

Labour Migration

4. Migration, Dependency and Inequality in the Pacific: Old Wine in Bigger Bottles? (Part 1)

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A quarter of a century ago, I wrote a paper whose title was the first part of that above (Connell 1980), which sought to provide an overview of the complex relationship between migration, remittances and rural development in the region, and largely concluded that this had been negative for the sending regions. The conclusion stated that 'remittances on the smaller islands tend to foster dependence rather than inequality; on the largest islands they generate inequality rather than dependence. But both trends are ubiquitous' (1980: 51). Such sweeping conclusions, centred on dependency theory, were not without criticism (e.g., Hayes 1991). Given the present extraordinary global and regional interest in migration issues, and the substantial increase in most forms of migration in the region in the past quarter of a century, it is timely to revisit these conclusions in the light of more recent data and trends. Moreover, there has now been about half a century of international migration from several parts of the Pacific, and especially from Polynesian states, hence it is useful to review their experiences. Almost all post-World War II international migration from the island Pacific has occurred since the 1960s. Since then there has been continued migration from 'mature migration' economies, mostly in Polynesia, and a rise in migration from all other island states.

As emigration continues, small and vulnerable South Pacific states have become irrevocably a peripheral and dependent part of a wider world. Contemporary patterns of migration have diversified, and have become more selective and skilled, demographic structures have changed, and the restructuring of global and island economic landscapes present different development contexts. The life courses of island people, present or absent, are embedded increasingly in international ties, and island states have sought out new migration opportunities. Island states, individuals and various international agencies have attached new and increased significance to migration, remittance flows, return migration and the role of the diaspora, in contexts where 'conventional' development strategies have achieved limited success.

An economic context

The variety of reasons put forward to explain migration in the South Pacific sometimes seems interminable and the problems of generalisation considerable.

Apart from migration as a result of natural hazards, migration is largely a response to real and perceived inequalities in socioeconomic opportunities, within and between states. Social influences are important, especially in terms of access to education and health services, and are in turn often a function of economic issues. Migration remains, in different forms, a strategy of moving from a poorer area to a richer one in search of social and economic mobility abroad or at home. It is related to the economic aspirations of migrant households and to development in island states, hence it is useful to set migration within the context of economic change in the region.

Major influences on migration have been rising expectations of what constitutes a satisfactory standard of living, a desirable occupation and a suitable mix of accessible services and amenities. In parallel with changing aspirations and the increased necessity to earn cash, agricultural work throughout the Pacific has lost prestige and the declining participation of young men in the agricultural economy is ubiquitous, despite rising levels of unemployment. There is a widening gap between rising expectations and the reality of limited domestic employment and incomes. Changes in values, following increased educational opportunities and the expansion of bureaucratic (largely urban) employment within the region from the 1970s, have further oriented migration streams outwards, as local employment opportunities have not kept pace with population growth.

The islands and island states of the Pacific, with the exception of PNG, are small and vulnerable. Many states are isolated and fragmented, with numerous populated islands and, in Melanesia, with many distinct language and cultural groups. Prospects for economic growth are limited, especially in Polynesia and Micronesia, where no island state has a population of more than 250,000. Five island states are officially classified as least-developed countries. Although the region does not suffer from the absolute depths of poverty experienced in some parts of the developing world, it does have social and economic problems (Abbott and Pollard 2004). Generally, growing populations have intensified pressure on lands and seas. Economic growth has been disappointing since independence, usually about 30 years ago, though mining and tourism offer solid prospects in a few places. This has resulted in a series of imposed attempts at restructuring, including structural adjustment programs in various countries, urged by institutions such as the World Bank and the ADB.

Most countries, other than the large Melanesian states, have benefited substantially from aid and from remittances from overseas migrants, enabling them to run big current account deficits, maintain substantial bureaucracies and undertake relatively large public investment programs of a kind that could not otherwise be financed. The Pacific Islands are the most heavily aid-assisted part

of the world on a per capita basis. The public sector increasingly dominates formal economic activity almost everywhere, despite efforts at restructuring.

Economic growth in the region has been limited with one important consequence: in every state formal sector jobs are being created more slowly than school leavers are emerging from the education system. The consequences are rising unemployment, the growth of the informal sector and visible signs of poverty within urban areas. Although poverty is not a welcome word in most parts of the region, and few countries officially admit that it exists, there is growing evidence that it is widespread, though disguised by words such as 'hardship' (Abbott and Pollard 2004). Much poverty is also hidden in outer islands and on remote mountain sides, where there is a poverty of opportunity and minimal access to crucial educational and health resources, alongside employment opportunities. One consequence of this is sustained rural-urban migration; hence a major task for most states is to create employment and provide services for outer islands and remote places that would stimulate development and reduce migration and thus unmanageable urban growth.

Until quite recently, there was a widespread belief that poverty did not exist in the Pacific, because of the existence of urban and rural 'safety nets', where extended families could and would support those who for whatever reason experienced temporary problems. There is now good evidence that both of these are breaking down and it is no longer possible, if it ever was, for urban people simply to return and be supported by rural kin (Connell 2003a: 68–70). Absolute poverty is not generally apparent in the Pacific; however, some households are poor in the sense that they do not have enough food, clean water or access to adequate housing or a basic education (Bryant 1993); and poverty is significantly worse in Melanesia and Micronesia than in Polynesia (Abbott and Pollard 2004: 20). Indeed in PNG relatively recent data suggest that in 1996 as many as 41 per cent of rural people and 16 per cent of urban people were living below the poverty line (Allen et al. 2005). In Fiji, firstly, the extent of poverty grew significantly between 1975 and 1991 when the Fijian economy was growing relatively rapidly. In other words, no effective trickle-down effect was occurring, which meant that inequalities were simultaneously increasing. Secondly, Fiji has achieved greater levels of economic growth than other island states, hence the extent of poverty and inequality is probably greater in other places, notably in Melanesia and Micronesia (Connell 2003a).

