Moving and Rootedness: the Paradox of the Brain Drain among Samoan Professionals

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For almost half a century, conceptions of Pacific islander movement have been influenced by the perspective of national economic development – one to which many planners and policy makers subscribe. In this view, movement is assumed to be unidirectional, from the islands to the metropolitan Pacific. This assumption creates and enhances images such as "permanent migration", "emigration", "exodus" and "brain drain" which are fundamentally associated with the core-periphery and growth-centre constructs of the Western-derived model of dual economy (White and others, 1989). Not only do they seriously misrepresent locally rooted meanings of mobility among indigenous islanders, but also these images imply development uncertainties that will face island populations in the future.

The implications of these images for understanding the international mobility of Pacific islanders are explicit in the literature dealing with the movement of skilled workers (South Pacific Commission, 1982; Macpherson, 1983; Connell, 1987; World Bank, 1993). The brain drain, perceived as detrimental to development, has over the last three decades been an issue of concern among island Governments. However, the term is founded on the assumption that the movement of skilled people is strictly a one-way flow to

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the places of destination and thus portrays those who move as people detaching themselves physically and socially from the homeland and from cultural values. The brain drain concept freezes the many travels undertaken by members of this group as well as the associated flows of goods, money and ideas, many of which are not quantifiable and therefore fail to appear in migration and national income data.

Focusing on the movement of Samoan professionals, this paper first examines the debate that revolves around brain drain, and how this notion has been adopted over the last four decades to explain the international mobility of skilled persons in third world situations. Second, it argues that the mobility of Samoan professionals is part of the overall complex flow of Pacific peoples within and beyond the region. Based on a study conducted in 1993, which involved 109 Samoan professionals from Fiji, New Zealand and Samoa, the paper argues that the construct of brain drain does not accurately fit the diverse and flexible movement of these people, for it is a process that is strongly connected to cultural and kinship values. It concludes by affirming that the mobility experiences of Samoan professionals speak of travels that draw them closer to, rather than away from, home.

The brain drain: global perspectives

The term "brain drain" has been widely used by migration scholars to refer to the permanent exit of skilled and professional workers from one country to another. The term was coined in 1962 by the British Royal Society on Science and Technology to describe the substantial outflow of British engineers, scientists and technicians, especially to the United States of America (Committee on Manpower Resources for Science and Technology, 1967). Since then, it has been applied to the movement of highly qualified people and students from developing to developed countries (Appleyard, 1989). In 1972, at the third session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, held at Santiago, a new phrase "the reverse transfer of technology" was added to the meaning of skilled migration. This phrase implies that it is not so much the loss of "brains" which is at stake, but rather that the skilled migrants "embody capital and knowledge, and constitute a transfer of resources and technology in the reverse direction" (d'Oliveira e Sousa, 1989:197). This reverse transfer maintains a balance of resource flows between the developing and developed worlds.

The brain drain debate is marked by two diametrically opposed perspectives, namely the nationalist and the internationalist. Based on

Marxist conflict analysis, in which labour migration is seen essentially as a manifestation of continuing dependency that increases underdevelopment in the third world and overdevelopment in the first world, the nationalist view condemns emigration as a problem for countries of origin. Some nationalists take a more extreme position, claiming brain drain to be the most severe form of exploitation of third world peoples. For example, Ward (1975:233) argues that brain drain is a manifestation of exploitation of developing countries by those with more developed, capitalist economies. Zahlan (1977) sees it as "an act of treason and theft", because the movement is unidirectional and results in irreplaceable losses to the sending countries (Mundende, 1989:185). In the 1960s and 1970s, the effects of brain drain movement were considered particularly serious for newly independent countries. The flow of skilled people from the former colonies, primarily to once colonizing powers, was seen as a way of sustaining development in the latter, which already had achieved economic prosperity (Kannappan, 1968; Kidd, 1970).

