

## 5. Migration, Dependency and Inequality in the Pacific: Old Wine in Bigger Bottles? (Part 2)

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The proportion of skilled and highly skilled Pacific Islanders among all migrants is increasing, as a result of shortages in the receiving countries, some of which — as in New Zealand and the USA — have led to private sector recruitment in the Pacific Islands. Low remuneration, poor promotion opportunities, limited training and further educational opportunities, poor working and living conditions, particularly in remote regions, are push factors for skilled migrants. The growing shortage of skilled workers has also contributed to increased intra-Pacific migration, with workers migrating to countries offering better work conditions and salaries, such as Fijian nurses and teachers migrating to the Marshall Islands and Palau, and tourism workers moving to the Cook Islands.

### **Selectivity and skilled migration**

As metropolitan states have made migration more difficult and sought skilled migrants, illegal migration (and overstaying) and the growing dominance of skilled migration have occurred. Fiji and other island states are now seen in Australia as 'high-risk' states because of the extent of overstaying, and there are many illegal Fijian and other overstayers in the USA (e.g., Scott 2003) and New Zealand. Skilled migrants, and particularly skilled health workers, but also teachers (Voigt-Graf 2003) and football players, have made up growing proportions of migrants, especially from Tonga, Samoa and, in the wake of the 1987 and 2000 coups, Fiji. This brain-drain has become critical in some small states.

Skilled workers in general, and medical workers in particular, represent a high proportion of immigrants from island states to metropolitan states because of the increased focus on skilled migration (within declining immigration numbers) in most destinations, and the continued (and increasing) demand for health workers there (see below). Each of the principal destinations for skilled migrants — the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — has the acquisition of permanent skilled migrants as one of the objectives of its immigration policies. Ironically, many of those migrants become part of a 'brain loss' or 'brain-waste' because their qualifications, despite contributing to gaining them entry, are unrecognised in the destination.

Emigration rates of skilled people have increased steadily in Pacific Island countries, particularly as overseas recruitment occurs, and especially for health workers. As a result, there is a shortage of skilled health practitioners in almost all island states. Doctors are twice as likely to migrate as nurses because wage differentials are greater, and because most nurses are women and men are often the primary decision-makers regarding migration (Brown and Connell 2004). Female Fijian nurses, however, frequently took the decision to migrate autonomously, often leaving their husbands and children behind, mainly for higher wages, but also to escape marriage problems and customary obligations (Rokoduru 2002). The recent migration of teachers and nurses to Kiribati and the Marshall Islands indicates the significance of skilled labour migration within the Pacific region, usually to countries with better working conditions and higher salaries (Rokoduru 2002: 44). Skilled migration is unlikely to decrease, given the significance of skilled worker shortages in each of the 'standard' destinations, and increased shortages in newer, more distant markets.

### **Outcome of skill loss**

The loss of skilled labour has been a serious issue for several island states, but perhaps especially for some of the smallest, which need, but have few, skilled workers. In larger states such as Fiji, the loss is significant and problematic. Of the 8,669 professionals who left Fiji between 1987 and 2001, 2,728 were teachers, 1,774 architects and engineers, 1,410 accountants, 1,137 medical professionals and 1,620 were other professionals (Voigt-Graf 2003). Even these figures might well underestimate the true numbers due to the unreliability of data sources, overstaying, and so on, and Fiji has also lost airline pilots, army personnel and sportsmen. A survey in 2000 of the Fiji Nurses' Association found that 88 per cent of nurses migrated for higher wages; and across the region at least two-thirds of migrant workers sought higher wages (Connell 2004a). Between May 2001 and 2002, 32 doctors emigrated and the Ministry of Health has had to recruit 56 doctors from the Philippines and the Indian subcontinent to fill the gaps (Chandra 2003: 194–5). This has raised concerns about the costs and the cultural differences between patients and health workers. In some smaller states the brain drain has been equally excessive; the Cook Islands, for example, lost more than half its vocationally qualified population in the single decade from 1966 to 1976 (Connell 2005a) and much the same happened again in the mid-1990s when the national economy collapsed.

Return migration has not solved labour shortage problems and, as in Fiji and other states, the Cook Islands has turned towards Asian labour markets for replacements (Connell 2005a). In the case of the migration of Tongans and Samoans to the USA alone, 'Emigration results in the permanent loss of young educated skilled labour from the Pacific Island nations. Skilled labour is in short supply and emigration probably hinders development' (Ahlburg and Levin

1990: 84). This is certainly true more generally in the health sector, where more costly (and sometimes less skilled) replacements have sometimes been required, and in the movement of sportsmen. The combination of changing aspirations and the migration of the more educated young contributes to the brain and skill drain from national peripheries and from small states, perhaps ultimately worsening the welfare and bargaining position of those places (Connell 2004a). In small island states, it is unusually difficult to replace skilled migrants, because of the duration of training that is required and the very small demand for particular skills.