In every state urban areas are growing faster than the rate of population growth. Consequently, informal settlements are growing particularly quickly, as the supply of land and formal housing is inadequate to meet the needs of new migrants (or even established residents). In the two largest cities in the region, Port Moresby and Suva, settlements house more than half the urban population. In Suva, the expansion of settlements is a result of rural-urban migration

precipitated by the demand for services (especially education), the expiry of land leases and the breakdown of extended families. Similar rationales exist elsewhere.

Many urban poor live in settlements, and socioeconomic inequalities are most evident in urban areas. Those who are poorest are those with little support from the rural economy and no opportunity to move away from town when poverty, rising unemployment, old age or social disorder make life difficult. In settlements such as Blacksands, Vila (Vanuatu), insecurity over land tenure and employment ensured that migrants often contemplated return migration but usually chose to remain for their children's sake. Most households in Blacksands had incomes below the national average and at least a quarter had problems meeting school fees, paying rent and providing food. Most supplemented their cash incomes from subsistence food gardens (Mecartney 2001), an option not always open to settlement residents, especially in Port Moresby. Low incomes and a lack of support during illness or unemployment give a sense of biding time, waiting for unforeseen and uncertain opportunities and sometimes securing multiple jobs, maintaining strict budgets and abandoning some 'traditional' obligations, simply to get by. Many urban residents survive rather than prosper in the city.

One consequence of urban growth exceeding urban job creation is the steady emergence of the informal sector, with particularly rapid growth in prostitution and the rise of crime. In the two main cities, and elsewhere, the rise of urban poverty and the informal sector has been marked by new repressions of the poor and marginalised, in new forms of anti-urban policies, as they are forced out of urban areas, most dramatically by the bulldozing of settlements, and by attempts to devolve solutions to the churches from the State, rather than by concerted attempts to devise welfare and employment policies that might reduce such problems (Connell 2003d; Koczberski et al. 2001). Anti-urbanism is not matched by pro-ruralism. Even urban markets and market vendors have been opposed by urban and national governments, despite their ability to provide substantial employment for youths and women. Social disorganisation and crime are functions of substantial inequalities in access to land, housing and other services. Port Moresby has been declared the most unlivable city in the world, because of the extent of crime and violence, much of it fuelled by lack of access to urban resources.

Unemployment is essentially an urban phenomenon, and rising unemployment occurs in all urban areas, though there are rarely adequate measures of its extent. Where there are more or less reliable measurements, urban unemployment is never below 10 per cent and might well be higher in many cases. Unemployment is particularly high among youths (Bryant 1993: 46; Abbott and Pollard 2004), and there is growing recognition of the existence of significant numbers of unemployed and marginalised youth in most urban centres, such as Port Vila

(Mitchell 2004); and inadequate access to employment, land and credit have led to increased levels of unemployment in the small Vava'u town of Neiafu and in Nuku'alofa (Gailey 1992b). This, in turn, has stimulated emigration. Broadly similar conditions occur throughout the region, but are much less evident and undocumented in the smaller states (Abbott and Pollard 2004). They are seedbeds of discontent and incentives to migration, but those affected are among the least able to achieve, or gain from, it.

Urban poverty bears some relationship to internal migration since it is evident at least in PNG, but almost certainly elsewhere, that the urban poor are often those who have migrated from the most impoverished rural areas (such as remote areas on the fringes of the Highlands). People are thus moving away from rural poverty, in the sense of inadequate access to employment and income-earning activities, and towards services; yet migration tends to transfer poverty to urban areas. It is in this very broad context, which takes minimal note of either substantial or subtle regional variations, that migration is embedded.

A population context?

All states within the region are going through the demographic transition: hence the 'doomsday syndrome', which was prevalent a decade ago as the Pacific, and especially traced to Melanesia, then seemingly facing explosive growth rates, is now a thing of the past. (Fry 1997: 333–4; Chappell 2005: 295; cf. Bedford 2003). Nonetheless, population growth rates remain high in some states. While the average population growth rate is about 2.2 per cent, in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands it is about 2.6 per cent, though in both states it is now falling. In several states, such as Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, growth rates are less than 1 per cent, partly because of high levels of out-migration. Here, as elsewhere in the region, there are very great differences.

Throughout the region life expectancies have risen in the past quarter of a century, but remain lowest in the Melanesian states. Infant mortality rates are also highest in Melanesia, with PNG and Kiribati (at 88 per thousand) being the worst of the region. In PNG there is evidence that the infant mortality rates are increasing largely because of the inadequate, and declining, provision of health services to rural areas. Some of the worst health and mortality problems are experienced in the growing urban settlements, especially in Port Moresby and those urban areas established on coral atolls (Connell and Lea 1992).

Although prolonged rural-urban migration, increasing pressure on rural land and urban services, rising youth unemployment, social discontent and high levels of maternal mortality all contributed to a more favourable climate for establishing population policies, as in PNG (McMurray 1992: 13), developing and implementing population policies has proved difficult. The factors that are most conducive to successful population policies — integration of population

and development policies, improved rural development and communications to spread new values and reduce the economic significance of children, formal sector employment opportunities for women of increasing age of marriage — are usually absent. The outcome of high population growth rates has been that in most states there is a preponderance of young adults in the population, a situation that has placed strains on land resources, but also on employment markets, education and social organisation. A critical development issue throughout the Pacific is that of maintaining, let alone improving, present standards of living in the face of continued population increase.

In certain localised contexts, population pressure on resources is perceived as a growing problem. This is true in parts of the Highlands of PNG, and also in some coral atolls where, at least in Kiribati and Tuvalu, a 'Malthusian crisis' was recognised as early as the 1880s (Munro and Bedford 1980), and Islanders were being resettled in the 1940s. There are many local areas where population pressure on resources has created tensions, where land is not freely available, but is zealously guarded by its traditional owners. In Solomon Islands recent conflicts around Honiara were partly a consequence of Malaitans leaving their own densely populated island and settling on the land of the local Guadalcanal population, who resented the loss of their resources (and the greater competition for scarce urban jobs). More broadly, it has recently been argued that there is a possible correlation between recent political tensions in the Melanesian region (Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands), where migration is said to be limited or non-existent, and Polynesian and Micronesian states, where migration has been considerable and political stability much greater (Ware 2005). The argument no longer holds true for Fiji, and in any case there are other crucial differences and indications of tensions elsewhere (most recently in Tonga), which suggest that the relationship between migration, population pressure on resources and political tensions is much more complex.

