Introduction

◆●◆

When August was fifteen years old, he left his small home island of Paama to attend a wedding in Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. After the celebrations ended, August's uncle did what all urban kin 'should' do, and found him a job in town. Twenty-five years later, August was living in one of Vila's many informal settlements, married to a woman from a different island and still working for the same employer. While most of August's children lived with him in Vila, one daughter lived on Paama with her uncle, who was caretaking the family's rural assets. August's other children had limited knowledge of their rural 'home' and spoke little of the Paamese language, preferring instead to communicate in Bislama, the Pidgin English that is Vanuatu's lingua franca. Unlike many of his kin, August held steady employment as airport ground staff, meaning he was able to slowly stockpile materials for the permanent house he planned to one day build in town. He dreamed of eventually returning to Paama, but first he had various goals to achieve, such as putting his children through school and setting himself up as a successful businessman on 'the island', the phrase that most Paamese use to describe what they perceive of as home. Yet, marrying a wife from a different island inevitably made return difficult. August had benefitted from his life in town, but believed island life was superior and longed for the simpler ways of his rural village.

Focusing on those who, like August, belong to the urban Paamese community in Vanuatu, and their kin on Paama, this book uses longitudinal data to explore continuity and change in urbanisation and migration over a generation. It reveals, at the very least, that migration and urbanisation are fraught with uncertainties and imponderables. Paamese experiences of mobility and town are populated by themes familiar throughout the Pacific and elsewhere in the Global South, where urbanisation has occurred relatively recently and rapidly, urban life is characterised by precarity, and rural villages are thought of as the 'proper' place to live. Theirs are stories of

unintended permanence, ambivalence and longing, and geographically sep-arated families that remain intimately connected. Such stories are becoming increasingly common as urban populations continue to grow; by 2030, some 60 per cent of the world's population will probably live in urban areas (UN HABITAT 2014). In the Global South, the scale and velocity of urbanisa-tion has outstripped that of developed nations, megacities have emerged, and new urban hierarchies and networks have evolved (Davis 2006). While Pacific Island cities may be small by global standards, a combination of rapid urbanisation and high population growth means infrastructure and services have been unable to keep pace with population needs, and, for many, urban life is characterised by the grind of poverty and hardship.

In the Global South, rural-urban migration has been a key driver of urban population growth, and remains significant in many regions. Yet, as international mobility has become increasingly common and technology has facilitated new forms of and opportunities for mobility, rural-urban migration has largely disappeared from research agendas, despite internal moves usually being the most significant form of global mobility in terms of population shifts. As studies of international and internal mobility gen-erally draw upon different data sources, methodologies, funding opportu-nities and disciplines, they tend to be treated as separate phenomena, and research at the international scale has contributed little to understandings of internal migration (King and Skeldon 2010). Consequently, contem-porary patterns of rural-urban migration are often poorly understood, with the result that policy and planning – where they exist – are seldom effective.

In the Melanesian states of Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands, migration is almost solely internal, and while the rela-tive contribution of natural increase to urban population growth is rising, rural-urban migration has historically been at the root of rapidly expand-ing urban populations (Connell and Lea 1994). Nonetheless, and despite mounting evidence to the contrary (e.g. Lindstrom 2011; Mecartney 2001; Petrou and Connell 2017) popular discourse has it that migration to town is temporary and that problems such as limited housing, high unemploy-ment and rising poverty and inequality would resolve themselves if only migrants would just return 'home'. Yet, evidence from around the Pacific suggests many have nowhere else to go, as access rights to rural land and resources are eroding and many second-generation migrants have limited experience of these rural 'home' places (Kraemer 2013; Thornton 2017). At the same time, town life is precarious; urban residents struggle to earn cash incomes as economies stagnate, housing tenure is uncertain and infor-mal settlements – which are home to a significant and growing proportion of urban populations – are often located on marginal land. Furthermore,

as cultural and language groups are thrown together in ways never experienced in traditional society, inter-ethnic tensions can result, leading to conflict, accusations of witchcraft and violence (Rio 2011). There are no easy solutions to these problems, which are compounded by a lack of data to plan effectively, scarce resources to enact policy and planning, limited management expertise and the ever-present threat of climate change. While there is now a growing recognition of urban planning issues (e.g. Keen 2017; Keen et al. 2017), and the need to address them, many aspects of urban (and rural) life remain poorly understood.

