Status or Subjugation? Women, Migration and Development in the South Pacific

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Despite much research on migration in the South Pacific, there is almost no information relating either to the migration of women (either internally or internationally) or to the impact of migration on women (either those who move or those who stay) or on the societies of emigration. This article attempts to draw restricted conclusions from the limited data available, indicate some implications of these conclusions and point to the problems of lack of information in an area where migration is of major significance for social and economic change. The nature of available information results in some bias towards Melanesia and especially Papua New Guinea.

The International Labor Organization has recently observed that women comprise 50 percent of the world's population, contribute two thirds of the world's work hours, receive 10 percent of the world's income and own less than 1 percent of the world's property. That this is inequitable suggests that both research and development projects should devote greater emphasis to women's needs and women's participation in development, unless women are to remain merely the passive recipients of development policy. This is as true of the South Pacific as elsewhere yet only in the development plans of Western Samoa and Fiji is special consideration given to improving the conditions of women (Kite, 1981:7–8). With the exception of brief notes on women migrants in some Papua New Guinea towns and passing references to the impact of migration on rural life there is virtually no published or otherwise available research anywhere in the Pacific. In an area of striking cultural and economic diversity, including twenty-two states and almost a thousand language groups (*cf.* Connell, 1983a), this restricts the possibility of producing useful generalizations on female migration and the impact of migration on women or on society as a whole. Moreover we have recently been warned, 'Don't generalize about the Pacific' (Wendt, 1981).

Almost all migration research has been carried out with male migrants. It is they who are interviewed and it is therefore their job situations and welfare status that are considered in analysis and policy formation. Since there is no

research on women migrating there is little information on which women are migrating, why they are moving and where they are moving to, how autonomous or passive their migration decisions are (and if, and how, women influence male migration decisions) and, most important, what impact this is having on the women themselves (in terms of their job situation and welfare status) and on the village or national economy and society. The role of rural-urban migration in relation to women's status is also not clearly known; migration may either raise or lower women's status, in itself ambiguous and changing, depending on other factors.

MIGRATION

Although it remains true that in the Pacific (unlike some other parts of the world, and especially Latin America) migration tends to be dominated by men or households, increasingly women are migrating, both with their husbands (or to join their husbands) and, more importantly, as individuals for reasons of their own. Social norms are now less substantial constraints to secondary education, and implicitly to movement, while greater economic diversification in urban areas is providing a wider range of job opportunities beyond those traditionally occupied by women. Moreover the expansion of bureaucratic employment in the 1970s especially, which marked the decade of independence for many South Pacific states (notably Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands), resulted in increased numbers of jobs in more traditional occupations. Obviously there are variations within the South Pacific region. In the Cook Islands about 65 percent of the public service (the main source of formal employment) are women whereas in Papua New Guinea only 18 percent of the public service are women and in the Solomon Islands only 9 percent. Most other countries vary between these extremes. In Melanesia where social control is stronger and where employment is biased towards males (notably on plantations and mines) migration is more obviously male than in Polynesia or Micronesia. Throughout the region however there has been extensive urbanization especially in the 1960s and 1970s (Connell, 1982, 1984a); the declining rate of creation of new urban job opportunities in more recent years, alongside increased population pressure on resources in many rural areas, notably in Melanesia, has contributed to a parallel decline in circular migration and an increase in permanent migration as urban migrants prefer to regard urban employment as something of a career rather than as a brief period of target income accumulation. This trend in male employment and migration has also resulted in increased female migration as wives have joined their husbands in urban areas. Both as independent and 'passsive' migrants women are increasingly significant. Consequently, the extremely imbalanced sex structures of

migrant destinations in pre-war years, and post-war years throughout much of Melanesia, are now relatively rare, apart from unusual cases such as the mining towns of Papua New Guinea, the phosphate mine on Nauru or for several forms of seasonal migration. The details of these migration movements have been set out in a series of country reports of the South Pacific summarized elsewhere (Connell, 1983a).