Internal migration

International movements (see below) are paralleled by intensified migration within particular countries. This migration has been characterised by movement away from remote islands and isolated rural areas to more accessible coastal locations and particularly to urban areas, which have usually grown steadily in recent years. Thus national populations have become increasingly concentrated on the more central urbanised islands, accentuating problems of service delivery in remote areas. This situation has in turn accentuated and accounted for further movement away from isolated areas.

The depopulation of small islands and remote mountainous areas is widespread. Employment opportunities and services are concentrated in the urban centres and on small island states; where manpower and capital are often limited, centralisation is inevitable at some scale. The more educated have tended to

migrate first and migrants have left many rural areas to take advantage of superior urban educational and employment opportunities. In Blacksands settlement (Port Vila) some 7 per cent of families had moved there for better education for their children (Mecartney 2001). In other parts of Melanesia, migrants have moved away from inadequate rural opportunities, not because of the perceived superiority of urban opportunities, but out of increasing rural poverty.

In most Pacific countries, earning power is concentrated increasingly among urban bureaucracies while the absence of developed state mechanisms (such as progressive taxation, unemployment benefits and pension schemes) for affecting transfers of income minimises redistribution towards rural areas other than through personal remittances. Yet ultimately an economic rationale, real or latent, underlies most migration moves. Simply stated, in Port Vila, one of the most important reasons was '*long winem smal vatu from no gat rod long winim vatu long aelan*' (to earn a little money since there's no way to earn money on the home island) (Mitchell 2000: 172). For many that is reason enough. Growing inequalities, coupled with rising expectations, are the concomitants of increased migration.

Within the Melanesian states especially, remittances from urban to rural areas continue to play an important role, especially where migration is from small islands, such as Ponam or Ware in PNG. Otherwise they are of lesser economic significance, though they might be of considerable social significance (Mecartney 2001). Even for remote parts of large islands such as Tanna, Vanuatu, however, remittances from urban migrants are the single largest source of income in several villages (Winthorpe 2004).

Expectations are rising steadily but, at the same time, employment crises in many urban areas, growing populations, inflation, static (or even falling) commodity prices and the declining availability of land in some areas, slowly increase the gap between expectation and reality, at the same time as it becomes more visible. This increasing gap is a critical problem. Experiences and perceptions of the wider world, its values and its material rewards further underlie the migratory experience.

The existence of kin in urban areas is a major influence and support. Not only do they provide demonstrations, or create images, of an impressive lifestyle, they might also provide remittances (the visible monetary symbols of success), fares and accommodation for new migrants to the city. Indeed, migration is often best seen 'as an almost inevitable decision that they [villagers] will have to make sooner or later and once this view is accepted a sort of migration momentum develops' (Walsh 1982: 7). The spreading taste for commodities has influenced work habits and, for many in the Pacific, the largest cities and the metropolitan countries exercise a powerful allure, offer a sense of future and simply validate migration. In urban areas, especially in Melanesia and Micronesia, growing

differentiation has occurred between those permanent urban residents who are relatively poor (including some long-established urban villagers and the migrants from poor rural areas) and others who are well off. The particularly disadvantaged had little or no support from the rural economy and no opportunity to move away from town when poverty, rising unemployment, old age or social disorder made urban life difficult, at least for those who were, in one way or another, 'trapped' in town. In Blacksands, insecurity over land tenure and employment ensured that migrants contemplated return, but most realistically believed they would remain in town for their children's sake (Mecartney 2001: 80). As in many international contexts (see below) return migration is constantly deferred ('until children leave school', 'until enough money is saved', 'until retirement', etc.) until the point where it becomes implausible. The combination of growing urban permanency, high unemployment and increased expectations has put considerable pressure on urban services.

Until relatively recently, urbanisation in the Pacific was viewed positively, but since independence attitudes to urbanisation have hardened, through prejudice against squatter settlements. In PNG especially opposition to urbanisation has continued, from urban authorities and influential leaders (Connell and Lea 2002; Goddard 2001; Koczberski et al. 2001) in the guise of achieving order and cleanliness, reducing crime and unemployment, freeing land for business development and demonstrating that the State was not weak. Pervasive opposition to urbanisation has delayed and discouraged the development of coordinated plans for urban management, and hence the reduction of urban development problems. Ironically there is no evidence that it has slowed rural-urban migration.

International migration

Since the 1960s there has been accelerated migration from the Pacific region, as Islanders begin to seek employment and access to services in the metropolitan states on the fringes of the region: mainly New Zealand, Australia and the USA. International migration remains primarily a Polynesian phenomenon, and a phenomenon of the past half-century. Many people from Niue, the Cook Islands, American Samoa, Tonga and Samoa have moved either to New Zealand (whence some have gone on to Australia) or, increasingly, as the New Zealand economy has stagnated and immigration restrictions have become tighter, to the USA (Connell 1987a) — legally or illegally. For the smallest states, including the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau and Pitcairn, migration has been particularly dramatic since a majority of the ethnic population live overseas. Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands have experienced declining populations in the past quarter of a century, while it has long been forecast that the smallest state, Pitcairn, might simply disappear as its population falls below what is sustainable (Connell 1988b). Niue too is presently seeking immigration from Tuvalu as its population has

declined sharply in the recent context of Cyclone Heta and a long-term 'culture of migration' (Connell 2006). Larger states, such as Samoa and Tonga, have experienced very limited population growth as emigration has become something of a 'safety valve' for high population growth rates (cf. Ware 2005), but more obviously for, at best, slowly growing economies.

In the larger countries of Melanesia, economies have perhaps been more viable, political ties less effective and emigration conspicuous by its absence, though there has been significant emigration from Fiji, especially of Indo-Fijians. This dramatically accelerated after the 1987 and 2000 coups, with migration to Australia, New Zealand and also Canada. Quite new patterns of skilled migration have taken nurses from Fiji to a diversity of destinations from the Marshall Islands and Palau to New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates (e.g., Rokoduru 2002; Connell 2004b), and took rugby players beyond the 'traditional' destinations of New Zealand and Australia to Japan and the United Kingdom. Even newer patterns of emigration have become particularly important in the past couple of years with a new structure of migration to the Middle East, emphasising the manner in which new and highly paid overseas employment opportunities are being grasped firmly, even in a threatening security and social context.