Rapid urbanisation and migration are but two manifestations of the increasing globalisation of economies, cultures and societies. Yet, rather than resulting in a global monoculture, local communities' experiences of these processes are rarely, if ever, uniform or straightforward. Rather, local encounters with modernity are often messy and non-linear, and vary over time and space (Connell 2018; Lindstrom 2018). As promises of a 'modern' future that is better and different from the past have failed to materialise in many areas of the Global South, local values have informed these experiences of 'alternative' or 'fractured' modernities (Gregory and Altman 2018). Indeed, there is an extensive literature on the ability of existing social structures to accommodate and adapt to change while remaining grounded in local ideologies and institutions (e.g. Connell 2007; Curry 2003; Curry et al. 2012; Thornton et al. 2010); generalisations about how modernity will or 'should' unfold are nigh impossible. Even within a single community, attitudes to and negotiations of modernity and tradition vary with context; seemingly simple acts such as attending school or building a 'modern' brick house may be seen as both desirable markers of development and threats to traditional values (R. Smith 2018). Ambivalent experiences of 'failed' or 'stalled' modernity are, for now, largely limited to those who live precariously in remote locations of the Global South such as Melanesia. However, Bruce Knauft (2019) argues that as promises of ever-expanding economic growth fail to be met globally, and lifestyles begin to stagnate, Melanesian experiences may be forerunners to an increasingly common global condition.

This book seeks to follow processes of migration and urbanisation over a period of almost three decades and examine what this has meant for the people of the small island of Paama. It will consider their role in the urban expansion of Port Vila, the implications for broad understandings of changing rural and urban livelihoods, the opportunities and pitfalls of modernity and tradition (such as urban living, cash cropping and persistent social values), the contested nature of change, and the multiple challenges of securing 'development' and achieving resilience in a small island state.

Longitudinal Research: Looking to the Past to Understand the Present

Using data collected at different points in time, longitudinal research emphasises temporal processes. In the case of migration and urbanisation, restudies challenge the simplistic notion that migration ends upon arrival, usually in urban destinations (e.g. Kemper 2002; Kemper and Foster 1975), and emphasise the significance of ongoing interactions between urban and rural populations. More generally, longitudinal restudies chart processes of continuity and change, rather than simply offering conjectures (Vandergeest and Rigg 2012), and distinguish one-off events at a particular time from ongoing patterns and processes (Howard and Rensel 2004; Meggitt 1979). Restudies further enable researchers to 'check' their interpretations of past events (Harrison 2001; O. Lewis 1951), which in turn provides opportunities to reflect upon changes to disciplines and research methods over time (N. Lewis 2018; Lutkehaus 1995). In addition, restudies may allow researchers to revisit places that have changed in unpredictable ways whether through natural disaster (Connell and Lutkehaus 2017) or human agency such as civil war or violence (Connell 2007; McDougall 2016), facilitating new understandings and interpretations. Longitudinal research can thus highlight the non-linear and often unpredictable routes that change may take. It is not uncommon for researchers to work with one community ('their' community) for an extended period. Nonetheless, comprehensive restudies of the Pacific, and elsewhere, remain rare (Connell 2007). Various reasons account for this, including changes to research interests, academic disciplines and study sites over time (Carucci 2004; Flinn 2004); time constraints, particularly where field sites may be remote or difficult to access (Howard and Barker 2004); and a fear that restudies may be seen as repetitive rather than innovative, with associated funding issues. In addition, previous researchers may be reluctant to share 'their' field sites with newcomers (Foster 1979), preventing the next generation from taking up where they left off. Some projects simply do not lend themselves to longitudinal restudies, but many topics, urbanisation and migration amongst them, benefit significantly from a longitudinal view.