The outcome in the health sector is that basic needs are less well satisfied, especially in more remote areas, and there is a loss of morale among those who have remained, as working conditions deteriorate. Wards are closed, waiting lists and times lengthen, examinations are more cursory, or complicated by cultural differences (Connell 2004a). Large proportions of budgets are directed to referrals to distant places, and the Millennium Development Goals recede into the distance. It is equally evident that, because of the necessity for appropriate skills training, it is more difficult to substitute for (or transfer from elsewhere in the public service) absent skills in the health workforce.

Given the global demand for skilled health workers, and active recruiting by New Zealand and other states in the region (especially Fiji) there is no easy solution (Connell 2004a, 2004b). Recent work, however, has shown that nurses at least send very high levels of remittances, sustained over long periods, to the extent that their remittances are almost certainly substantially above the training costs (Brown and Connell 2004). At the same time, more nurses are joining the profession because it provides migration opportunities, hence some of the Pacific states are moving towards the situation in the Philippines, where nurses are effectively trained to be migrants. This does suggest that the economic costs of skilled migration are not as great as has been feared and might not even be negative, even if training is in the public sector and remittances are private, and it is impossible to accurately cost the health disadvantages of high levels of emigration.

Helen Ware has argued that the problems of 'brain-drain' are overstated and having an excess of professionals is not a bad thing if they have the chance to work overseas, while emigration frees up the job market at home (Sharp 2005). These are, however, two quite different contexts and job markets that have become conflated. There is a surplus of teachers in Fiji, at the same time as there is a deficit of doctors, measured by unfilled vacancies and declining service provision. While other skilled migration losses, outside the health sector, might not now be either generally significant or have negative implications, such demand-driven migration is likely to have negative consequences in the future.

There are hints that this might already be so in the context of the migration of sportsmen and military personnel.

## **Return migration**

At no time during the past quarter of a century has there been substantial return migration, due at least partly to the great differences in income levels between the island Pacific and the metropolitan periphery, and to a host of social factors. Return migration appears to be primarily of unskilled workers (and retirees), though skilled migrants do return, despite the discrepancy in wages and working conditions (Liki 2001; Brown and Connell 2004a), so that there is return migration across a wide range of categories and age groups (Maron 2001). For the Cook Islands, many skilled, qualified and experienced people have returned and have been able to use their skills in a range of occupations, not merely in the public service (Hooker and Varcoe 1999: 96), though the Cook Islands is unusual since wages and salaries in the islands are more comparable with those in the destination. Limited return is a function of the situation in which the children of migrants are educated in the destination country and have lost some degree of contact with 'home' societies, even to the extent that they have lost critical linguistic and other skills. This is also linked to a gradual shift in the demographic balance, especially in the Polynesian states, from those states to the metropolitan fringe; relatives are increasingly likely to be found in destinations and thus there is reduced incentive to return to what is less likely to be seen as 'home'. This has obvious implications for the migration of skilled labour.

## **A policy context?**

Within countries there is some ambivalence towards migration. In Melanesia there are major concerns about perceptions of excess migration to urban centres and often draconian policies directed to reversing migration flows, notably in PNG but also in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands (Connell and Lea 2002; Connell 2003a). Since such practices address the symptoms of largely rural development problems, rather than their causes, they have failed to slow migration. Policies that focus on decentralisation and regional development are largely things of the past (Connell 1987c) as states exercise a more limited role in policy formation. Broadly based rural and regional development policies are unlikely to be implemented.

No country has sought to discourage international migration in recent years though several have expressed particular concerns, mainly attached to the loss of skilled labour (including nurses and army personnel), the breaching of bonds by scholarship holders or, in the case of Niue, particularly extensive migration. Early Development Plans in Samoa and Tonga did express limited concern, but there was no attempt to translate these concerns into policies that might discourage migration (especially where bureaucrats themselves were sometimes

the prime beneficiaries of international migration). For the past quarter of a century, governments have neither sought to intervene in emigration nor tried to curb the loss of skilled and unskilled workers. They are unlikely to do so in the future.

