



THE
NANSEN
INITIATIVE

DISASTER-INDUCED CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT

PACIFIC DIASPORA: MOBILITY, TRANSNATIONALISM, AND IDENTITY OF TUVALU

DISCUSSION PAPER

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DISASTERS
CLIMATE CHANGE AND
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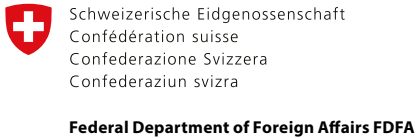


TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. ABSTRACT | 4 |
| 2. EMBODIMENT OF MOBILITY..... | 4 |
| 3. CULTURAL RETENTION AND DAILY PRACTICES 'FAKA TUVALU' | 6 |
| 4. MALAGA: EXCHANGE TRIP BETWEEN TUVALU AND NEW ZEALAND | 6 |
| 5. COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES | 6 |
| 6. E-RELATIONSHIPS IN CYBERSPACE | 8 |
| APPENDIX..... | 9 |
| 1. BASELINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE | 9 |
| 2. FEAST DAYS AND CONTRIBUTION..... | 9 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 10 |



1. ABSTRACT

Based on diverse dynamics of motivations, a large number of the Pacific Islanders have formed diasporic communities in metropolitan countries beyond boundaries. Transnational migration is not a new phenomenon among them as these practices with the continuous flow of remittances have been central to the socioeconomic development of Pacific microstates since the post-colonial era. This paper explores the questions of the impact of transnational migration of the Pacific Islanders and their maintenance of cultural values through their community activities. The findings I present here are based on qualitative analysis of transnational migration among the several Tuvaluan immigrant communities in Auckland, New Zealand. The Pacific diasporic islanders maintain their strong links to their homelands in multiple and complex ways, and the forms of mobility and transnationalism continue to shape their lives.

2. EMBODIMENT OF MOBILITY

The intergenerational patterns of mobility and the form of transnationalism in the Pacific Islands are closely associated with their post-colonial settings. They have been sustained by the awkward relationship between state-imposed conceptions and their own perceptions of socio-economic relatedness across national boundaries that emphasize kinship, reciprocity, and cultural identity. Tuvalu used to be part of the British Protectorate of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands until independence in 1978, and the separation of the Polynesian Ellice Islands from the Melanesian Gilbert Islands (now the Republic of Kiribati) in the middle of the 1970s caused the large-scale return migration and consequently the rapid growth in Tuvalu's urban population.¹ Although Kiribati and Tuvalu are now classified as belonging to different

geopolitical sub-regions, multicultural linkages² can be seen within a family unit. Ethnographers of Pacific diasporas have therefore seen the Pacific not just as a sea of islands, but also as a sea of families.³

The socioeconomic model in the South Pacific island states is conceptualized as 'MIRAB', where **M**igration, **R**emittances, **A**id and the resultant largely **B**ureaucracy comprise their socioeconomic system along with a common heritage of colonial welfarism (Bertram and Waters, 1985; Bertram, 1986). Particularly the characteristic of 'remittance-societies' has been central to the economy of the Pacific microstates, notably Tonga, Western Samoa, Cook Islands, Kiribati, and Tuvalu. As in Tonga, migration and remittances are intertwined as means for improving family welfare rather than for direct national economic development (Tongamoa, 1987: 67). Migration has also rarely been an individual decision to achieve individual goals, without due consideration of family network. Similarly in Tuvalu, according to the baseline survey⁴ that I carried out in 2007, approximately 30% of the households in Tuvalu relied on the remittances from their family members living abroad as primary income source. Figure 1 shows that the national economic resource of Tuvalu is highly dependent on remittances from migrant laborers and seafarers.