In the Pacific, longitudinal research most often takes the form of rural-based ethnographies, and there has been a perhaps natural tendency to concentrate on highlighting change rather than processes of continuity. As a result, themes such as modernity, individualism, monetisation and technological change are common. Thus, in PNG, Knauft's (2002) reflections on working with the Gebusi between the 1980s and 1998, and Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington's (1991) intermittent fifteen years of research with the Chambri both described periods of transition

and negotiations of modernity, while discussion of continuity was mostly absent. Similarly, writing about her experiences in Tonga spanning three decades from the 1980s, Cathy Small (2011) focused on the decreasing reciprocity, and increased individualism, that resulted from penetration of the cash economy into all aspects of village life. The presence of new technology (satellite dishes, electronics, etc.), vehicles and new housing styles provided a constant visual reminder of these changes. Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson's (2009) reflections on forty years of research in Samoa focused on the global forces that had driven change, as Samoans became more connected to the outside world. Similarly, Anne Chambers and Keith Chambers (2018) found that over the four decades in which they had worked in Tuvalu, the 'distinctiveness' of island life had decreased, as many Tuvaluans sought to engage with the wider world. By contrast, in Tokelau, Antony Hooper (1993) noted the continuity of village structures between 1967 and 1981, but his analysis concentrated on changes to the village's 'ideological productive style'. On the Sepik island of Kairiru in PNG, Michael French Smith (2002, 2013) discovered that issues including land tenure, leadership and access to cash, which had been a source of conflict in the 1970s, continued to provide fodder for disagreements a generation later. Kinship exerted as powerful an influence on livelihoods as it had previously done. Again, however, Smith's main concern was with islanders' interpretations and negotiations of modernity. Thus, while recognition of continuity is not altogether absent, it is often only a minor focus of existing restudies, and change appears more exciting and occasionally dramatic. Indeed, returning researchers may be disappointed when restudies reveal predicted pathways to modernity have not materialised (Connell and Lee 2018b), and it is not surprising, therefore, that some appear tempted to forecast impending change, even where continuity has hitherto been significant (e.g. Firth 1959).

Of course, there are several important exceptions to this focus on change, both in the Pacific and elsewhere. Some of these restudies are ethnographic; in PNG, Nancy Lutkehaus (1995) recorded the persistence of chiefly leadership amongst the Manam, an aspect of social life that her predecessor Camilla Wedgwood had predicted would disappear. Based on her work with Tongans dating back to 1979, Helen Lee (2018) argued Tongan child socialisation was characterised by fundamental continuities, namely the persistence of Tongan cultural values, and the relative lack of change in quotidian aspects of life. Continuity and change were far from being linear and predictable, and in Bougainville (PNG), John Connell (2018) found that while Siwai life had undergone massive change between 1988 and 2001, economic life had remained largely unchanged from 2001 to 2016, a source of frustration for many villagers. Most often, however, continuities seem to be

observed in livelihood studies, perhaps because such data is quantitative and hence less susceptible to changing interpretations or research approaches, or simply because livelihoods rarely change quickly (Connell and Lee 2018a). Thus, returning to Raymond Firth's field site, the tiny Polynesian island of Tikopia in the Solomon Islands, Ole Mertz and colleagues (2010) recorded great continuity in food production and consumption systems between the 1930s and 2002. Similarly, on Bellona Island in the Solomon Islands, Torben Birch-Thomsen and colleagues (2010) discovered that despite increased population, a greater reliance on imported foodstuffs and non-agricultural livelihood strategies meant land use patterns had remained relatively unchanged since the 1960s. In some instances, change was itself a form of continuity; in Chimbu (PNG), changing land tenure systems were not a postcolonial phenomenon but rather represented a continuous pattern over the last century (Brown et al. 1990). On the atoll of Ontong Java in the Solomon Islands, both resilience and adaptability marked islanders' mobility and ability to cope with changing livelihood opportunities since the 1970s; continuity and change were both evident as the bêche-de-mer trade brought cycles of prosperity and economic collapse (Christensen 2011; Christensen and Gough 2012). Finally, returning to Kadavu Island (Fiji) more than twenty years after his original fieldwork, Michael Sofer (2009, 2018) found the island's economy and patterns of production remained largely unchanged. Continuity of livelihood strategies, which are both resilient and adaptable, has thus been relatively well documented for certain regions of the Pacific but especially on the smaller, more remote islands, distant from obvious forces of change.

