour options.

The combined effect of these positive and negative pressures for conformity to the normative values associated with parenthood is reflected in statistical reports. Callan (1986: 85), for example, observes from census estimates that fewer than 'ten percent of women prefer voluntary childlessness or a single child family'. Reporting on a survey of 4511 Australians over the age of eighteen, Milburn (1991b: 46) notes that fewer than 'two percent of respondents chose the formula of either one or no child'. In conclusion to a cross-cultural study of parenting goals, Levine (1974) asserts that the desire to parent is a universal phenomenon. It is predictable, therefore, that many non-fecund couples will not be content with their childlessness.

The sense of loss and grief attendant to the acknowledgement of personal non-fecundity has been noted by some, including Aitken (1983: 17-22), Harper (1985b) and Howe (1992: 6). Given the evidence of high failure rates in in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) programs (see, for example, Rowland 1992), it is predictable that many of those couples will feel motivated to adopt.

Of the sixty applicants interviewed, thirty-five were not parents prior to their adoption of a child from abroad. Of those thirty-five, three were married to

spouses who were 'biological' parents. Of the sixty applicants interviewed, thirty-two who had not achieved parenthood status biologically indicated that they sought to adopt from abroad in order to 'have children' or 'form a family'. Ten applicants who had not previously achieved parenthood status biologically indicated that they sought to adopt from abroad for altruistic reasons. Of those ten, seven also indicated family-formation motivations.

Twenty-five applicants had gained parenthood status biologically prior to adoption from abroad. Those adoptive parents are known in the related literature as 'preferential adopters'. Of those twenty-five, three had married with spouses who were not parents. Eighteen indicated that they sought to adopt from abroad in order to 'have children' or 'form a family'. Seventeen said that they were motivated by altruistic reasons to adopt from abroad. Four indicated altruistic as well as family-formation motivations. Those motivations were typically expressed in the following ways,

'We wanted to be parents'.

'We wanted to adopt a child from a third-world country  
to give the child a chance'.

*Service restrictions* The scope, scale and efficiency of adoptions services are limited by the running costs. Funding restrictions limit staffing levels and usually exclude expensive training programs such as visits by officers to sending countries. With bureaucratically imposed staffing levels, adoptions officers thus have to provide a service without the facilitating benefits of personal contacts with officers in sending countries. The number of applicants accepted for assessment must therefore be managed so that officers have reasonable workloads.

Hard evidence on deterrence of applicants is available. The Tasmanian service's Annual Report (Department of Community and Health Services 1993: 59) records that of the 200 couples who attended pre-application information seminars in the year ending 30 June, 1993, only thirteen went on

to apply. Those figures compare negatively with Toft and McIntyre's (1992: 90) recording of a United States agency that had about one-fourth of the 625 who attended orientation go on to apply.

The levels of funding that restrict the number of applicants the service can accept for assessment and that contribute to the slow processing of applications (see chapter eight), are a source of great frustration for some officers. As one officer put it, the problems have been exacerbated by the regionalisation of the Department and the bureaucratic division between policy makers and service providers,

'It's an absolute disaster. I am accountable for what happens, but have absolutely no control over the resources allocated to it. It is absolutely disastrous. Departmental reorganisation has caused utter and complete chaos'.

Many applicants, on the other hand, attributed the service restrictions and the slowness and inefficiency of process to the hostile motivations of officers. Many of the motivations attributed to officers by applicants do not reappear as officers' goals. Twelve applicants said that they did not know what motivated officers. Ten officers indicated that their motivation was to promote the welfare of children. A typical expression used by officers was,

'to provide the best possible future for children placed from overseas'.

That response was attributed to officers by only eighteen applicants. Sixteen other applicants indicated that the motivations of some officers were positive. Conversely, thirty-four applicants indicated that for officers intercountry adoption work was just a job or a part of the job. As one parent put it,

'I haven't come across any that's got a real love for intercountry adoption'.

Another said,

'Certainly it's not something that they enjoy at all. Part of their job description'.

A third explained,

'Because they made it so hard, I had the feeling in the end that maybe the officers were racist and didn't want non-white children in Australia. When we were in the orphanage to pick up our child, we saw another child that needed a home and we wanted to adopt him. We rang the Department in Tasmania but it was all negative. You have to start the process all over again'.

*State powers of coercion* Such examples of officers' powers of coercion illustrate the sharp contrast between adoptive family formation and the self-determination of biological parenting. Since biological parenting is normal and the originally preferred option for most applicants, that contrast is itself a source of tension. Furthermore, the element of dominance or compulsion contradicts the developing democratisation of conjugal intimacy that has emerged as a function of the rise in status of women in modernity. Economically independent men and women sustain conjugal relationships only for such emotional reasons as love and affection. The essential affectivity of the postmodern conjugal relationship is described as a 'pure relationship' in Giddens' (1992: 185) work on the transformation of intimacy in postmodern society. Such emotional motivations are extended to the adoption project by applicants but run counter to the officers' responsibility to ensure the safety of the child and, as we have seen, to keep the service at sustainable levels.

Officers' control of the process underpins a hierarchical relationship with applicants that does not sit well with the reappearing 'symmetry' (Young and Willmott 1973) or egalitarianism of the nuclear family. Challenge to authority can be expected as a result of the three characteristics of postmodern society identified by Easthope (1993: 294), the rejection of unquestioning submission to absolute authority, '...the growing appreciation of the diversity of choice', and the emergence of the postmodern individual who '...is reflexive and creates him or herself through lifestyle choices'. Thus the different domains of the family and the state provide for structurally-derived variation in the agendas of applicants and officers, that is a predictable source of tension.

Twenty-four applicants, who saw the exercise of coercive power by officers as arbitrary, attributed those officers with negative or obstructivist motivations such as the desire to wield bureaucratic power and to deter people from applying. Typical comments were,

'They were motivated by bureaucracy. They just wanted to throw a spanner in the works to try and deter you'.

Some were specific,

'Our officer was actively against intercountry adoption. It was fairly obvious that she disapproved of intercountry adoption because you could catch her out at times when she deliberately obstructed things or withheld information. At an information seminar she said intercountry adoption is a form of colonialism - I'm quoting her. She was malicious, obstructive and gave false information. She would refuse to accept any advice we had received from ASIAC about what the sending country required in our file. She saw that admitting that



applicants had legitimate information was a way for her of losing power. She wanted to maintain control over the situation'.

An (unlikely) alternative future society where state welfare services operate in accordance with the principle of client autonomy, rather than the principle of official coercion, is outlined by Jordan (1985: 330-349). Unfortunately, he does not explain how the social structures that currently hinder, if not prevent, the democratisation of social-service delivery are to be removed. Those structures underpin current inequalities in the relationship between officers and clients. The democratisation of the relationship between officers and clients would require, for example, a massive change in political will if state services were to be funded to the level where service rationing were no longer necessary. Jordan's mechanism of compulsory consultation could, moreover, only effectively serve the principle of autonomy if it could be guaranteed that officers actually gave due political weight to the views of clients. Such guarantees would require massive supervisory mechanisms with high levels of subjective evaluation on the part of the supervisors.

Jordan's ideal alternative future society predictably appeals to postmodern individuals who, as Easthope (1993) asserts, are suspicious of the unitary authority implied by scientific and professional exclusiveness. Jordan (1985: 339-40) suggests that increasing political pressure for bureaucratic change may result in the replacement of official arbitration with mediation and facilitation. However, the emergence of his ideal relationship between officers and clients is militated against by fiscal constraints and officialdom's resistance to deskilling, not to mention the political inertia of current systems of social management. It is predictable, therefore, that the institutionalised powers of coercion will be defended and retained by state bureaucracies, even though those powers contribute to tension in the relationship between service providers and their clients.

*Legitimation crisis* Officers' powers of coercion are a source of strain in their relationship with applicants. Officers therefore need to legitimise their coercive authority. One way in which they do this is by claiming the 'moral high ground'. The demonisation of applicants' motivations, for example, is a boundary-maintenance mechanism that underpins the professionalisation of officers by pre-empting applicant endorsement of the fundamental altruistic principle of the paramountcy of 'the welfare and interests of the child' (Adoption Act Tasmania 1988: S.8). In addition, the mechanism may be used to preclude applicants from the option even of agreeing with officers that 'a healthy motive is generally seen to be one that aims to provide a home for a needy child rather than a child for a home' (see, for example, Triseliotis 1993: 119). For example, one officer said,

'Altruism on its own is very dangerous. "The poor little unfortunates - we'll take them in and they'll be grateful" - and they're not'.

Placement problems are associated by some authors with parental non-fecundity. For example, Whaley and Wong suggest that with the advent of adolescence, adopted girls may have difficulty in accepting their sexuality because they may 'not be able to identify with a nonfertile parent' (1987: 83). Conversely, Howe (1992: 6) suggests that non-fecund mothers sometimes have trouble accepting the sexual maturity of their adopted daughters. Such views on family-formation motivations form part of a broader argument that amounts to a demonisation of all applicant motivation. For example, imagination and anticipation among prospective adoptive parents is redefined by authors, such as Harper (1985b), Smith and Sherwen (1984) as unrealistic 'phantasy'. More specifically, applicant altruism is redefined as 'rescuer phantasy' that they associate with unrealistic expectations about the child's behaviour in response to its 'rescue' by the benevolent adoptive parents. The balanced observation that, while dangerous, phantasies about the child-to-be are healthy since they provide the mother with a 'dress-rehearsal for parenting', also appears in the work of Smith and Sherwen

(1984: 39), but was not mentioned by any officer in interviews.

The most common motivation expressed by applicants was the desire to achieve parenthood status or to enlarge the size of the existing family with the inclusion of adopted children. The total number of applicants who indicated that motivation was fifty, of whom thirty-two were childless at the time of application. The total number of applicants who indicated altruism as their motivation for adoption was twenty-seven of whom ten were childless at the time of application.

The motivation among preferential adopters was almost equally distributed between family-formation and altruism. In contrast, among childless applicants the family-formation motivation was indicated almost three times as often as altruism. There was, therefore, a substantial difference in the structure of motivations among childless applicants on the one hand and preferential adopters on the other. For childless applicants the adoption project is undertaken to achieve not only a child, but also parenthood status.

Officers' perceptions of applicant motivations were not always consistent with the aggregated responses from applicants themselves. For example, eleven of the twelve officers who participated in the study said that applicants were motivated by the wish to form a family or add another child to the family. That is in line with applicants' responses. However, ten officers said that applicants were also motivated by the desire to help a child in unfortunate circumstances. For example, one officer said that sometimes applicants are motivated by the desire 'to help a child already in the world'. In fact, fewer than half the total number of applicants indicated altruism as a motivation. Six officers mentioned childlessness as a contributing factor in the structure of applicant motivation, but only one officer associated the family-formation motivation with childless applicants, and the altruism motivation with preferential adopters,

The motivation is to have a family in the case of infertile couples. Preferential adopters want to give a home to a child who otherwise wouldn't have one'.

Officers' apparently inflated estimates of the significance of applicant altruism may be linked to officers' need to ration the service. That link is discussed in greater detail in chapter seven. Officers placed more emphasis on altruism as a motivation for applicants than did the applicants themselves, for example,

'Do-gooders do it out of duty, not out of volition'.

In contrast to the British immigration worker who thought that altruism was a 'fair enough' motivation for intercountry adoption applicants (see Humphrey and Humphrey 1993: 25), three officers redefined applicant altruism as predictive of placement problems. Indeed, altruism in applicants was associated with a weaker capacity for both bonding and acceptance-of-difference. Two officers asserted that altruism is attended by expectations of gratitude from the child. Finally, altruistic applicants were expected to be more likely, on the one hand, to accept the credit if the adopted child excels, and, on the other, to be inclined to allude to the child's origins if the child does not excel. In other words, altruistic applicants were expected to reconstruct the adoptive relationship between parent and child in terms that deny parental responsibility for any undesirable behaviour of the child.

The association between altruistic motivations and the alleged negative implications for placement was not substantiated with argument or reference to experience or research. No reference was made even to any academic assertions such as Winkler et al.'s (1988: 109) unsubstantiated association of applicant altruism with increased post-placement adjustment problems. Since the association between the motivation and its alleged implications is not explained, it seems that some officers were prejudiced against altruism among applicants. One officer expressed her intuition thus,

'I believe there are many more problems in families where the applicants have the do-gooder mentality'.

Conversely, three officers indicated their disquiet about applicants who are motivated by the 'need to have a child'. One of these officers linked that motivation with the payment of fees to the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service. The problem here was that non-fecund or fee-paying applicants were seen to focus on their own parenting aspirations, that is, their 'right to a child', rather than the needs of the child. As one officer put it,

'Sometimes people get submerged in their own needs and think of the child from their own point of view, not from the child's point of view'.

## Conclusion

The data show that the contesting parties attribute to each other motivations that are different from the motivations those parties claim for themselves. This chapter has shown that there are more motivations involved than just the successful placement of the child. Moreover, it has explained how broader considerations such as the restricted funding of the service and the challenge to official powers of coercion can influence how motivations of the 'out-group' (Merton 1980) are attributed. Sources of tension are thus capable of diversifying into new sources of contention and conflict. Given the range of officers' views on applicant motivation, applicants' best strategy in interaction with officers would be to show support for agency regulation and supervision procedures. Applicants should also acknowledge the propriety of officers' high status. As their motivations are variously defined by officers, applicants should not show too much enthusiasm for their personal adoption projects. Rather, they should show commitment to, and support for, the bureaucratic process.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### RATIONING OF THE INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION SERVICE

#### Introduction

Rationing strategies, in governmental agencies as in other bureaucratic organisations, take many forms and may be implicit, explicit, formal and informal (Turner 1988: 198-99; Knapp 1984: 90; Foster 1983: 12). Implicit rationing restricts access to services through budgetary controls and public demand. Explicit rationing includes the more overt and therefore politically visible attempts by governments to control client eligibility. The notion of 'formal rationing' includes publicly visible mechanisms of social control such as documented eligibility rules, points systems, official waiting lists, charges and means tests. Informal means of welfare rationing, such as deliberate delay, deterrence and withholding of information, are far less open to public scrutiny.

Rationing contributes to the tension in the relationship between officers and applicants. In the first place any apparent limitation to the number of children, or to the number of applications accepted, is seen by applicants as symbolic evidence of the limits to government support for intercountry adoption. If governments are perceived not to support the service, or to deter applications, they will be perceived as increasing the risk of failure. This anxiety or fear of failure will generate tension in the relationship between officers and applicants. Secondly, applicants who are aware of the conditions in overseas institutions will link concern for children with speedy processing and see any obstacles, delays or restrictions in number as an indication that the government cares little about children. Similarly, the same limitations may be seen by applicants as government's lack of concern for them in their desire to become parents. Thirdly, applicants who are aware of the large number of children potentially available for intercountry adoption will not accept government protestations that there are few children available. Fourthly, mechanisms for the regulation of the adoption process that applicants see as delaying strategies will generate anxiety about the eventual

outcome – even though officers see these same mechanisms as essential to the process of placing children in secure, successful and long-term relationships by allowing time for adequate assessment and supervision to be undertaken.

The previous chapter identified the Department of Community and Health Service's need to restrict the intercountry adoption service to manageable proportions as a source of anxiety that contributes to the tension in the relationship between officers and applicants. The restrictions were discussed in the context of the analysis of motivations that showed that some applicants took limitation of the service as evidence of hostile, negative and obstructivist motivations among officers. This chapter explores the rationing of the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service in greater depth in order to gain further insight into how the number of children available and the number of applications accepted 'colour' the relationships between officers and applicants.

Predictably, some rationing mechanisms are strongly defended by social-service officers who will act to protect working conditions, their reputations, jobs and careers against outsiders in various forms of what Lyman and Scott (1970: 103) call 'turf defense'. Officers may internalise bureaucratic rhetoric and be unaware that rationing of the service strains their relationships with clients.

Just as predictable as official defence of rationing is client dissatisfaction with it. Rationing, after all, represents a diminution of service to current and potential clients. Clients' complaints about their interaction with intercountry adoption service officers, then, should be expected to reveal disquiet about rationing mechanisms, even if the behaviours and procedures at issue are not recognised by clients or even officers as rationing mechanisms. Client dissatisfaction is usually expressed informally as a part of the oral tradition that gives expression to their 'vocabularies of complaint' (Turner 1988: 152). Some officially recognised complaints have been published, however, and

they do indicate disquiet over rationing techniques. An example is the Tasmanian Ombudsman's Report (Willee 1986), discussed in chapter three.

The implementation of explicit rationing rules is subject to officers' powers of discretion and are sometimes so complex that clients remain ignorant of their rights and of decision-making guidelines. The effects of rationing are, however, always discernible to clients and are a source of tension. In intercountry adoption, for example, many applicants have attempted to circumvent official processes because of frustration with the procedural pace (see, for example, Kröger 1991), or with restrictive mechanisms such as the 'domicile clause' that is used for residential adoptions in Australia but not in New Zealand or England (Triseliotis 1988: 26; Fogarty et al. 1989: 60; Fyfe 1991b). (The distinction between residential and guardianship adoptions is explained in chapter three.) The domicile clause in Australian legislation requires prospective adoptive parents to live in the child's country of origin for at least twelve months immediately prior to the recognition of the relinquishing country's adoption order by the Australian state (Newby et al. 1991: 125; Fogarty et al. 1989: 60; Interdepartmental Committee 1986: 154; Fopp 1982b: 58; Milburn 1991a, b, c).

