

Gerald Haberkorn, *Port Vila: Transit Station or Final Stop?* Pacific Research Monograph, no. 21. Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1989. Pp. xiii, 162, maps, tables, figures, bibliography. A\$20 paper.

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Demographers and geographers working in Melanesia in the 1970s proclaimed that "circular migration" was the dominant pattern of population movement between countryside and town. Rural migrants came to town, undertook short-term employment to earn cash, and then went back home again. Vanuatu's 1982 Development Plan assumed this pattern still to hold although, by this time, it was clear that significant numbers of people had come to town to stay. The population of Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital, expanded 7.2 percent annually during the late 1960s and 1970s. In this book, which builds on his earlier Ph.D. thesis in demography, Gerald Haberkorn surveys patterns of population movement in Vanuatu between 1953 and 1983 to assess whether the ruling geographic metaphor for urban migration should be circles or lines.

Migration is a serious topic in the Pacific, given a relatively small land base, rising populations, and limited economic resources. The Vanuatu case is an important one in that, unlike Tonga or Samoa, almost all migration is internal. Few people have the opportunity to emigrate overseas, although Noumea's nickel boom of the 1970s left behind a small community of Vanuatu expatriates in New Caledonia. And unlike the Tonga and Samoa cases, cash remittances are only a minor factor in town/country relations.

Haberkorn's answer to his subtitled question is that Port Vila is both transit station and final stop. Some people do continue to come to town intending to return home after earning some cash, visiting relatives, or

enjoying the bright lights of the “transit station.” Haberkorn’s data, however, show that the number of these circulators is declining--a decline correlated with a decrease in short-term employment opportunities in town and on periurban plantations. Significantly more people are moving to Vila as a final stop. The average length of time in town among Haberkorn’s urban study population was around ten years. These people have relatively steady employment, have their families along with them, and have town-born children. Relatives from the countryside visit them in town more often than they return home.

Haberkorn’s explanation for the shift from circular towards lineal migration to town looks for causes within the general social structural “setting” as well as the particular “situations” that inform people’s choices to stay home or to move. Both ends of the road influence those choices. Urban opportunities pull people into town; and rural difficulties force them there. The core of the book presents Haberkorn’s comparisons of two areas of north-central Vanuatu: the Liro area of Paama, a small island in the Shepherds group, and the Hurilao region of north Raga (Pentecost Island). Haberkorn demonstrates that differences in land tenure, descent and marriage patterns, and local organization in these two locales affect people’s choices to migrate. An interesting element of the “setting” of migration in Vanuatu is the impact of sorcery and sorcery accusations. Such concerns on Paama, for example, have made that island a center of antisorcery campaigns. Although similar percentages of Liro and Hurilao people have moved to town, Haberkorn is able to demonstrate that “survival” drives the Paamese to Vila (they face land shortages and economic leveling institutions back home), while “convenience” pulls many of the Ragans.

Haberkorn provides a valuable systemic perspective on migration. As migration proceeds, it may over time change the character of both town and countryside, making additional movement either more or less likely. Whereas in the past the rural subsistence economy subsidized the plantation system by maintaining pools of cheap labor, nowadays the town also subsidizes the countryside’s subsistence and prestige economies by drawing off excess population and by pumping resources out into the islands.

In Vila, the Ragans control better-paying jobs than do the Paamese. Although Haberkorn does not pursue reasons behind this, in Vanuatu generally people from Anglican areas (including Raga), many of whom have received an education at Anglican schools, have tended to enjoy greater employment opportunities and skills than those from Presbyterian regions (such as Paama). The fact that prominent leaders of the

two main political parties in the 1980s came from Pentecost may also partly account for Ragan employment achievements in Vanuatu's capital city.

Haberkorn stresses urban migrants' deepening commitments to town life. What is less clear is the extent to which their commitments, or their children's commitments, to home islands will be sustained in the future. Some urbanites, at least, continue to play a double game. They work to maintain their links to the country, particularly if rural land rights and access to plantations are in question. They continue to remit goods, cash, some of their children, and also their bodies back home. People from Tanna, in southern Vanuatu, for example, often pool money to airfreight home their dead--the defunct urbanite's return home announced in one of Radio Vanuatu's famous *ded mesej* (death messages). Haberkorn might ask where dead migrants from Liro and Hurilao rest in peace.

This study concluded in 1983, although Haberkorn was able to determine that 93 percent of the migrant urban population he studied was still resident in Vila in 1987. Haberkorn predicts that most migrants are in Vila to stay, despite government efforts to promote rural development to keep people back in their home villages. (It would be interesting to know whether the huge increase in kava cash-cropping on Pentecost in the late 1980s--to supply Port Vila's eighty-some kava bars as well as the Fijian market--has had an impact on out-migration from Hurilao.)

Studies such as this are immensely important for appropriate urban--and rural--planning, especially in the peripatetic South Pacific. Haberkorn remarks that Port Moresby's chaotic scenes present a "timely" reminder that Port Vila and other Pacific towns need to grasp the scope and causes of urban migration if they hope to avert some of its problems. Port Vila, although increasingly populous, still remains a magnificent town; I have often longed to migrate there myself.