What follows in this chapter is an overview of the patterns of Tuvaluan migration to New Zealand. The bilateral contract on labor migration between Tuvalu and New Zealand goes back to the 1980s and 1990s, when the governments of Kiribati and Tuvalu sought new opportunities in overseas markets as they were aware that the Nauru phosphate industry rapidly shrunk. The number of Tuvaluan people in New Zealand currently represents more than one-third of the total population in Tuvalu and approximately 80% of these people live in

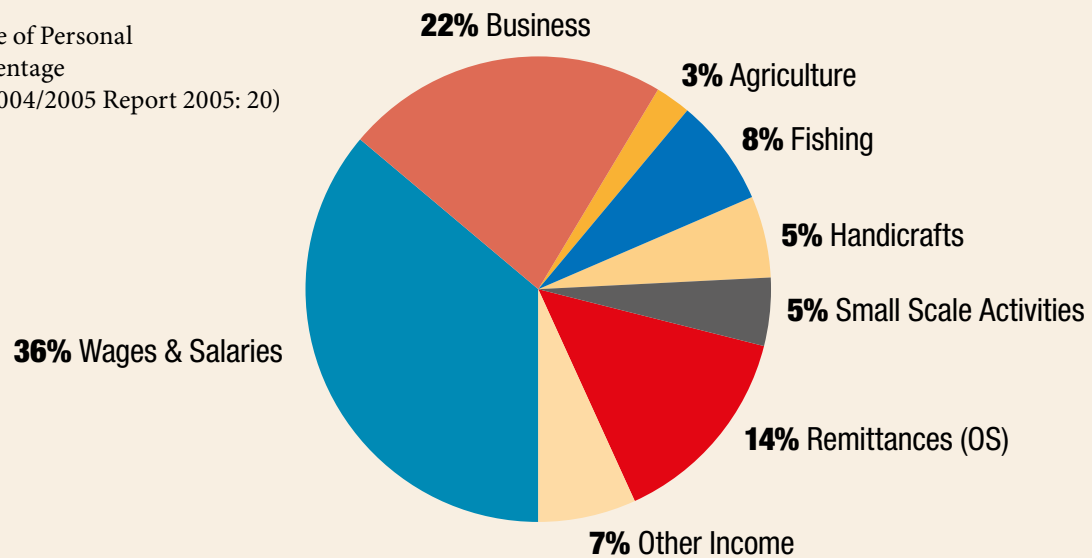
¹ Around 1,800 Tuvaluans who had been living and working in the Gilbert Islands and in the phosphate mines on Nauru and Banaba returned to Tuvalu after independence.

² For instance, some older people and the people of Nui atoll in Tuvalu speak both of Tuvaluan and Gilbertese.

³ See also Kaeppler 1978; Gershon 2007.

⁴ For detailed sample questionnaires, see appendix 1.

Figure 1: Source of Personal Income by Percentage
(Tuvalu HIES 2004/2005 Report 2005: 20)



Auckland. Between 1991 and 2006, Tuvaluan people in New Zealand increased from 430 to 2,628, which is attributed to the work policy between the Tuvalu government and New Zealand's Department of Immigration (INZ), called Recognized Seasonal Employer program⁵ since 1990. The most common industries Tuvaluan immigrants work in are manufacturing (17%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (13%), administrative and support services (12%) (Statistics New Zealand: 2007). Most of the informants I interviewed in 2007 worked in these categories, such as agricultural farms and orchards, wine manufacturers, nursing homes, and restaurants.

As another adjustment to New Zealand's immigration policy settings to accommodate increasing flows of Pacific Islanders, the Pacific Access Category (PAC) has been operated since 2004 to ensure a stable labor force and a resettlement visa. The 2012 PAC allows 75 citizens of Kiribati, 75 citizens of Tuvalu, and 250 citizens of Tonga, who are selected by ballot, to be granted residence in New Zealand each year (Immigration New Zealand 2012). While their recognition of at-risk communities in the Pacific due to climate change was part of the impetus behind the operation of PAC, INZ has not yet approved the Pacific immigrants as environmental refugees because the current refugee law does not have legal protection to climate-change victims from its definition. The crucial question here is whether these at-risk communities identify themselves as 'victims' at local level. Although the sea-level rise-affected people I interviewed in Tuvalu were aware of the risk of rising sea levels, and felt the need to struggle

with it on a daily basis, they nevertheless followed a collective pattern in decision-making based on the premise that the disaster had not yet struck them. When deciding whether to leave or not, they frequently pointed to the call of livelihood rather than motivations based on risk and predicted calamity.