This chapter identifies three structural constraints on the scope and procedural pace of the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service. The first constraint analysed is the restriction of funding that is beyond the control of the case-officers and the manager of the agency. Secondly, the marginalisation of the adoptions agency by the current management structure is seen to have major implications for levels of resourcing. Thirdly, the necessarily protracted nature of the assessment process is explained. Despite these three *structural* constraints to funding, many applicants blame officers' alleged philosophical opposition to intercountry adoption for the limitations of service. Rationing is thus identified as a source of tension in the relationship between officers and applicants. The allocation process is not used as a rationing mechanism and does not contribute to relationship tension. However, officers' assertions about allegedly low numbers of available



children are identified as a further source of tension.

### **Rationing of the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service**

Accessibility to the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service is restricted, limited or rationed due to funding restrictions, the lack of access to representation on managerial levels within the bureaucracy, and the length of time needed for the careful assessment of applicants. The rationing of the service is necessary from the point of view of officers who take their assessment tasks seriously and who are aware of the funding constraints. For applicants, however, the rationing amounts to a diminution, and in some cases, a denial of a service that they want and that is in the interests of institutionalised children overseas.

*Funding restrictions* The limitation of funding for social services has a long history. State welfare services usually cater for the needs of minorities, but are funded indirectly by all taxpayers. That arrangement creates a high level of social security for all citizens, that, because of its expense to the public purse, is nevertheless controversial.

The phenomenon of social-welfare rationing in late-capitalist Western nations occurs in part as a result of the world-wide recession (Johnson 1985; Turner 1988). Turner, for example, argues that since 1973, when: '...the producing and exporting nations [took] control over the supply and price of oil by means of collective action' (Odell 1983: 211), late capitalist economies have experienced '...decline in commodity prices, an increase in world indebtedness, a spiral of inflation and unemployment, and a crisis in the world monetary system' (1988: 183). He goes on to argue that the economic recession has led to a crisis of legitimation for modern democratic governments as they seek to balance their responses to the conflicting demands of business that seeks greater profit and expansion, and the electorate that seeks greater access to improved social services (1988: 183-84). Rationing of social service provision is one response by Western governments to that fiscal crisis.

Rationing of social welfare services was evident before the oil crisis of 1973, however. Because of its social functions, rationing is an institutionalised feature of social service provision (see Foster 1983: 14). For example, some historical studies identify rationing as a mechanism for the deterrence of potential clients from access to social services in the administration of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act in England (Glennister 1975: 39). Others, such as Garfinkel (1956) and Turner (1988: 57-8), discuss the deterrent effects of rationing in the hospital setting.

In Tasmania, the government has thus followed a long tradition. With an eye to reducing the Tasmanian state debt, government policy has significantly limited the funding of social services. The effects of that policy on the Intercountry Adoption Service have been noticed by applicants. Forty-one applicants said in interview that the service is inadequately resourced. Only nine said that it is adequately resourced. Six said they did not know. When asked to explain their assessments of inadequate resourcing, nineteen said that the officers, who are often not properly qualified or trained, are incompetent. Typical comments include the following,

'There is limited funding and limited knowledge. More training is needed to find out what goes on in sending countries'.

'They definitely work on the barest of information'.

'The officers are not very well qualified. They don't have the knowledge they should have'.

'Officers are not very professional, not very well trained. It would be good for officers to go to the sending countries and see how the orphanages work. One officer went and learned a lot but was later shunted out of the Department

as she was becoming too committed to intercountry adoption and the Department opposes intercountry adoption'.

Thirteen substantiated their views on inadequate resourcing with reference to the need for more staff.

'If the service was better funded, they would have more staff and better information'.

'They could do with more staff'.

Eleven others said the problem is the lack of specialisation that limits officers' chances of developing appropriate levels of expertise. As one applicant couple put it,

'Workers don't have enough time for intercountry adoption work. Our worker has one and a half days a week. The rest is local and fostering and other programs. Even if they had one full-time on intercountry adoption it would be better'.

Four applicants suggested that the service should maintain control but liaise with non-government organisations that can facilitate and accelerate the process. Such co-operation was seen as a cost-efficient way of facilitating the process, of educating officers, and of circumventing the service restrictions caused by limited funding,

'The only way I can see it overcoming budgetary constraints is a greater partnership with non-government organisations and parent groups. Use of voluntary resources could help overcome the lack of internal resources'.

Officers were also aware of the funding constraints. Nine expressed their frustration. For example, one said,

'We are straightjacketed by not being able to visit the sending countries and work face to face with the services there'.

Six said that intercountry adoption work is only a small part of their total workloads. As one officer put it,

'Intercountry adoption is something fostering officers do off the side of their desks'.

Three said that fostering takes priority over adoption work because fostering is seen as crisis work. That impression was recorded also in Timms' (1973: 20) study of applicants in Britain some twenty years ago, and underpins his call for specialisation of adoption work. Three wanted the Department of Community and Health Services to specialise adoption work in order to maximise officers' opportunities for developing expertise. One expressed her views in the following way,

'It would be good to have specialist officers for fostering and adoption. The restructure of the Department didn't allow any specialisation at all'.

Three said that staffing was adequate for the existing number of applicants. Two said that the service is understaffed.

On the whole, applicants and officers agreed that the service is inadequately resourced. While applicants complained of the 'incompetence' of many service providers, officers identified systemic limitations to the development of expertise as a major cause of the problem. Bureaucratic structures that

redefine specialisation as deskilling militate against the development of expertise in a narrowly defined area. For example, where 'merit' is defined as 'generalism' and 'adaptability' by managers of bureaucracies that provide a wide range of services, the occupational careers of individual officers will be advanced by comprehensive, rather than specialised, work experience. Moreover, the development of officer expertise would accelerate the processing of applications, thereby increasing service demand and the need for more funding. Finally, specialisation of officers would warrant their visiting sending countries in order to familiarise themselves with conditions and procedures there and to create personal relationships to facilitate the processing of future applications. Specialisation is, therefore, structurally not in the interests of officers' career paths, nor in the interests of bureaucratic executives who are rewarded for budget control or rationing and not for service expansion. Funding for the adoptions agency is restricted not only by general departmental policy, however, but also by the current management structure.

*Management structure* Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service workers are marginalised within the larger Department of Community and Health Services. The Department follows the British example, cited by Triseliotis (1993: 132), of giving intercountry adoption a lower priority than the placement of special needs children in local care. Intra-departmental marginalisation of the intercountry adoption service might also be a result of reference-group awareness of discredited permanent placement policies such as those cited by Thurnham (1993: 140).

Current bureaucratic arrangements have structurally isolated the Adoption Service from the regionalisation of all other agencies within the Department. One officer expressed her views ironically,

'All the service delivery is regionalised because that is thought to be better, especially in a state like Tasmania with such a large population. "Unfortunately" they can't

regionalise adoption. We've been so lucky with adoptions to keep the cohesion we've got'.

As the only non-regionalised agency, the Adoption Service is left with 'cohesion' but without clear managerial lines of accountability. More importantly, the service does not have formalised access to the managerial level within the departmental hierarchy. One officer pointed out the important funding implications,

'They couldn't regionalise adoptions services. So this unit can't be a part of central office (it was always a part of Head office) because it is not policy. Neither is it confined to one region. So it's what they call "out-bureaud" to the Southern Region, which means it is a pain in the neck to the Southern Region, but it has no lines of communication with the North and the South, and I mean none'.

Another explained,

'There are seven programs, each has about six subprograms all competing for resources. It's a fight with your mates. There is now an administrative structure which doesn't provide for adoptions services because those services don't regionalise nicely and they haven't built into their management structure a flexibility to allow you lines of communication with decision-makers at policy level so that the other services with whom you are competing for funding do have clear and undisputed access to decision-making bodies or individuals while you do not'.

A third said,

'The Department is not keen on adoption. They don't know where it fits. Managers forget about adoption. They don't know how it works. It is a fairly autonomous unit with negative funding implications. We are the only non-regionalised part of the Department'.

Restricted funding and a lack of representation at senior level within the bureaucracy deny the adoptions service the staffing levels it would need to increase its client load. Officers could increase service accessibility by completing the assessment reports on new applicants much quicker than they currently do. However, since that option would require a major change in officers' sense of appropriate service-delivery standards, they are likely to reject it.

*The assessment process* Officers have to ration the service in order to be able to assess applicants thoroughly 'in the best interests of the child'. The process of assessing the future parenting ability of an applicant is essentially one that requires officers to make predictions and to hope that those predictions will in time be shown to have been accurate. As we saw in chapter five, officers have a keen sense of responsibility for the child. The assessment process, that is therefore necessarily careful and thorough, will inevitably take considerable time to complete. Without additional funding, the service could only increase the number of applicants for assessment by reducing the time taken for assessment. The need for deterrence increases along with the number of applicants. The option of quicker processing would compromise the quality of the service in the eyes of many officers. Their views were encapsulated by the officer who said,

'It's a long, difficult, tedious process. You don't take their responses at face value. You have to get to know your family really well to be able to satisfy yourself that they are OK'.

Restricted service accessibility can thus be identified as a result of the complicated nature of the assessment process. Responses to the question in interview on service accessibility show a polarisation of views. Thirty-nine applicants and two officers said that the service is not constantly available to the public. In contrast, thirteen applicants and ten officers said that the service is constantly available to the public. Seventeen applicants' and two officers' views that the service has been closed from time to time are corroborated by the Intercountry Adoption Service's own annual reports 'that intercountry adoption lists were closed from July 1990 till July 1992 (Department of Community Services 1992; Department of Community and Health Services 1993: 59). Given the high turnover of staff, it is possible that some officers are not aware that the Intercountry Adoption Service lists have ever been closed.

While the question of service accessibility proved controversial, there was agreement on the need for an assessment process that is designed to determine the suitability of applicants for adoption. All seventy-two interviewees agreed that there should be an applicant-screening process by state officers in Tasmania. For example, one applicant said,

'Sometimes there may be a personality clash between the officer and the applicant. But the screening process is good. Applicants should be screened because there are a lot of people who love these little children because they are dark and they think they are little dolls. But once they get older they are like any other child. If they are not going to get a proper home life they might as well stay in their home country'.

Some others said that the screening process is not stringent enough. As one put it,



'There has to be screening of some kind. One officer was very thorough. She explained to us it was going to take time because she had to do this and this. The first officer saw us once and said she could see we were alright and that was it. Most of that interview she spent talking about her child - most inappropriate. An hour is not enough for screening. Anybody could pull the wool over her eyes'.

Forty-five applicants said that officers support the existing screening process. Those results suggest that there is a high level of value consensus on the matter of screening for approval in Tasmania. However, applicants, who supported the process in principle, usually expressed criticism and suggested improvements. For example, of a total of twenty-nine complainants, thirteen said some questions were intrusive, twelve said that officers were not sufficiently informed or qualified to conduct the screening process properly, and eleven expressed criticism about the irrelevance and stringency of the medical form. Furthermore, forty-seven applicants who said there should be a screening process, indicated substantial dissatisfaction with the service in general. That dissatisfaction, that is discussed in detail in chapter ten, was expressed, for example, in the following terms by one applicant,

'There should be a screening process, but it needs to be improved. We waited years to be approved. The Department never explained why it took so long. Round and round in circles. We attended an eight-hour seminar. For the first five and a half hours we got why we should not adopt from overseas. To me that is totally disgusting'.

Dissatisfaction with the screening process was also expressed by some officers. One, for example, wanted protocols to be established between the adoption service and the Child Protection Board,

'There's not a child protection check. It's going to change but has to go via a panel. Fostering has a child protection check. From now on I will ask applicants if it's OK that I do a child protection check because if something goes wrong and we have not done that we could be liable. I can access child protection documents with the permission of applicants but not without. We leave ourselves wide open. In the Act it says you can't adopt a child if you have a record of an offence against a child. We won't be able to find out that if we don't do a child protection check. Currently the screening runs the risk of contravening the Act. Officers should have a check done on themselves too'.

That officer's concerns have since been allayed by the introduction into the process of official access to any Child Protection Board data for the purposes of assessment.

*The allocation process* While there was substantial dissatisfaction with aspects of the assessment process, applicants expressed very little disquiet about the allocation process. Forty-three applicants said that the sending country allocates the child to prospective adoptive parents. Only three said the adoptions manager does not always pass the offer-of-allocation on to applicants for consideration. Five said that ASIAC allocates. Four said the Tasmanian service manager allocates if asked to by sending countries. Two said they had chosen the child themselves. Two said they did not know who allocates the child to applicants.

There was virtually no misunderstanding among applicants about who allocates intercountry adoptive children. It is therefore not the case that applicants are generally of the view that officers ration the service by withholding allocation or by allocating children only to their favourite applicants. Furthermore, there was little complaint about eligibility criteria.

*Number of children available* Other research has shown that adoptions officers will show a 'blue-ribbon' attitude of encouragement towards intending applicants when the supply of children exceeds demand (see, for example, Reid 1971: 6-8; Melichercik 1981: 12; Harris 1981: 192). In addition, Toft and McIntyre (1992) illustrate the flexibility of adoption criteria. Faced with a shortage of adoptive applicants, officers lower the price or costs of adoption, for example, by guaranteeing the applicant a 'perfect' child. Conversely, when there is a shortage of children, eligibility criteria for applicants become more restrictive. Thus Close (1977: 33), for example, associates stricter criteria with decreased supply of children.

The simple association between rationing and the number of children available for adoption rests on the assumption that officers face no other pressures to limit the size of their services. It also rests on the assumption that bureaucrats do not arbitrarily limit the number of children available in order to deflect client criticism about service rationing. Given the evidence that there are many children who could benefit from intercountry adoption (see, for example, Boss 1993; Benet 1976: 133-4; Gamage 1993; Snow 1994; and Thurnham 1993: 142), the replacement of 'blue ribbon' with 'red tape' appears as a function not of a lack of children but rather as a function of the size of the agency. Since the agency is small, there is a need to ration the service and manage the attendant dissatisfaction from frustrated clients.

Forty-eight applicants said that there were adequate children available for intercountry adoption. As one applicant put it,

'There are plenty of children overseas that need adoption who have been processed for adoption because their names appear in support group literature'.

Nine applicants and four officers said there were not enough available to meet the demand from prospective adoptive couples in Tasmania. Five

officers said they did not know whether there are enough children available. One officer said that there are enough families available in Tasmania for intercountry adoptive children. Forty-three applicants, including four who had said that there were not enough children available, indicated that the number made available for adoption is bureaucratically limited in Australia,

'Yes, more than enough from personal experience. The Department says there are not enough because it has some hidden agenda. The number made available for intercountry adoption is limited by bureaucratic processes and bureaucratic anti-intercountry adoption ideology'.

Another compared Tasmania with the United States,

'It seems strange you can only apply for one country at a time. There are a lot of children out there that could be adopted. The numbers are limited by government negotiation. The U.S. adopts heaps more children proportionately than we do - so there must be lots of kids out there'.

Twenty said that the number is limited by state bureaucracies in the sending countries. Fourteen of them said that the number is limited by state bureaucracies in sending countries and in Australia.

Nine applicants at first seemed to agree with the Department's official position on availability, that is, that there are few children available for intercountry adoption, and that availability is determined by authorities other than the Department. However, applicants' responses only reveal the perception that the number of children available for intercountry adoption is bureaucratically limited. That perception is in line with the view expressed in the Proceedings of the 4th North American Conference on Adoptable Children (see Benet 1976: 134). Interviewees who, for example, identified

welfare departments in sending countries as sources of rationing, seemed to agree with the Tasmanian departmental line that the numbers of children available are beyond its control. Most of those interviewees, however, also identified the Tasmanian Department as a source of rationing. That identification is a predictable point of tension. Intercountry adoption service pronouncements about low numbers of children available for intercountry adoption (See for example, Department of Community Welfare 1990: 16) are questioned by some officers and are, on the whole, not accepted by applicants. The identification by twenty applicants of service-rationing mechanisms beyond the Tasmanian Department's control indicates a level of congruence between officers and applicants.

### Conclusion

The Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service asserts that there are very few children available for intercountry adoption. The monetary and non-monetary costs of adoption to applicants are therefore raised. For example, unpopular fees have been introduced, and constantly emphasised statements concerning the small number of children available for adoption serve to deter all but the most motivated from applying. Once in the scheme, applicants are continually told by officers to expect delays. Applicants are also told to expect serious post-placement adjustment problems on the part of the child as part of the normal adoption process. Such statements, too, deter people from applying. Finally, applicant motivations are sometimes demonised and normal respect for applicant privacy is pushed aside in the alleged interests of the child. Applicants pay a high price for permission to adopt. The process tests their commitment, motivations, integrity, values, and patience.

Nevertheless, this empirical study of rationing shows that applicants and officers do not adopt polarised positions. Applicants' attitudes to rationing of the service are ambivalent. State intervention, regulation and supervision of adoptive family formation is acceptable to applicants where the interests of the child are seen to be promoted. Where the service has failed to convince applicants that rationing is in the interests of the child, let alone of the

applicants themselves, dissatisfaction appears. Dissatisfaction on the part of the weaker party in a politically unequal relationship underpins frustration, tension and anxiety.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### PARENTING ROLES

#### Introduction

At first glance, during placement, responsibility for the child appears to be 'shared' between officers and applicants. While the adoption process runs smoothly, cooperation appears to characterise their relationship. At this stage of the process applicants assume the status of parents, refer to themselves as adoptive parents and begin to exercise typical parental 'rights' over the child. For their part, officers appear to 'delegate' just such custodial rights to applicants – even if only in the form that applicants' assumption of parental roles is not contested by officers who withdraw into the background.