Although Vanuatu has been the subject of numerous ethnographic studies, longitudinal restudies remain surprisingly rare. In South West Bay, on Malakula, Joan Larcom (1983) drew upon Bernard Deacon's work to inform her own research with the Mewun, for whom she concluded place was of longstanding importance. She argued this was an insight she might have missed without access to Deacon's own data. A decade after the original study at Port Vila Central Hospital, Yan Lai and Robert Grace (2014) predicted rates of decline in traditional medicine use meant it would soon disappear; change was anticipated to proceed along a straight line from tradition to modernity. In contrast, Lamont Lindstrom's (2011, 2018) work over several decades with Samaria villagers from Tanna highlighted the unpredictable, cyclic routes that change may take. Based on his general observations over the period, Lindstrom concluded urban Tannese were part of the first generation of one-way migrants to Port Vila, and most would never return 'home' to Tanna. Even so, change had not followed a simple trajectory from tradition to modernity, and customary practices that were once in decline, such as traditional dance, had been revived to attract

the tourist dollar. Thorgeir Kolshus's (2017) work with Mota islanders, too, emphasised the unanticipated nature of change, as islanders' mobility reflected altered conditions in town and home places; whereas Vila was once perceived as a place of opportunity, as town life became increasingly difficult, Mota island came to represent a comparative safe haven from urban hardship. Michael Allen (2011) and others in John Taylor and Nick Thieberger's (2011) edited collection provided general reflections on long-term research associations and collaborations with various communities throughout Vanuatu, spanning colonial times through to the present day. For the most part, however, these restudies focused on simply noting broad changes, as research interests had changed over time, and collecting detailed longitudinal data was not always feasible, particularly when returns to the field were brief (e.g. Lindstrom 2011) or disappointingly superficial.

While existing restudies have often highlighted the fairly predictable aspects of change, other, more fundamental organising principles of cultural life have invariably persisted. Yet, this continuity (as well as many changes) would not always have been apparent without the use of longitudinal data. Recognising the extra insight that may be gained from employing a longitudinal lens, this book was fortunate in being able to utilise Gerald Haberkorn's (1987, 1989) detailed study of Paamese rural-urban mobility and urbanisation, centred on fieldwork spanning 1982 to 1983, as baseline data. Haberkorn's findings are compared with similar data collected roughly a generation later, in 2011. Drawing upon these two data sets, this book asks how processes of urbanisation and migration have changed or persisted, and seeks to record why this might have been so, rather than merely speculate on how this has occurred.

Translocalism: Many Homes, One Community

Before proceeding any further, it is important to note that while Pacific populations are often described as being either 'urban' or 'rural' (indeed, the chapters of this book are organised in this manner), this is an artificial division that does not reflect the daily lived realities of these communities. Rather, 'rural' and 'urban' populations are deeply intertwined within a steady flow of goods, people and information travelling back and forth between the two locations: in many respects, geographical location is irrelevant to the maintenance of kinship ties. At the same time, it would be quite incorrect to suggest life in rural areas is at all identical with that in urban areas. In fact, there is an increasing gap between urban and rural lives and outcomes, which largely relates to structural factors including the concentration of education, employment and other services in town. Put simply, and despite their ongoing interconnection, the lived realities of

migrants and non-migrants remain grounded in particular physical locations (Brickell and Datta 2011). Consequently, 'rural' and 'urban' remain important categories for Pacific Islanders' understandings and negotiations of opportunities, experiences and behavioural norms. Nonetheless, there are certain similarities between the two locations that are often glossed over: urban residents may live largely subsistence lifestyles, while houses in rural areas may be built and furnished with many of the trappings normally associated with urban lifestyles (brick houses with fridges and so forth). There is thus a 'blurring' of divides between rural and urban populations, in terms of both physical environments and social lives, as migrant and non-migrant communities remain part of a single multilocal social network. Focusing on these translocal connections not only emphasises the inherently spatial nature of mobility as it links locations across space and place, but by examining how global level processes are experienced at the local level, translocalism also highlights the connections and commonalities between seemingly isolated communities – such as the Paamese – and the wider world.

Book Outline

Having now introduced the main themes of this book, chapter 1 provides a short history of urbanisation and migration in Vanuatu, drawing parallels with the wider Pacific, as well as other nations of the Global South, and says something of the methodology and data collection employed in this research. It highlights the enduring cultural importance of mobility and how it has evolved over time, alongside the recent and rapid rise of urban areas. Unplanned urbanisation, together with significant and sustained population growth, has resulted in problems relating to urban housing, environmental degradation, unemployment and crime, but urban planning is yet in its infancy.