The nationalist perspective also suggests ways in which brain drain could be lessened or stopped. Some emphasize the responsibility of the sending countries, saying that social, political and economic environments that enhance development should be created by their respective Governments, thereby discouraging skilled citizens from migrating (Patinkin, 1968). Others such as Grubel and Scott (1977:145) have recommended large-scale policies to narrow worldwide income differences and to make immigration more difficult through tight immigration policies in the receiving countries. However, these suggestions have encountered a number of difficulties. Nationalists acknowledge that a complex of factors characterize these movements of talented professionals and that no particular strategy can be effective enough to stop them (Long, 1989).

On the other hand, the internationalist or cosmopolitan liberal tradition views migration as an equilibrating response to spatial inequalities, as essentially voluntary in nature, as a rational attempt by migrants to maximize utility and as a vehicle for upward social mobility (Johnson, 1968; Salt, 1988; Ong and others, 1992). As one of its early proponents, Johnson (1968) argued that the international migration of highly skilled workers was a process beneficial to both the global community and individual migrants. For this process demonstrates the free distribution of human resources rather than exploitation and reflects the free choices of individuals who chose to migrate. Skilled migration between countries therefore indicates that "the market for the educated professional people, like the market for commodities, is becoming increasingly an international rather than a national market" (Johnson, 1968:90).

The international labour market to which Johnson referred three decades ago has now become more and more diversified and powerful as the globalization of production and services and the new international division of labour became increasingly inevitable. More recently, advocates of the internationalist school of thought have pointed out that skilled migration is simply about “brain exchanges” (Salt, 1983) or “skill exchanges” (Findlay, 1990). These “exchanges” occur as a response to the internationalization of economic activities, the changing structure of the global labour market, and the globalization of higher education.

The internationalist viewpoint is derived primarily from studies conducted in the countries of Western Europe as well as the United States of America. Salt (1992), Gould (1990) and Findlay (1990), for example, focus their work on the movement of professionals within Western Europe. Others such as Long (1989) Furuya (1992) and Sekiguchi (1992) concentrate on migration from Latin America and parts of Asia to Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The nationalist perspective, on the other hand, focuses basically on movement between countries categorized as third world and first world and has come to dominate analysis in the Pacific. While concerns about the loss of skilled workers had, since the 1970s, been acknowledged at the country level, it was not until 1982 at a migration conference jointly sponsored by the South Pacific Commission and the International Labour Organization, held at Noumea, New Caledonia, that brain drain was specifically addressed at the regional level. Since then, this notion has been echoed in various reports and development plans of many island Governments as a critical “development” problem.

The measure of the “brain drain problem” in the Pacific islands, as identified and discussed in both official reports and academic accounts, is the shortage of skilled and professional islanders, particularly in the public sector (Connell, 1987; Chetty and Prasad, 1993). In Samoa, for example, the government sector is reported to have experienced a shortage of highly qualified personnel during the last three decades. While skill shortages in the earlier years of independence, from 1962, were to be explained by the few Samoans trained in local and overseas tertiary institutions (Western Samoa Economic Development Board, 1966; Western Samoa Department of Economic Development, 1970) the situation today is attributed to the loss of qualified Samoans to the rim countries of Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America (Western Samoa Department of Economic Development, 1984; Western Samoa Department of Statistics, 1989; Petersen, 1993). This latter reason dominates current analysis on the labour market in the Pacific and is presented as a major impediment to efficient economic performance (World Bank, 1993).

Uprooting the "problem" of misrepresentation

There are critical assumptions embedded in the nationalist and internationalist perspectives which need to be addressed and seriously examined. First, despite their seemingly oppositional character, both traditions have one thing in common. Their frame of reference is economic development, which not only assumes universality and homogeneous economic behaviour of people but also operates on conceptions of a dual economy. Consisting of two parts, this dual economy assumes socio-cultural and political differences between Western countries and the third world. Western cultures are presented as highly organized in terms of material objectives and production, compared with the loosely organized and fatalistic cultures in the third world. The fundamental problem of "development" in this model is the emphasis on the imbalanced connection between these two sets of cultures. As Johnston and others (1994:141) observe:

> Such emphasis upon development generates an economistic and universal view of the world, and so legitimates dualist thinking by imposing a particular and singular Western view of the world on all 'others'. It thereby encourages the simplistic division of the world in dualist terms.