However, this thesis argues that when issues of guardianship emerge, a contest is generated over who has the right and responsibility to act as the 'parent' of the child. In such contests the residual rights of officers become evident. In cases of dispute over authority, the parental roles of the adoptive parents and of the officers become more clearly defined. The assumption of total parenthood status by applicants, acquiesced to by officers as part of the normal transition into full custodial rights, becomes a matter of contest as officers exercise their residual powers and 'claim back' some of the authority that they appear to have delegated. It is the exercise of the very real powers that officers have over the children, whose care they supervise, that points to the fact that roles are not shared but rather compartmentalised. In the normal course, the tension that is evident in the relationship takes the form of anxiety, largely latent, about control and responsibility. Once roles have been sharpened in the course of a dispute, and the relative position of the parties clarified, the tension between officers and applicants becomes manifest and, given that legal lines of authority have hardened, turns on the timing of the transfer of parental roles fully to the applicant parents. In every day terms, applicants come to accept that officers have rights over the child; rights which, one day soon, will pass over to them as fully-fledged parents.

This chapter explores that anxiety and tension further by focusing on the parenting roles assumed by officers and applicants. The distribution of parenting roles affects officers' and applicants' expectations of each other. In particular, it influences their views on the pace at which applications should be processed and the timing of the transfer of parental authority.

Adoption is essentially different from fosterage, ritual sponsorship and adrogation that Goody (1971: 335) describes as various ways of dividing the care and responsibility for children between families. She contrasts those child-placement options with adoption where: '...the *substitution* of one set of parental roles for another, rather than the sharing of roles, is the object' (1971: 335). Her set of parental roles contains five elements, only the first of which is restricted to biological parents: genitor/genetrix, source of status identity, nurse, tutor, and sponsor (1971: 332). Later she makes it clear that her understanding of 'substitution' in adoption is one where: '..."total parenthood" is renounced by one couple and assumed by another' (1971: 342). Furthermore, she concludes that the 'transfer' of all available parental roles in adoption is the antithesis of the pattern of 'shared' parental roles '...found in the institutions of fosterage, ritual sponsorship and adrogation' (1971: 344).

Since Goody's (1971) theory of adoption does not account for the status and role of the intercountry adoption service officer, it is too restrictive for this analysis of relationships in intercountry adoption. Her conceptual framework is limited to the analysis of ideal unregulated adoption where, unlike in the murderous institution of babyfarming, parental roles are transferred directly from the biological parents to the adoptive parents. In state-regulated guardianship adoption, officers temporarily assume ex-officio the rights and responsibilities normally associated with relinquishing parents.

Ritual sponsorship and adrogation are alien to modern Western societies, but fostering remains. Of interest to this chapter is the fact that, as we saw in chapter seven, many adoption officers also work as foster-care workers. Crisis, out-of-home-care service takes up more of their time than does



adoption work. Thus when Goody observes that:...

'...there is in adoption, as it is practised in our society, no basis for the *sharing* of parental role elements, just because adoptive parents are seeking to fill all these roles themselves. They want a whole child, not a part of one' (1971: 342)...

...she is writing from the perspective of (prospective) adoptive parents and not from the perspective of Intercountry Adoption Service officers. We can imagine that officers can distinguish between adoption and fostering, but the ability to distinguish between these institutions is not necessarily attended by the ability to suspend the normative bureaucratic pattern of 'shared' parenting in an unequal power relationship with clients. In other words, there is no evidence to show that official preparedness to relinquish all pro-parenting rights and responsibilities appears as a result of official cognizance of applicant goals. Rather, officers' approach to intercountry adoption is informed by their familiarity with the dominant, and to them normative, pattern of shared parenting.

In fact, parental roles are not shared. Rather, they are compartmentalised and that has implications for officers' and applicants' perceptions of time. Divided parenting arrangements, such as fostering, are underpinned by the institutionalised, if not legislatively stipulated, status and role of the biological parent, the welfare officer and the foster parent. Such long-term parenting arrangements are better described as compartmentalised than shared. The notion of 'sharing', with its (in this case) misleading connotation of consensual and symmetrical division, denotes pro-parental involvement of various parties but does not indicate the level or nature of each party's rights and responsibilities. In contrast, 'compartmentalisation', with its connotation of inflexibility, more accurately conveys a sense of rigid or institutionalised allocation of pro-parental rights and duties and, because it is not connotative of mutual consent, is more representative of the unequal social and political power within allegedly 'shared' parenting arrangements.

In the following discussion, applicant urgency and commitment to project

completion are explained in part as results of the social stigmatisation of welfare services, and are contrasted with officers' sense of professional caution. Officer reticence, that persists despite the weight of research evidence in favour of happy outcomes in approximately ninety-seven per cent of intercountry adoptions, is identified as a source of frustration for applicants. The difference between officer and applicant views on procedural pace is recognised as a major point of tension in the relationship. However, significant elements of consensus are also identified.

In relationships of unequally compartmentalised social and political power, discrepancies between officers' and applicants' judgements of what constitutes appropriate periods within the process predictably emerge as points of tension. Conceptualisation of time allocation and procedural speed is thus to a large extent structurally derived.

#### **Parenting roles and the pace of processing**

Now that the postmodern conjugal dyad is characterised by a re-emergence of familial 'symmetry' (Young and Willmott 1973), and often the attendant 'democratisation' of the spousal relationship (Giddens 1992: 185), there is a sense of mutual control and intimate, creative self-expression in biological reproduction. The perception of being in control is strengthened by the highly 'determinate' nine month waiting period of pregnancy. The analogy between adoption and the birth process drawn by Berry (1973: 101-2) is false. Humphrey and Humphrey (1993: 26), for example, show that applicants in intercountry adoption are obliged to conform to the social domination of strangers for indeterminate periods that, since they are usually much longer than nine months, are perceived by prospective adoptive parents as frustrating, lengthy delays.

Furthermore, pregnancies are typified as 'episodic', that is, they are '...characterized by an intensity of activity' and in that sense can be compared to romantic affairs (Lyman and Scott 1970: 194). Conversely, intercountry adoption service waiting periods are 'continuous', long-term, slow and

requiring an '...inhibition of excessive spontaneous emotionality' (Lyman and Scott 1970: 194). In other words, applicants are denied the expression of precisely those emotional highs normally associated with antenatal parenthood. Applicants' typifications of anticipated parenthood thus prepare them for the normal pregnancy and birthing process, but not for intercountry adoption procedures.

Typification of adoptive family formation for intercountry adoption applicants is informed not only by comparison and contrast with pregnancy, but also by knowledge of local adoption. Intercountry adoption procedures usually take longer than pregnancy but are quicker than current arrangements for domestic adoption. Depending on applicants' points of reference, therefore, the intercountry adoption process may seem fast or slow. Applicants' views here will, of course, also be influenced by the actual time taken for their adoptions to be completed.

Regulations, that stipulate limited age-differences between child and applicant or that limit the total time allowed for applicant involvement in programs, impose deadlines. In Lyman and Scott's (1970: 207) terms, applicants may experience 'time panic' as a result of their need to make a good impression within a limited period.

The separate orientations, agendas and subcultures of officers and clients predictably inform differing views on procedural pace. As Pinker (1973) observes, given the stigmatisation of many social services provided by the state, it is predictable that clients who seek access to such services will only do so if the object desired cannot be gained by them from private or market sources of welfare. In other words, state welfare services are provided for citizens who, demonstrably, have failed to gain welfare objects through the family, friends or the market place. State services are the last port of call. Where possible, citizens will first attempt to gain the welfare they need from private, non-stigmatised sources. We can expect, therefore, that clients may approach state welfare services with a structurally-derived degree of

reluctance. That reluctance may delay their approach to services with the result that a sense of urgency has developed in clients prior to their initial meeting with service providers. Reluctance to approach services for help can be expected to persist after placement. For example, Howe (1992: 2) observes adoptive parental reluctance to seek guidance from the Post-Adoption Centre in London.

Officers and applicants all seek to secure the best interests of the child. Tension emerges, however, as a result of the varying orientations that lead to significantly different perspectives. Officers' opinions on procedural pace are informed by a very different structurally-derived agenda. For example, the officer will maintain the pro-parenting role element of sponsor as explained by Goody (1971: 332) until she is satisfied that the prospective adoptive parents will provide a suitable home and family for the child. It is at that point that the evaluative component, that underpins the tension in the relationship with applicants, ends.

With regard to the unidentified, pre-allocation child, the officer seeks to respect the various rights of biological parents and the rights of the child to be placed with suitable adoptive parents. Since a careful and thorough examination is needed, the assessment of applicant-suitability is necessarily a slow process. Painstaking examination of intercountry adoption applicant suitability will be insisted upon by officers who have to satisfy themselves that the prospective adoptive parents are suitable applicants for exclusive, private (that is, unsupervised) access to, and care of, the child. That insistence has implications for the speed of processing and for the number of applicants the service can accept. As one officer put it,

'The time taken for the home study (that is, the completion of the assessment of applicants) varies from region to region according to the number of applicants'.

Officers talk about 'shared' responsibility for the child, but that concept is

alien to the pattern, normative to applicants, of private and holistic child care within the nuclear family setting. A preoccupation with the rights of the child, along with the low levels of specialised pre-service training and professional development, leave officers ironically unprepared for their responsibilities for post-placement support of the adoptive family. Support for the family would be an obvious way of supporting the child. Such support is needed in light of the research evidence of post-placement problems, including depression among adoptive mothers (Gair 1994). Adoptive parents see the child as a member of the family. Officers may share that view, but from their perspective as pro-parental guardian of the child, they tend to see the child as an individual. Officers' emphasis on the rights of the child, therefore, predictably create tension where that emphasis is seen to compete with applicants' concern for the rights and well-being of the adoptive family.

Some authors assert that the bureaucratic principle of the paramountcy of the best interests of the child in this context is not followed in official practice (see, for example, Eisen 1980: 56). Adherence to the principle of the best interests of children has ironic stressor effects for children if it obscures the concerns of parents (Boss and Edwards 1992: 27). Failure to address their concerns, leads to adoptive parental stress that, in turn, has a detrimental effect on adoptive children. That argument is put, for example, by Eisen (1979: 199) and the Community Welfare Advisory Committee on Adoption Matters in South Australia (1976: 27). That committee responds to the identified adoptive parental stress by recommending the implementation of stricter eligibility criteria as a rationing mechanism, and the provision of counselling for those applicants whose names are subsequently removed from the Adoption Register. Their response involves a procedural but not a structural change. Officers remain as arbitrators in positions of unassailable, unitary authority.

The positive results of research into adoption outcomes and the internationally low disruption rate of between 1 and 3 per cent (see, for example, Harper 1985b: 6) for intercountry adoptive placements will not be

known to the majority of intercountry adoption officers who have received little specialised training. Past successes, therefore, do not contribute to official confidence that current applicants will make good parents. Rather, the onus of proof remains with applicants who must establish to the satisfaction of officers that the intercountry adoptive child will be looked after well in the adoptive family. Ultimately, the intercountry adoptive tasks for applicants and officers are impossible to achieve. Applicants can not demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that they will be good parents to the intercountry adoptive child. Conversely, officers can never be completely sure that the applicants they approve for adoption are actually suitable. In the final analysis, officers have to trust the applicants' assurances. It is no wonder, then, that the views on procedural pace differ.

An overview of studies of intercountry adoptive children's post-placement adjustment and functioning is provided by Triseliotis (1993). He cites on the one hand the findings by Rathburn (1965), Gardell (1979), and Hoksbergen (1990) who showed that some children were unhappy and had adjustment problems, and on the other the positive outcomes reported by Gunnarby et al. (1982), Hofvander et al. (1978), Loenen and Hoksbergen (1986), Simon and Alstein (1987), Gill and Jackson (1983), Feigelman and Silverman (1984), Kim (1978), Pruzan (1977), and Ahlijah (1990).

Rathburn (1965) finds that almost one third of the thirty-eight intercountry adoptive children he studied in the United States had adjustment problems. Simon and Senturia (1966) and, more recently, Howe and Hinings (1987) also record negative results. They find a significantly high representation of extra-familial adoptive children and adolescents in psychiatric settings. Simon and Senturia infer from their data that non-relative adoption is '...a specific stress associated with increased incidence of psychiatric illness' (1966: 867). Adopting a psychological perspective, Simon and Senturia locate the stress and attendant anti-social behaviours within the adoptive family. They suggest that future studies should examine the contribution of hereditary factors to the delinquency of adoptive minors (1966: 865), but fail to locate the

undesirable behaviour in broader social contexts. They do not, for example, consider any lasting effects of pre-adoption trauma. Nor do they acknowledge that juvenile delinquency is a social construction that, as Cohen et al. (1993: 557-58) for example confirm, varies between biological and adoptive families. Cohen et al. (1993) find that adoptive families are more likely to account for behaviour problems in terms of the child's genetic make-up and pre-adoption experience. In contrast, biological families tend to explain problems in terms of family dysfunction. For biological families '...parent separation from each other rather than from the child was more often seen as a solution', while adoptive families '...were more likely to consider removal of the child from the home as a solution' (Cohen et al. 1993: 558). Simon and Senturia, possibly unaware of such sociological research and theory, propose a simplistic solution to the problem of adoptive child delinquency in terms that, like Eisen's, consolidate existing political power structures,

'...Our study suggests that child care agencies might well consider criteria for selecting persons who can adopt so that the specific stresses we feel to be inherent in the adoption situation might be minimized' (1966: 867).

Gardell (1979) finds serious adjustment problems among sixty-four per cent of intercountry adoptive children who were six years or older on arrival in Sweden. In contrast, Lawder et al. (1969), Cunningham et al. (1977: 251) and Bohman (1972: 96) find no higher incidence of poor outcome among placement of older children. Hoksbergen (1990) attributes the reduced popularity of older adoptions among the Dutch to public awareness of children's adjustment problems. Based on a review of research conducted in the 1960s and 1970s, Kim et al. (1979) conclude that the long-term effects of transracial adoption remain controversial. Simon and Alstein (1987), however, find that domestic transracial adoptions within the United States were halted not because of awareness of adjustment problems but because child welfare agencies saw the change of policy as politically expedient. Shireman and Johnson (1986) record positive outcomes for most transracially adopted children in the United States. McRoy et al. (1982) find

no difference in child self-esteem in a study of thirty transracial adoptive families and thirty black in-racial adoptive families. They do, however, observe that the black transracially adopted children had greater difficulty in the development of racial identity.

Macaulay and Macaulay (1978: 292) observe that in the 1970s, transracial adoption was a matter for official discretion. Hill and Bramley (1986: 167) describe official discretion as a mechanism for the distancing of policy makers from the resolution of 'critical value problems'. In other words, any dissatisfaction with transracial adoption was managed by allocation of decision-making power to official discretion rather than departmental policy.

Tizard (1978: 240) and Feigelman and Silverman (1984: 601) observe that the important point of comparison is between adopted children and those still in orphanages or similar institutions, not between adopted children and children 'born into stable families'. Tizard and Rees (1977) and Winick, Meyer and Harris (1975) confirm that post-institutional adoption has beneficial effects on children compared with children still in orphanages or similar institutions. Dumaret (1985) and Bohman and Sigvardsson (1988) find that adopted children progress better than children returned to their biological parents. Gunnarby et al. (1982), Hofvander et al. (1978) and Loenen and Hoksbergen (1986) observe that adjustment and health problems among intercountry adoptive children in Sweden and Holland gradually diminish or disappear. Gill and Jackson (1983), Feigelman and Silverman (1984 and 1983: 146-72), Kim (1978), Pruzan (1977), Ahlijah (1990), Bagley and Young (1979) and Costin and Wattenberg (1979) find positive implications for the transracial adoption of children when compared with non-adopted or intra-racially adopted children.

Transracial adoption has also been found to have positive effects on the IQ of adopted children. There is debate on this topic, however. Levin (1994: 13) and Lynn (1994: 26) assert that the mean IQ difference between blacks and whites is 'significantly genetic in origin' and that the mean IQ of black children



adopted into white families is therefore the same as the mean IQ of black children raised in black families. In contrast, Moore (1986) and Waldman et al. (1994) argue that transracial adoption of black children into middle-class, white families has beneficial effects on the IQ and educational achievement of the children. The heredity/environment debate reveals evidence from both sides that transracial adoption at worst has no effect on mean black IQs, and at best has a beneficial effect.

Lack or shortage of specialised intercountry adoptive training explains officers' lack of awareness of the positive outcomes of most research on intercountry adoption placement. That lack of awareness, along with the need for the officer to be seen to be adopting a disinterested, dispassionate, objective, careful and considered approach to each case, precludes rapid decision-making. In addition, the officer's primary socialisation underpins her reluctance to revoke pro-parental rights. It is predictable, therefore, that a fast pace of operation, that clients welcome as efficient and humane, will be seen by officers as hasty, careless, unprofessional and inappropriate.

The expectation that officers would take a cautious approach to their work and to the ultimate relinquishment of their pro-parental authority over the child, was borne out in interviews. Nevertheless, officers showed substantial empathy with applicants' frustration over waiting periods.