Chapter 2 introduces the realities of life on Paama, a small, mountainous outer island known for its high levels of outmigration. Despite its small size and propensity for outmigration, Paama is in many ways similar to other rural areas of Vanuatu and more generally to the Global South in its orientation to subsistence agriculture, small-scale market production and close kinship relations. For rural Paamese, substantial continuity was evident in lives and livelihoods, and many aspects of village demography had scarcely changed. Despite an increasing desire for consumer items such as DVD players and mobile phones, livelihood opportunities remained much the same as a generation ago, and the mismatch between rural income and expenditure persisted and increased, as aspirations and expectations have grown. Paama thus provides a useful local case study whose conclusions are of much wider significance.

Chapter 3 focuses on the rural social environment and its influence on livelihood opportunities. Little had changed in social organisation or in time-consuming community work commitments that continued to limit villagers' ability to engage in livelihood activities, and fuelled rural out-migration, as Paamese could not meet their financial needs locally. The introduction of mobile phones not only facilitated the flow of goods to and from town but also increased both the ease and speed at which remittance requests were made and information was shared. Nonetheless, from a rural perspective, phones primarily reinforced pre-existing relationships and, in the absence of other changes, had not revolutionised social organisation or livelihood opportunities. Influenced by the largely unchanged access to social, human, natural and financial capital, Paamese successfully combined on- and off-island livelihood strategies, much as they had been doing for at least a generation.

Chapter 4 considers patterns of island-based mobility including attitudes towards and experiences of migration. Despite the widely acknowledged difficulties associated with town life, including limited housing, high unemployment and the need to pay for things that are free on Paama, migration to town continued much as it had done for generations. This was explained by the strong culture of migration and the poverty of opportunities on the island; mobility to access education, employment and health services was perceived as a necessity. At the same time, mobility norms reflected and had evolved alongside wider changes to social norms.

Mobility from an urban perspective is discussed in chapter 5. The trend towards urban permanence continued, however much that was unintended, yet migrants remained ambivalent about urban life, and many claimed they would one day return home. When that failed to occur, as was the case for August, a second generation, many of whom had little real experience of Paama, steadily emerged as an urban proletariat. These individuals represent Vanuatu's first most obviously urban generation, and face an uncertain future as urban opportunities (employment, housing and even the availability of peri-urban agricultural land) diminish. The ongoing role of kin relationships in determining urban commitment and opportunities is highlighted; just as in the past, kin ties continued to structure migration flows and opportunities both to and from Port Vila.

Urban sociality is discussed in chapter 6. In town, people of all kinds lived together in informal settlements and formal suburbs; housing was not an indicator of socio-economic status, and the line between formal and informal living was blurred. Port Vila itself was a vibrant, exciting place, but it was also fraught with danger and uncertainty as Paamese found themselves negotiating new social relationships that did not exist in homogenous rural villages. Whereas in the past, the urban Paamese community was small and

tight-knit, by 2011 the 'community' had grown and splintered. Evidence was emerging of tentative class formation, and Paamese had begun to form new social networks based on place of residence, employment and church affiliation. As in the past, kin networks remained integral to urban survival, but they were no longer the only networks Paamese relied upon.

Chapter 7 details the realities and economic hardships associated with contemporary urban life, including access to education, high unemployment and the necessary involvement in the cash economy. For most urban residents, meeting even basic needs was a struggle. Women's employment levels had increased, but so too had levels of unemployment. The gap between those who earned cash incomes and those who did not was significant, and although remittances were vital in reinforcing and sustaining ties with rural kin, many urban Paamese could no longer afford to participate in this exchange. While economic and social success were not unheard of, and social mobility was possible, for most Paamese migrants, life in town was often difficult, yet for many there was no option but to remain.

Chapter 8 concludes by drawing together the themes raised in previous chapters and reflects upon the extra insights offered by longitudinal data. It highlights the continuity in many aspects of Paamese livelihoods and mobility, which simultaneously reflected broader processes of social and economic change, through which migrants from a small Vanuatu island in the capital city have not always fared well. At the same time, new social situations available in the urban environment had led to distinct forms of hybrid social organisation that blended the traditional and the modern. Underscoring all of this, however, was the enduring significance of kinship bonds, the importance of maintaining kin relationships and cherishing and nurturing rural roots in a variety of ways.

Note

Parts of this chapter are taken from Petrou (2017).