Linked to this view is a second critical point: that both the nationalist and the internationalist traditions assume the permanency of population movement. The use of the term "brain drain" implies discrete differentials in mobility between sections of the dual economy. In these, movements from traditional to modern locales are motivated by wage and job opportunities between them. In general, explanations offered for population mobility among third world peoples have been attached to development analysis and assumptions that do not always portray the complex reality found in these situations. White and others (1989:277) have critically examined this relationship, arguing that "Development is an element of conventional migration models.... This is illustrated by the central role ascribed to market conditions, which vary from place to place in reflection of economic growth-and-decline experiences at the national, regional and local levels".

The travels of Pacific islanders have been portrayed in such dualisms as "island/metropolitan" or "rural/urban" in which, as Chapman (1991:267) argues, people are "assumed to be moving inexorably in one direction and to be sliding down the slope of gravity from rural settlements into town...". In addition, such constructs as "unskilled" and "skilled" migration strongly mirror the human resource perspective, one segment of which addresses the effects of migration on development (Gober-Meyers, 1978; Brown and Lawson, 1988). As White and others (1989:278) clearly point out, migration

from the human resource viewpoint is selective, so that "origin places are drained of quality human capital to the benefit of destinations, thus altering development prospects of each locale". While such constructs conveniently serve the vested interest and economic purpose of development, they also impose the danger of narrowing a much wider and more complex frame of reality to which travelers relate and which they value much more deeply than is often assumed. This is particularly critical in the Pacific, where culturally-based meanings of family and community relations are strongly held and firmly rooted in the "lifeworlds" of peoples and the travels they make.

The brain drain idea is basically Eurocentric in origin and focus. The notion shares the same implied meaning underlying the concepts of "emigration" and "exodus" which are, to use Chapman's phrase, "metaphors of misunderstanding".

Their origin "lies not in the island Pacific but in the work that urban sociologists had undertaken concerning the American Midwest during the 1920s and 1930s. Reflecting the practice of the day, these observers considered each move made from one location to another as a discrete event or activity occurring at a particular moment in time" (Chapman, 1991:265).

The application of the brain drain notion to the situation of third world societies has been a simple matter of direct application to and importation and imposition on local experiences of movement. The idea, which traditionally referred to the permanent loss of British professionals to the United States of America during the 1950s and 1960s has been adopted unthinkingly to explain labour shortages in island countries, a problem which possibly could be explained by a different reason or set of reasons. The international movement of islander professionals is said to be a one-way flow, with counter flows or circulation assumed to be non-existent. Geographic mobility is presented as a process whereby the individual is "uprooted" from the homeland, the social links with which are discontinued.

Such misrepresentations have dominated conceptions of the international movement of skilled citizens from the third world. In his work, Patinkin (1968:94), a proponent of the nationalist school of thought, once argued that if these individuals (skilled migrants) did not themselves attach a value to living within the cultural, ideological and historical milieu of their original country; if they felt no ties to birthplace, family or specific social structure; if they felt no difficulty in leaving their native language and living their lives with an acquired tongue; if they attached no importance to the

national aspiration of their countries... then the movement of skilled manpower to where salary and working conditions were best could not be prevented.

This viewpoint, while assuming a structured and universal behaviour, ignores a complex of other contexts that are also significant in the decision to move. By considering the local contexts of culture, family and community, powerful meanings to people's movement can be revealed. In these contexts, the movers - regardless of career associations or qualifications - share the same identity through family and community connections. These merit serious attention, since their consideration in research and incorporation into planning would help to broaden perspectives on the dynamics of islander movements.

Locally oriented travels: meanings and complexity

The migration constructs already discussed are problematic when placed against the backdrop of not only the actual experiences of the movers, but also "the locally oriented significance that Islanders attach to their purposes and values in travel" (Peter, 1996:18). Locally oriented travels are clearly manifested through frequent visits to islands of origin and to the continuing flows of material goods, money and ideas between and among travelers and their island-based families. These flows occur not only between the island homes and overseas, but also among relatives in the different metropolitan settings.