The empirical study found that applicants and officers gave similar responses to questions about what constitutes an appropriate wait for an intercountry adoptive child. Fifty-eight applicants responded to the question on what they considered an appropriate period to wait from application to placement. The total number of months nominated was 943. The mean was sixteen months. The range was from two to twenty-four months, with a median of thirteen months. The mode was twenty-four months. Twenty applicants said that twenty-four months was an appropriate time to have to wait for placement. Some simply indicated that,

'Two years from application to placement'

was appropriate. Others responded in greater detail. For example, one said,

'Approval should take no more than six months here and preferably no more than three months in the relinquishing country. Approval to placement should be no more than twelve months. The total should be no more than twenty-one months to two years'.

Fourteen applicants said that a waiting period of up to eighteen months would be appropriate. Eleven said twelve months, another eleven said nine months, and one applicant said two months was an appropriate period to have to wait. Of the fifty-six respondents, therefore, only thirteen indicated that the process should take no longer than a normal pregnancy.

Five officers said that twenty-four months was an appropriate time to have to wait for placement. Two officers said eighteen months would be appropriate. Three said twelve months. One said up to five years' waiting could be realistically expected. Another one said twelve months was an appropriate period to wait for a decision on approval to adopt in Tasmania. One officer explained her views very carefully by pointing to the distinction between the notion of an 'appropriate' waiting period and a 'realistic' waiting period,

'Nine months would be ideal. I doubt I could wait three to four years and maintain the same level of feeling about the whole thing. Maybe between twenty and forty years of age having to wait four to five years is not so bad, but past forty having to wait five or six years is something which I feel has quite concerning effects. A five-year wait for a child is not reasonable but realistic'.

Actual waiting periods as recorded by applicants were on average longer than officers' indications of normal waiting periods from application to placement. Where applicants had completed more than one application, only the longest period waited was recorded for this comparison. Fifty-two applicants indicated how long they had actually waited for placement. The total number of months indicated was 1,709. The mean was thirty-three months. The range was from nine to eighty-four months, with a median of forty-seven months. The waiting period of twenty-four months was experienced by nine applicants. Twenty-seven applicants waited longer than two years. Twenty-one waited three years or more. Thirteen waited four years or more.

Four officers indicated that the normal waiting period for placement was within twenty-four months. Two officers indicated that the normal waiting period for placement was thirty-six months. Two officers indicated that the normal waiting period for placement was eighteen months. Two said there is no normal waiting period. Four said it varies, depending on the sending country. One said it does not vary according to sending country. One said she did not know where the delay occurs. One expressed her frustration on behalf of applicants,

'It normally takes longer than twelve months. After the file has been approved and sent overseas, it can be there twelve months and we hear nothing. Then the application has to be reviewed here to update the information. I can't do much more. I don't know where the delay is'.

Applicant typification of appropriate waiting periods was based for about half the total number of applicants interviewed on the normal nine-month duration of pregnancy. Twenty-nine applicants said that applicants should be required to wait for longer than nine months for placement. Thirty-two indicated that nine months was an appropriate period for applicants to be

required to wait. Only two applicants said that the waiting period till placement should be shorter than nine months. While the nine-month pregnancy term informs applicant notions of appropriate waiting periods, therefore, awareness of structural constraints on officialdom underpins a high level of applicant agreement with officers that the process should take longer than nine months to complete.

Four officers said that applicants should have to wait for longer than nine months. Four indicated that nine months was an appropriate period for applicants to be required to wait. One said that twelve months' wait is 'plenty'. One said that 'you can't compare' adoption with pregnancy.

Thirty-seven applicants complained that in Tasmania it takes too long to gain approval-to-adopt. Nine officers pointed out that once the file is overseas, the length of waiting periods is beyond the Tasmanian agency's control. Another one officer said that once the file has left her office it is beyond her control.

There was a high level of agreement between officers and applicants that the minimum twelve-month placement period is acceptable. Nevertheless, many applicants expressed dissatisfaction with this obstacle to completion of their adoption projects. Twenty-nine applicants said that the twelve-month placement supervision period was acceptable. Typically, those applicants observed that,

'It's reasonable. It is different to biological arrival.  
Feedback to the sending country at this stage is  
important'.

Twenty applicants said that it was too long. Ten said that the placement supervision period should last only six months. Some gave several reasons. For example,

'The twelve months is quite wrong. Local adoption is six months. Intercountry adoption should not be different. If the relinquishing country has allowed applicants to adopt the child and assume full responsibility, the Australian government should recognise that decision. Otherwise they are not having regard to the law of the other country - that country's expression of taking care of the child'.

Three said it should last only three months. Three said there should be no placement supervision period at all where the child has been adopted in the sending country prior to arrival in Australia. Seven saw the placement supervision period as a rationing mechanism that delays the filing of subsequent applications. Subsequent applications are not accepted until current applications are finalised by the granting of adoption orders by Australian magistrates. That arrangement causes frustration among applicants. As one explained,

'The twelve-month placement period was frustrating because it delayed our second application which couldn't proceed till the first child was adopted in Australia. It was frustrating to think that someone could still walk in and ... it's still their child'.

Five explained that the twelve-month minimum supervision period is harmful to older children who are aware that their status in the prospective adoptive family and in Australian society remains tenuous. Five based their complaints about the placement period on the grounds that prospective adoptive parents had no guarantee that the adoption would proceed. Two applicants labelled placement supervision a 'double standard', there being no supervision of postnatal parenting in families of origin.

Ten officers said that the twelve-month placement period is acceptable. A typical response pointed to the parenting role of the officer,

'The placement period is sound. It legitimises the worker being there in a supervisory role. It stops immediate ownership and exclusiveness. For some applicants who have no experience of living with a child on their own, it's good to have an experienced worker available'.

One said it is too long. Two indicated that they believed that the bonding process is more difficult with older children. They therefore suggested that twelve months' placement supervision is appropriate for older aged children, but too long for babies or infants,

'Infants should be brought into line with local adoption, six months. With older children it gives time to supervise'.

The Child Welfare League of America (1973: 40) recommends that the length of pre-adoption placements should be determined jointly by the adoptive parents and the relevant agency. In contrast, the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service has established the convention of a minimum twelve-month placement period despite only oblique and ambiguous reference to this stage of the process in the 1988 Adoption Act, Section 39 (3). No placement time limits are included in the 1992 Adoption Regulations. The intercountry adoption service has, therefore, succeeded in redefining a convention as if it were law. Criticism is effectively stalled by redefinition, in terms of legal requirement, of this power of official discretion. Insistence on a minimum twelve-month placement period is to be expected from officers who seek to postpone their relinquishment of the child for as long as possible.

There was a high level of agreement between officers and applicants that the entire intercountry adoption process takes too long. Fifty-three applicants said that the process takes too long. Six applicants said that they were happy with

the length of process. All six had experienced shorter-than-average waiting periods. Of that group, two had waited nineteen months for placement. The other four had waited nine months for placement. It seems, therefore, that applicant evaluation of procedural pace is informed by the length of time they had to wait.

There were high levels of in-group, and low levels of across-group discussion about the length of waiting periods. Reluctance among applicants to discuss waiting periods with officers may be linked to applicant views on whether applicants and officers agree on how long the home study process should take. Forty-two applicants said that applicants do not usually agree with officers on what constitutes an appropriate time between application and approval, that is, completion of the home study. Eight applicants indicated that they did not know whether the two parties usually agree. Four applicants said that applicants and officers usually do agree on how long applicants should have to wait for approval. Fifty-five applicants said that they had discussed the waiting period to approval with other applicants. Only twenty-two applicants said that they had discussed the topic with officers. Of those twenty-two, only seven expressed satisfaction with the response received from officers.

Six officers indicated that applicants do not usually agree with them on the time taken to complete the home study report. Six officers said that applicants usually do agree with officers on this issue. Five officers said that they discuss the topic with other officers. Five officers said that they discuss the topic with applicants.

Applicants did not use the term, 'indeterminate', but their dissatisfaction with the length of waiting periods, their awareness of the possibility of failure to gain a child, and the observations made by some that waiting periods seemed to take forever at the time, but with hindsight do not seem so bad, together suggest that this group of intercountry adoption applicants identify indeterminate waiting periods as a significant stressor. The problem of

indeterminacy was expressed by some as 'putting your life on hold'. Raynor (1980: 145) records the same result from her British study.

Reports of quicker intercountry adoption procedures for German, Swedish and United States applicants appear in some academic texts. Expedited procedures are explained by the partial deregulation of adoption (see, for example, Humphrey and Humphrey 1993: 8, 77; Textor 1992: 560; Kim and Carroll 1975; Toft and McIntyre 1992: 88). In addition, some intercountry adoptive parents in Tasmania assert that prospective intercountry adoptive parents in the United States notice less concern about the child's levels of health and fitness on the part of the Immigration Department.

Australian bureaucratic ethos, marked by higher levels of official concern, is explained by some applicants not as evidence of increased commitment to the welfare of children in Australia, but as a result of the existence of Medicare, a national health care system that meets substantial proportions of the medical costs of its members. As the Australian state pays for the health care of children, it seeks to minimize the costs. Denying or delaying potentially expensive children access to the country is one way of reducing the state's health care bill. In the United States, where health care is paid for privately by citizens who are members of private medical funds, official reluctance to allow entry to children who present with medical problems or who are merely underweight and/or undersized (both of which are normal for intercountry adoptive children) is weaker. It seems, therefore, that institutionalised provisions for the funding of health care have significant implications for procedural pace and for the attendant relationship between officers and applicants.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, neither bureaucratic ethos nor the socialisation of individuals in modernity prepares officers and applicants for shared parenting nor does the law of adoption allow it. In a study of court rulings on freeing for adoption, Hill et al. note that while social workers '... tend to see themselves



as neutral or objective professionals ...', judges '... saw them as an interested party' (1992: 385). More than merely interested parties, intercountry adoption officers have ex-officio parental responsibilities for the child. In intercountry adoption we see a sequential and compartmentalised pattern of parenting, starting with the biological parents or mother, then the orphanage staff, the relinquishing country's welfare department, the receiving country's welfare department, and finally, the adoptive parents.

It may seem at first that the last two categories share simultaneous responsibility for the child, but systematic study shows that, in the unequal power relationship between officers and applicants, officers only relinquish their pro-parental powers and responsibilities once they are satisfied that applicants are suitable and only then at the end of the stipulated placement period. In terms of political power, the parenting is never shared. There is no evidence that points to the democratisation of parenting roles. After placement but before finalisation, applicants provide the child with a source of status identity, nurse, tutor, and sponsor, while the officer retains all decision-making power. It is the officer who gives permission for intercountry adoptive children to have any necessary operations prior to finalisation of adoption for example. Bureaucratic ethos prepares officers for compartmentalised rather than shared parenting.

Descriptions of adoption as the transfer or substitution of all available parenting roles from biological to adoptive parents accurately represent the goals of prospective adoptive parents but fail analytically to account for the status and role of the Intercountry Adoption Service officer nor for the reality of tension generated by the contest over authority. An adequate theory of intercountry adoption must juxtapose applicants' projects of parental substitution with officers' ex-officio insistence on the compartmentalisation of parental roles at least until officers are satisfied that relinquishment of their interventionist and supervisory authority is directly in the best interests of the child, and indirectly in the best interests of the officer. A record of disrupted placements would, after all, not increase the officer's chances of

promotion within the bureaucratic management structure.

Since officers have to satisfy themselves on a matter in which applicants have long since reached conclusion, namely, the parenting ability of applicants, it comes as no surprise that applicants tend to complain that the process takes too long and that the transition to full parental rights is unreasonably deferred. Officers, as expected, defend a cautious pace of processing, but do so with sensitivity to the impatience or urgency of applicants. Officers manage criticism about the length of time the process takes by explaining the need for careful supervision, and by deflecting blame for delays onto sending countries.

Conversely, while it is still true that some officers are '... not sufficiently conscious of the feelings of hostility and resentment aroused by their disregard of the meaning of wasted time for applicants' (Timms 1973: 26), Tasmanian applicants show sensitivity to, and acceptance of, the structural constraints on officers. For example, waiting for longer than nine months is accepted by most applicants, their phrases, such as 'testing commitment' and 'thorough preparation', echoing the vocabulary of legitimation developed by the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service and, as Toft and McIntyre (1992: 90) observe, by adoptions officers in the United States. On the matter of procedural pace there is evidence of both empathy and dissatisfaction. Those elements of intercountry adoption in Tasmania are explored in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER NINE

### SHARED VALUES

#### Introduction

Dispute over decision-making authority is a characteristic outcome of interaction in settings where representatives of the family meet with representatives of the state in order to discuss matters of interest and importance to both institutions. Nevertheless, most state-service clients accept that state officers should adopt a universalistic orientation to their work. Conversely, state officers accept the normative value of autonomous and private familial decision-making. Both the disinterested supervision of state officers and the emotional warmth of the parents are socially legitimate bases for involvement in the intercountry adoption process. There is therefore substantial empathy between officers and applicants. At the same time, however, the shared legitimacy sustains their contest over authority. As the previous chapter demonstrates, and as Tizard (1978: 243-45) observes, the question of the 'social ownership' of the child remains unsettled in modern society.

This chapter considers first the ambivalence of officers' and applicants' assessments of each other in social interaction. This ambivalence is a product of widely shared values about the welfare of the child in adoption that sustains the relationship and of the tension, born of fear of failure and the awareness of limits to control, experienced by officers and applicants alike. In interviews, the mutual ambivalence becomes evident in the responses that officers and applicants give to questions on the notions of 'social ownership' and 'primary responsibility' for the child. The chapter explores the two sides of this ambivalence - first, the notion of state compulsion and second, the values that the two parties share. The argument that the state's powers of coercion produce social stability are rejected in favour of support for the view that social stability is a product of widely shared values. The data gathered on bias and objectivity, on eligibility constraints, on the rights of the relinquishing parents, orphanages and governments, on the supervision and

disruption of placements and on the parenthood status of applicants during the placement period show that applicants' support for state regulation and supervision persists despite substantial concern over the alleged bias of some officers. Despite the tension, the relationship is held together by the values that the two parties share. Those shared values are the focus of this chapter.

### Ambivalence

The empathy between the client and the officer has implications for their relationship. Timms' (1973) record of 'consumer accounts of social help for children' illustrates clients' ambivalence towards officers. On the one hand, clients accepted the need for official universalism or fairness, a point of empathy with officialdom that underpinned their compliance with state regulations and official directions. On the other hand, clients were dissatisfied with their social powerlessness. Relationship difficulties are revealed by the juxtaposition of positive and negative comments about service providers, for example,

'...Of course selection is necessary. I am not in the least arguing for indiscriminate acceptance of applicants ... I felt again the same sense of desperation and complete helplessness ... We had far too much at stake to be able to afford the luxury of plain speaking' (Timms 1973: 7, 17, 34).

Humphrey and Humphrey reveal the same ambivalence twenty years later,

'...we could really have done without the official visitors, as more than anything we wanted to be left alone to get on with our new life.... There was a fair amount of documentation needed, but nothing that struck me as being unreasonable and nothing terribly difficult to get hold of' (1993: 45, 55).

What we can expect, then, is that the tension in the relationship between officers and clients will emerge as a consequence of the fact that the

institutional authority of the family overlaps with that of the state. This explains the confusion and ambivalence of clients who simultaneously defend the institutional autonomy of the family and accept that universalistic state intervention is needed to protect the rights of the individual. Conversely, we can expect officers to be torn between the demands of official responsibility on the one hand and private support for the autonomy of the nuclear family on the other.

The polarisation of emphasis here should not be confused with a polarisation of views. Each party can be expected to understand and at least in part empathise with the views of the other. Family autonomy, individual rights and state universalism are not controversial issues. Controversy does arise, however, on the question of what constitutes appropriate lines of authority. Anxiety emerges not just as a result of the tension in the relationship but, ironically, also as a result of the values and assumptions that clients and officers share. Each party seeks to legitimise its independent decision-making authority by referring to values and principles with which representatives of the other institution are likely to agree.

The client, as an individual, may agree with official supervision, intervention and authority. As a representative of a family, however, the same client may reject any kind of external authoritative intervention. Conversely, the officer is at once a citizen and a representative of the state. As citizens, clients and officers can be expected to concur widely. As representatives of competing institutions, they can be expected to disagree on what constitutes appropriate lines of decision-making authority. In short, their relationship can be described as 'inconsistent' (see Frankel 1978a).

*Social ownership of the child* In interviews, thirty-seven applicants indicated that the child belonged to them from allocation. Another sixteen said that the child was theirs from placement. Typical responses included the following from one couple,

'After allocation I feel as if the child belongs to me. She's got a picture of him in every corner of the house. As soon as you get that photo you feel that the child is part of our family. You try not to get this very strong attachment till you are actually there. That's the biggest thing. After placement the issue of social ownership of the child is complete, as soon as he's in the house. The final adoption is just a process - doesn't mean anything to the actual situation'.

Fifteen said that the child belongs legally to the Australian state until adoption is finalised. As the following comments show, applicants saw a clear distinction between the notions of legal and emotional ties to the child,

'The child belongs to the sending country, the Australian state, then to you. You feel like the child belongs to you when they give you a name. Definitely when you get a photo. But she's not legally yours till adoption. Our sense of relief on adoption was amazing - finally it was all finished with them - they have no power over us'.

Thirty-six applicants gave a further indication of their emotional attachment to the child by identifying the adopted child as their heir. As one applicant put it,

'We would want our child to inherit our wealth if we had died during placement. Before placement not because the child could be allocated again'.