The variety of reasons put forward to explain migration in the South Pacific sometimes seem interminable and thus the problems of generalization considerable. Much migration is a result of marriage or natural hazards but, otherwise, the major influences on migration are economic even where social objectives are also significant. Migration is primarily a response to real and perceived spatial inequalities in socioeconomic opportunities, that are themselves a result of dependent and/or uneven sectoral and regional development. Social influences on migration are important, especially in terms of access to education and health services. While for young men migration may be a means of acquiring status and prestige, these kinds of opportunities have often been denied to young women, who are often not expected to migrate and are occasionally prevented from migrating (*e.g.* Bathgate, 1975:878). Throughout the region male migration has preceded female or family migration; the only exception appears to be recent migration from the small Polynesian islands of Tokelau and the Cook Islands where women were the first to go to New Zealand, hired as domestics with fares paid by their employers (Graves, 1984:366). In Papua New Guinea a range of attitudes constrain migration (and access to education) for women; these include a preference for girls to retain their traditional roles as gardeners and homemakers, limited finance for education, the belief that it is a waste of time and money to educate girls, the view that boys are more dispensable in the village then their hardworking sisters, the fear that girls may 'play around' and become pregnant or marry outside their communities (see below) with a consequent loss of control over marriage exchanges and brideprice payments or, finally, concern that girls will enter the westernized urban world and adopt unacceptable attitudes of behavior (Johnson, 1982). In 1974-76 almost all female migrants from Siwai (North Solomons Province, Papua New Guinea) were employed as nurses, teachers or clerks; the first two of these were the most acceptable within Siwai since it was believed, quite accurately, that the girls who took up these jobs (all of whom were unmarried) were more likely to live in situations of firm social control in official housing (Connell, 1985a). Consequently, and increasingly, both men and women may choose to migrate to escape traditional customs and constraints, such as arranged marriages, or simply limited economic and social status (*e.g.* Connell, 1985a; Graves, 1984:367). In Kiribati, for example, the possibility of migration makes it easier for young people to evade the family and church pressures that customarily enforced stable marriage (Lambert,

1975:264). Migrant women (and men) may also be those who have flouted traditional norms and restrictions.

There is little information on the extent to which migration of women in the South Pacific region is autonomous or passive. A study of Namoluk atoll (Federated States of Micronesia) revealed that between 1971 and 1976 there had been a massive increase in female migration, first, because women increasingly obtained a secondary education previously denied them by cultural and social attitudes and, secondly, because few eligible young men remained on the island (Marshall, 1979:3–5). In 1971, of 37 women who were away from the atoll, only 4 had employment (Marshall, 1975:181) and, for nearby Etal atoll in 1968, only 2 of 37 women absent had employment (Nason, 1975:140); in both cases most of the remainder were either at school or accompanying their husbands or parents. Evidence for a similar era from nearby Kiribati gives similar results. Among migrants in urban Tarawa only 8 percent of women had moved for employment compared with 52 percent who had accompanied their spouses or other relatives; for men the comparable percentages were 56 percent and 9 percent (Bedford, 1968:31). Between 1961 and 1971 two thirds of all migrants from Makin atoll (Kiribati) travelled as the dependents of job-holders (Lambert, 1975:247) and none of these job-holders were recorded as women. These studies were undertaken largely before the more rapid expansion of bureaucratic employment that opened up wider opportunities for women.