Fiji is one country where there have been serious concerns about some impacts of recent migration, frequent high-level discussions of its consequences, but no policy formation to discourage it. Concerns have been expressed in Fiji within the Ministry of Health, by military leaders and by the Fiji Employers' Federation and the Ministry for Employment Opportunities (e.g., *Fiji Times*, April 2, 2004). Bonding of students who study on government scholarships has been the only policy directed at (temporarily) retaining qualified people (although most countries have sought to provide in-country tertiary training, thus discouraging international migration at formative ages). The Fiji Government, however, once tended to regard emigrants as 'traitors' and some policies effectively punished return migrants, for example, where migrant nurses had to start on a lower salary on re-employment in Fiji compared with before migration (Rokoduru 2002). While this policy discourages the temporary migration of nurses in the first place, it also discourages return migration in a sector where there are acute shortages.

More recently, however, Fiji has sought overseas migration opportunities, partly as a legacy of earlier perceptions. In 1977, the Fiji Minister of Labour argued that the provision of overseas employment was 'the greatest form of overseas aid any government can offer' (quoted in *The Fiji Times*, December 19, 1977). A quarter of a century later, in 2004, after the Minister of Labour, Kenneth Zinck, had finalised contracts for migrant workers to go to Kuwait, he commented that '[w]e need to look for overseas companies to employ locals to combat poverty and unemployment. [We are] already holding talks about sending workers to either Australia or New Zealand to [work on] apple farms. This should be finalized soon' (*Fiji Sun*, December 20, 2004). Zinck has also argued that the USA could assist by legalising the status of Fijians who now work illegally as care-givers there (Scott 2003), which would enable them to provide more support for relatives in Fiji:

For a country like Fiji, it will be good if they can give an amnesty to our people there because these people are actually sending money home to feed their families. All I'm asking the government of the United States is to give our people amnesty at least, now that [the] WTO has ordered the United States to scrap the garment export quota it usually offers us. (Quoted in Pareti 2005b: 46)

Such notions of a form of reciprocity were exactly what Tuvalu had long been arguing for with respect to the greenhouse effect, and have economic parallels in Nauru.

Several countries have trained workers for overseas employment, notably in the Marine Training Schools of Tuvalu and Kiribati, and there has been recent discussion in the region of the possibilities of adopting a 'Philippines model': expanding and developing the Tuvalu and Kiribati models to include skilled workers such as nurses, for whom there is global demand, centred on the dual assumptions that many such skilled workers will migrate anyway and that their remittances will be greater than the cost of the training, hence there will be a net benefit to the sending countries. The Commonwealth Secretariat, alongside the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, has recently commissioned a study of the potential for a regional training program for nurses (Duncan 2005). Kiribati has sought to extend the seaman program to cover nurses, and Tonga and Samoa would like to train more professionals than can be employed locally (Ware 2005: 445, 446), and benefit from presumably superior remittance flows. This shift to the deliberate export of skilled workers has major potential ramifications for development.

At various times and in various contexts island states have sought greater migration opportunities elsewhere. During the nickel boom in New Caledonia in the 1970s, leaders from Tonga, the then Gilbert and Ellice Islands (Kiribati and Tuvalu) and Fiji all requested opportunities for their citizens to work in New Caledonia but all were rejected, with the French territory preferring to bring workers from the two other French Pacific territories, less because of language issues than because they would be 'docile labour and reliable voters' (Connell 1987b: 217). There is a curious contemporary echo of this in the decision of New Caledonia to import as many as 4,000 Filipino workers for the Goro nickel mine rather than hire local workers, despite union demands, or bring workers from regional sources (*Oceania Flash*, September 6, 2005). In the three decades since the 1970s many countries, notably Tuvalu, have sought more migration opportunities for their citizens, on economic and environmental grounds.

On several occasions, Tuvalu has drawn attention to the particular difficulties of sustaining populations in a small, densely populated island state, with few resources, alongside the problems of absorbing return migrants, while threatened by climate change (Connell 2003e: 94–5). Such requests fell on stony ground in Australia, though New Zealand provided a migration quota of 50 households per year. In the context of the emerging Pacific Plan, the President of Kiribati observed that 'mobility of labour is the big issue' (quoted in *Islands Business*, April 2005: 5). PNG has also requested guest worker positions for agricultural workers in Australia, while the PNG academic John Ngongorr has argued that young Papua New Guineans would benefit from agricultural work in Australia, and might also gain additional social skills (Sharp 2005).