Six said they would want the child to inherit their wealth from allocation. Thirteen indicated that they would have proceeded with the adoption project had the spouse died after allocation.

The sense of social ownership for applicants is thus associated with the anticipated or physical assumption of parental roles with regard to an identified child. In contrast, only one officer said that the child belongs to the prospective adoptive parents from allocation. Another one said that the child belongs to the family from the point of view of the child. One officer said that social ownership of the child is shared between the biological mother and the prospective adoptive parents until finalisation of the process in Australia. One said the child belongs 'emotionally' to the biological mother. Three said that the state adoptions agency and the prospective adoptive parents share responsibility for the child. Five said that the child belongs to the Secretary of the Department of Community and Health Services who is the legal guardian until adoption in Australia. A typical response was,

'After placement, the child belongs to the Director of the Department in Australia'.

One said the child belongs to 'itself'. Two said that the child belongs to the 'society in which it lives'. Most officers thus did not acknowledge the pro-parental status of adoptive applicants.

*Responsibility for the child* Responses to the question about primary responsibility for the child show that for officers and applicants the notion of 'parental responsibility' is clearly distinguished from the notion of 'social belonging'. While thirty-seven applicants indicated that the intercountry adoptive child belongs to the applicants from allocation, only eleven said that they had primary responsibility for the child from allocation. For example, when asked who has the primary responsibility for the child, one couple replied,

'The adoptive parents. After allocation it's your responsibility'.

'Primary responsibility' did not mean 'sole responsibility'. Some applicants gave detailed descriptions of the role of the adoptive parent. For example,

'The adoptive parents from allocation in a financial sense, for food, health care, English lessons'.

Primary responsibility for the child was claimed by forty-one applicants from placement. Some seemed to indicate that they saw no role for the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service at all after placement. For example, one asserted that primary responsibility for the child rests with the,

'family after placement. Before placement it is the welfare department in the sending country'.

That applicant later said, however, that he supported in principle the need for assessment of applicants by state officers and he agreed with the twelve-month post-placement supervision period. Such responses illustrate the importance of triangulation in interviews.

Twenty applicants said that primary responsibility for the child rests with the child's country of origin until placement. Some indicated that they were aware of the complexity of the notion of primary responsibility for the child in intercountry adoption. For example, one identified the responsibilities of the relinquishing country, the prospective adoptive parents and the receiving state. In addition she distinguished between legal, economic, financial, social and moral responsibilities,

'On allocation, but prior to placement, the relinquishing country has primary responsibility. Morally, applicants would pay for medical expenses for the child but it becomes very difficult because it would be nice to have some kind of guarantee that the child was actually going to be yours. Legally the state – during placement



ultimately they have the right to remove the child from your care. Socially and morally the parents have the final responsibility to do the best ... but I don't object to the state having supervision rights to make sure you are doing that. Parents have primary economic responsibility for the child'.

Only three applicants said that the primary responsibility for the child is shared between prospective adoptive parents and the officers in Tasmania until finalisation. Conversely, six officers said that they shared pro-parental responsibility with the applicants. One officer expressed her awareness of the complexity of the notion of primary responsibility in the following way,

'Difficult to answer. In some ways the Department, the whole society/structure/thing community. In other ways the couple who do all the necessary physical caring. I think it's a shared responsibility'.

Another two officers said that the primary responsibility for the child lies with the Department of Community and Health Services. Three officers said that the prospective adoptive parents have primary responsibility for the child from placement. Another three acknowledged the custodial responsibilities of adoptive parents from placement,

'In legal terms the state is the primary carer, but in terms of everyday care it is the adoptive parent'.

Officers' responses here were as expected in that they had to claim some pro-parental responsibility or put into question their post-placement involvement in the intercountry adoption process. One officer said that, unlike applicants, officers cannot relinquish their pro-parental responsibilities prior to finalisation of the process,

'In a social sense governments assume social responsibility for the child and hand that responsibility to the receiving government which hands it to parents. The responsibility moves from officers who handle the case in the sending country to immigration officers to the receiving country government to the Tasmanian government to Tasmanian welfare officers to applicants with legal adoption. Applicants may pay expenses for the child from allocation so the responsibility starts shifting. But officers are *in loco parentis*. The responsibility is mine legally. Applicants have responsibilities but no obligations. They can relinquish that child at any time prior to adoption. They do have social obligations to bond with the child etc'.

If officers, following Janowitz (1980), identify rights as complementary to responsibilities, then, in light of official obligations, they will see their parental rights as greater than the rights of applicants.

### **State compulsion**

Analyses that focus only on state powers of coercion over the family fail to account for the inconsistencies in the institutional relationship. For example, some authors describe the state as an institution that controls society through the imposition of sanctions. In that group are Game and Pringle (1983: 100), who personify the 'interventionist' state as a social actor with a mind of its own. Others, such as Petersen (1991: 93) and Mason (1989: 4), see the state as a socially autonomous institution that continues to expand as it achieves greater control over the family. Still others, including Meyer (1983), Lasch (cited in Gittins 1985: 134) and Mount (1982), focus on the 'malice' or 'incompetence' of the personified state as it assumes the responsibilities traditionally associated with the family. Thus the two institutions are conceptualised as autonomous, independent and in conflict with each other.

State expansion into the traditional social domain of the family has on occasions had undesirable consequences for some individuals. Many authors give examples of negative effects of the exercise of coercive powers by the state. For example, Van Krieken (1992: 8), Berger (1986), Murphy (1977), Read (1983), and Chisholm (1985) show that, as an institution, the state does not always provide very well for the welfare of children leading some of them to the conclusion that the state should not intervene in family matters. To cite such data as evidence for the analysis of the state as a dominant group or party that controls the family by coercion, however, is to ignore the contradictory evidence. Van Krieken (1992: 141) and Gould (1988: 177), for example, observe that the modern democratic state normally depends, at least partially, on broadly based legitimacy rather than on relationships of coercion and/or economic dependency.

Furthermore, authors such as de Mause (1974), Gould (1988), Mintz (1989: 397) and Donzelot (1979) show that the family has throughout history also failed in many cases to provide proper care for children. The horrors of unregulated family life for some children are Kafkaesque. Support for the expansion of state regulation of the family, by these authors, is based on their awareness of the dangers of unregulated care for the child. There are many state services of high quality and there are many loving families. To show that some state service practices are poor and that some families are dysfunctional is not a convincing argument for the exclusion of either institution from the provision of welfare, neither does it establish that either institution is socially autonomous.

At issue here is not whether the state or the family as institutions provide optimum care for children, but the question of whether social stability is achieved primarily through dominance by the state over the antipathetic family (and other institutions) or whether stability is underpinned by shared values and socially legitimised procedures. The latter view, following van Krieken (1992), dispenses with the notion of 'social control' as coercion and redefines 'social control' in terms of social legitimacy. Stability is thus

maintained by official recognition of the civic rights of individuals, and not by repression.

*Bias and objectivity* Interview responses do not, however, indicate high levels of applicant confidence in officer objectivity. Thirty-five applicants and five officers said that adoptive parents are usually biased. Bias was seen by some as a desirable quality. For example, one couple thought that parents are usually biased as well as objective,

'Both. I hope parents are biased towards their children, but also objective about the child's capacities'.

Others associated bias with bonding or emotional attachment to the child,

'The child doesn't mean as much to the officers as it does to the parents. Officers are more objective'.

Only ten applicants and three officers said that adoptive parents are usually objective. In contrast, seventeen applicants said that officers are usually objective. Seventeen other applicants said that officers are usually biased. Of those seventeen, fifteen were clients of the Northern Regional Office. The remaining group of twenty-six applicants indicated that they were uncertain about officer objectivity or bias. Typical responses from this group revealed high levels of understanding of the complexity of the task that confronts officers. As one applicant put it, when asked whether officers were usually objective or biased,

'Didn't apply. They didn't interact with the children. They are just doing a job. It must be the hardest thing in the world to talk to two people and find out why they want to adopt. Very hard to award points to answers or questions. Very hard thing to assess'.

Despite their awareness of, or uncertainty about, officers' bias, most applicants supported official supervision, even where it is conducted without parental consent. This result indicates substantial respect among applicants for official universalism, that is, most applicants ultimately see state supervision as more important than family privacy and autonomy. These findings do not support descriptions of the state as an autonomous, malicious social actor that uses its powers of coercion to control society.

### Shared values

In intercountry adoption harmony might be expected among officers and applicants who respect the institutional responsibility of both the state and the family for the child. However, given the unequal power relationship, and fluid lines of authority, the status of officers and applicants will be constantly contested, defended, and redefined. Competing and consensual social impetuses are simultaneously at play.

*Eligibility constraints* Disquiet is evident, for example, in responses to the question about the rights of official intervention in the life of the adoptive family. The question prompted respondents to think particularly of the Regulations about pregnancy and infertility. Applicants' responses were almost equally divided on whether those rules are appropriate or inappropriate. Twenty-six applicants said that the pregnancy rule (Regulation 14k) gives officers undue rights of intervention in the life of the adoptive family. Twenty-five applicants said that the rule was appropriate. Twenty-four applicants said that the infertility treatment rule gives officers undue rights of intervention in the life of the adoptive family. Twenty-eight applicants said that the infertility treatment rule was appropriate. These Regulations were less controversial among officers. Eleven officers said the pregnancy rule is appropriate. Nine officers said the infertility treatment rule is appropriate.

The control of pregnancy, the required use of contraception and the cessation of treatment for infertility are points of tension for approximately half the

total number of applicants. It is not surprising that officers should accept provisions that underpin the effectiveness of their service. To have many applicants withdraw from the service because of pregnancy would result in many hours of bureaucratic work leading to no tangible result for the Department. More remarkable is the high level of acceptance among applicants of the state's right to intervene in family life to the point of policing the most intimate of conjugal relations. Again the evidence contradicts those 'social control theories' that pit the state and the family against each other as implacable, personified enemies. Rather, the results of this study suggest that state officers are agents of socially legitimate and formal systems of regulation.

The ambivalence of the relationship between officers and applicants is evident in the juxtaposed points of consensus and tension revealed by the empirical study. As we have seen, many applicants accept high levels of state intervention in their private life-world. Nevertheless, thirty-four applicants said that the process is complicated. Furthermore, twenty-eight applicants said that the Tasmanian service makes the intercountry adoption process more complicated than it need be. The following comments encapsulate these views,

'Complicated. The Intercountry Adoption Service could make it easier for applicants if they give you an up-to-date checklist of what is required. If you don't know somebody who has already adopted from that country you'll have trouble getting through the process'.

'Very complicated. It's made more complicated than it need actually be. The mechanics are straightforward and logical. Complicated because we are dealing with human beings and emotions, viewpoints, lack of information and procedure in a Department which is ponderous and unwieldy'.

Many complaints were recorded about officers' behaviour in interaction with clients, the criticism making the high level of inter-group empathy all the more striking. For example, twelve applicants complained about inaccurate information received from the service. Only fourteen applicants said that the process is straightforward. The mean average time waited for placement by those fourteen was thirty-one months, just under the mean average of thirty-three months waited for placement by all applicants.

*Relinquishing parents* Shared values were also evident in responses to interview questions on the rights of relinquishing parents. There was, however, a difference of emphasis in the responses gained from applicants on the one hand and from officers on the other. Fifteen applicants said that the relinquishing parents should have the right to non-identifying information about the child's welfare after placement. Some expressed initial reluctance, for example,

'Parents: none. If they were seeking non-identifying information I would like to see that given. But no personal stuff like addresses'.

Thirteen said that the relinquishing parents should have the right to know that the child was going to a loving family. Another thirteen said that the relinquishing parents should have the right to progress reports even if those reports did identify the adoptive family. Thirteen applicants revealed a need to confirm the transference of all available parental role elements by indicating that relinquishing parents' right to 'contact' with the child should be subject to the approval of the adoptive parents. They were keen to recognise the rights of relinquishing parents provided that those rights do not compromise what Edith Goody (1971: 342) calls the desired 'total parenthood' status of adoption. As one put it,

'Our child still belongs to her biological mum because you've got a lovely mummy haven't you who looks just like you in ... The biological mum has lent you to us for a long time to help you grow up. She also has the right to privacy and not to have her life upset by us making contact with her. We'd oppose her if she started court action to get the child back'.

Nine said that relinquishing parents had the right not to have the child taken away from them. Six said that the relinquishing parents should have the right to 'privacy'. Those applicants expressed respect for relinquishing parents' rights to choose not to resume contact with the child. Four said that the relinquishing parents should have the right to revoke consent prior to placement. Only ten applicants said that the relinquishing parents should have no rights in intercountry adoption. Another five said that the relinquishing parents should have the right to progress reports only where the child had not been abandoned or otherwise inappropriately treated by those parents.

The relinquishing parents' rights recognised by officers included progress reports, revocation of consent, choice of country and allocation. Only the first of these is relevant to the post-placement period. None of the rights recognised by officers compromises official pro-parenthood. Despite the fact that openness in adoption is official Department of Community and Health Services policy, two officers, but no applicants, indicated that biological parents should have no rights after relinquishment. Perhaps persistent rights of biological parents are seen by officers as symbolic of yet another pro-parental competitor. That explanation seems plausible since, given the closer assimilation of adoptive, as distinct from official, pro-parenting to the normative role of biological parents, official claims to parental rights and responsibility are more tenuous than the claims of applicants.



*Orphanages and governments* The shared values and difference of emphasis were also evident in applicants' and officers' views on the rights of orphanages and relinquishing governments. Thirty-nine applicants and five officers said that orphanages should have the right to progress reports. Some limited that right to the first year of placement. As one applicant put it,

'The orphanage has the right to be kept informed of the child's welfare in placement'.

An officer expressed the same view,

'The orphanage has the right to information for the first year'.

Those responses again show the 'total parenthood' goal of adoption.

In response to the question about the rights of the relinquishing nation, it was predictable that officers would relate to their foreign *colleagues*. In contrast, thirty-two applicants emphasised the importance of the welfare of *the child* by indicating that governments of relinquishing nations should have the right to see that the child is well placed. For example, as one applicant observed,

'They relinquish reluctantly. One good thing about working welfare to welfare - the sending country has a say in what happens to the child. They have the right to make sure all goes smoothly and legally for the child. They don't want to lose face'.

In contrast, officers tended to emphasise the importance of recognition of state governments' rights to supervision and to choose for or against involvement in intercountry adoption. Three officers said that governments in relinquishing countries should have the right to choose whether or not to

participate in intercountry adoption. Six said the governments should have the right to supervise the adoption process. Emphasis on the rights of relinquishing governments was typical,

'It becomes political. Intercountry adoption programs are arranged between countries. They can opt out at any time. Korea did some years ago. That is an appropriate right ... to decide whether or not to be involved in intercountry adoption. They should have the right to request reports. Ethiopia wants reports until the child is eighteen. Fine. It's like being the ultimate parent'.

Only twelve applicants and one officer said that the government of the relinquishing country should have no rights in intercountry adoption.

It could be argued that, since the United Nations' (1989: article 21) Convention on the Rights of the Child identifies intercountry adoption as a legitimate permanent placement option, officers here are redefining the rights of the state as more important than the rights of the child. In summary, the question about the rights of the relinquishing nation prompted applicants to respond in terms of the welfare of the child, and officers to respond in terms of the legitimacy of state authority. Applicants respect the relinquishing state that they see as the relinquishing parent. Tasmanian officers respect the relinquishing state as a model of legitimate state authority that, by implication, underpins the legitimacy of official authority in receiving states.

The shared values of officers and applicants were particularly evident in their responses to the question on the officer's right to supervise. That question directly addressed the issue of contested parenthood status.

*Supervision of placement* More analytical light was thrown on respondents' constructions of 'belonging' and 'responsibility' by their high level of agreement that officers should have the right to supervise placements without applicants' consent. Eight officers and twenty-seven applicants said that officers should inform, and seek approval from, applicants prior to any intended supervisory investigations. As one officer explained, if adoptive parents did not give her consent to supervise placement she felt that she had,

'...the right to take it further. Usually applicants comply. The country of origin requests information to be reassured that the child is well placed. If I did not gain consent I would have to refer to the Adoptions Manager'.

Thirty-seven applicants and all twelve officers said that their responsibility to supervise placements in the interests of the child ultimately took priority over applicants' rights to parental privacy. One applicant summarised the views, including the initial reluctance, of this group,

'No - they should go through the parents. It's difficult. If the officers had genuine concerns about the welfare of the child and went through the parents there would be some resistance there anyway. Officers should have ways of checking other than through the parents if there is genuine concern for the well-being of the child'.

Conversely, twenty-one applicants said that officers should not proceed with supervision without the consent of the prospective adoptive parents. Many based their views on personal experiences,

'No. A young child can say anything which can be misrepresented by officers. I attend all supervision visits for my child. I did not attend all of one - went to make a cup of tea and hung around in the kitchen, thinking let

the child talk. When I got the typed report the officer had done I was shocked. Now I stay in the room. We know what our child is trying to say. The officer doesn't always. A child can be misinterpreted'.

The opinion of most applicants that officers should have the right to persist with supervision even in cases where the adoptive parents refuse to give consent to that supervision shows commitment among applicants to official universalism.