In their analysis of studies of mobility among indigenous populations in Africa and the Pacific, Chapman and Prothero (1985) provide much evidence of the "constant ebb and flow" that constitute a major part of life at family and community levels. Their conclusion emphasizes the persistence of locally oriented journeys that are often overshadowed by conventional analysis.

Although the dominant argument on international mobility over-emphasizes the one-way flow of remittances from overseas to the islands (Brown and Walker, 1995), there is ample evidence of persistent counter-flows of goods from the islands. Ongoing visits among islanders to their relatives in metropolitan cities signify also the transfer of island goods and values to those places. As Hau'ofa (1993:13) argues: "(F)or everything homeland relatives receive they reciprocate with goods they themselves produce". These "invisible" reciprocal exchanges and mobility escape the proclaimed "accurate" data collection of migration scholars, consultancy experts and development planners.

It is only recently, however, that the challenge of the complex mobility system among Pacific islanders has seemingly dawned on the minds of some conventional migration specialists. With a strong flavour of post-modernist thinking, Connell (1995) analyses Samoan migration as depicted mainly through two of the novels, *Sons for the Return Home* and *Ola*, of prominent Samoan writer, Albert Wendt – himself a professional claimed to be part of the brain drain syndrome. The Samoan migrant that Connell sees in Wendt's novels is one with an evolving identity over time...apparently from being a "permanent migrant" in New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s to a contemporary one with an "ambiguous" identity. Connell (1995:277) sees this latter stage as "reflecting a more complex Polynesian... and the diversity of the lives of now middle-aged Samoans, as they overcome both distance and difference". In such a world, as depicted in *Ola,* characterized by the "flexibility of metaphor, culture and geography,...notions of stability and coherence have disappeared". Connell (1995:276) seems convinced that "[d]ichotomies are no longer useful, as the world is revealed to be far more complex involving 'movements in specific colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours and returns'".

The danger, however, of situating Samoan (and other islander) mobility in the frame of post-modernism is the disappearance of one's roots, for "[t]o have multiple roots is to have no roots" (Strathern, 1991:90; quoted in Connell, 1995). Thus, Pacific people are, once again, subject to new constructs such as "multiple identities" that at least in theory can easily dissolve the rootedness of islanders in their cultures and values. However, as clearly evident in several of Wendt's comments in previous interviews, there is no disputing his "Samoanness" and the fact that his roots are in Samoa. "As a person I'm Samoan and I write about Samoa...1 need a sense of roots, of home – a place where you live and die. I would die as a writer without roots..." (Beston and Beston, 1977:153; quoted in Connell, 1995). This rootedness to the homeland has both tangible and intangible forms which need to be considered in mobility research.

Similarly, the economists Brown and Walker, in a report of their survey on remittances among Sydney-based Tongans and Samoans, admitted that "since remittances can take many forms and pass through different channels and networks, there are clear obstacles to making definitive assessments" (1995:15). The obstacles encountered by Brown and Walker are clearly those parts of reality that do not fit within the framework and requirements of their "rigorous statistical analysis". Bonnemaison's work with the Tanna community in Vanuatu identifies complex, yet locally

defined and meaningful movements among these people. Advancing into the deep meanings of movement among Tanna residents, Bonnemaison (1985:30) describes the process with a "contradictory" metaphor of the tree and the canoe. The tree is a "symbol of rootedness and stability" and the canoe symbolizes "journeying and unrestricted wandering". Paradoxical as it seems, this metaphor simply emphasizes the complex dynamics of islander mobility that spreads out spatially and socially, yet it is anchored in the community of origin. Moreover, it indicates that people's movement is not only part of a social and cultural setting but also is maintained through shared identities.