While New Zealand has established quotas for migration from the Pacific, favouring its former colony of Samoa, neither Australia nor the USA has

developed particular policies for the island states. Apart from Niueans, Tokelauans and Cook Islanders, with free access to New Zealand, most Tongans, Fijians and others have migrated to New Zealand under the family migration and the general skills categories. In 2002, New Zealand introduced the 'Pacific Access Category' under which an annual quota of 250 Tongans, 75 Tuvaluans and 50 i-Kiribati were granted entry to New Zealand ('Esau and Hirai 2002: 22), thus making more widely available specific provisions for more of the Pacific region.

At different times, in Australia at least, specific policies enabling greater migration from the Pacific have been suggested, but never implemented, despite a long history of policy consideration (Connell 1988b). The *Report of the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program* (the Jackson Report) argued in 1984 for two of the smaller countries in the region that '[t]heir long-term development prospects are discouraging. In view of structural problems which are beyond their control and beyond the reach of aid, Australia should make available limited opportunities for immigration from Kiribati and Tuvalu' (Australian Government 1984: 8), and thus go beyond traditional ideas of aid to provide special immigration quotas for the two countries, with which Australia had hitherto had few formal ties (Australian Government 1984: 181). Two decades ago this then radical idea was wholly ignored, from concern that if Tuvalu and Kiribati were accorded special consideration this would become the thin end of the wedge for other countries to follow.

A 1989 review of Australia's relations with the region called for Australia to introduce a work experience program for Islanders, but it too was rejected. The review also noted that 'the issue of migration has the potential to damage Australia-South Pacific relations, particularly as population pressures in the region increase' (Australian Government 1989: 123). Nonetheless, academics and others regularly touted similar possibilities. In 1990, Rowan Callick echoed the Fijian Minister's comments: 'In terms of relations with island nations, there are few levers more practical, helpful and yet of course sensitive than immigration.' He went on to recommend that the Australian Government play a role in taxing such overseas workers, thus ensuring a steady and reliable flow of remittances that would not only be highly beneficial to the island states, and would more directly assist households than overseas aid, but 'could prove an interesting alternative to the prospect of endlessly propping up micro-economies through aid' (Callick 1990: 15). Not all have favoured more expanded migration opportunities (as opposed to labour migration), arguing that they might lead to higher birth rates in sending countries and/or welfare ghettos in destinations (Cuthbertson and Cole 1995; Hughes 2003), though there appears to be little support for such prognostications. A review of aid policy in 1997 returned to the issue of migration and made what had become a now almost familiar statement that granting Pacific Islanders the right to live and work in Australia 'may prove

to be more cost-effective than continuing high levels of aid in perpetuity' and again met an equally familiar rejection.

Dobell (2003) has similarly suggested that Australia should move towards special short-term migration provisions, rather than aid, for island states, a view further supported in the Australian Senate review of Australia's relations with the region, which again argued in favour of special migration schemes to fill labour shortages in Australia, especially in seasonal agricultural work, and argued that risks of overstaying would be lessened if workers knew that they could return each year (as happens in Canada) and/or if the schemes were managed in the home country (which might, however, produce a different outcome). In familiar vein, however, the Australian Immigration Department argued against such 'low-skill migration schemes', emphasising how the idea of Pacific guest workers had become the 'great taboo' of Australia's Pacific policy.

Most recently, Helen Ware has argued that whereas in other parts of the world the slogan 'trade not aid' makes sense, in the Pacific, where trade options are limited, it should be 'migration rights for the poor not handouts for the rich', to avoid continuous aid delivery. She has further argued that because numbers are small (other than in PNG), Australia and New Zealand could 'readily take all those who wish to come in from the Pacific (especially if short-term migrant worker schemes are accepted)' (Ware 2005: 451–2), and that they could be employed in jobs such as fruit picking and working in nursing homes. Since various nationalities are allowed to enter Australia on working holiday visas, and the supposedly non-discriminatory migration policy treats New Zealand differently, '[i]t is simple racism not to allow our Pacific neighbours the same access to work in Australia. Australia is all for free trade in goods — where we are the ones who benefit. Why not free trade in people where the benefit is equal on both sides? The Pacific Islanders supply the labour and earn money to take home, and Australia gets the work done and forms closer bonds with its neighbours. As sea levels rise we will have to take them in any case' (quoted in Anon. 2005). Ware has also argued that 'it is a humane and cheap way of keeping the region secure' (quoted in Sharp 2005: 30). Stewart Firth has taken an apparently similar perspective in arguing that Australia might play the same role for Melanesia that New Zealand does for Polynesia, by enabling Melanesians to come as guest workers and generate millions of dollars of remittances (*Pacbeat*, September 15, 2005), though many of those who send remittances from New Zealand are settlers rather than short-term migrant workers. There is therefore a growing consensus that relaxation of migration restrictions and the introduction of a guest worker policy might benefit island states.