*Disruption of placement* The strength of the value consensus was particularly clear from officers' and applicants' responses to questions on the disruption of placement. Forty-six applicants and ten officers agreed that officialdom should have the right to disrupt placements against the wishes of prospective adoptive parents in cases of child abuse. Those results show that applicants on the whole accept that ultimately the legal responsibility for the intercountry adoptive child in placement should belong to the state and not the family. Fifteen applicants and four officers said also that disruption should only occur on the same legal grounds applied to families of origin. One applicant gave the following reasons,

'Only child abuse: physical, sexual, failure of applicants to give the child the educational and growing opportunities it deserves. Like any biological child'.

Eight applicants, and no officers, explicitly stated what that response implies, namely, that disruption should only occur after due process of law. Those eight applicants were keen to explain that their acceptance of the notion of disruption against adoptive parental wishes was symbolically representative of commitment to the rights of the child, a commitment held dear despite misgivings about the evaluative competence of intercountry adoption service officers.

Forty-seven applicants and six officers indicated that they did not know of any current Regulations that, in their assessments, provide for the possibility of inappropriate disruption. Ten applicants and the other six officers said that the Regulations did not provide for the possibility of inappropriate disruption. There is virtually, therefore, no disquiet in the Tasmanian intercountry adoptive population about the Regulations in this regard.

*Comparison with biological parents* Finally, the shared values are evident in the high level of agreement among applicants that officers should have the right to supervise placements despite the attendant delay to applicants' achievement of the desired goal of 'total parenthood' status. The final question in this section of the study asked whether applicants should have the same rights as do biological parents with regard to their children. From the perspective that the state maintains control over society by means of its coercive powers, it could be expected that applicants would seize the opportunity to demonstrate their rugged individualism and insist on equal rights, that is, on state withdrawal from family life. Instead, the response given by thirty-four applicants and eleven officers was that officers should have the right to supervise placements. The question stimulated applicants to reflection that was typically along the following lines,

'After adoption definitely. Before that it's tricky. Officers should have the right to supervise. After placement your rights should be the same as with biological children. Does placement still occur if after allocation one of the applicants dies? It's a difficult question isn't it? Does the allocated child inherit along with any other children already in our family home? I haven't ever really thought about the question with regard to between allocation and placement. You don't have the same rights on allocation as you do with biological children.

Placement should be overseen. We know of a child who

was removed from an adoptive family where he was very unhappy only because of the diligence of the officer. Not all adoptive parents love their children from day one'.

It was understood that, from the time of formal adoption, applicants do have the same rights as biological parents. Prior to finalisation of the intercountry adoption process, however, despite the strong desire to assume total parenthood of the child, the official claim to supervision is seen as legitimate if often frustrating in practice. Only twenty applicants and one officer said that applicants should have the same rights as do biological parents from placement.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the data gathered in interviews for this thesis confirm Thurnham's impression of applicants' attitudes towards adoption workers:

'...all the people with whom I have been in contact express their desire to follow the system, but do not understand the procedures they are expected to follow and are not told how long it will take' (1993: 144).

The evidence points to a high degree of empathy among applicants and officers in a relationship that nevertheless remains characterised by tension. Officers and applicants alike agree that there should be assessment of applicants, that supervision of placement is essential and that officers should retain the right to seek the disruption of placements where appropriate. It is remarkable that the substantial levels of value consensus persist on precisely the same issues that are the subject on which most dissatisfaction is expressed. A more detailed analysis of the dissatisfaction that underpins this tension is undertaken in Chapter Ten.

## CHAPTER TEN

### MANAGEMENT OF DISSATISFACTION IN INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

#### Introduction

The tension in the relationship between applicants and officers in intercountry adoption has been analysed in the preceding five chapters by exploring the institutionalised anxiety and the motivations of the participating parties, the rationing of the service and the division of parenting roles that contribute to that anxiety. Consensus on key values was identified as the basis for the durability of the relationship that survives despite the tension. This chapter focuses on the dissatisfaction of applicants that is a result of the persistent anxiety and tension and that has been noticed by other commentators including Boss and Edwards (1992: 13), Thurnham (1993: 143) and Close (1977: 32).

Those applicants who express dissatisfaction do so on two grounds. The more obvious ground for complaint is the failure either to receive approval or to succeed in obtaining a child for adoption. Less obvious, but more pervasive, is the process itself. Indeed dissatisfaction about the process is so pervasive that one might speak of it as being institutionalised, giving support to the general assessment (Boss and Edwards 1992; Willee 1986; Close 1977; Wilson 1989) that this is a vexed area of social administration where joy and pain are inextricably mixed.

An expression of dissatisfaction is one element in a repertoire of possibilities by which applicants act to preserve and protect their self esteem in the face of the loss which is attendant upon their failure to be approved or to gain a child. Similarly, since applicants are involved in a process that calls into question their character and motives, and that substantially restricts their freedom of choice, many mobilise an expression of dissatisfaction in their own defence.

Whatever impels an expression of dissatisfaction among applicants, officers have to manage the dissatisfaction expressed by their clients or face the consequences of their clients seeking redress (publicly or administratively), or face damage to their careers, or see the quality of their relationship with applicants deteriorate, or see the reputation of the service denigrated and its long-term viability undermined.

First, this chapter identifies the sources of dissatisfaction, including applicants' self esteem, their emotional investment, their loss of social rights, the social stigmatisation of the client role and the strain of being assessed. Dissatisfaction is experienced by non-fecund, preferential, successful and unsuccessful adopters alike because the sources of dissatisfaction are integral to the process. Discussion of the empirical data gathered in interviews for this study reveals the sources of dissatisfaction that are of greatest concern to applicants in the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service.

Secondly, this chapter turns to the management of applicant dissatisfaction. It briefly considers the ways in which applicants manage their own dissatisfaction, but the bulk of the discussion explores the management strategies that we might expect from officers and those that were revealed in interviews.

### **Sources of applicant dissatisfaction**

This part of the chapter explores five structurally-derived sources of dissatisfaction that we can reasonably expect to find among all applicants to the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service.

*Self esteem* Dissatisfaction among social service clients is most likely when the object desired is central to their self-esteem, and when the client reference group is small. When that object sought is intimately associated with the client's body and is normally accessed privately, then the client will have a strong need for support but only a small social resource of fellow



clients from whom to draw encouragement. The non-fecund adoptive parent is a good example of a client in that situation, a client who approaches the state service with structurally-derived dissatisfaction at having to access the service at all.

*Emotional investment* At issue for applicants in intercountry adoption are the welfare of the child and the social reputation of the applicants themselves. Applications are therefore emotionally charged. Where levels of emotional investment are high, there is a concomitant high level of intolerance for delays and failure. There is also an understandable unwillingness to accept personal responsibility for any problems that might arise, as the clients in many cases are seeking to replicate the natural, that is unproblematic, process of gaining children.

*Loss of social rights* Client dissatisfaction may also emerge as a result of substantial loss of social rights such as the right to pursue personal, private projects. Intercountry adoptive applicants, for example, are denied the right to engage in projects such as invitro-fertilisation or even natural attempts at human reproduction. Non-fecund applicants, therefore, are denied the most efficient approach, namely, simultaneous attempts at various ways of family-formation.

*Stigma* The decision to apply for welfare from state authorities is stigmatised in modernity if the object of the request is normally accessed by most other citizens through private welfare sources (see Pinker 1973). The stigmatisation is underpinned by the recipients' inability to meet 'the obligation to repay' (see Mauss 1970: 40-41). While state services provide a fundamental degree of social security for citizens, it is common knowledge that those services are paid for out of the public purse that, in turn, is filled from taxation revenue. In other words, virtually all citizens pay for the services consumed by a few. Despite the fact that everyone benefits from the existence of state services, there is prestige associated with high levels of familial autonomy. Pinker (1973) observes that the stigmatisation of recipients of state services is usually

understood and shared by clients themselves.

Furthermore, stigmatisation of welfare recipients in largely free-market economies is, according to Jordan, predictably stronger than in centrally planned societies where the more interventionist and authoritative role of the state leaves relatively little '...scope for individual choice for any citizens in the spheres of production and consumption'. Therefore, the '...paternalism which characterises the state's dealings with welfare recipients is less distinguishable from the paternalism which characterises its dealings with everyone else' (1985: 129).

Given the stigmatisation of many state services, clients can be expected to feel dissatisfied with their need to access those services no matter what the quality of the service offered.

*The strain of being assessed* In chapter six it was argued that the strong, normative motivation for parenthood, that precludes the need for assessment of the suitability of adults for the role they unquestioningly seek to fill, leaves prospective adoptive parents socially unprepared for the evaluation, let alone the questioning, of their parenting ability:

'...After all, how many natural parents would take kindly to having their potential to be good parents assessed by someone who held the power to prevent them having a child?' (Timms 1973: 7).

Many applicants regard parenthood as a basic human right (English 1990: 16-20).

The notion of being assessed for parenthood predictably leads to resentment even though the need for publicly accountable procedures may be accepted as necessary for the best interests of the child:

'...They [officers] are not God, even if they are performing one of His functions, and they should not presume His infallibility. Just occasionally the client may also be right ... I'm sure it is inevitable to feel at least partly that one is on trial' (Timms 1973: 7).

During the assessment process, further dissatisfaction on the part of clients emerges as a result of the 'culture shock' mentioned in chapter five. The recognition by state bureaucracies of 'merit' in terms of achievement clashes with the ascribed value system of the family. Even where clients appreciate the need for state officials to evaluate cases on the basis of achievement rather than ascription, there is still reason to expect high levels of residual client dissatisfaction as a result of the tension that arises from simultaneous particularistic loyalty to the family and universalistic support for noble democratic, legal conventions.

A superficial assessment of client dissatisfaction is all we need to be able to predict that unsuccessful intercountry adoption applicants will be unhappy with the service received. The analysis of dissatisfaction in this chapter, however, shows that dissatisfaction is to be expected also among successful non-fecund and preferential adopters.

*Non-fecund adopters* Involuntarily childless adopters experience the heightened stress that Hagestad and Neugarten associate with '...catastrophic events that upset expected health and social time tracks' (1985: 41). Anticipatory socialisation and an identified set of peers prepare individuals for catastrophic events such as widowhood in old age. In contrast, non-fecundity is often attended by the social isolation that is a result of the unscheduled and unanticipated occurrence of the stress. Non-fecund adults do not meet in organised groups for mutual support. Their need for social support will therefore be greater than the need experienced by other social service clients who have access to established reference groups.

*Preferential adopters* Preferential adopters do not share the stresses attendant to non-fecundity, but predictably experience dissatisfaction as a result of the contrast between their experience of adoptive family formation and their memories of biological reproduction. Preferential adopters, therefore, experience both the privacy of biological birthing and parenting on the one

hand, and the openness to official scrutiny of intercountry adoption on the other. The loss of prestige that attends the shift from private reproduction to family formation under state supervision predictably leads to dissatisfaction. For preferential adopters, dissatisfaction emerges from officers' universalistic orientations to deeply intimate, normally private, matters and from 'degradation ceremonies' such as loss of privacy, loss of authority and subjection to a long period of indeterminacy. These experiences are shared by all adoptive parents, but only preferential adopters can contrast them experientially with the social autonomy of biological parenting.

*Successful and unsuccessful applicants* Successful as well as unsuccessful applicants have to undergo the indignities of inspection, examination and evaluation, as well as the frustrations of lengthy waiting periods. In intercountry adoption, therefore, dissatisfied clients may include applicants who have already adopted a child. Thus it is not only those who are never allocated a child who need to be appeased. Other clients who require consolation include those who fail to gain approval-to-adopt. In addition, dissatisfaction is to be expected of those who question certain specific bureaucratic procedures and of those who are unhappy with the child they receive. In all of these situations, there is dissatisfaction and disappointment with oneself, the program, or both. The expectations of dissatisfaction were borne out in interviews where almost all applicants complained about the quality of the service.

*Quality of service* The most frequently mentioned complaints were that the process takes too long, that officers have negative attitudes towards intercountry adoption and towards clients, and that those attitudes and the incompetence of many officers contribute to the poor quality of the service. As we saw in chapter eight, fifty-three applicants said that the process takes too long. In addition, in response to the question about their positive and negative experiences, thirty two applicants complained about delays. Some associated delays with administrative error. The following comments from three applicants are typical,

'The negatives? With the second child they couldn't tell us how long it would take and didn't bother to find out. Our officer told us our file had been sent overseas. I thought you got written confirmation of that. So I rang central office - "Oh no your file is still here. I need photos" - this and that. I said [our officer] had told us the file had gone. Central office said, "No, it's still here". If we hadn't rung the file would have sat in Hobart for two or three months'.

'The negatives were the amount of effort needed to keep the officers moving on your case, hoping you had enclosed proper documents, the length of time it took, always the uncertainty'.

'Nothing in the assessment process with our officer was positive. The heartache! She would blow any little comment out of proportion. The waiting drains emotionally. You wonder if you'll ever get a child'.

Twenty-eight complained about officers' 'negative attitudes' such as sustained emphasis on the problems and difficulties of adoptive parenting. The perceived negative attitudes were typically explained by applicants in terms of the obstacles placed in the path of applications, and the lack of compassion and respect shown by officers,

'Our officer sat there and downgraded us in the report, but if she could see the child now. But she did apologise later. The officers don't give you any positives'.

Others pointed to the alleged racism of some officers,

'Total frustration. If our officers had their way, there wouldn't be no intercountry adoption in Tasmania. They want a white Australia policy. One officer couldn't give a [expletive] if people die in those poor countries. But every human life is equal'.

Alleged negativistic behaviour may be a result of social structures rather than personal ideology. For example, many obstacles, such as prolonged and indeterminate waiting periods between approval and allocation, are beyond the control of the individual officer. Other obstacles, such as failure to meet appointments may be explained with reference to officers' crisis-care commitments. Failure to notify applicants about postponed appointments, however, does suggest lack of respect for clients.

Further sources of dissatisfaction were revealed by the final question in interview that invited participants to reiterate points of interest or to raise any topic that had not yet been discussed. Seventeen complained about officers' 'incompetence'. Of those seventeen, six criticised officers for being uninformed, inefficient, and inconsistent. The suggestion was made that age limits for officers be introduced. As the following comments show, some applicants linked the poor standard of service to unethical, as well as incompetent work,

'Negatives: heartlessness, unprofessionalism, unethical behaviour in some cases. They lie sometimes. Sophie's choice questions: if two children were drowning or in the house on fire which would we save first, the adopted or the biological child? We were asked that one many times and were very insulted by it'.

'Negatives: some officers lie. They told us at reception on the phone that the officer wasn't in. My spouse had to go there to deliver a parcel from work and guess who

popped up at the office?! I got there within minutes of the phone call. Some officers are heartless. They wanted to split up two biological sisters and let us adopt only one of them. One of our adopted children had bonded with a child in the orphanage but the Department wouldn't let us adopt that child as we had too many already in their opinion, even though the number they publicly stated we had was one more than we actually had. We pointed that out to them and they said, "Sorry we have made a mistake", but they didn't change the decision'.

Others suggested that the quality of the service would improve if it provided post-placement parental guidance, if it were better advertised, and if the policy of showing applicants their home study reports prior to submission were observed by all officers.

Complaints about poor service were expected because of various structural factors that restrict officers' opportunities for acquiring expertise. These include the lack of rigorous pre-service training and the minimal co-operation with specialist non-government organisations and support groups. The development of officer expertise is further limited by low levels of specialisation and high staff-turnover rates. Those obstacles are underpinned by bureaucratic bias towards comprehensive, rather than specialised, curricula vitae. Finally, high staff-turnover rates in the Adoptions Unit is contributed to by heavy workloads and by departmental marginalisation of the Unit that is subject to external control of resource allocation. This marginalisation is a source of dissatisfaction for officers. One conveyed her frustration particularly clearly,

'Many workers in the whole Department in children's services don't like adoption. There's a moral stain on it. I don't quite know why. One of the difficulties for workers is that many of their colleagues look down their noses at

adoption. I don't know why. Sometimes colleagues can be openly hostile. Some to domestic and intercountry adoption. Those only against intercountry adoption tend to have reasons such as children should stay in home cultures. Those against all adoption tend to have little reasoning, more adoption is a dirty word. As if it's not real work. It's a middle class thing, for the affluent. It's just not true. The people who adopt are normal people. It's difficult to work in an environment where colleagues don't value the work you do and don't see how hard it can be at times. It seems easy and can be lovely. Part of the explanation is in the difference between work that has pleasant moments in it and some of the other work that is pretty soul destroying, trying to work with some badly damaged teenagers'.

High rates of staff turnover underpin applicant dissatisfaction. The number of officers consigned consecutively to a case, and low levels of officer experience have been associated with increased problems for the post-placement adoptive family (Barth and Berry 1988).

Officers were directly asked about their 'attitude' to intercountry adoption. Only seven said that it is in the best interests of the child. The other five were not sure. As one officer put it,

'It's good to see children get better life chances, but there may be problems when the child reaches teenage and wonders whether it would have preferred to stay in its culture of origin. It depends on how the parents handle it'.

Three expressed concern over problems in transracially adoptive families. Without reference to Harvey's (1983) work on adopted children from



Vietnam, one commented,

'We don't know enough about the ongoing effects of relocating a child in another culture. No-one yet in Australia has done any studies on what's happened to the Vietnamese children who came in the influx of intercountry adoptive children in the 1970s. I know some children have gone back to Vietnam and found their families and its been quite traumatic for them because they were middle class Americans and they've gone back to farming families where they've come from. They can't go back and live because they've got American citizenship. I know of children who have come from overseas who just don't fit ... who still continue to come and don't fit and we have to find alternatives'.