Elsewhere, for example in large parts of Melanesia, women rarely migrated either to join their husbands or to take up employment until at least the 1960s. In Siwai (North Solomons Province, Papua New Guinea) it was not until 1967 that there is any record of women working outside Siwai; less than a decade later, in 1974–1976, some 15 of a sample of 121 people employed outside Siwai were women while rather fewer were living with their migrant husbands (Connell, 1985a). In 1971 less than 5 percent of all migrants from Mount Hagen in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) were women, and almost all were wives of Hagen migrants (Strathern, 1975:389). The 1975 Rural Survey of Papua New Guinea found that 56 percent of females in urban areas migrated to accompany their husbands or parents and only 9 percent to seek work (Clunies-Ross, 1977), although the number was quite substantial. In the most remote parts of Papua New Guinea, such as Wovan, women have never yet moved away from a very localized home area, where their mobility was essentially for marriage (Flanagan, 1981). When plantation economies dominated Melanesia women did not migrate with men since there were no jobs for them, colonial policy restricted female residence in labor lines and women had a significant part in maintaining the predominantly subsistence agricultural system (Connell and Curtain, 1982:467–469; Barnes, 1981). The legacy and legitimacy of this form of migration has not yet disappeared; however, in

some areas, women migrate on their own volition to work on plantations (Burce, 1981:148). Recent data from around Mount Hagen show that, in a number of cases, women take up coffee plantation employment while their husbands remain in the villages (Johnson, 1984). Thus, although there are massive variations within a single country in the region, and overall virtually no evidence on the different factors influencing male and female migration, there is now widespread evidence of both increasingly autonomous female migration and also of increasing migration of women to join their husbands. For autonomous migration economic explanations appear paramount.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

The sex selectivity of migration has implications for demographic change. When migration was primarily of men there is much evidence that this slowed the birth rate; in early colonial times in parts of Papua New Guinea the proportion of absent males was so great and the rural birth rate fell so sharply that colonial authorities attempted to limit labor recruiting in some areas (Oliver, 1973:81), primarily to protect future labor supplies. More recently, in the case of Rotuma, Fiji, migration away from the island was regarded as one means of family planning (Howard, 1961). In some rather unusual cases, where male migration continues to predominate, spouses are older than in pre-migration periods. For example, on Ontong Java (Solomon Islands), so many young men have left that few males remain on the atoll and females now marry at more advanced ages (Bayliss-Smith, 1975:467; *cf.* Levin, 1976:187; Lambert, 1975:262). This is further likely to reduce fertility. Elsewhere the situation is more complex. For example in the Outer Reef islands of the Solomon Islands the total fertility rate rose among remaining females as the total number of females decreased through migration (Davenport, 1975:112), a situation which poses interesting questions on causality. More commonly however, as exemplified in the rather extreme case of Eauripik atoll, Yap State (Federated States of Micronesia), where migration has caused an increase in the number of biologically close relatives left on the island, and since three-quarters of all persons on the atoll have kin term references within one ascending or descending generation, few eligible spouses remain on the atoll (Levin, 1976:255). This too reduces fertility. However changes towards more balanced sex structures of migration and the demise of long-term labor contracts have tended to limit the impact of migration on reduced fertility although, especially where male migration predominates (as in large parts of Papua New Guinea), the effect may still be considerable. More generally, other trends in the region may have resulted in increases in fertility that counteract any decline following migration, hence the direct impact of migration on the level of fertility in the

region is now limited.

The major impact of migration on fertility is through the transfer of fertility from one part of a country to another, usually from rural areas to urban areas, or outside that country. On Namoluk atoll, Truk state (Federated States of Micronesia), Marshall recorded that 90 percent of the *de jure* population in the age group 15–29 had left the atoll (1979:10). In this kind of situation a high proportion of children born to Namoluk people are born off-island. Much the same is true in outer islands in other countries and for some countries, and especially in the case of Wallisians and Futunans in New Caledonia (Rallu, 1982), one result is that migrants, and especially those children born outside the home village or country, increasingly lose their village, island or national identity, experience problems of ethnicity and, perhaps most important, find that they have only minimal residual claims to land, and hence development opportunities, in their 'home' areas. This is exacerbated by intermarriage between language and cultural groups (*See*, below).