In her study of population mobility on Manihiki atoll in the Cook Islands, Underhill (1989:165-166) observed that "not only individuals constitute the mobile unit, but also they are part of a wider group – the domestic unit and the collective household – themselves each located within a particular socioeconomic environment". Mobility, according to Underhill, is a household strategy. Mobility patterns are dominantly circular and it is these recurrent patterns that both create and sustain bi- or multi-local households. The existence of multi-local households indicates the fluidity and continuity of islander mobility within and beyond atoll homes. More important, ihese movements speak of a social/family system that cannot be contained within the limits of an atoll environment. As Underhill indicates clearly, the travels of the Manihiki peoples have transcended geographical and national boundaries so that the household expands socially and geographically. With contemporary socio-economic advances in copra production and pearl-shell farming, Manihikian mobility cannot adequately be presented by such limiting constructs as urban/rural and metropolitan/local, but in fact both stimulates and increases the possibility and intensity of complex circulation.

Moving and rootedness: Samoan movement in the context of the *'aiga*

Attempts to analyse the movement of "skilled" Samoans should begin with an understanding and appreciation of family structure and, in this paper, the *'aiga* (extended family) is the primary point of reference. Why focus on the *'aiga*? The concern here does not imply support for a dualism of culture (*'aiga*)/modernity, since this carries the danger of promoting the very same "differences" embedded in dualist thinking of rural/urban and traditional/modern. Rather, the focus on the *'aiga* acknowledges the place where one's roots and identity are anchored. Disconnect people from the *'aiga*, an act quite impossible in the world of *fa 'a Samoa* (Samoan way of life), and they are disconnected from the cord of identity.

The intention here is not to paint a picture of a perfect, traditional, Samoan *‘aiga*, especially given the complex socio-economic and political transformations that Samoa has experienced over the last 200 years. To do that would not only be erroneous, but would also impose more damage than good on the image of *‘aiga*. Neither is it the intention to bow to dominant misrepresentations of Samoan family structure and *fa ‘a Samoa* as a disintegrating unit swamped by the forces of modernization. Rather, it is maintained that the *‘aiga* remains the fundamental force guiding and sustaining social actions, behaviour and relations among Samoans. The *‘aiga* also is central to movement, because of its capacity simultaneously to bind and to distribute relatives across geographic and social spaces. This reality is embedded in the Samoan proverb: *E sui faiga ae le suia fa'avue*, meaning that forms and ways of doing things may change, but their foundations remain. Changes that have been incorporated in *fa‘a Samoa*, of which the *'aiga* is central, should not be taken necessarily as indicating basic alterations to ideas that underlie reciprocal exchanges and relations.

The Samoan *‘aiga* constitutes blood relations and connections through marriage or adoption. It is not geographically confined, although its members usually identify with both the maternal and paternal villages as their places of origin. The *‘aiga* is a web of social relations and a unitary core that is intact and yet also flexible and unbounded, so much so that it transcends social boundaries. Every extended family has its own *pa‘ia* and *mamalu* (scared attributions) and *fa‘alupega* (honorary addresses), which distinguish it from other *‘aiga*. Samoans understand that embedded in each *‘aiga* member is that *pa'ia* and *mamalu* which provide the basis for all social interactions and exchange at the levels of both the individual and the community.

‘Aiga members overseas and in the islands are not considered individuals in the Euro-American sense of the word. When meeting for the first time, Samoans ask the question: “Where about is your *‘aiga* or village?”, *not* “What is your name?” The latter question, when asked in an inappropriate context, may be offensive to Samoans because of its directness to the individual and away from the *‘aiga*. Enquiring about one’s *‘aiga* emphasizes the centrality of an individual’s communal identity rather than that individual *per se*. One’s identity, then, is rooted not within the self but encompasses the whole *‘aiga*, giving rise to the double reflection of the individual in the *‘aiga* and the *‘aiga* in the individual.

In this context, the Samoan professional is not an individual who, as commonly perceived and interpreted, merely embodies capital and knowledge. Nor is he or she just an individual with the label “skilled

migrant" assigned by census experts, migration scholars, social scientists and politicians. Rather, the skilled Samoan is fundamentally part of a collectivity, one part of the *'aiga* and one part of the community of origin. It is the *'aiga* that forms the basis and meaning of one's particular identity. It is also within the *'aiga* that the practice of reciprocal exchange takes place, thereby strengthening and sustaining ties of kinship. Understanding the movement of skilled Samoans is thus neither derived from nor narrowly focused on individual attributes as in Western-based notions of professionalism and skills, but encompasses cultural values of anyone who moves.