Negativistic behaviour may also be demonstrated by officers who are reluctant to recognise the legitimacy of applicants' claims to parenthood. Officers delay such recognition because they see it as their responsibility to legitimise the proposed adoptive parental status only after careful, longitudinal scrutiny. Moreover, given the normative culture of exclusive parenthood, insistence by applicants that their parenthood status be recognised is seen by officers as a challenge to the legitimacy of official pro-parenthood responsibility. That is, official status is dependent upon the tacit construction of the officer as parent and the applicant as carer.

Eight officers said that they had noticed client dissatisfaction with delays and six said that they had noticed client dissatisfaction with the quality of the service. Officers raised a number of issues not mentioned by any applicant. These include client dissatisfaction with individual officers. Personality clashes with officers were seen by three officers to be a problem for some applicants. Four officers said that some applicants were ideologically opposed to state involvement of any kind. As one put it,

'Dissatisfaction among applicants? Yes with Departmental involvement of any kind in one case. It is complicated and that tests some applicants' commitment and some resent that. Some men don't like discussing their emotions – especially older applicants'.

Officer sensitivity about indiscriminate and total opposition from applicants seems to be unfounded as, for example, only one applicant expressed the view that the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service should be privatised. Furthermore, some applicants did make many positive comments about the service. Nine expressed satisfaction with Tasmanian officers. Six said that the assessment process was good because it made applicants think about the issues and examine their own motivation. Five said they were happy with the speed of the process. Finally, as we saw in chapter seven, all sixty applicants agreed that there should be an applicant-screening process by state officers in Tasmania. Nevertheless, there is evidence of serious dissatisfaction that must be managed since it results in substantial tension in the relationship.

### **The management of dissatisfaction**

There are, broadly speaking, three parties who manage dissatisfaction in intercountry adoption in Tasmania, officers, support groups, and the clients themselves. While the work of the last two groups may serve the interests of officers, the main aims of clients and their support group friends in this context is to redefine the situation in such a way that what has transpired does not reflect badly on the client as a person and a potential parent. It is to be expected, therefore, that when the desired outcome of rapid placement of ideal children does not eventuate, blame will often be attributed to procedures and officers. In that way, failure to parent is not seen to indicate that there is anything wrong with the clients themselves.

*Self-management of dissatisfaction by applicants* As Wright Mills' observes, it is common practice for 'human relations' experts to allow '...the employee

to "blow off steam" without changing the structure in which he is to live out his working life' (1977: 106). The Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service encourages applicants to join support (that is, reference) groups that provide for the self-management of dissatisfaction.

Fifty-two applicants were members of support groups. Support groups maximise the 'political leverage' of applicants in dispute with the Intercountry Adoption Service. The metaphor is borrowed from Subramaniam (1985: 203) who defines political leverage as the capacity of an interest group or agency to contribute to or disrupt the planned implementation of government policy. In other words, apart from the attendant psychological benefits for individual applicants, support group membership is a social answer to 'political vulnerability' (see Matthews 1988: 155). The development of political leverage and of vocabularies of complaint is a predictable social response to officers' agenda control and mobilisation of bias.

The political power of support groups is limited by their lack of official status. Even if incorporated into bureaucratic decision-making processes, however, support groups deny the client ideal or maximum efficiency of representation because they impose constraints on their members (see Jordan 1985: 139). An example of such constraints was the debate at the 1993 First Australian Intercountry Adoption Network (AICAN) Conference at Monash University, about whether or not the Inter-country Adoption Resource Network should be admitted to the national body. Nevertheless, access to sources of political leverage provides all clients with the latent power to affect negatively officers' reputations or standing within and beyond professional boundaries. Serious negative influences may weaken promotion chances for individual officers.

Fortunately for intercountry adoption service officers, there is a social norm in Western societies:

'...persuading persons to keep their chins up and make the best of it - a

sort of social sanitation enjoining torn and tattered persons to keep themselves packaged up' (Goffman 1980: 114-5).

Furthermore, clients can be expected to manage their own dissatisfaction to some extent by adopting the strategies of secrecy and hedging. Secrecy about their involvement in intercountry adoption programs allows clients to keep secret also any eventual disappointment, along with the commensurate perceived loss of status, as long as no public complaints about intercountry adoption service procedures are made. Hedging implies delayed commitment. Clients keep their emotions under control so that any eventual disappointment will be easier to bear:

'... All of these strategies give the mark an out; in case of failure he can act as if the self that has failed is not one that is important to him' (Goffman 1980: 113).

*The management of applicant dissatisfaction by officers* While it is true, as Timms (1973) shows, that clients are in a weak position to challenge expectations of them as welfare recipients, officers will predictably nevertheless seek to manage client dissatisfaction. The management of client dissatisfaction by officers emerges as a result of the anxiety they experience in the face of client access to formal and informal mechanisms for complaint and redress as discussed in chapter five (see also Jordan 1985: 133; Goffman 1980: 99). Those mechanisms include administrative appeals tribunals, review committees, the offices of the Ombudsman and of Members of Parliament, the mass media, and client-support groups.

The management of dissatisfaction is difficult in intercountry adoption because, as Aitken (1983: 28) asserts, the notion of parenting makes an important contribution to the formation of self-identity for most people. Particularly for involuntarily childless adults, to be denied a child by officers is for those prospective adoptive parents to be hit where they 'really live' (Goffman 1980: 107). In other words, as the notion of becoming a parent plays a central role in the ongoing development of most adults' maturing self-identity, to be denied this goal is to be forced to redefine oneself as a person, as

an adult, and as a member of a social out-group. Officers therefore have to choose their management strategies very carefully.

*Management strategies* Research into the provision of social services has identified many ways in which client dissatisfaction has been managed by officers. For example, management styles are influenced by the personalities of individual officials. More specifically, policy formulation and decision-making are affected by psychological characteristics that may hinder objective assessment. Katz and Kahn (1966: 284-99) identify eleven predisposing factors in decision-making. Their classification of observed managerial behaviour is valuable, but they do not identify systemic, structurally-derived mechanisms for the management of anticipated and/or experienced client dissatisfaction. Those mechanisms include the defence of official authority, the incorporation of applicants and the stalling of criticism.

*Defence of official authority* In various ways, officers will attempt to influence clients' political consciousness by describing the relationship between officers and their clients as one that is properly unequal and that properly denies the client autonomy. Following Jordan (1985: 142), from the official perspective, therefore, there is only one form of authority, namely the bureaucracy. The client is not alerted to a plurality of contradictory authority that allows the individual the freedom and power of choice between different kinds of constraints. Moreover, as Jordan (1985: 143) points out, in capitalist societies, where the freedom to exchange items of social value is essential to the notion of individual autonomy, officers will remind clients that they are competing with other applicants for scarce welfare objects and that clients' only item for exchange of value to officers is compliance.

That strategy for the management of dissatisfaction may not be successful, however, since it denies the client the element of choice. Jordan's (1985) redefinition of individual freedom as access to choice from among a plurality of constraints is relevant here. It leads him to suggest that it is the:

'...unitary and inescapable nature of the constraints imposed by

intimate, total, face-to-face relationships that seems to explain why communes in capitalist countries (even the most successful) tend to break up after periods of a few years or less' (1985: 145).

That theory serves to explain in broad terms the likely emergence of tension in the intimate, total, face-to-face relationship between officers and applicants that, in the political consciousness of the client, is a unitary and inescapable system of constraint.

Officers may try to minimize the risk of conflict with clients by taking great pains to explain that all the procedures that are followed are necessary for the protection of the best interests of the child. In seeking to define the situation by appeals to the generally acceptable moral dictum that the best interests of the child should always be paramount in intercountry adoption matters, complaints and criticisms from clients can be redefined as evidence that those clients are placing their desire to parent above the interests of the child. Thus the officers take the moral high ground and explain that their professional 'distance' allows them the objectivity necessary for rational decision-making. Conversely, prospective adoptive parents are presented as well-meaning people whose judgement is necessarily clouded by their emotional involvement in the quest for a child. In summary, the 'best interests of the child' argument is a form of official agenda control and mobilisation of bias against applicant contribution to decision-making.

Emphasis on the paramountcy of the interests of the child not only reminds applicants that they should remember their place as defined by officialdom, but can also be used as a means of managing dissatisfaction in cases where no allocations or placements are made. Failure to gain a child can be explained as evidence that no appropriate child was available, and not as an indication that the applicants were in any way assessed as potentially inadequate parents. That explanation is not plausible where applicants fail to gain approval-to-adopt.

The argument that intercountry adoption service officers enjoy greater clarity of vision in adoption matters than do clients can be further substantiated by pointing to the managerial perspective or overview that public servants have by virtue of their office. That is, intercountry adoption service officers have all the data relevant for informed decision-making. Only officers know which children are available and which applicants. Therefore, only officers can make appropriate allocations. Consequently, the appropriate role of clients is to wait patiently in the knowledge that all that should be done is being done by those in authority.

*Incorporation* Perhaps the most fundamental attempt to manage dissatisfaction in intercountry adoption is the persuasion of clients to accept, internalise and adopt the officers' point of view. If the attempt is successful, rather than question bureaucratic methods, clients can be expected to display consistent compliance and obedience:

'...Difficulties of relationship arise through feelings of indebtedness arising from the reception of at least some friendly attention ... "What right do we have to complain? Are we queens? We should be grateful for anything people do for us"' (Timms 1973: 3).

Officers can emphatically assert that, contrary to popular belief, there is a shortage of children available for intercountry adoption, that is, that demand exceeds supply. The 'rare object' argument implies that successful clients are especially fortunate or well-regarded by intercountry adoption service agents. Again, clients are motivated by circumstances to curry favour with officers. That approach by officers has also been recorded with reference to in-country adoption. For example, a Child Guidance Clinic in Britain:

'...sent a letter that said there was such a shortage of babies that we should be grateful to have got one' (Timms 1973: 17).

Where officers seek to distance themselves from decisions that are unfavourable to the client, a collusive relationship between officer and client may be developed in order to redirect client anger away from an individual

officer or specific department and towards a more diffuse sense of 'the system', of which both the official and the client are redefined as innocent victims. Officers can assert that they are doing their best, the implication being that while some dissatisfaction with the progress of an application may be warranted, complaint would be unfair. Conversely officers can plead incompetence. Frank admissions that files have been lost, for example, can, if accompanied by apologies, prevent further complaint as failure to accept an apology would seem churlish:

'...At one stage they lost the mother's file and could not contact her and we were delayed again. There seemed to be one reason after another - partly, I realise, because their department was sorting itself out and everyone was taking on new roles' (Timms 1973: 22).

The incorporation of support groups with the Intercountry Adoption Service has the dual function of providing applicants with a sense of decision-making power while allowing officers a considerable amount of control over the nature, extent and method of expressed criticism of their work. In Tasmania, the establishment in 1995 of the Intercountry Consultative Committee is such a strategy.

Another form of incorporation or of 'getting the client onside' is the waiving of normal procedures to appease the victims of administrative error. Applicants report, for example, that age-difference criteria have been waived for couples who were previously told they were too old to adopt young children. Placements have been arranged within weeks of the revelation of intercountry adoption service misplacement of files. The need for reapplication has been waived after exposure of intercountry adoption service misinformation and babies have become available from countries that allegedly only had older children for intercountry adoption. This strategy has been used by the Intercountry Adoption Service after the service has embarrassed itself with error. Since error increases dissatisfaction, radical management strategies are used to manage the consequences. Appeasement strategies are recognised by applicants. The two examples that follow are



typical of many,

'We applied to Thailand and did all the paperwork and then they told us Thailand wouldn't accept our application because we already had a child from Korea. I nearly died. They'd never said a word about this. Hobart knew but they hadn't told the branch office. I said where are we going to go and they said [naming a country] but we said, "No", because [country] only had older children and we had to have one younger than the first child. That's the policy. Suddenly there were babies available from [country] – four days after the Thailand blunder'.

'They left our file in The Philippines by mistake and we were allocated a two-year-old child even though the Department in Hobart told us we could only have a child seven or older. We told them they had made a mistake. The next day an officer rang and said "Our mistake is to your advantage". We were asked to keep their mistake quiet'.

Officers also try to keep applicants onside on the issue of fees. The task is difficult because there is substantial dissatisfaction on this issue. Twenty-five applicants said that fees should not be charged. Some opposed fees even though they were seen to give applicants more power,

'You'd feel like you're paying for a service so you'd expect and can demand quality service. You shouldn't have to pay fees - they are government employees. We pay in taxes. Fees will give applicants more power - consumerism, "I'm paying for it - where's the action?"'.

Eighteen said that many interested people, who would make good parents, cannot afford the fees,

'It is very offensive to charge fees. Applicants will become more demanding, which may not be a bad thing. Just because you've got money doesn't mean you'll be a better parent - that's effectively what it boils down to. Lots of good parents can't afford it. It makes you feel like it's a privilege, a treat you can pay for. It's offensive that IVF etc are heavily subsidised. And here there are children who already exist and it's all out of your pocket'.

Fifteen said that applicants will now be more inclined to complain. As one couple put it,

'It'd make us less inclined to let them get away with it. At the moment we keep our mouths shut, not wanting to upset the system. If you'd put your money up front you'd expect a service for it'.

Twelve said the introduction of fees has had no implications for the relationship between officers and applicants. Ten contrasted the charging of fees with state subsidisation of the costs of infertility treatment and of birthing, but none indicated awareness of subsidised transracial adoption (see Benet 1976: 151; Toft and McIntyre 1992: 88). A typical comment was,

'Fees shouldn't be charged.. If people are entitled to have assistance on IVF and other programs, then why not in intercountry adoption? Ultimately there is no difference to the effect on the country. It's morally wrong to charge fees when the Department says it is a service for children, but the applicants, who are providing the service, are the ones who have to pay. It's inconsistent to charge

intercountry adoption fees when in other areas there is no existing child needing a family but you can be paid to conceive'.

Five applicants and one officer said that the charging of fees is bad because it has connotations of baby buying. One said,

'Fees are not good. They make me feel dirty in that I feel as if I am buying a child. Paying costs is OK. Fees might prevent good parents who can't afford them from applying'.

Only four applicants supported the introduction of fees. They did so on the condition that the standard of the service will improve. Three officers expressed disquiet about fees, their agreement with applicants forming an effective stalling mechanism for the management of dissatisfaction. By distancing themselves from the decision to charge fees, officers deprive applicants of a target for criticism. Moreover, in agreeing with applicants, officers deflect criticism by redefining the Department of Community and Health Services, that is the funding body, as the common enemy to officers and applicants who are comrades in adversity. Other attempts to get onside with applicants include observations about applicants and officers having a lot in common, about the hope that fees will encourage applicants to become more critical (of the Department of Community and Health Services, not the Intercountry Adoption Service), and about officers being terrified about having to play the role of God. Officers are thus redefined as responsible individuals who reluctantly wield the power thrust upon them by a heartless Department of Community and Health Services. That image is likely to engender more support from applicants than the one applicants themselves often convey, namely, the impersonal, heartless bureaucrat who, if ever sincerely committed to the welfare of the child, has long since been corrupted, like Tolkien's Lord of the Ring, by the power of office.

Twenty-nine said that applicants will expect better service now that they have to pay fees. Subsequent responses show that for most applicants, the term 'expectation' should be understood in the sense of 'demand' rather than 'prediction'. For example, only four said that the process will now be quicker.

Where failure to progress as desired has caused disappointment among clients and where incorporation strategies have failed, client dissatisfaction can be managed by giving them a second chance. Thus clients are motivated to refrain from seeking redress for fear of jeopardising their subsequent chances of gaining a child. Where clients are nevertheless determined to seek redress, their dissatisfaction can be managed by the use of stalling mechanisms.

*Stalling* Applicants are often denied the opportunity to seek redress. This is a familiar strategy that Goffman (1980: 116) calls 'stalling'. In other words, limited, if any, opportunities for complaint are provided by intercountry adoption officers:

'...At this stage I think one of the major disadvantages of dealing with a national agency become apparent - there is no real support when things go wrong' (Timms 1973: 13).

That strategy leads to predictable responses from clients:

'...we did feel so entirely in their hands and nervous about antagonising them in any way - after all, they had the babies! This feeling of utter helplessness, to me at any rate, characterised our position and our dealings with adoption agencies' (Timms 1973: 6-7).

Feelings of helplessness are mixed with resentment:

'...Nor, of course, was it any good trying to change the agency's policy. I remember feeling extremely resentful that they had put me in this position with my husband. If I remember rightly, we wrote one letter to them but they said in reply that we should change our agency if we could not accept their regulations' (Timms 1973: 11).

Dissatisfaction about appeal procedures is also evident in the outcomes of the present study. Questions were asked in interview about current and ideal redress procedures. Twenty-seven applicants were unaware of current provisions,

'Don't know - I blame the system for that. I've never seen any document informing me of my rights with regard to complaints and redress'.

Another seventeen said that there was no adequate system of redress for applicants. Typical comments pointed to resentment over official responses to complaints,

'You ring up and make a complaint and they just switch off. They listen but just say the same old thing, "There's nothing we can do about it - you'll just have to wait"'.  
'You can see the Head of the Department but it's a waste of time'.