In mid-2005, some 134 Fijian soldiers were deployed in Iraq, and the Government was contemplating sending another 90 to join the peacekeeping forces, continuing a long-existing policy of Fijian soldiers working for the UN, for example, in Lebanon. A second group of Fijian soldiers was in Iraq as members of the British Army, with one estimate putting this number as high as 1,000 (Pareti 2005a). Others were peacekeepers in the Solomon Islands (as they had earlier been in Bougainville). Many former Fijian soldiers were employed as security guards for private companies in the major Iraqi cities, and other Fijians were employed in support roles in Kuwait, covering engineering, mechanical and IT roles.

Estimates of the numbers recruited to the Middle East from Fiji are variable but have gone as high as 20,000, within little more than two years (Pareti 2005b), though this figure relates to the numbers recruited, who had paid fees of more than \$F150 (emphasising the demand), rather than those who had actually migrated, which might be about 2,500. Recruitment has covered all regions of Fiji, appears to have focused entirely on ethnic Fijians, and recruitment companies have allocated quotas to churches.

Recruitment drives have touched on circuits of the Methodist Church to the extent of job quotas for specific church circuits. On farmlands in Baulevu, beside the Rewa River, groups of men wait and hope they will be included in the 150 quota given to the Kasavu Methodist Church. In Raiwaqa in Suva, and Nadera, the Methodist Church has offered to use church funds to pay for application fees for members hoping for a job in Kuwait if they agree to repay the money.

In Dreketi Tikina, in Macuata, a village used its development fund to pay for application fees. Similar stories have been heard from Koro Island and other villages around the country (Pareti 2005a).

Such a village basis for migration, and support for and selection of migrants, is reminiscent of earlier labour migration schemes to New Zealand (see below). There are, however, real disadvantages, in terms of the loss of skills to Fiji (Pareti 2005b) and circumstances where more than a dozen workers have been killed in the Middle East.

So substantial has this migration become that a recent study of migration and remittances in Fiji (and Tonga) revealed that as many as one-third of all households in Fiji had at least one overseas migrant, and remitter (compared with 60 per cent in Tonga), and 43 per cent of households received remittances (compared with 90 per cent in Tonga). In circumstances where households might be the migrant unit (especially for Indo-Fijians), this is a remarkably high percentage, after a relatively short period of engagement in international labour migration, and already reflects the substantial presence of Fijians in the security industry in the Middle East (Brown et al. 2006). Moreover, Indo-Fijian households were also remittance recipients, contrary to earlier beliefs that few received remittances. It has been stated that the earnings of 250 Fijian soldiers working in Iraq for a UK security company totalled nearly \$F5 million in a six-month period in 2004–05, with all that pay being sent back to bank accounts in Fiji (*Pacific Islands Report*, April 14, 2005). Recent estimates have suggested that remittances to Fiji were about \$A269 million in 2005 (Brown et al. 2006) or would reach about \$F350 million in 2005 (Pareti 2005b), well up from the \$A71 million in 2002, and substantially more than transfers from Fiji (Gani 2005). These recent events in Fiji emphasise and dramatise the ‘outward urge’ that has become so powerful in the region.

The former US territories of Micronesia — Palau, the FSM and particularly the Marshall Islands — have increasingly exhibited similar trends (Ahlburg and Levin, 1990; Hezel and Levin 1996; Hezel and Lightfoot 2005), with an equally substantial growth in recent migration flows. In the past 20 years, emigration accelerated from the FSM and the Marshall Islands, as the signing of the Compacts of Free Association guaranteed migration rights in the USA and its territories. Between 1990 and 2004, more than 13,000 people left the Marshall Islands for the USA, especially after government jobs were lost in public sector reforms (a situation that has also been true of the Cook Islands), so that one in five Marshallese now lives in the USA (*Fiji Times*, September 7, 2005). FSM is following a similar course. The migration process in Micronesia is becoming increasingly similar to that in other parts of the South Pacific: a steady outflow, the growth of relatively permanent urban communities overseas (beyond student groups), the return flow of remittances and growing interest in migration.

Kiribati and Tuvalu have been characterised by migration for even longer, dating back into the 19th century, but of contract labour — mainly to Nauru (for employment in the phosphate mining industry) or to work in the international shipping industry (for which both countries have training schools) — hence return migration is normal, and the impact on national population change much less significant. In the past decade, Tuvalu has experienced accelerated migration, and has requested new opportunities in metropolitan states, while the Tuvalu community in New Zealand is growing steadily. Nowhere does the demand for migration appear to be decelerating.

Interest in migration has long been such that in Samoa, when prospects for emigration were particularly poor at the start of the 1980s, the ‘broken dreams’ of potential migrants contributed to a significant rise in youth suicide (Macpherson and Macpherson 1987). At a national level the economic future of several states hinges partly on the continued flow of remittances, and hence on some continuity of migration (Ahlburg 1991; Connell and Brown 1995). The possibility of blocked migration in the future, a situation ever present in public debate (Macpherson 1992; Shankman 1993), emphasises the potential problem of a high rate of natural increase in case emigration is substantially reduced, especially since there is now a ‘culture of migration’ where emigration is normal, expected and anticipated, and an important element in household and national social and economic systems.

In recent years migration opportunities in metropolitan states have tended to decline, and are increasingly targeted towards skilled migrants rather than family reunions. Thus migration flows from the Pacific are increasingly likely to be of skilled migrants from various sectors including health (Connell 2004a, 2004b) and education (Voigt-Graf 2003), as the overall number of migrants from the independent states has tended to fall. Structural changes within metropolitan states have meant that certain sectors, notably health, are short of skilled workers. Pacific Island nurses, usually entering the bottom levels of the ‘global health care chain’, have migrated much greater distances, to the United Arab Emirates and beyond, as demand intensifies. Before the early 1980s, male migration had preceded female or family migration throughout the South Pacific, but there is now minimal gender bias in the numbers of Pacific Islanders migrating to the Pacific Rim; however, preferences are shifting towards women. In many cases, families migrate as units either as skilled migrants on the basis of one of the spouse’s qualifications or as family migrants. There are, however, flows of specific occupational categories, which are either male or female dominated. For instance, Fijian women have migrated as nurses, domestic helpers and care-givers, while Fijian men have moved overseas as soldiers, tourism workers and employees of private security companies (Voigt-Graf and Connell 2005).