LOCAL IMPACT

Overriding in significance most other forms of migration is rural-urban migration (both national and international) hence the principal destinations of migrants are towns and cities within the South Pacific and beyond. Not all migrants find employment. Underemployment (or formal unemployment) is usually higher for women than men in the towns of the Pacific, since women tend to have fewer formal skills and lower education levels and must therefore tend to depend on unskilled work (such as child-minding and domestic cleaning) for income. Similarly, in Melanesia, women who live but do not work in town, may not be able to obtain garden land and may lose any real opportunity to be economically productive while simultaneously losing contact with rural culture. Thus in Morobe (Papua New Guinea) "many migrant women are frustrated by the lack of gardens and the consequent loss of their role as providers and domestic managers. A kind of modern diaspora but without a sense of destiny" (Townsend, 1980:286). There is some evidence that newly migrant wives in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) experience greater psychic strain than more established urban or rural wives (Lechte, 1978:166). The decline in woman's role in urban areas has been documented (*e.g.* Dalton, 1979:49, 59), as has the decline in primary social relationships and hence social, psychological and economic support (Dalton, 1979:67–75). Female social life revolves around casual visiting, with a restricted group of visitors or fellow urban residents; it is the boredom that follows from this restrictedness, and its separation from rural kin and society, that is mainly responsible for female disenchantment with urban life (Connell, 1985b). For most women there is no

personal meaning in staying in town hence the village continues to remain their point of reference (Dalton, 1979:95; Strathern, 1975:391). Other evidence from Papua New Guinea does however indicate that, over time, women do participate more fully in urban life, establish new urban ties and relinquish traditional ties (Oeser, 1969; Whiteman, 1973); they may nevertheless retain a highly dependent and peripheral position with reference to males and to urban society and economy. This situation is quite different for autonomous female migrants but there is no information on their changing social and economic status.

At village level there are a range of social effects of migration and these are difficult to distinguish from social changes occurring for other reasons. Where male migration predominates the economic and social status of other groups, and especially women, remaining in rural areas, may change considerably. The absence of predominantly male labor tends to lead to a changing sexual division of labor, as some traditional male jobs become partly female jobs. In several parts of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea the wives of migrants maintain their coffee gardens and, through the sale of coffee, have become for the first time part of the decision-making process regarding the allocation of money and wealth earned by their own time and labor and, because of this, many have gained prestige (Hayano, 1979:44–5; Schiltz and Josephides, 1981:140) although there are often serious disputes over the ownership of money from cash crops (*e.g.* Strathern, 1982:314, 317) and, in some areas, women do not keep the money from crops they have tended, harvested and sold (*e.g.* Reay, 1975:6). In a wide range of areas it is common for women to have increasing responsibility for cash crops and this extra responsibility has sometimes had unusual effects; in at least one case in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea the increased economic, and hence social, status of women has resulted in a significant decline in the suicide rate (Johnson, 1981).

Invariably, throughout the Pacific, women (and, to a lesser extent, children) carry out extra work even in those parts of Melanesia where male agricultural work is of limited importance. Thus in Duidui village, Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands), at the season of peak out-migration, 3- to 6-year olds, the elderly and the infirm were all obliged to carry water, prepare vegetables, supervise infants and keep the village swept and weeded while the women worked (Chapman, 1969; *cf.* Boyd, 1981). In Solomon Islands the extra burdens on women, alongside high population growth rates, have contributed to female life expectancies being less than those of males. Women are not always able to undertake all the agricultural tasks; in Orokaiva some jobs were left undone and if the husband's absence was prolonged some kinds of agriculture could not be maintained; women might become attached to other families and eventually remarry (Baxter, 1973:105–7). If women are overworked and can-