This dimension is important in analysing the relationship between movement and development. In spite of geographic separation and territorial distinctiveness, overseas-based Samoans and their *'aiga* in the islands have one familial identity. The practice of remitting money or goods is basically reciprocity and speaks to a reality that is profoundly cultural. Remitting takes place not because, as commonly claimed by migration scholars, those away want to retain kinship ties, but *because of* those ties. It is the *'aiga* and identity that drive the practice of remitting, not the other way around. It is not that people must superficially *keep* their relations; they are born into them and travel with them. One can choose physically to separate oneself from or deny the *'aiga* but, in the world of *fa'a Samoa,* one is still identified on the basis of that age-old connection.

Movement of Samoan professionals: findings of a study

In 1993, the author undertook a study that initially had little to do with "brain drain" as part of the Master's degree in development studies course at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji. This enquiry examined the patterns, causes and consequences of occupational moves made by Samoan professionals within and beyond Samoa (Liki, 1994). It was based primarily on formal interviews with a sample of 109 Samoan professionals who were working at the time in Fiji, New Zealand and Samoa. Government leaders, including the Prime Minister, government ministers and department directors, as well as heads of the three mainstream churches in Samoa (Catholic, Methodist and Congregational Christian), were involved in the interviews. The brain drain issue emerged as a major point of discussion among members of both groups, although their perspectives were quite different.

Since the late 1970s, a significant number of Samoans who formerly were government employees have worked in various regional institutions in the Pacific. The Department of Statistics "guesstimated" that their number by the early 1990s was between 80 and 150 and that the majority were in

Fiji, as the fastest growing regional centre of commercial and administrative affairs (Muagututi'a, personal communication, 1993). Many more are in New Zealand and data from its Department of Statistics show that by 1992 a total of 903 skilled Samoans were in that country. This number, however, could be underestimated, since many highly qualified Samoans may be included in the category of "New Zealand citizen".

At the time of field enquiries in 1993, those working in Fiji were with one of the following institutions: the University of the South Pacific, the Forum Secretariat, the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, the South Pacific Commission and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programmme. Skilled Samoans in New Zealand consisted of those who were either self-employed in their own business or working in the private or government sectors. Although those interviewed were not statistically representative of the whole population of Samoan professionals, the responses of the selected sample provided interesting information which merits discussion.

The study revealed that a dialogue existed between Samoan leaders and skilled local professionals, which revolved around the brain drain issue and which clearly replicated the nationalist-internationalist debate discussed previously. Samoan leaders agreed that the country's labour market suffered from the loss of skilled personnel and emphasized that Samoan professionals needed to show loyalty to their country -this being a solution suggested to counter emigration. The professionals, however, raised two significant points. First, their decision to leave for overseas-based jobs had much to do with their dissatisfaction with government work, and unattractive economic and political spheres of employment in the public service were identified as key reasons for departure. The second point was to question the meaning of brain drain. One professional interviewed in Fiji suggested: "The brain drain concept needs to be redefined. My own interpretation is that Samoans in regional institutions still work for Samoa through the development programmes for the island countries we are involved in".

Many spoke of the continuing commitment they have to relatives in Samoa. All, while living outside Samoa, have been visited more than once by their relatives from home. They also have had requests for financial assistance: from parents, from siblings and from other extended family members in the islands. The Fiji-based professionals, through their careers with regional institutions, travel back and forth between Samoa and other Pacific islands. Because of the contractual nature of their careers in Fiji, Samoans have no right to become permanent emigrants. All held an initial

three-year work contract which had been frequently extended, thus prolonging their stay but not guaranteeing permanent residence in Fiji.

The New Zealand-based professionals, however, spoke not only of their continuing involvement with major *fa'alavelave* (obligations) of their *'aiga* in the islands, but also of their role in the affairs of the Samoan community in New Zealand. Samoan historian Malama Meleisea, himself resident in New Zealand, pointed out in an informal conversation how most Samoan professionals in New Zealand hold positions that involve them in providing services to the total of 85,000 Samoans living there. On this basis, he questioned the relevance of concepts of "drain" and "gain" in the case of Samoan professionals, who range from university instructors to travel agents and to social welfare specialists in support services administered by the Government.