Thus in recent years migration has become more complex, globalisation has extended the number of destinations and brought longer migration chains, migration has become more selective, and part of that selectivity has favoured the migration of women. The more remote and rural parts of the island states are even less likely to be perceived as favourable places of residence. This has been matched with continued urbanisation throughout the island region. Although the largest concentrations of Pacific Islanders are in overseas destinations, such as Auckland and Honolulu, urbanisation now characterises the Pacific (Connell and Lea 2002), especially where international migration remains largely absent.

A rationale

Migration decisions are usually shaped within a family context, as migrants leave to meet certain family expectations, the key one of which is usually financial support for kin. Migration has rarely been an individual decision to meet individual goals, nor has it been dictated by national interests (except perhaps in the case of Kiribati and Tuvalu). Migration is directed at improving the living standards of those who remain at home and the lifestyle and income of the migrants. In Tonga, 'there are few opportunities for socioeconomic advancement ... and migration is perceived as the only solution' (Lee 2004: 135). In Samoa, the reason for migration was simply 'to seek wealth for all' (Muliaina 2001: 25). Consequently, 'families deliberate carefully about which members would be most likely to do well overseas and be reliable in sending remittances' (Gailey 1992b: 465; Cowling 1990). Through this process, extended households, as in Tonga, have transformed themselves into 'transnational corporations of kin', which strategically allocate family labour to local and overseas destinations to maximise income opportunities, minimise risk and benefit from resultant remittance flows (Marcus 1981). To an even greater extent, therefore, than for internal migration (where health, education and social reasons explain some part of migration), international migration is more evidently an economic phenomenon, though other factors are necessarily involved.

Developing this notion, Bertram (1986: 820) has suggested that migrant extended households are characterised 'by remittance transfers among various component parts of the "transnational corporations of kin" which direct the allocation of each island's family labour around the regional economy', and in so doing not only help to maintain these family and communal networks but even enlarge their social fields of interaction, incorporating them into multi-local networks of support and empowerment. Similarly, for households in Samoa, 'having young wage earners abroad diversified families' earnings streams and reduced their dependence on high-risk activities. Having family members in several locations abroad diversified earning sources and reduced risk levels still further' (Macpherson 2004: 168). Moreover, Macpherson went on to argue that families

‘using intelligence from migrants abroad, periodically surveyed risks and returns in various enclaves and encouraged others abroad to relocate in places in which returns were found to be higher and risks lower’.

In this way Samoans were, for example, encouraged to join the US military because jobs were assured, wages were higher and education could be obtained without loss of earnings. ‘If this analysis depicts Samoans as calculative and instrumental, it is because in relation to risk and return they are necessarily so ... [as] risks and returns available in various places were formally canvassed and modeled by families’ (*ibid.*). While this form of household consensus certainly occurs, and demonstrates the significance of access to the migration-remittances nexus, it has been argued that applying the same kind of model in Tonga tends to portray families as being in agreement about their economic aims and functions, whereas there are often conflicts and tensions within them (Lee 2004: 136). In Kiribati and Tuvalu, where seafarers are away from their wives and parents and send remittances to both, there are frequent disagreements about their allocation and use (Dennis 2003: 35). There are household uncertainties about outcomes in various places. Moreover, more than a decade ago, James argued that in many Tongan villages remittances were becoming individualised and the idea of a transnational community of kin was becoming increasingly invalid (James 1993b: 361; Lee 2003: 31). The extent of greater individualisation is impossible to determine, but such conflicts over use emphasise, rather than downplay, the role of remittances.

Political factors have also been significant influences on migration in various contexts, notably in the migration from Fiji that followed the 1987 and 2000 coups, and in the skilled migration from Bougainville and the Solomon Islands during the recent crises. In Fiji, migration was not only of ethnic Indians, arguably most affected by the coups, but of Fijians, emphasising how migration could be seen as ‘a barometer of fear’ of further conflict (Narayan and Smyth 2003). Environmental factors have similarly influenced migration. There has been recent movement from such places as the Carteret Islands in PNG, where localised sea-level rise posed particular problems, and even more recently from Manam (PNG) and the northern islands of the Marianas, after volcanic eruptions. Cyclone Heta, which devastated Niue in January 2004, destroying almost one-quarter of the houses on the island, even prompted some thoughts about the permanent abandonment of the island (with the remaining 1,500 people following so many of their kin to New Zealand). Global warming poses a future threat to the islands, and especially to more than 100 populated coral atolls, should sea-level rise occur. In Tuvalu, fears are such that emigration has already occurred in anticipation of new difficulties (Connell 2003d). Island states are in no position financially, geographically or politically to defend themselves against such potential threats, but if — perhaps when — the worst does occur, Islanders might become a new stream of environmental refugees to metropolitan states.

Remittances

Remittances play an increasingly important role, especially in the smaller island states. In many countries remittances form a significant part of disposable income, hence the smaller island states (specifically initially Kiribati, Tokelau, Cook Islands and Tuvalu) have long been conceptualised as MIRAB states, where Migration, Remittances, Aid and the resultant largely urban Bureaucracy are central to the socioeconomic system (Bertram and Watters 1985). The notion of MIRAB is applicable also in rather larger states such as Samoa and Tonga, where remittances constitute some of the highest proportions of GNP of any country in the world. While this acronym is disliked in the Pacific, for cultural reasons and because of its implication of a 'handout mentality', it nonetheless suggests the centrality of migration and remittances in the island states, and has been largely unchallenged for two decades (Bertram 1999). It spawned other acronyms such as MURAB, which places extra and appropriate emphasis on the attendant urbanisation within island states such as Tuvalu (Munro 1990), and even MIAB, where migration did not initially stimulate a significant flow of remittances, as in some parts of Micronesia (Ogden 1994; Karakita 1997), though there is now a shift in this direction (Grieco 2003; Connell and Brown 2005).

