

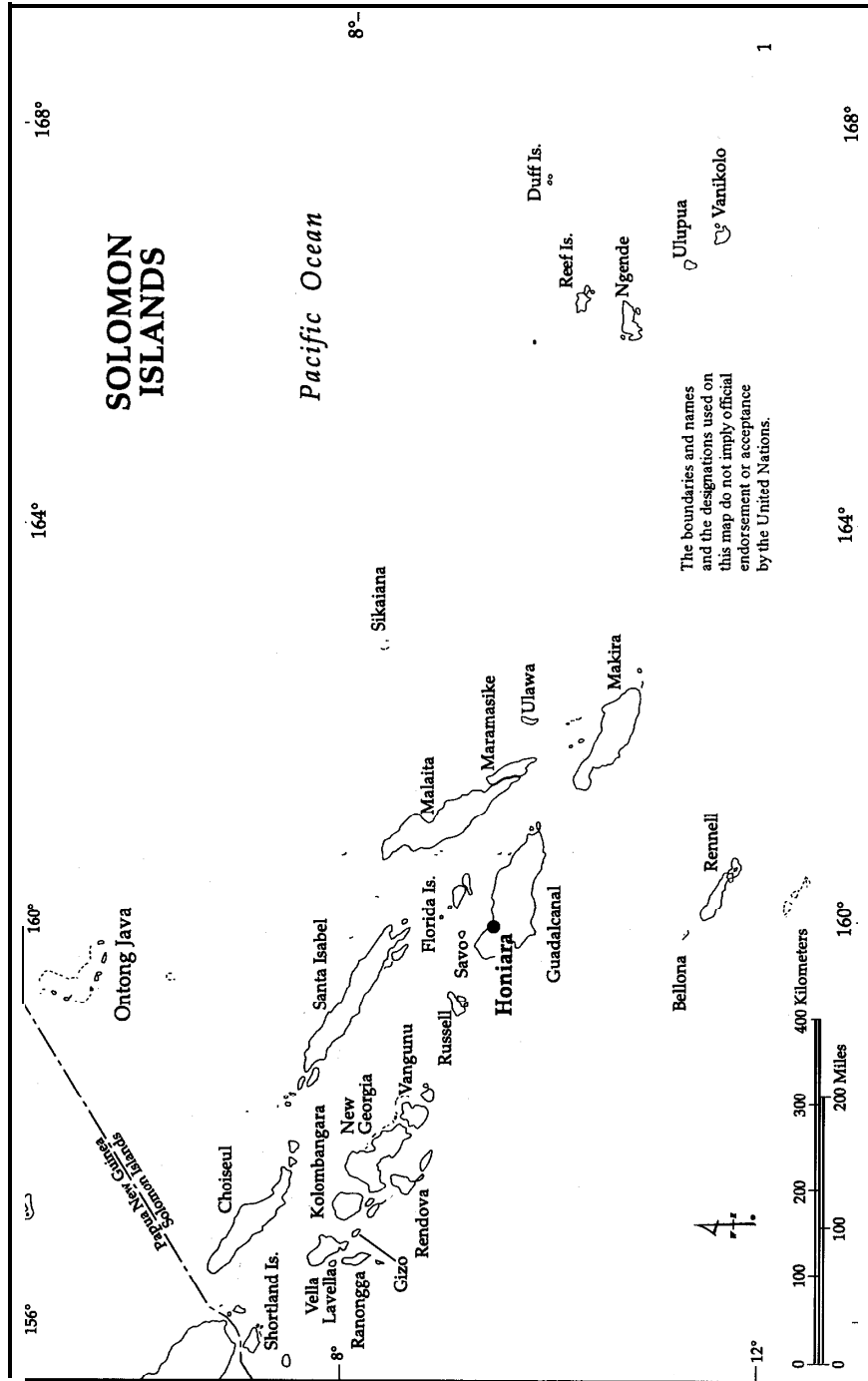
The Process of Internal Movement in Solomon Islands: The Case of Malaita, 1978-1986

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Migration, one of the three components of population change, has become an increasing focus of research and policy development in many third world countries. Internal and international movements exert varying degrees of influence on specific countries or regions, depending on a mix of political, social, economic and environmental factors. The internal movement of Solomon Islanders is more visible and increasingly far more important than external movements, which more often than not are for educational purposes. In the third world, internal migration is strongly associated with rural-to-urban drift. However, this process involves a number of different movement streams, characterized by varying patterns and processes associated with various socioeconomic factors in places of both origin and destination (Pryor, 1975).

