

‘Pasifika Mobility: Pathways, Circuits and Challenges in the 21ST Century’ A Paper by Richard Bedford

A Commentary by Brenda Heather-Latu (Samoa)

A wise man once crooned “...regrets I’ve had a few but then again too few to mention...” and perhaps one of the singular regrets of this reader is not being able to pick up the fine nuances that are very much part of this very comprehensive piece of scholarship by Richard Bedford.

The full statistical implications of the reported volumes of mobility of the subject population, leaves the amateur demographer only able to grasp the starkly obvious with the rich vein of more subtle implications wasted as pearls before swine...

The paper identifies that there is a great deal of movement between New Zealand and the isles of the Pacific – why does this matter?

Clearly the startling rates of travel and thus movement between the two destinations, reflects a high degree of mobility between the migrant Pasifika communities permanently resident in New Zealand, and the source or home countries. This in turn reflects a strengthening of ties, affinity and loyalties between home islands and the communities resident in New Zealand which leads to the transfer of attitudes, approaches and experiences which changes what existed before and blurs the boundaries of where one community starts and the other starts.

Another notable factor in Bedford’s analysis is the impact and timing of various changes to immigration policies which have been reflected in distinct waves of migration which are reflected in the

statistics. These waves are increasingly supplemented by an underlying yet increasing flow of migration, perhaps based on the application of other policies (such as family grounds) which has also become an increasing constant in the total migration figures. Added to this are the numbers of migrants who are able to transition from the holders of temporary work permits to permanent residence status.

The impact of this type of information must ideally be part of the assessment of what services are provided for the community where that community is: multicultural, highly mobile and draws its cultural imperatives from increasingly accessible home islands . This information should also be relevant in the discourse which needs to take place about the future of the region and whether we should aspire to a form of Pacific Union (where there is free trade and free movement) or some other form of geopolitical or economic arrangement which leads to better lives for Pacific peoples through the pooling of resources and activity.

Portes is quoted in the paper as attributing transnational communities as a byproduct of globalization where common people "... create communities that sit astride political borders that, in a very real sense, are 'neither here nor there' but in both places simultaneously"...

The mobility reflected in the Bedford study confirms what many Pacific people can attest to anecdotally which is; the increasing role of NZ and Australian based individuals and communities in family and cultural matters through their increased and deliberate attendance at significant cultural events such as title bestowals, funerals, weddings and village as well as district meetings.

The factors which seem to influence increasing mobility include the impact of low cost carriers such as Pacific Blue and in Samoa's

case Polynesian Blue (a joint venture between Government and Virgin Australia, which has increased the frequency of flights into the Pacific, lowered the cost of airfares from the legacy carriers and has in turn reduced the costs of related services such as rental car rates and hotel accommodation. Other factors include the portability of superannuation, the age of the initial migrant population, the pacific renaissance of culture and language, the phenomena of 'return migration' (where New Zealand born and raised Samoans are returning to settle and live in Samoa) and personal factors such as the desire to care for elderly parents or relatives, the opportunity to utilize unused family land and more recently the identification of potential business opportunities in the region.

A desire to be more involved in decision making in home islands has led some resident NZ chiefly title holders to travel to Samoa for lands and titles court cases and for important family meetings sometimes five or six times a year, and to take up multiple titles, all of which has strengthened their contribution to their home villages with the remarkable phenomena of overseas remittances to the pacific growing and not diminishing (as predicted by donors and academics alike).

As raised in exchanges during the Symposium, remittances can be categorized as a positive form of investment in two ways- firstly the **maintenance** remittance which is often a regular amount which is sent to maintain the welfare of a parent or is sent to assist a brother or uncle in maintaining village contributions and the *monotaga* (contribution) of a non resident chiefly title holder, or the **special event** remittance which is often a one-off lump sum which provides the bulk of a particular family's gift to build a substantial European style family home, a taxi or small shop to support the family or to build a church or *maota* (chiefly meeting house).

In the world of commerce these remittances are often characterized as gratuities or gifts which have no long term value beyond goodwill however, seen through cultural eyes, each remittance and every contribution of goods or money signifies a very positive and tangible personal investment and input by the particular individual or family to the long term sustainability of the family, the village and ultimately the district, given that the individual in Samoa certainly is defined in terms of who their family is, what titles their family holds and the district from whence the family hails. Such an affinity also contributes to the strength of family ties and loyalties and underpins future activities where the contributor will also be a recipient of family largess where they experience their own family events such as funerals, weddings and title conferrals. It is custom that all those to whom you have contributed and cared for will in turn reciprocate because of your family or title affinity.

In social terms, the interaction between New Zealand (or indeed Australia's) domestic migration policies and the use and approach to Aid in the region will impact both New Zealand resident communities as well as those resident in the islands, given the rates of mobility and the heightened participation of New Zealand based pacific peoples at home. By way of example, if there is a domestic health initiative concerning lifestyle diseases the statistics in the Bedford study would seem to suggest that the catchment area for such policies will need to be broader than New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone or even its maritime boundaries but that some thought will have to be given to the health of those who travel to New Zealand temporarily and move to live here permanently. The need for some form of coordination of policies which will impact upon communities which exist in two locations, becomes an increasing imperative not only to achieve the aims and objectives of the policies *per se* but also to reflect the interrelationship and interdependence of the two resident and non-resident Pasefika communities.

Is mobility always good ? Clearly the experiences of Tokelau, Niue and the Cook Islands provide interesting case studies of what may happen to small places which enjoy the citizenship of a larger and more developed country. In fact even in Samoa case, the annual loss of 1100 able bodied Samoans and their immediate families under the quota system, is not considered to be of mutual benefit when tertiary trained Samoan citizens join the queues together with their less or unskilled cousins and leave a country which they have contributed to in a significant manner... both of these situations has raised the spectre of a population drain which cannot be restored and for which the moves of source island governments to stem have failed in the face of more attractive economic and social projects.

Traditionally, the peoples of the Pacific were the great seafarers of the world and where they ended up eventually became their homes. In modern times the *vaka* has been replaced by sailing ships and more recently jet aeroplanes and still the peoples of the Pacific are travelling... The great merit of Richard Bedford's work is to provide support to the notion that there is heightened mobility by the Pasefika group of peoples more than any time previously, which can lend support to the notion that when New Zealand formulates its policies for its people, those policies must also acknowledge the interests and the welfare of a group of citizens;

....who are neither here nor there but are in both places simultaneously...*tihei tagata pasefika*....