Because of the continued and increasing significance of remittances, the sustainability of remittance-dependent development is particularly important — and necessarily uncertain — especially if, in the countries of origin, the need for remittances grows faster than its supply (Macpherson 1992), or if the number and flow of migrants dwindle. The rate of growth of migration to major destinations, namely New Zealand, Australia and the USA, has declined in recent years due to the restructuring of migration controls; return migration has also sometimes been considerable (Maron 2001), and migration has become increasingly more selective towards those with skills (Liki 2001; Brown and Connell 2004). Even with continued migration, however, an anticipated imbalance is assumed to occur because of the dynamics of settlement migration. With family reunification and with greater integration of migrants in the host communities, their ability and willingness to remit have been expected to decline over time (e.g., Macpherson 1994). If that were so, without other sources of income, the future of the economies of remittance-dependent Pacific countries would be uncertain.

Only recently have second and third generations of Pacific Islanders grown up outside their island 'homes'; hence the extent to which they will remit to the island Pacific (and even whether they can be described as 'Islanders' or 'migrants') is not well known. There is some evidence that the links between second-generation Samoans in New Zealand and Tongans in Australia with Samoans in Samoa and Tongans in Tonga respectively are declining, though, at least in the latter case, links are maintained with other migrant Tongans elsewhere

(Muliaina 2001; Lee 2003, 2004a). Similarly, these new generations are more likely to act as individuals rather than perceive themselves as members of wider transnational social groupings. Anecdotal evidence points to the growing individualism of overseas migrants, but especially to the increasing numbers of second-generation Islanders born overseas, and the reduced likelihood of such people sending remittances to their 'home' countries, especially if they take up host country citizenship. Thus one migrant Tongan has observed of the Australian context: 'People who were born here [Tonga] or went to school here send remittances. People born there? No way!' (quoted by James 1997: 20). Many Tongans in Melbourne have lost interest in continued financial support of their overseas kin, as their sense of *kavenga* (obligations) has declined over time (Lee 2004). Similarly skilled Tongan migrants in Sydney are increasingly stating that they no longer remit (Fusitu'a 2000). Though data on Tongan and Samoan nurses in Australia indicate that even skilled migrants sustain remittances at high levels and over long periods, those data date from the mid-1990s (Brown and Connell 2004, 2005), though circumstances might not have changed.

Remittances are particularly important in the smaller states of Polynesia and Micronesia, and in the more remote islands in those states. Thus for the tiny coral atoll of Manihiki (Cook Islands), migration and the resultant remittances have been seen as so crucial that they constitute nothing less than a socioeconomic strategy for collective survival (Underhill 1989). In Nanumea, in Tuvalu, remittances grew from being about half of the island income in the 1970s and 1980s to some 75 per cent in the 1990s, in large part because of the collapse of copra marketing as world prices slumped (Chambers and Chambers 2001: 156). In Kiribati, the 2000 census recorded that overseas remittances, primarily from seamen, were the primary source of income for as many as 30 per cent of households in the urban centre of South Tarawa, and, in 2002, some 35 per cent of all households in Tuvalu received remittances. In both countries this was usually the main source of income in the outer islands (Abbott and Pollard 2004; Borovnik 2003). Similar situations occur in other small islands and island states, and there is mounting evidence that the northern Micronesian states are now following this pattern (Connell and Brown 2005: 6).

Conventional wisdom suggests that remittances are used overwhelmingly for consumption objectives and inadequate amounts are directed towards investment. There are, however, alternative perceptions of the use of remittances and issues of fungibility (where the specific use of remittances cannot easily be distinguished from other spending patterns and might distort them) (Connell and Brown 2005). After debt repayment, remittances are used for housing and for community goals (such as water tanks and churches), airfares and education (an investment in social capital). They are also used for various forms of investment, sometimes in the agricultural sector but more frequently in the service sector, and especially in stores and transport businesses. In Samoa and elsewhere, remittance money

has constituted the start-up funds for many shopkeepers and other small business entrepreneurs. Half of all market vendors in Apia (Samoa), all of whom received remittances, claimed that some had been used as capital for the purchase of seeds, fertiliser and tools to engage in food production for sale (Muliaina 2001: 28). Even on a small outer island such as Falahola (Tonga), remittances have been used for economic ventures, ranging from agriculture to tourism, though remoteness has limited their success (James 1991: 18–20). Throughout Tonga the increased use of remittances for investment purposes, in fishing, agriculture, stores and transport businesses, attests to the shift from consumption to investment (Faeamani 1995; Walker and Brown 1995), which has occurred in part as consumption goals have been satisfied. This transition has also occurred in Pakistan (Helweg 1983), parts of rural PNG (Boyd 1990) and in similar small-island environments in several parts of the eastern Caribbean (Connell and Conway 2000). While the transition might benefit economic development, at least one anthropologist (Small 1997: 134, 195, 199) has raised concerns that it might also further emphasise intra-village (and country) economic inequalities and hamper social development.

Remittances have also contributed to urban investments of various kinds. The expansion of the Nuku'alofa flea market in Tonga since the mid-1980s demonstrated the manner in which many households used remittances as an investment in their market stalls, and later economic diversification (Brown and Connell 1993). Moreover, as James has noted, 'It has been argued that remittances take away the motivation of locals to produce, but the facts of local entrepreneurship seem to contradict this since large consignments of local products ... are sent to relatives overseas for sale among the Polynesian population' (1991: 2). Even in the most difficult circumstances, remittance recipients make efforts to invest where they can. In the outer islands of Kiribati, where most remittances went into providing basic needs, and the custom of *bubuti* (a request that cannot be refused) makes savings let alone business almost impossible, all recipients nevertheless sought to retain some income to invest in land purchase, doughnut bakeries, stores or even in sewing material for blouses that might later be sold (Borovnik 2004). Here, as elsewhere, there is no evidence that any part of the economy is abandoned or neglected but that remittances enable some limited diversification. Where there are opportunities, and where consumption goals have been satisfied, remittances are used for investment, to stimulate entrepreneurial and trading activity, increase the extent of formal sector employment and produce multiplier effects.