not maintain the agricultural system, nutrition may suffer. In the Oksapmin area of Papua New Guinea, where levels of male outmigration are high, malnutrition seems to have been a direct result (Cape, 1980:6). In a somewhat similar area "the most likely cause of high malnutrition rates in the Okapa District is the very high rate of absenteeism particularly amongst adult men" (Bourke and Allen, 1979:15) and, nearby, women discouraged their husbands from labor migration (Boyd, 1984:36). In another similar area in Chimbu Province a number of village women had inadequate support and were often hungry; physical and emotional support, which were inter-linked, were both lacking (Dalton, 1979:72). Finally, in a third similar area, in Southern Highlands Province, a high level of child malnutrition occurred and women appeared 'to be working themselves to the point of exhaustion' (Allen *et al.*, 1980:132). Since little attention has been given to these kinds of issues the extent to which they are typical remains unknown. Subsistence production must fall following outmigration, but the extent to which it falls relative to the number of the remaining population is far from clear. One estimate for Papua New Guinea is that it will not fall until over a third of young men are absent (Harris, 1972), but this is a bold assumption, without proof, and may well demand extra inputs of women's labor beyond reasonable limits.

Much of the most dramatic impact of migration necessarily occurs where it is both long-term and extensive. On Merir Island (Palau) one observer recorded the last years of permanent settlement:

> the island is dying, at least as far as the present generation are concerned . . . . The women are too old to cultivate taro in any quantity and the men cannot keep the coconut groves cleared.
> (Osborne, 1966:49)

In this case both men and women together could not maintain the economy. Much the same is true on Pitcairn Island (Connell, 1984c) where an increasingly aging and declining population are extensively supported from off the island.

The overall impact of migration on agricultural production varies from place to place. Output is most likely to fall where family migration is more common, as in large parts of Polynesia, and in areas where males make a greater contribution to agricultural production, as also throughout Polynesia. Migration reduces the availability of family farm labor (which is rarely surplus) hence extra labor may be hired to replace the migrant's labor but, in some areas including most coffee-growing areas of Papua New Guinea, a shortage of labor has contributed to a full harvest of cash crops not being made (Jones and Ward, 1981). In a number of areas there has been a general decline

of marginal or more distant land, accentuated in a number of parts of Melanesia especially by migration from more remote areas (mountains and small islands) to more accessible, often urban, locations. A decline in the availability of rural labor, alongside changing attitudes to agricultural work, has also resulted in a shift of labor inputs from food crops to cash crops and the substitution of more labor-intensive crops (such as taro) by less labor-intensive crops (such as sweet potato and cassava), and the widespread decline of the subsistence agricultural system. The variety of food plants has sometimes decreased, the nutritional value of diets has often worsened and imports of foods have increased.

Changing demands on women's work are not solely the result of migration; men may also spend increasing proportions of time on activities that are not directly productive (including social, political, ceremonial activity and gambling) and the establishment of cash cropping places further demands on women's labor beyond traditional subsistence activities (*cf.* Barnes, 1981:275). At the same time they may not acquire claims to the cash crops, while cash crop groves may displace garden land over which their control was clear (Strathern, 1982:312). Women are not therefore marginalized by being allocated solely the labor intensive, poorly paid or under-enumerated activities but are marginalized through receiving additional tasks which not only restrict their ability to participate in non-productive activities but place heavy demands on them and their time. Throughout the region the rate of natural increase has increased in post-war years, sometimes to remarkably high levels (in several countries over 3%); most obviously this has resulted in South Pacific societies having greater numbers and proportions of dependent children. The burden of this dependency (and, of course, reproduction) is primarily experienced by women who invariably have the major role in child care. This has further reduced their time available for other activities. Moreover reduction in the fallow period, in areas of increasing population pressure on resources, or more distant gardening have both placed increasing demands on women, at least in Melanesia, as soil fertility is reduced. In some areas, for example Ponape (Federated States of Micronesia), where once women had produced the exchange goods that knitted together their society, handcrafts have been replaced by imported commodities and women have come to rely on agriculture and men's wage labor; from a position of causal partnership in production women have been turned into consumers (Petersen, 1982:137). And, in Western Samoa:

> As the female productive sphere has declined, the male sphere of agriculture has expanded with a variety of new crops and techniques primarily directed to male producers. One result of these changes has been a shift of women's work from an autonomous and prestigious domain to

> a secondary, supplementary and less prestigious one.
> (Schoeffel, 1973:10)

The extent to which greater pressures on women's labor are compensated by greater participation in economic and political decision-making and the use of money is therefore variable, especially since there are substantial variations from place to place because of different forms of agricultural organization and different patterns of migration; even within the Highlands of Papua New Guinea there are quite striking variations (Connell, 1983b). Although there is a close and important relationship between migration and the welfare of women, that relationship is quite variable.

The absence of migrants is usually offset, if not compensated by, some form of resource transfer from the migrants to kin in the areas of origin. Again little is known of the use that women migrants make of cash incomes or the extent of women's remittances, except that in Mount Hagen women both sent and received significantly more goods to and from their home villages than male migrants (Wright, 1979:121-2); this may have resulted from either their shorter period of urban residence and/or the greater probability of their return to the rural area (which may, in turn, reflect the fact that a significant proportion of female migrants are employed in jobs—nursing, teaching and secretarial work—where there are some rural employment opportunities). In Western Samoa there is some evidence that young single females are particularly encouraged by their families to migrate because they are the most dependable source of remittances (Shankman, 1976); whether this is because social responsibility is more strongly instilled in women or because they are more likely to return is not clear. Women, in many areas, are at least partly dependent on remittances for the maintenance of the domestic economy. In the Papua New Guinea (Gulf Province) village of Kukipi urban migrants were "sending home part of the means of subsistence . . . . This is quite a different pressure on urban incomes from one where gifts to people at home are luxuries and the timing of them more or less immaterial to the recipients" (Morauta and Hasu, 1979:31). In these kinds of situations women were often far from passive participants in migration and often arranged the departures of migrants in such a way that ties with remaining kin were solidified and strengthened in part through recasting the experience of migration into a more familiar localized ritual mould (*cf.* Lewis, 1980:212-214).

Once again little is known about the exact forms and extent of rural dependency and the role of migration and remittances in contributing to that dependency. There is, however, much information, mainly qualitative, on remittances to states and villages in the region, although there remains controversy over the extent to which remittances benefit the individuals and areas

that receive them. Doubtless, as in Lesotho, "women's experience ranges from relative security to bitter frustration, acute personal stress and emotional desolation" (Murray, 1981). Remittances maintain social ties, are principally used to repay debts, finance migration moves for kin and purchase consumer goods, including housing. Remittances may not go to those most in need; sometimes they are diverted to leaders (*cf.* Connell, 1980:16–17) and sometimes to relatives such as mother's brothers. Thus in the Chambri river area of Papua New Guinea, although virtually all labor migrants were men (an unknown proportion being married) women received fewer remittances than men (Gewertz, 1983:167). In general remittances reinforce a traditional set of values and, through the inequality of migration, tend to reinforce, rather than conflict with, the social hierarchy. They have contributed to limited economic growth, largely through their contribution to employment, but not to development, because of their very small role in investment, especially in agriculture, and their fuelling of inflation (Connell, 1980a, 1983a). The restricted opportunities for agricultural mechanization in the region, principally because of difficult terrain and the ubiquity of root and bush cash crops, have meant that remittances have not resulted in the replacement of labor by machinery but have rather contributed to the decline of agricultural systems in the South Pacific. Returning migrants, especially in the first years of contract migration, have however often returned with new plants, new ideas on crop cultivation (especially for cash crops) and new tools and technological innovations. Few of these seem to benefit women; for example returning migrants to Siane villages in the Central Highlands of Papua New Guinea brought back new men's tools but not women's tools, although women did most of the work (Salisbury, 1962:159). Elsewhere in Papua New Guinea innovations that would have saved women's time have been rejected by men (Rooney, 1974:41). More broadly there have been male objections to women's participation in commercial agriculture, through objection, criticism and attempts to withdraw land from women, as in the case of Western Samoa (Schoeffel, 1983:10). In these kinds of situations, and there are certainly others, women are denied the opportunity to participate in a more broadly-based economic development. For both economic and social reasons family structures are likely to weaken through migration, either of a single male or of a family. Migration itself has been noted to contribute to increased divorce rates. Male migrants may come to regard agricultural work as trivial and demeaning, and hence the value of rural life and a rural wife also declines. Both men and women may experience loneliness and psychological pressures that direct them towards new partners; others may gain strength from their separation and prefer a single status. Women may be unable to maintain agricultural systems, especially in the not unusual circumstances where communal work groups are disintegrating (*cf.* Connell, 1980:34), and thus necessarily attach themselves to other households.