After Nauru's economic crisis, Australia has quite remarkably examined the possibility of developing a migration-remittance economy that might benefit Nauru in the absence of other obvious alternatives, which presumably would

be centred in Australia where there is already a tiny migrant Nauruan community. Australia has, however, rejected a request from PNG to allow Papua New Guineans to undertake seasonal work in Australia, with the Minister for Immigration observing that ‘there are issues of people overstaying and that would bring into question the credibility of such a program and obviously issues of other countries then saying we’d like the same opportunity’ (*Pacific Islands Report*, December 16, 2004). By August 2005, the Government was again examining the possibility of guest worker migration with the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Bruce Billson, stating somewhat blandly that ‘[t]here’s a lot of work to be done. We are not closed off to the idea. It’s [a] work in progress’ (ABC, August 11, 2005), but later observing that there should be reciprocal rights for Australian workers. Similarly, in response to the National Farmers’ Federation’s demand for labour migrants, a Department of Immigration spokesperson stated that there were no plans to change policy (ABC Radio, September 21, 2005: see below), and opponents of guest work continue to argue that it would be hard to regulate, it could take jobs from Australians and guest workers might be vulnerable to exploitation (*Pacbeat*, September 22, 2005). The Australian Workers’ Union has argued that ‘[g]uest workers are vulnerable to exploitation, depress local wages for Australian workers and could form an illegal immigrant underclass’ (quoted in *Australian Financial Review*, November 21, 2005).

In 2005, Australia also considered the possibility of recruiting as many as 2,000 soldiers from Pacific Island states to serve in the Australian Defence Force, where there are similar labour shortages. This has raised familiar questions about ‘the culture’ of the Australian Defence Force, the extent to which this would add quality and the value of such personnel in regional missions (*Pacbeat*, August 26, September 14, 2005). Were this to be implemented it is probable that many recruits would be from Fiji, they would be trainees rather than existing military, and they would be considered skilled migrants rather than guest workers.

Australia presently experiences almost full employment and there are repeated demands, sometimes from unexpected quarters, for more open labour migration to Australia. There are particularly evident shortages of unskilled workers in the agricultural sector and of skilled health workers, and Australia as a whole, and states such as NSW, have recently become even more interested in attracting greater numbers of migrant health (and other) workers. Most recently, the National Farmers’ Federation and the ALP have argued for the introduction of a guest worker scheme that would draw agricultural workers from Pacific Rim-aid recipient countries (National Farmers’ Federation 2006; Sercombe 2005).

It is readily evident that refugees have been highly efficient workers in rural and regional contexts (Stilwell 2003), and that rural labour migration policies — effectively a ‘guest worker’ scheme — in New Zealand were of considerable

value to New Zealand and Fiji, ending only when New Zealand imposed political sanctions on Fiji (Levick and Bedford 1988). In Canada and the USA, there have been several seemingly successful short-term employment programs, taking Caribbean health and agricultural workers to the southern states, which might also be models. Given these precedents, similar schemes in Australia might work well. Though some Islanders are notorious overstayers, this has been at no obvious cost to Australia and the greatest enthusiasm for such schemes has come mainly from those farmers who are the present beneficiaries of Pacific Islander employment. There is no question that the Melanesian states are the more impoverished in the region (alongside the atoll states) and would therefore be best placed to benefit from a guest worker scheme, yet fewer Melanesians are English speakers and — despite 19th-century blackbirding (which provides an intriguing precedent) — there is minimal tradition of migration to Australia or elsewhere. It is not therefore surprising that Bedford has commented that '[a]rguably the most contentious issue confronting Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific during the next half century will be how to cope with pressure for an emigration outlet from Melanesia' (Bedford 2003: 37). Space, and the current rapidity of change, preclude more detailed consideration.

Many migrants from the Pacific have been employed in the secondary labour sector, working in unregulated, non-unionised employment and being paid low and irregular wages (Khoo et al. 2006). This has been particularly true for Micronesians, who have migrated to the USA relatively recently, and for workers in the unregulated nursing home sector where there has been a considerable degree of exploitation of women. Similarly, there has been reported ill-treatment and exploitation of Fijians working in the Cook Islands (*Fiji Times*, August 30, 2004), where some 200 work, mostly in hotels and other service industries without being protected legally. Some have no work contracts at all while the contracts of others have been breached by their employers (Khoo et al. 2006). Tongans have exploited other Tongans in Hawai'i and elsewhere in the USA and cases of human trafficking have come to court (*Fiji Times*, September 8, 2005). In some contexts, notably the last example, such illegalities emphasise the demand for migration opportunities, and the need for there to be regulation of migration and labour contracts.