Even so, it has often been argued that remittances (and aid) are not conducive to private sector development, broadly what Ahlburg (1995: 42) has called the 'disincentive effect'. Indeed, the MIRAB model implies that there is a strong bureaucratic outcome, which might stifle, rather than enable, increased productivity. This perspective was stressed by a series of authors in the 1990s,

in overt or subtle attacks on the perceived stultifying role of aid in the region and the consequent necessity to stimulate the private sector (e.g., MacMaster 1993; Browne 1995; Duncan 1994; Pollard 1995; La Plagne et al. 2001). In the case of Tonga, Sturton argued that '[t]he Tongan economy displays all the characteristic markings of the "Dutch disease" where a dominant export activity attracts a disproportionate command over resources, pushes up domestic production costs, and reduces international competitiveness. In the Tongan case the "booming" sector has become development assistance and migrants' remittances' (1992: 3). Similarly, Faeamani has argued that, through the combination of the loss of young adults and an inflow of cash in the form of remittances and goods, 'there is a consequent reduction in garden size and production' (1995: 140; see Fairbairn 1993). More generally, several authors have stressed the wide-ranging notions of dependency that remittances appear to create.

It is implausible that remittances have no disincentive effects, but there is remarkably little direct evidence of this. MacMaster has suggested that in the Cook Islands, Tonga and Samoa remittances are 'a mixed blessing as they undermine the incentive to work and are rarely spent on productive investment. They are normally used for unproductive ceremonial purposes or on imported luxury consumption items' (1993: 279). These and other similar statements and conclusions (e.g., Ahlburg 1991: 39; Finau 1994: 308; World Bank 1990: 4) have suggested overall that 'it is not clear that the net effect of remittances and aid is conducive to long-term economic viability and prosperity' (Cuthbertson and Cole 1995: xiv). Few of these studies present data that justify these assumptions and conclusions.

It is all too often assumed that there is no desire to maximise (or even improve) incomes, hence Islanders become perceived as somewhat irrational or even lazy. Indeed, as Muliaina has observed, even second-generation Samoans in New Zealand assume that their relatives in Samoa are failing to take proper economic advantage of obvious land and marine resources (2001: 33). A similar situation appears to be more broadly true in the Pacific:

The growing flows of remittances into some countries (Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and increasingly Fiji Islands) are giving rise to what many [Islander] respondents termed laziness or over-dependence on others. This 'easy money' was perceived by many respondents to be a disincentive for young people to actively look for work. (Abbott and Pollard 2004: 61)

It is at least as likely that actively looking for work might well have been a waste of time. Moreover, subsistence activity is only exceptionally abandoned or reduced, despite remittances and attitudes in opposition to it. Where conditions are appropriate to adequate income generation, even where remittances have

reached high levels, the private sector might flourish and be stimulated by remittances.

The 'crowding out' argument was prominent in the initial formulation of the MIRAB model by Bertram and Watters, who argued that, with additional sources of income from remittances (and indirectly from aid), people 'can be expected to evaluate the return on [agricultural] investments relative to the alternatives. On this basis it would be expected that as the alternatives to commercially oriented agriculture would improve, so a reallocation of household effort away from agriculture would take place' (1985: 511). Despite Faeamani's (1995) observations on declining production in Tongan villages, this might be exceptional, and indeed might be more likely to be a function of labour shortages (Evans 1996, 2001). Even so, as agricultural decline does occur, as has partly happened in the Cook Islands and Niue (Connell and Brown 2005), it is 'what is required for efficient economic behaviour: that the family allocates its resources to the highest productive use, even if it happens that this particular use is not "productive" in the "domestic" economy, but rather in a "foreign" economy' (Poirine 1998: 77).

Most studies of remittances have observed that a significant proportion of remittances support 'traditional' customs and obligations. This is at least in part because economic opportunities are few, so investing in custom avoids what would amount to 'intensive self-exploitation in agricultural activity' and gives villagers respect and autonomy (Evans 2001: 17–18). Similarly, sellers in the Nuku'alofa flea market, most of whose goods arrived as remittances — and who might be seen as involved in trade and investment, the fetishisation of cash, sales rather than gifts, thus epitomising the rise of market capitalism — preferred to see themselves as located within complex, reciprocal exchange systems that 'maintained the social integrity of Tongan society despite diasporic fragmentation' (Besnier 2004: 19). It is simply more appropriate to engage in exchange and gift-giving rather than sale and purchase, hence commercial practices are downplayed in favour of social obligations. The social and the economic cannot be disentangled.

Successful development of small businesses provides some incentive for those who have sent remittances to return home and manage those businesses. In overseas Polynesian households that include nurses, the greatest propensity to return comes from those with business investments at home (Brown and Connell 2004). International migration has provided new opportunities for women, including those in remote areas and outer islands, as in Tonga, where the production of traditional textiles (*koloa*) for the ceremonial economy is a prime example (Horan 2002). Overseas Tongan women lack access to the required raw materials and often also to time, instead importing these textiles from Tonga. Their reciprocal contribution of remittances further exemplifies how remittances

are constituted through a process that might be seen simultaneously as social exchange and trade.

The MIRAB model has been largely unchallenged for two decades (Bertram 1999), and continues to be recognised in new contexts. It has, however, been appropriately observed that the model appears to largely deny any real semblance of agency to Pacific Islanders, other than as migrants, though this has been evident, for example, in a range of autonomous agricultural and other activities, such as the 1990s' boom in squash cultivation in Tonga (van der Grijp 1999; cf. Hooper 1993), and in the above example of *koloa* production. Moreover, it is evident that

Islanders in their homelands are not the parasites on their relatives abroad that misinterpreters of 'remittances' would have us believe. Economists do not take account of the social centrality of the ancient practice of reciprocity. ... They overlook the fact that for everything homeland relatives receive they reciprocate with goods they themselves produce, by maintaining ancestral roots and lands for everyone. ... This is not dependence but interdependence. (Hau'ofa 1994: 157; van der Grijp 2004)

At the very least, remittances have complex and important social and economic dimensions.