From this dialogue between local leaders and skilled Samoans abroad, the perspectives of each group reflected different orientations and beliefs. From a development-based view, government leaders declared the "emigration" of Samoan professionals to be a critical problem affecting the supply of skilled personnel to the national labour market. The professionals, however, acknowledged and valued their continuing involvement in the world of their *'aiga* and of communities both at home and overseas. They argued that being away from the country should not be equated with discontinuation of such commitments or being uprooted from Samoa.

Moreover, contributions that sustain connections to Samoan *'aiga* are not restricted in the forms of goods and money remitted. Many Samoan professionals living overseas have expressed through writing their sense of connectedness to their *'aiga.* Almost all of Wendt's novels and poems, such as *Sons for the Return Home, Ola* and "Shaman vision", articulate the dynamics of the *'aiga.* Meleisea (1980, 1987, 1992) tends to reflect on the historical development of modern Samoa so as to raise awareness among contemporary leaders of the danger of being absorbed into the mission of development and modernization. Many young Samoan scholars and writers, both those born locally and overseas, engage themselves in such issues as culture and identity in an attempt to reaffirm their *'aiga* connections (Simi, 1992; Malifa, 1992; Figiel, 1996; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1997; Kruse-Vaai, 1998).

It is interesting to note that the strength of the *'aiga* has continued to thrive among the children of original Samoan migrants. The established role of the Samoan church in cities such as Auckland, Wellington, Sydney and Los Angeles has made a positive contribution to the maintenance of Samoan identity. The question of "who am I?" has become increasingly

important among New Zealand-born Samoans, for example. This is obvious in the emergence of art work including tattooing, emphasizing Samoan life and identity, island-oriented fashion shows and the increasing number of overseas-born Samoan scholars whose work explores the persistence of *'aiga* and Samoan culture in a post-modern world (for example, Salesa, 1997; Anae, 1998; Lima, 2000).

While such a trend reflects the search for identity among the younger generations of overseas-based Samoans, their strength has been a result of constant travels between the islands and the metropoles made possible by frequent airline services and the modern means of communication available today. Viewed from this perspective, it seems highly unlikely that commitment to the *'aiga* will diminish in the near future. In the contemporary world, where roots and identity have become increasingly valuable to one's sense of survival, generations of young Samoans overseas may continue to find a sense of completeness in their rootedness in their *'aiga.*

Conclusion

This paper has argued a case for understanding the movement of Samoan professionals in the context of the *'aiga.* Given dominant beliefs embedded in the idea of brain drain, there seems no room for "alternative ways of knowing" (Chapman, 1995). However, the experiences of these Samoans are paradoxical to conventional images of movement, for they are part of a context that both considers and values the traveller as part of the whole - the *'aiga.* Because of that connedtion, Samoan professionals cannot be viewed as "permanent migrants" uprooted from their island homes and wandering in a world within which they cannot find themselves. Like the canoe and the tree in Bonnemaison's (1994:321-22) metaphorical phrase, the goal of the Samoan professional is to "circulate, to go beyond the tree, to move from place to place and island to island...to the Big Land and the most powerful of allies very far away....[T]he infinite number of his roads and the rootedness of his places make him forget that he is surrounded by definite space".

Samoan mobility spans geographic and social spaces, yet is firmly anchored in the *'aiga.* Viewed from this context, Samoan professionals are travellers who, through the very process of travelling, are continually drawn closer to home, where their roots and identity lie. Thus, the movement of Samoan professionals would not constitute a "drain" as often claimed. This concept is meaningless in the long run, especially because modern Samoa

has established its own institutions of higher learning and is training its young people in regional universities and institutions based in other islands of the Pacific. These institutions are already producing well-qualified graduates for quite a limited number of professions available in the local labour market. From a policy point of view, it is in Samoa's best interest and a monitor of the country's economic health that the circulation of its skilled population within the Pacific and beyond continues to takes place. This circulation will also mean continuity of *'aiga* identity.

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