Above all, migration may expose migrants to a greater variety of potential marriage patterns than exist within rural areas. In some circumstances this may result in quite dramatic social changes. For example in Siwai, one of some twenty language groups in Bougainville island (Papua New Guinea), perhaps the most striking aspect of marriage, at least until 1975, was the extremely short distance usually separating marriage partners. Between 1960 and 1975 a minimum of 34 percent of all marriages were contracted in the same village and the mean marriage distance was 2.2 kms; no more than 20 (5%) out of 426 marriages had one partner from beyond Siwai. However from a sample of 25 marriages between 1976 and 1981 some 11 (44%) had one partner from beyond Siwai. The potential contribution of this changing situation to social change is substantial; in Siwai it has resulted in a much more complex range of claims to land, and disputes over land tenure, emphasized by the fact that many Siwais spend substantial periods away from home and may not be fully conversant with the central elements of the land tenure system. This tends to result in more marital disharmony, more permanent urban residence and children having minimal contact with rural societies. This kind of change is particularly dramatic in small-scale Melanesian societies, where languages, social structures and customs vary over short distances, and is much less apparent in Polynesian or Micronesian societies. Overall the social changes that result from migration are complex, and difficult to differentiate from other similar social changes (Connell, 1984b) directed towards a decline in local cultural traditions, the convergence of cultures and the new discontents of modernity.

CONCLUSION

As in similar situations elsewhere in the world the impact of migration on women's lives is complex and variable. One the one hand women may gain independence, autonomy, competence in new skills and status, whether they are themselves migrants or remain in villages as household heads when male relatives leave. On the other hand they may lose independence and status (especially as 'passive' migrants to towns or through over-dependence on remittances), suffer poorer health and welfare (when the maintenance of necessary rural economic activities proves excessively demanding or urban incomes are poor) and become subjugated to men. It is apparent from one area alone, the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, that rather different situations may occur in superficially similar areas. That conclusions cannot be more precise is because few have made such studies and many perceived effects are a function of time, apart from local and national social and economic structures, and the perspectives of particular researchers. Equally, migration is only one

component of, and one influence upon, other social and economic changes in South Pacific societies. Overall relatively little is known about the changing distribution of power, status and authority between the sexes in South Pacific societies, or even changes in more tangible variables, such as the changing distribution of resources or nutrition and health status. The relationships between migration, these variables and other issues such as rural productivity and production, all crucial issues in the region, are even less well understood.

In more traditional South Pacific societies women and men generally perceived themselves and each other as living in complementarity and interdependence, not in competition, in societies that lacked the sharp separation between public and private spheres, family and community, work and play, religion and recreation that characterize industrialized nations (Rohrlich-Leavitt, 1975:625). While this may not always have been wholly true, since women may well have often been legally, politically and socially subjugated to men, the establishment of capitalism, and with it the emergence and consolidation of cash cropping, wage labor, migration and greater individualism within nuclear families, has tended to separate families from the community and women from men. The migration of men physically emphasizes this isolation and occasionally brings with it conflict, diversity and tension. In one part of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea:

> Crudely and quickly put men are fast becoming capitalists and women the proletariat or sub-proletariat. *Consistent with traditional patterns*, men manage, women are managed . . . . Capitalism may, at one stroke, increase the productive value of women and provide means for men to achieve public prestige both individually and collectively
> (Johnson, 1981:333; my emphasis).