It is possible to be concerned that once a culture of migration is established short-term workers will prove to be long-term residents (as in Europe, where the 'Polish plumber syndrome' is a major contemporary discourse), as the antithesis of flexible labour markets. This poses complex questions about the relationships between employment and society, the needs of rural and regional Australia, multiculturalism and even of 'Australian values', which cannot be discussed here.

## **Conclusion: the outward urge**

In this century alone there has been a spectacular increase in overseas migration from the Pacific, and in unmet demand for it, from individuals, whose dreams might turn to dust, and from governments, who have put increased pressure on countries such as Australia to relax what are perceived to be overly restrictive and even unethical migration policies. After about 30 years of independence, and disappointment over the challenges and fruits of development, there is a new outward urge that is beginning to spill over into Melanesia. That urge parallels labour demands in destinations such as the USA, Australia and the Middle East, especially in the agricultural, security and health sectors, and a slight possibility that metropolitan migration policies might be relaxed in favour of Pacific Islanders. Migration, already changing fast, might be on the verge of taking quite new forms.

The extent of international migration, and growing demands for migration opportunities, well evident in Fiji, are indicative of a region where the best economic opportunities are seen by many households to be overseas rather than in the islands themselves. For even relatively large states such as Samoa and Tonga there are now as many ethnic Samoans and Tongans overseas as there are at home. The future — a diasporic future — is perceived to be elsewhere. While the continuity of Pitcairn emphasises that the Pacific will not become the 'earth's empty quarter' (Ward 1989), it will be increasingly dependent on migration opportunities in other parts of the world. Indeed, there is a growing belief that '[s]ustainable development in the 21st century, as in New Zealand and Australia, will depend heavily on opportunities for young people to travel overseas for training and employment' (Bedford 2003: 37). For small island states that dependence is both positive and negative.

Within countries, migration occurs primarily out of a context of poverty of income and opportunities and unemployment, yet this nexus is itself also one outcome of internal migration, and is concentrated in the largest towns of Melanesia. The most visible and quantifiable existence of deprivation occurs in island states which have potential national development prospects, yet almost no international migration. In Melanesia colonial partition and regulation have lessened wider connections, and even reduced the extent of older forms of circulation. By contrast, in Polynesia and Micronesia, where local development opportunities are few, international migration — rarely in contexts of poverty and unemployment — has intensified and created extensive diasporic communities.

In the short term, a number of distinct benefits accrue to individual migrants and their families and to the sending societies. Migration has reduced the level of open and disguised unemployment, although it has also contributed to a loss of skilled human resources in the 'modern' sector. In the case of migration of

Tongans and Samoans to the USA alone, '[e]migration results in the permanent loss of young educated skilled labour from the Pacific Island nations. Skilled labour is in short supply and emigration probably hinders development' (Ahlburg and Levin 1990: 84). This is certainly true more generally in the health sector where more costly replacements have been required (Brown and Connell 2004a; Connell 2004a); it is true of the government sector in Samoa (Liki 1994), and certainly also true elsewhere. Exceptions occur where wages and salary levels are more comparable with those in the main migrant destinations, as in several politically dependent territories, such as the Cook Islands (Hooker and Varcoe 1999), though the Cook Islands and Guam have struggled to achieve the return migration of health workers (*Pacbeat*, September 15, 2005).

Remittances compensate for skill losses, though they flow largely to the private sector and only incidentally support the public sector where most skills are generated. Moreover, remittances are maintained for very long periods — beyond what has hitherto been recorded in most other world regions — and in quite new socioeconomic contexts (Morton 1998, 1999: 237). The most striking conclusion of the most detailed studies is that remittances do not decline over time, emphasising that migrants are ultimately motivated by factors other than altruistic family support, such as asset accumulation and investment at 'home', as the intergenerational flow of remittances takes on a more individualistic element (Brown 1997, 1998). Despite an abundance of predictions that remittances will fade over time, as migrants find new commitments elsewhere, they have resolutely failed to do so in quite different contexts (Brown et al. 2006; Simati and Gibson 2001). As long as there are needy kin in the islands, remittances will reach them. This also reflects the pervasiveness of island social mores, and perhaps some discrimination in destinations that increases the desire to maintain island social ties. For whatever combination of reasons, there is room for some degree of optimism that remittance flows will not decline significantly in the near future, but alongside pessimism that this will not continue indefinitely, especially for non-migrant generations. Thus far at least, MIRAB has proved sustainable, and in Melanesia even worthy of emulation.