Fifty-two were clear in their preference for an appeals system that is independent of the Intercountry Adoption Service and the Department of Community and Health Services and that makes binding decisions. The former review system, with a board selected, or recommended for selection, by the Intercountry Adoption Service and with only the power of recommendation to the Secretary of the Department of Community and Health Services, was rejected by applicants,

'There should be somebody who can put the applicants' case to the Department, rather than individuals trying to fix problems for themselves. There was a panel but if it is loaded with Department stooges it's just a smoke screen. The adoption review committee was very biased. The

panel has to be independent. An independent appeals board is better, depending on who selects the membership of it. It must not be a rubber stamp outfit. Applicants should be allowed support like a lawyer if they want it'.

Five officers agreed that an independent system of appeal is good. Four officers said that they did not know what appeals or review systems were available for applicants,

'There's a complaints procedure for applicants. I don't know what it involves, I'm sorry. Officers can go to the local office manager or the coordinator'.

'For applicants, yes - they can go to an independent appeals board, the Ombudsman, politicians, which they all do from time to time - that's how the amendments to the legislation came about. I'm not sure whether there is an appeals board or a review committee in place now'.

Access to independent appeal gives applicants the right to be heard by an impartial judge in cases of dispute. Appeals thus provide applicants with natural justice. Officers may be expected to oppose provision for appeal in an effort to manage anticipated dissatisfaction by depriving applicants of what Goffman (1980: 116) calls the 'institutional machinery' of redress. Dissatisfaction can also be managed, however, by providing an appeals system that is independent of the Intercountry Adoption Service and the Department of Community and Health Services. Criticism of the service can then be deflected with reference to the independent arbiter.

Ideal systemic appeals structures provide officers as well as applicants with natural justice. Through them, dissatisfaction can be managed in a formal, socially legitimate manner. Officers can argue that serious, unresolved dissatisfaction is always taken to appeal, and that any residual complaints

must be trivial or must have since been resolved. The procedural formality, together with the emotional and financial expense incurred by applicants who seek formal redress before the appeal committee, however, may deter many applicants from seeking redress in the officially prescribed manner. Since appeals may incur the loss of official goodwill, fear of jeopardising future applications may also deter many applicants, despite the independence of the appeals committee.

### Conclusion

In conclusion it is to be expected that intercountry adoption service officers will attempt to appease frustrated and disappointed clients. Where the client refuses to be appeased, there is a secondary line of defence for officers, namely the maintenance of total control over the approval of applicants and the allocation and placement of children. Furthermore, often no officially recognised avenue for complaint is provided. Where disaffected clients, such as the complainants heard by Willee (1986), persist in registering their criticism of bureaucratic procedures, officers can minimize damage done to reputations and career chances simply by choosing not to respond (see, for example, the Inter-Departmental Committee Report 1986). In intercountry adoption 'cooling the mark out' may not serve to make the mark feel any better, but to suggest to him that there are more costs than benefits in rocking the bureaucratic boat:

'...It is not pleasant even at the best of times to find oneself on the receiving end, and this was such a very dependent receiving end' (Timms 1973: 19).

The empirical study reveals evidence of much dissatisfaction among applicants, and to a lesser extent among officers. Various management strategies appear. Their interest to a sociological investigation of intercountry adoption lies not in the light they throw on the imaginative capacity of bureaucrats and applicants, but in the contribution they make to sociological understanding of the structural implications on participants' behaviour. Patterns of social interaction become more predictable and comprehensible as

awareness of the implications of social arrangements reduces our reliance on the vagaries of genetic chance, idiosyncrasy and psychologism.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### CONCLUSION

The family and the state, as institutions, both have responsibilities for the welfare of the child in modernity. These responsibilities, that at times overlap and at other times are discrete, are met in ways that reflect both the strain and the interdependence between the institutions. With the rise of individualism, the recognition of the citizenship status of the child and the structural isolation of the nuclear family, state services have developed to provide for the well-being of children. The gradual expansion of state welfare provisions, that has occurred particularly where wider kinship structures are diffuse and where intermediate welfare structures are inadequate, has seen the state assume responsibility for the care of children in official, bureaucratic ways that are sometimes complementary and sometimes contrary to the informal, primary-group particularistic affection of the family. The expansion of the state into areas of welfare, including intercountry adoption, has brought with it a new universalistic orientation expressed in impersonal, legal and rational terms. Thus, long-term processes of social change have brought the institutions of the family and the state into a relationship that is characterised by both cooperation and competition.

Today, where the institutional responsibilities of the family and the state overlap and compete, their relationship is marked by strain. In general, this strain is the source of the tension that is institutionalised in the interaction between state officials and their clients. The public accountability and disinterested fairness associated with the state and the privacy and intimacy of the family give each institution a social legitimacy that shapes the meaning that officers and their clients give to their own and each other's behaviour in social interaction. Where the concerns of official accountability overlap with the desired self-determination and privacy of families, the institutional strain produces tension in the interaction between state officials and their clients. In turn, the tension produces institutionalised anxiety for

officers and their clients as a result of the structural strain that informs the interacting parties' conceptualisations of the roles that they should play.

The institutionalised tension between officers and applicants in intercountry adoption is in part a consequence of the social legitimacy of the role played by both parties in competition over the right to decide over applications and the future of the adoptive family and child. This shared social legitimacy generates value consensus between officers and applicants as each party recognises the propriety of the involvement of the other, even though they are in competition. To argue that the other party should have no political rights in the intercountry adoption process is to deny the social legitimacy of that party. The importance of recognition of the social legitimacy of both parties is intuitively understood by some journalists. Where the conjuncture or balance of political power is tilted one way or the other, the news media are quick to exploit for commercial reasons the attendant disadvantages for the adoptive child. For example, where bureaucrats are perceived as making excessive demands of applicants, those applicants and the children are portrayed as the hostages of heartless administrators. Those hostages are metaphorically bound hand and foot by red tape. Conversely, when applicants are perceived as making excessive, impatient or subversive demands of officialdom, those applicants are portrayed in the news media as self-serving, idiosyncratic and quixotic rebels.

Some officers feel that the legitimacy of their role in intercountry adoption is threatened by the socially legitimate claims made by applicants. Thus we see those officers attempt to demonise the motivations of applicants or at least of those applicants who are seen to challenge the authority of the officer. In the Tasmanian Intercountry Adoption Service, where there is a responsible and professional approach, and an insistence on a cautious and therefore lengthy assessment process, these same features serve as mechanisms for the exclusion of applicants from decision-making authority. Finally, the political power base of officialdom is bolstered by a range of strategies for the management of applicant dissatisfaction and by catch-cries and slogans, such

as the 'paramountcy of the interests of the child', that associate the well-being of the child with the unchallenged authority of officers.

In contrast, applicants are confronted simultaneously by their desire to assume 'total parenthood' status as soon as possible and their respect for the regulation and supervision of the intercountry adoption process by state officials. Applicants therefore reserve their criticism for specific behaviours of individual officers. Where applicants can see that procedures are in the interests of the child, they are tolerant and understanding. Where the process is perceived to be contrary to the interests of the child, however, such as when the process takes a long time and therefore leaves the child 'lingering' in an institution, applicants feel justified to express their impatience. They do this in the knowledge that any complaints that associate official behaviour or decisions with negative consequences for the child will amount to socially legitimate criticism that tilts the balance of public opinion and political power temporarily back into the favour of the applicants.

Since the institutional relationship between the family and the state is characterised by both interdependence and strain, and since institutional relationships change slowly, substantial value consensus and tension will continue to shape the interaction of officers and applicants in intercountry adoption. Nevertheless, the shared values identified in this thesis provide ground for optimism. Furthermore, since the thesis itself is an analysis of the structural bases for both cooperation and dispute in the relationship, it contributes to improved understanding of the meanings that each party gives to their mutual interaction. Officers will be alerted to the approaches that succeed in gaining the support of applicants as well as the ones that fail. Conversely, applicants can improve their ability to discern in interaction with officers between structurally-derived behaviours and idiosyncrasies. For example, boundary maintenance such as defence of the officer's right to supervise placements can, on the basis of this research, be clearly identified as structurally-derived in that officers have to defend their intervention in what is normally private family life against the legitimisation crisis that is a

result of state expansion into welfare areas that previously were the exclusive domain of the family. In contrast, the 'Sophie's choice' type of question, put by some officers, that asked several preferential adopters to nominate whom they would save from a sinking boat or a burning house if they had to choose between their biological child or their adopted child, is clearly a morally questionable, idiosyncratic curiosity of the individual officer.

By helping officers and applicants to identify the deep social roots of their respective approaches to their mutual interaction in intercountry adoption, the thesis provides a conceptual framework for the analysis of their relationship. The thesis has shown that differing approaches are not necessarily indicative of opposing motivations. Furthermore, the thesis provides the basis for the development of a more satisfactory relationship from the perspective of both parties. By providing sociological insight, the experiences of both parties in interaction no longer need to be reduced to psychologism or 'personality clashes' even though these will sometimes still occur. In broad terms, the thesis has shown that the relationship between officers and applicants will be at its best when each party shows understanding for the institutionalised anxiety and respect for the motivations and orientation of the other. In conclusion, as the state continues to expand it is predictable and proper that the nature of that expansion be a matter for ongoing discussion and debate with representatives of institutions such as the family that are affected by the slow but significant processes of social change. Ultimately, the insights provided by research such as this will help to improve the quality of the relationship between officers and applicants and thereby improve also the quality of life of many children currently waiting in institutions.

## **APPENDICES**

### **SCHEDULES FOR INTERVIEW WITH OFFICERS AND APPLICANTS**

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR OFFICERS

#### 1. STRUCTURE OF MOTIVATIONS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTHOOD.

1. Are you male or female?
2. How long have you worked for the Department?
3. How long have you worked for the Unit?
4. What is your occupational position in relation to the Department?
5. What are your goals as an intercountry adoption service officer?
6. What motivates applicants in intercountry adoption?

#### 2. SERVICE RATIONING

1. Are there enough children available for intercountry adoption?
2. Do you think the Tasmanian Adoption and Information Unit is adequately resourced?
3. Is the service constantly available to the public? If not, why not?
4. Are adoption workers required to select from among applicants? If so, why and on what basis?
5. Do any applicants object to the selection process? If so, why?
6. Do any applicants support the selection process? If so, why ?
7. Do you object to or support the selection process? Why?

#### 3. MANAGING ANXIETY

1. Are placements with applicants who have gained official approval-to-adopt always successful?
2. What is the disruption rate of adoption placements; nationally; internationally?
3. Is it easy or difficult to assess the suitability or otherwise of applicants?
4. Are there any professional implications of disrupted placements?
5. Do workers/applicants worry about the possibility of failing to achieve their goals?

6. Do workers/applicants ever discuss their concerns, if any, about the possibility of failure with you? Why? Why not?
7. Are staff training and development provided for adoption workers? If so, of what kind?
8. Are information and education provided for prospective adoptive parents?

#### 4. TIME TRACKS

1. What do you regard as an appropriate period for applicants to have to wait for a child?
2. How does/did that period compare with the normal time between application and placement?
3. Should adoptive parents be required to wait for more, less or the same time for a child as do biological parents? Why?
4. Do adoption workers and applicants usually agree on what constitutes an appropriate time between application and approval, and then between allocation and placement?
5. How do you feel about the required twelve-month minimum period between placement and adoption?
6. How do you feel about the length of the waiting period between application and adoption?
8. Have you ever discussed this with officers or applicants?
9. How did they respond?
10. What did you think of their response?

#### 5. EMPATHY IN A STRAINED RELATIONSHIP

1. In intercountry adoption to whom does the child belong?
2. Who has the primary responsibility for the welfare of the child?
3. Between placement and adoption, should officers have the right to supervise the child's progress without the consent of the adoptive parents? For example, should officers be allowed to make enquiries at the child's school without first seeking the consent of the parents?
4. Are parents usually biased or objective in their views on what is best for the child?

5. Are officers usually biased or objective in their views on what is best for the child?
6. What do you think are the appropriate rights of the relinquishing parents, orphanage, nation?
7. Under what circumstances, if any, should placements be disrupted against the wishes of the adoptive parents?
8. Are there currently any regulations that provide, in your opinion, for the inappropriate disruption of placements?
9. Do regulations give officers undue rights of intervention in the life of the adoptive family? e.g. Tasmanian Adoption Regulation 14 (j) and (k):  
 "...Applicants for assessment are not to be accepted for assessment unless they satisfy the Director or the principal officer of an approved agency that they fulfil all of the following requirements:-  
 (j) that neither applicant is undertaking treatment for infertility;  
 (k) that, in the case of the female applicant, the applicant is not pregnant".
10. Is intercountry adoption a straightforward or complicated process?
11. Should intercountry adoptive parents have the same rights as biological parents with regard to their children?

## 6. MANAGING DISSATISFACTION

1. Have you ever noticed any dissatisfaction among applicants and/or officers in your intercountry adoption service?
2. If so, to what do you attribute that dissatisfaction?
3. How do you respond to that dissatisfaction?
4. Do others share your views on these matters? If so, where and when do you discuss your grievances?
5. Does your intercountry adoption service allow for adequate redress when officers and applicants are unhappy about procedures?
6. Would you like to see the service changed in order to change your powers of redress? If so, how?
7. Does the introduction of fees have any implications for the relationship between officers and applicants in intercountry adoption?



8. Is intercountry adoption in the best interests of the child?
9. Did you apply or volunteer to work in the intercountry adoption area?
10. Anything we've missed?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

#### 1. STRUCTURE OF MOTIVATIONS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTHOOD.

1. Are you male or female?
2. How old are you?
3. Do you have any biological children?
4. How long since you first applied?
5. Of which support group (if any) are you a member?
6. Did you apply for a 'special needs' child?
7. Did you pay fees to the Tasmanian Adoption and Information Unit?
8. Through which branch of the Adoption and Information Unit was/is your application processed?
9. What motivated you to become a Tasmanian intercountry adoption service applicant?
10. What motivates officers in intercountry adoption?

#### 2. SERVICE RATIONING

1. Are there enough children available for intercountry adoption?
2. Do you think the Tasmanian Adoption and Information Unit is adequately resourced?
3. Is the service constantly available to the public? If not, why not?
4. Are adoption workers required to select from among applicants? If so, why and on what basis?
5. Do any officers support the selection process? If so, why ?
6. Do you object to or support the selection process? Why?

#### 3. MANAGING ANXIETY

1. Are applications always successful?
2. Are placements with applicants who have gained official approval-to-adopt always successful?
3. On what basis do officers select applicants for approval?

4. Are there any implications of applicant criticism of the officer(s)/ service?
5. Do applicants worry about the possibility of failure to gain a child for adoption? If so, with whom do they discuss their concerns?
6. Do applicants need encouragement? If so, from where do they get it?

#### 4. TIME TRACKS

1. What do you regard as an appropriate period for applicants to have to wait for a child?
2. How does/did that period compare with the time between your application and placement?
3. Should adoptive parents be required to wait for more, less or the same time for a child as do biological parents? Why?
4. Do adoption workers and applicants usually agree on what constitutes an appropriate time between application and approval, between application and allocation, and then between allocation and placement?
5. How do you feel about the required twelve-month minimum period between placement and adoption?
6. How do you feel about the length of the waiting period between application and adoption?
8. Have you ever discussed this with officers or applicants?
9. How did they respond?
10. What did you think of their response?

#### 5. EMPATHY IN A STRAINED RELATIONSHIP

1. In intercountry adoption to whom does the child belong?
2. Would you have wanted to continue with the adoption of your child(ren) if your spouse had died before placement, or during the placement period?
3. Would you have wanted your adopted child(ren) to have shared in equal part in your inheritance if you and your spouse had died after allocation but prior to finalisation of adoption in Tasmania?
2. Who has the primary responsibility for the welfare of the child?

3. Between placement and adoption, should officers have the right to supervise the child's progress without the consent of the adoptive parents? For example, should officers be allowed to make enquiries at the child's school without first seeking the consent of the parents?
4. Are parents usually biased or objective in their views on what is best for the child?
5. Are officers usually biased or objective in their views on what is best for the child?
6. What do you think are the appropriate rights of the relinquishing parents, orphanage, nation?
7. Under what circumstances, if any, should placements be disrupted against the wishes of the adoptive parents?
8. Are there currently any regulations that provide, in your opinion, for the inappropriate disruption of placements?
9. Do regulations give officers undue rights of intervention in the life of the adoptive family? e.g. Tasmanian Adoption Regulation 14 (j) and (k):  
 "...Applicants for assessment are not to be accepted for assessment unless they satisfy the Director or the principal officer of an approved agency that they fulfil all of the following requirements:-  
 (j) that neither applicant is undertaking treatment for infertility;  
 (k) that, in the case of the female applicant, the applicant is not pregnant".
10. Is intercountry adoption a straightforward or complicated process?
11. Should intercountry adoptive parents have the same rights as biological parents with regard to their children?

## 6. MANAGING DISSATISFACTION

1. What can you tell me about your experience as an applicant from the time of application? What were the positives and the negatives?
2. Have you ever noticed any dissatisfaction among applicants and/or officers in your intercountry adoption service?
3. If so, to what do you attribute that dissatisfaction?
4. How do you respond to that dissatisfaction?

5. Do others share your views on these matters? If so, where and when do you discuss your grievances?
6. Does your intercountry adoption service allow for adequate redress when you are unhappy about procedures?
7. Would you like to see the service changed in order to change your powers of redress? If so, how?
7. Does the introduction of fees have any implications for the relationship between officers and applicants in intercountry adoption?
8. Anything we've missed?

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