While women may indeed acquire some increase in status and prestige from their participation in a greater range of economic and perhaps even social and political activities, men too may gain in prestige and status while the problems of peripheral capitalism, in a context where a "terminal peasantry" (Howlett, 1973) is more likely to be found, ensure that women are subjugated and that their new status is often illusory. Moreover pressures on women's time, and those pressures are increasingly apparent (*cf.* Reay, 1975; Smith, 1982), have actually reduced the ability of women to participate in a greater range of activities especially in contrast to men. These influences also contribute to new and increasing economic inequalities; while both men and women have gained in status and prestige others have just as surely lost them. These kinds of conclusions are valid elsewhere in Melanesia, and may well be valid for a much wider area of the South Pacific, as the cited cases of Western Samoa and Papua New Guinea suggest, even if the trajectory of change has been some-

what different.

The significance of women in more traditional social and economic organization in Melanesia has recently received renewed emphasis, resulting in the re-evaluation of a number of earlier ethnographic studies in which the power and status of women had been downplayed or ignored, casting some doubt on statements of traditional roles such as that of Johnson (1981) cited above (*cf.* Weiner, 1976:228; Feil, 1978:276). However, these issues are unresolved; a recent study of Mount Hagen (Papua New Guinea) society has argued against the harmonious interdependence of men and women but rather for a continuous struggle between them for the monopoly of power albeit giving validation to the continued male appropriation of female labor by constituting it not as appropriation but as interdependence (Hawkins, 1984:223). Yet, just at this time of reevaluation, these traditional structures have been disrupted by external influences. One reviewer, commenting on the significance of the accumulation of banana leaf bundles in the acquisition of power by Trobriand women, commented:

> life in Kiriwina is changing as a result of recent political integration and further intrusions of trade goods and Western cash into traditional exchanges. What kind of world, one wonders, would allow Trobriand women to abandon banana bundles to get into banana futures? (Lindenbaum, 1977:801)

The irony is that in the periphery the world of "banana futures" offers little to Pacific Islands women. Awa (Papua New Guinea) women are "exploited laborers on the capitalist fringe" (Boyd, 1984:36) but, more generally, women have become "more firmly locked into domestic and reproductive roles as a consequence of the type of economic change that has been fostered" (Young, 1978:153). It is nevertheless readily apparent that in most South Pacific societies some women have achieved new sources of power and status, whether political, social or economic, as higher education levels bring social change, new employment and material benefits. Yet in small South Pacific states and societies little of this social change is translated into long term economic changes that will ultimately benefit the status of men or women in the region.

The absence of information on issues relating to the migration of women virtually ensures that they are excluded from policy discussions and decisions relating to the provision of appropriate social services or employment opportunities, in the areas of origin or destination, that might influence the rate, duration and content of the migration flow in accordance with national policy. This exclusion is not unusual in the South Pacific region, has been well documented for agricultural policy formation (Bathgate, 1975:901; Lechte, 1978:157; Connell, 1980b:1), and reflects a situation where the emancipation

of women is widely feared by men (Lechte, 1978:169). As women's awareness of social and economic opportunities increases, aspirations rise and social constraints to employment and mobility decline so that migration and the search for employment by women (whether rural, urban or overseas) is likely to intensify at a time when general employment opportunities may not be increasing. In this context it is particularly important to ensure that job and welfare opportunities for women are available in the right place at the right time. The available evidence, and there is too little of it, suggests that for the moment migration has tended to contribute to marginalization, peripheralization and dependency and that the burdens of these changes tend to be experienced by women rather than men.

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