The use and structure of remittances have changed over time, with significant intergenerational shifts in their structure. Initially remittances are sent to parents — as is so clearly happens in the majority of Pacific cases — and in an economic sense can be seen as repayment for their past investment in the human capital of the migrant; in a social sense this is usually expressed as duty, loyalty and maintenance of family ties. A second wave of remittances is subsequently more likely to be dominated by brothers and sisters and by children; this phase might also correspond with a decline in the volume of remittances. Decline after the death of parents seems ubiquitous (e.g., Muliaina 2001: 25). That phase can be seen as an investment in the human capital of the next generation (Brown and Poirine 2005). The third and final phase represents payments to spouses — and indirectly (via investment) to the remitters themselves, as return migration and/or retirement are approached. Some shifts in the destination of remittances are universal, sometimes paralleled by a decline in volumes, but both trends point to a structure that increasingly favours the interests of the senders.

The limited available evidence on the remittance patterns of the second generation indicates that, as Lee (2003, 2004a, 2004b) and Muliaina (2001) have emphasised, they respond only indirectly through the urgings of their parents and their sense of family, and they therefore contribute very limited sums. This is particularly significant as migration opportunities decline and the number of overseas-born

'Islanders' becomes the majority. Thus overseas-born Tongans (or 'Tongans') in New Zealand, as also in Melbourne (Lee 2004b), alongside Cook Islanders, Niueans and others in New Zealand, are now a majority rather than a minority. Not only does this probably mean that for all these groups their remittances are limited, but their social and economic ties are likely to increasingly be with each other rather than with 'home', so accentuating this trend. Lee (2004b: 10–11) has thus concluded that

[u]nless there are profound changes in the relationship of the younger generations with the Tongan 'homeland' and in their sense of 'belonging', the prospect of maintaining current levels of remittances is remote, which gives serious concern for Tonga's economic situation.

She further warned against the complacency of many people in Tonga, and institutions outside, towards the notion that remittances would continue into the indefinite future (*ibid.*). As overseas generations lose language and cultural skills, or 'marry out', their sense of belonging must decline. Moreover, there is no certainty that migrants' economic status will always improve.

Overall, remittances have contributed substantially to welfare in most states, especially improved housing, and to raised levels of consumption. Despite widespread concerns that remittances are spent rather than invested and constitute a 'moral hazard' by reducing the incentive of recipients to work (Wheatley 2003), there is limited evidence in support of this in the Pacific. Remittances are invested where this is feasible and opportunities exist and, as in other parts of the world, there has been a shift in the use of remittances from consumption to investment (Connell and Brown 2005). Remittances have contributed to employment (especially in the service and construction sectors) and eased balance of payments problems, despite contributing to inflation. Moreover, remittances have been sustained to a higher level and over longer periods than has been predicted, or has occurred in other parts of the world. This has often entailed some sacrifices by senders, to the extent that this might have hampered their own futures; thus, in a recent article lamenting the educational and economic success of Pacific Islanders in Australia, a Tongan lawyer stated, 'If the kids are not doing too well at school, they could spend \$30 on tutoring. Rather than send away \$1,000 to the folks back home that \$30 investment will pay off in the long term' (quoted in Tora 2005: 5). That shift towards prioritising the nuclear family is occurring only slowly.

There is no consensus on whether remittances improve or worsen income distribution. This is unsurprising given diverse contexts. Until relatively recently, the dominant view was that remittances tended to reinforce income inequality, by enhancing the capacity of recipient households to invest in additional migration, education and other income-generating assets (Connell 1980; Shankman 1976). Some village-level studies have demonstrated considerable income

inequality (Hardaker et al. 1987) and suggested that this is partly a result of remittance flows (Gailey 1992a; Small 1997: 134, 195). It is certainly a widespread perception; Marcus thus suggested, almost a decade ago, that 'the capacity to call on international resources has become a crucial factor in influencing a family's local economic conditions. The lowest stratum in contemporary Tonga are those totally dependent on the nation-state framework, and the limited resources it embodies, without any overseas options at all' (Marcus 1993: 29–30). Indeed, it is increasingly argued, as in Tonga, that 'every family needs to have someone overseas. Otherwise the family is to be pitied' (quoted in Small 1997: 152). Hence, in contrast with Western societies, it is often the single-female-headed households that survive most effectively (Gailey 1992a). More recent empirical studies, however, based on survey data have tended to challenge this view, and some macro-economic data suggest that remittances have not led to increased inter-household income inequality, at least within Tonga (Ahlburg 1991). Ahlburg (1991, 1995) and Brown (1995) found that the distribution of household income with remittances was less skewed than the distribution without remittances, while other recent studies indicated that inequality was a function of many factors, of which the migration-remittance nexus might have been an unimportant part (Evans 2001; Muliaina 2001; Halatuituia 2001). The most recent studies of migration and remittances in Tonga and Fiji have shown that those households with migrants were more likely to have a higher income, independent of remittances, but the direction of causality was unclear (Brown et al. 2006). A consensus in very diverse circumstances is improbable.

A number of conclusions on remittances are, however, possible. Firstly, there has been a consistently substantial and growing volume of remittances especially in the Polynesian states (making up a significant part of national income, in excess of the value of exports and aid). Secondly, the use of these remittances has gone through a partial transition from consumption to investment, as many consumption goals have been met, at least in part. Thirdly, remittances have been particularly important in the most remote islands where development needs are less well met (and probably therefore reduce inequality). Fourthly, remittances contribute to valuable objectives such as human resource development, and are a means of maintaining social networks and creating social capital (Grieco 2003). In several contexts, especially in smaller islands, education is highly valued, in a general sense and for the development of specific skills (for example, in health provision), in order to create human capital for potential migration. Overall remittances are positive and satisfying for households but insufficient in and of themselves to influence national development goals. Fifthly, households seek to increase incomes by migration and remittance strategies, even by fostering obligations and 'implicit contracts'. Even with imperfect knowledge, households are consciously making decisions in favour of the quantity and quality of education of children that boost their chances for migration and thus the supply

of remittances (Brown and Connell 2004). Migration and remittances thus stem from and contribute directly and indirectly to human capital formation.