That conclusion depends in large part on the continuity of migration flows. Ordinarily it might be expected that this would continue where possible in circumstances where there have been structural reforms that reduce public sector employment, wages and salaries remain low and unequal, working conditions are sometimes difficult and hierarchical, commodity prices stagnate and there are many kin overseas. Moreover, for some skilled groups such as nurses, there is now international recruitment. But if opportunities decline and, as Muliaina has argued, if there is a continued tightening of immigration policies in major Samoan destinations, for whatever reason, 'the standard of living of rural Samoans, as opposed to urban dwellers, may be expected to decline in the next decade' (Muliaina 2001: 20). If that is true of Samoa it is true of all other Pacific

states where there is presently a significant dependence on remittances. Moreover, Muliaina reached that conclusion primarily for a Samoan village about 12 kilometres from the capital where there were several business ventures and commuting to urban employment. Remote locations would face greater difficulties.

While international migration has had positive and negative effects in the Pacific, the significance of the positive effects (particularly increased standards of living) must be contrasted with the limited development potential of many states and their failure to achieve significant economic growth or sustainable development. In most of the South Pacific, the greater self-sufficiency that would follow a decline of migration and remittances would be difficult and painful (Connell 1980). A quarter of a century later these statements can be re-emphasised in a wider context. Demand for migration and remittances is likely to be sustained, alongside rising expectations, in conditions of limited national economic growth. The voices of those who urge more self-reliant development strategies have been stilled. This new diaspora has remarkably quickly come to characterise contemporary Pacific Island states. In this context the need to maximise the benefits from migration and remittances becomes ever more pressing.

Despite the immediate benefits of international migration, long-term international migration of skilled workers might impose considerable costs. Governments have not controlled or directed the use of remittances (and nor have they sought to do so) while the rising material consumption levels following migration tend to generate increased demand for consumer goods. Expectations never decline. This demand can usually be satisfied only by further migration, as long as other sources of national income prove difficult to develop. Inequalities might increase, and the establishment of population (and migration) policies might be delayed further.

It is now a commonplace that about as many Tongans and Samoans are overseas as are at 'home', while in the smallest Polynesian states the balance has shifted overwhelmingly overseas (and especially to New Zealand). Notions of home thus change, provoking anxious and partisan debates over the extent to which cultures are retained or transformed, and become hybrid or syncretic, resulting in new phrases such as 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Clifford 2001) to reflect the clash or combination of new residences, roots and routes. Traditions become reconstructed, articulated in ever changing forms and evident across now deterritorialised nations, islands and cultures. While identities might be hybrid and hyphenated, they might also, as in the case of Samoans in New Zealand, represent successful cosmopolitans 'at ease in multiple worlds, rather than natives of place torn by new and multiple allegiances' (Yi-Fu Tuan, quoted in Western 1992: 269; Connell 1995; Anae 2001). While cultures shift, citizenship changes

and new loyalties emerge, economic ties to home have remained remarkably resilient.

Migrants and their children remain 'migrants' though their identities have changed. New technology has made connectivity more fashionable and more feasible, as the Pacific, fully one-third of the Earth's surface, has experienced a new 'cartography of compression' (Kempf 1999), where telephones, email and chat pages have created 'cyber-Polys' (Morton 1999). Home nations and islands remain powerful unifying symbols for migrants and their children. Hence in these new transnational meta-societies, and

[i]n an uncertain global political economy, even the most cosmopolitan Samoan must ensure that Samoa is not merely a nostalgic fantasy, but a potentially real destination. ... Migration is rarely absolute, unambivalent or final; it is not a cause and consequence of a definite break with a cultural life that is part of history, but a partial and conditional state, characterised by ambiguity and indeterminacy. A fixed status presupposes that the future can be foretold. Uncertainty defines the experience of migration, even in second generations. (Connell 1995: 277)

Contraction and compression of the world through migration and electronics, and their consequences, from remittances to inter-regional kinship, have widened international ties, yet ultimately, in a wide variety of contexts, from the Melanesian island of Kairiru to the Polynesian atolls of Tokelau, those migrants who are regarded as successful are often those who have contributed most to the village (Smith 1994: 227; Huntsman and Hooper 1996: 324). These are 'the conquerors of the outside world' (Godelier 1986), in new guises.