Here is an ethnographic example of how Tuvaluan locals and communities in general see the future risk of relocation and migration decision-making under uncertainty through their daily conversation with their immigrant families. Mr. Sigano Talesi was born in Tarawa, Kiribati in 1935, moved to Tuvalu in 1959, and currently lives in Kavatoetoe village in the northern part of Funafuti atoll with his family. The average elevation of Kavatoetoe is one meter above sea level⁶ and it is one of the most affected areas from 'king tide', the especially high tide during the end of February through March. During the 2006 king tide, Sigano and his family suffered inundation damage and evacuated to his daughter's place in downtown Funafuti for a week. Like some other Tuvaluan families, all his lineal relatives live in New Zealand except his fourth daughter living in Samoa. In terms of remittances, his younger brother who has lived in Auckland since 2003 and his cousin send money to Sigano on ceremonial occasions. When I asked Sigano whether he had planned to move out from the country, he said, "Death comes when it comes...I know that one day I will die; whether the sea level is really rising or I get a permanent visa to New Zealand, or even I continue to live here. There is no set place to live forever." Whereas it has generally been argued

⁵ It is a New Zealand employer, whose core area of business is horticulture or viticulture, and who has an application for RSE status approved by Immigration New Zealand.

⁶ The average elevation of Tuvalu is less than 2 meters above sea level. The sea level has been rising at the rate of 5.1 (±0.7) mm per year from 1950-2009.

in labor-market theory that severe environmental disasters and family ties can be the push-pull factors, his narrative interpretation is not exceptional among Tuvaluan Islanders. The point is that what the local individuals and communities in Tuvalu deal with is a virtual and fluctuating scenario for which they did not use scientific knowledge to control their environment. Instead, they reacted negatively to future anxiety constructed as a predicted scenario while continuing to contend with the immediate demands of community.

3. CULTURAL RETENTION AND DAILY PRACTICES ‘FAKA TUVALU’

With these socio-cultural backgrounds in mind, I now examine how Pacific Islanders including Tuvaluan migrant people retain their cultural identities and customs whilst participating in the mobilized global economy. In the case of Tuvaluan migrants living in New Zealand, the ratio of the New Zealand-born population is expanding⁷ and many of those young people have never visited Tuvalu; they often marveled at me speaking Nukufetau accented Tuvaluan, which they thought was the marginalized language in the New Zealander society. Both in and out of Tuvalu, on the other hand, I have always seen that the islanders place much value on living ‘*faka Tuvalu*’ (literally means “in the style of Tuvalu”) in many ways. The term *faka Tuvalu* is an encompassing way of being and living that sum up nature of all Tuvaluan culture and society. The men and women at all ages often refer this term in their speeches during festive events in order to strengthen their socio-cultural bonds. Their daily commitment to community activities is typical part of living *faka Tuvalu*. Tuvaluan immigrants retain their social institutions through various associations such as the credit associations called *aiga*, home island-based communities, gender-based communities, and church-based welfare associations even after migration in New Zealand and Australia (I will discuss in more detail in the following sections). These types of communal works play a significant role in transmitting Tuvaluan cultural knowledge, values, and ethnic identity as well as in providing economic security for individual households. Similarly in Samoa, daily practices of *fa’a samoa* have been an important set of core social values of the Samoan immigrant society (Kallen 1982).

Furthermore, each island in Tuvalu has its own ceremonial culture and the term *fenua* has the meaning both of “country” and “island”. As it is common that the islanders ask a context-dependent question like “*Ko*

oi tou fenua (what is your home island / country?), they recreate the sense of island identities in everyday life as well as regional and national identities.

4. MALAGA: EXCHANGE TRIP BETWEEN TUVALU AND NEW ZEALAND

The striking examples of the Tuvaluan cultural retention include a customary group trip called “*malaga*” (literally means “a trip” in the Tuvaluan language) in which the local communities in each island of Tuvalu and of Auckland fundraise and send a certain amount of the islanders to New Zealand for a few months. This exchange program has been sponsored by the private funds called *aiga* or *fakapotopotoga* independently aside from the PAC scheme. In the fundraising events in Auckland, the locals gather at the community hall to perform Tuvaluan traditional dances and enjoy having feasts in the Tuvaluan manner,⁸ which also plays a role of passing down their cultural heritage to the younger generations and help them maintain their ties.

It is not exaggeration to say that the Tuvaluan socio-cultural norms have been built around a community hall called *maneapa* both in Tuvalu and New Zealand. I found almost all the community halls in Auckland decorated with shell necklaces and local woven mats - in the way of ‘*faka Tuvalu*’. Not only in Tuvalu, but also in Kiribati, *maneaba* (in the Gilbertese language) has been used as a congress hall by family heads and island chiefs as well as a ceremonial venue for festive occasions; *maneapa* / *maneaba* therefore is a ‘society’ itself for those Pacific Island countries.

5. COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

One way that Pacific Islanders stay connected to their sending communities is through transnational religious practices. As well as giving more than a passing thought to their migrant families abroad through daily prayers, Tuvaluans have retained their ties and values by engaging in activities of the socio-cultural associations which have historically been related with the Congregational church of *Ekalesia Kelesiano Tuvalu*⁹. During Christmas in New Zealand, the youth community *Talavou* visit elderly sick people and give

⁷ In 2007, Nearly 37% of the whole population were born in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand: 2007)

⁸ Like other cultural activities, feast in *maneapa* also plays a crucial role to strengthen Tuvaluan bonds. When I was in Nukufetau, we had festive feasts in *maneapa* almost 10 days a month.

⁹ 91% of the whole population in Tuvalu believe in their national religion, *Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu* (The church of Tuvalu that has ties to the Congregational Church and other churches from Samoa).

hymn services. When I visited to their homes with *Talavou* members, some of those elderly people were moved to tears as they were no longer able to attend worship as often as they had done in Tuvalu.

As appendix 2 shows, these communal activities come as a set with financial and material contributions. Tuvaluan people do raise funds to support their

activities, host visiting religious authorities and leaders both from Tuvalu and Samoa that EKT provides with a mental fallback position in return. On the other hand, however, it is also a fact that this custom of contributions based on the structural importance of Christianity and the local emphasis on family and community, causes financial burden to some immigrant families.



↑ Christmas party at the community hall in Auckland



↑ Wedding ceremony at the island community hall *maneapa* in Funafuti.



↑ Women in the community hall in Auckland (left); women in the island hall *maneapa* in Nukufetau, Tuvalu (right). The highlight of banquet is a whole roasted pig; the only difference is that Tuvaluans in New Zealand buy from a super-market while one in Tuvalu contribute their home-reared one.



↑ Children performing siva (originally introduced from Samoa) for a celebration of an old man's 90th birthday.



↑ The community hall in Auckland is used in the almost same manner as in Tuvalu.



↑ Old man listening to choir members of the youth community “Talavou” singing hymns (2008).



↑ EKT reverend's granddaughter's birthday party in Auckland.



↑ Reverend, his granddaughter and his wife.



↑ Tuvaluan immigrant's house in Auckland with a local mat on the wall.