However the impact of migration might be judged and debated, in terms of diverse migration streams, and ideologies from economic growth to dependency (van Fossen 2005), it is evident that alongside growing numbers of potential migrants there is growing interest in migration in island governments. Those who are most involved are those who have assessed migration most positively and 'voted with their feet' — or would like to do so. There might be greater inequalities in some sending contexts, at village or national levels, but there is little doubt that migration has provided new and welcome development opportunities. Pragmatism has overwhelmed intellectual doubts; short-term need has triumphed over long-term planning. Opportunities are eagerly sought. While many migrants are indeed within the disadvantaged secondary sector of metropolitan labour markets, and they and others have been deskilled during migration, they have accepted outcomes that, however disappointing, might well be superior to what has been left behind. Especially in circumstances where there appear to be possibilities for new forms of migration, and especially to Australia, migration will continue.

Migration has become an even more conscious household strategy, because of its crucial role in generating remittances, and there is growing evidence that island households are encouraging training and employment in careers with scope for migration. It is not yet evident that states themselves are training such highly skilled individuals for migration, but there are precedents in Kiribati and Tuvalu, where seamen are trained for the international labour market, and there is definite interest. Indeed, from the northern Pacific, the 'Philippines model' of training an excess of health workers for the 'global care chain' provides a possibility for smaller island states. While it might be expected that national development policies should encourage return migration, and such policies exist (Connell 2004a), alongside the recruitment, training and retention of those with skills, it now seems unlikely that policies will be developed and implemented to discourage or prevent further skilled migration, especially of women, but rather that skilled migration might be encouraged.

At a very different scale, international agencies, undoubtedly in a context of gathering aid fatigue, are increasingly stressing the role of diasporas and return migration in national development — an unreasonable focus on the potential role of emigrants, not least because their remittances support households, rather than the nations they have moved away from. Such a new form of 'international self-reliance' is inherently problematic.

The narrow yet open economies of the region are influenced increasingly by transitions in the international economic system, and particularly the superior growth of Pacific Rim nations, which has enabled migration. Foreign investment, tourism, new communications and intensified trade have drawn the Pacific Islands more comprehensively into the global system. In rather different ways, the futures of each of the Polynesian and Micronesian states (except perhaps Guam and French Polynesia) are bound up with the present and future of international migration and the ability of these countries to seek out new potential destinations overseas. All have retained interests in overseas employment opportunities. Tuvalu and Kiribati have experienced resettlement overseas, and Tonga has leased agricultural land in Asia. Tuvalu's Prime Minister has stressed that his country is continuing to seek employment and migration opportunities in Australia and that Tuvalu 'would not take no for an answer' on the provision of either employment or education opportunities, regarded as necessary for economic survival and even more critical in the face of future sea-level rise (Connell 1999, 2003d). Rising material consumption levels following migration have generated increased demand for consumer goods, a demand that can be satisfied only by further migration, as migrants bypass the small towns of the Pacific to seek superior living conditions beyond.

The shift from a more broadly based structure of migration towards more skilled migration has created a new dimension of inequality. No longer are the poor so

easily able to move (though that was never easy, at least from independent states, and that might change if guest worker schemes are [re]introduced), whereas the relatively rich (or at least those who have acquired training and marketable skills) are actively courted and recruited. There is growing international competition not just for 'the creative class' (Florida 2005) but for a wide range of skilled workers. This inequality also has national dimensions, most affecting the relatively poor Melanesian countries, where access to training opportunities is inferior to that in other parts of the region (though the loss of skilled workers might be unsustainable). New wine varieties are filling old bottles.

Uneven development is unlikely to decrease, but while poverty is evident in several states, few governments recognise its existence, and even fewer have sought policy solutions. The rhetoric of self-reliance, at national and household levels, has disguised a situation in which there has been a growing dependence on external sources of funding, whether from aid, remittances or investment. This has, in part, contributed to new forms of socioeconomic inequality in cities, and incipient class formation, though ethnic and regional divisions and traditional power structures are of pervasive importance. International migration has deferred and mitigated, but not resolved, issues of poverty but also of development. The combination of weak economies, overburdened bureaucracies, urban unemployment, fractured social networks and uneven development challenge notions of sustainable development. Most Pacific Island states are likely to remain weak for the foreseeable future, become increasingly dependent on the wider world and require new forms of external support and intervention. International migration constitutes one increasingly less hesitant solution: an expanding and unsatisfied outward urge, a necessary bottom-up globalisation that will always be uneven and somewhat unsatisfying.

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