6. E-RELATIONSHIPS IN CYBERSPACE

How have the flows of knowledge, information, and interests that urge decision-making in daily life changed among Pacific diasporic communities? What role do global technologies play in linking migrant people to the homeland? Pacific Islanders make unique use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) by which they deterritorialize and reconstruct their identities. For them, e-mail, social networking media, and video chat software have been a means of “staying connected” with their family members of seafarers and migrant workers abroad. Anywhere-anytime mobility in cyberspace enables Pacific Islanders share their experiential worlds with their families back home. Here’s an example: There is an annual Pacific festival in Auckland called the Pasifika Festival with the aim of celebrating Pacific Island communities’ cultural heritage through their art, music, dance performances and food. It features almost 1,500 performers from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Tokelau, Niue, Tahiti, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Aotearoa, and over 200,000 people from the Pacific region and around the world have been enthusiastic about this event. What the Tuvaluan migrant people do in addition to being performers is to record their shows to make DVDs and upload the movie clips on video-sharing websites for their extended families in Tuvalu. By using new emerging media, these recurrent interactions among the families reinforce collective national identity of Tuvalu. Digital media help them reconstruct their socio-cultural norms across boundaries as Hau’ofa has one described the Pacific Islands as the ‘enlarged world of Oceania’ and ‘expanded Oceania’ (Hau’ofa 2008).

In conclusion, my analysis of the Pacific cultural retention suggests that the Pacific diasporic islanders maintain their strong links to their homelands in multiple and complex ways, and forms of mobility continue to shape the local emphasis on family and community. Yet, the digitalisation of long-distance nationalism in which the islanders exchange information, communicate, and interact through cultural and religious practices across borders is still unscrutinized. I will leave room for further investigation on the question of the Pacific “translocality” after future relocation, permanence and resiliency of transnationalism.

APPENDIX

1. BASELINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of the head of family.....
 2. Year of Birth.....
 3. Number of people of household.....
 4. Monthly income and its source.....
 5. Consumption expenditure breakdown
- | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Food | (\$.....) | Water | (\$.....) | Kid's stuff | (\$.....) | Petroleum | (\$.....) |
| Power | (\$.....) | Articles | (\$.....) | Kerosene | (\$.....) | Land tax | (\$.....) |
| House Rent | (\$.....) | School Supplies | (\$.....) | Soap | (\$.....) | Others | |
- Contribution for pastor (\$...../year), Contribution for island (\$...../year), Clothes (\$.....), amusement (\$.....)
6. Frequency and purpose of moving to outer islands.....
 7. Frequency and purpose of migrating to overseas.....
 8. Community activities.....

2. FEAST DAYS AND CONTRIBUTION

| The name of holiday | name of holiday | period | donation |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Aso lasi</i> | Christmas and New Year | 1.5 months | ✓ |
| <i>Aso Tutasi</i> | Anniversary of Tutasi Primary School | February 11/ 2 days | ✓ |
| <i>Aso Matua</i> | Mother's Day | March /1day | – |
| <i>Aso Toetu</i> | Easter | April | ✓ |
| <i>Aso Talavou</i> | Youth Day | – | AUS10\$ per person |
| <i>Aso Fafine</i> | Women's Day | April | – |
| <i>Aso Taulaga</i> | Contribution for EKT Funafuti | May / 2 weeks | ✓ |
| <i>Aso Fakavae</i> | Contribution for the Island | June 30 | ✓ |
| <i>Aso te Mealofa</i> | Contribution for pastor | August / 2 weeks | ✓ |
| <i>Aso Tamana</i> | Father's Day | September / 1day | – |
| <i>Aso Komiti</i> | EKT Committee's Day | September 18 / 3days | AUS100\$ donation per committee |
| <i>Aso Tutokotasi</i> | Independence Day | October | – |
| <i>Aso te Maliu</i> | Passion Sunday | April 7 | – |



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DISASTERS
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This is a multi-partner project funded by the European Commission (EC) whose overall aim is to address a legal gap regarding cross-border displacement in the context of disasters. The project brings together the expertise of three distinct partners (UNHCR, NRC/IDMC and the Nansen Initiative) seeking to:

- 1 › **increase the understanding** of States and relevant actors in the international community about displacement related to disasters and climate change;
- 2 › **equip them to plan for and manage** internal relocations of populations in a protection sensitive manner; and
- 3 › **provide States and other relevant actors tools and guidance** to protect persons who cross international borders owing to disasters, including those linked to climate change.

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