In the past 25 years, many migration studies have been carried out in Solomon Islands and other countries of Melanesia ([see map on page 54](#)). These concluded that the mobility pattern in Solomon Islands and within the Melanesian region was dominantly *circular*, in the sense that Solomon Islanders — and Melanesians as a whole — rarely leave their rural

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homes “permanently” when they move (Bedford, 1973; Chapman, 1978). This challenged the conventional wisdom depicted by many theories. Lee’s (1966) theory of migration emphasized, for the mover, the importance of place of origin, intervening variables, place of destination and the intention to move away permanently from an established place of origin or residence. However, the new conventional wisdom on “circulation” (sometimes called “circular migration”) holds that movements into destinations are not intended to be permanent — even if they are long-lasting — and that the mover has an intention eventually to return to the original place of residence, usually the village and island of birth (Pryor, 1975).

The process of circulation involves many forms and types of mobility, usually short-term, but repetitive or cyclic in nature and commonly lacking any declared intention of a permanent or long-lasting change of residence (Zelinsky, 1971:225-226). The many forms of circulation range from brief, short-distance moves such as shopping, daily employment, schooling, or visiting, together termed “oscillation”, to medium-term and lengthy journeys such as taking business trips or contract employment, defined as circulation (Pryor, 1975; Prothero and Chapman, 1985). The intention of the mover in circulation to return to the original place of residence involves an absence of one or more months and can be reflected by the sort of arrangements made either to retain or end ties and ongoing interests at the place of origin. This makes it possible to differentiate *circulation* from *migration* (Bedford, 1973:3) through retrospective investigation of movers based on the time spent away, which is the focus of this paper.

Circulation incorporates a great many social and economic connotations. The process of circulation has been more common than migration in traditional societies and is argued to be the major form of spatial mobility in the process of modernization in third world countries (Bedford, 1973; Pryor, 1975; Chapman and Prothero, 1985). In a transitional society, where traditional patterns of living have been disrupted by such foreign intrusions as colonization, the coexistence of differently structured societies and economies often is found. As a former colony, Solomon Islands consists of a plural society sustained by a dual economy. Coexistence in a population of both semi-subsistence and introduced economies offers contrasting ways of life. Thus, migrants may maintain rural residency with its associated security and obtain the benefits of “new” economic development through the compromise of circulation between villages and the centres of wage employment. In this way, they retain an attachment and association with traditional institutions, while at the same time obtaining the benefits of paid work associated with introduced economic activities. The conclusion from much movement research in the 1970s was that, for Solomon Islands as for

Melanesia as a whole, the process of circulation was dominant. This reflected the weight migrants placed on kinship and the customary right to cultivate land and the security of maintaining a home in the rural village. In contrast, migrants considered administrative policies in town, the high cost of urban land and services, coupled with low wages, to be insufficient compensation for abandoning an active interest in rural-based economic activities (Bedford, 1973).

The circulation of wage labour from rural areas, as depicted in earlier studies in Solomon Islands and Melanesia (Chapman and Prothero, 1985), was regarded as a transitional form of mobility associated with the early stages of modernization. Consequently any shift from a subsistence to a market-based economy, coupled with changing aspirations and expectations of people through exposure to economic commercialization, could be expected to weaken ties to rural localities (Haberkorn, 1989). In Solomon Islands, as transportation and communication facilities improved from the 1950s, so the population became more mobile. The relocation in 1945 of the capital from Tulagi to Honiara, to make use of infrastructure constructed during the Second World War, saw the slow evolution of a main town and urban functions that created the necessary conditions for more extensive inward movement involving more permanent relocation. Over the years 1960 to 1980, in-migration to Honiara was a necessary factor of economic growth that indicated an interplay between mobility and structural transformation in both source and destination areas, which subsequently created the socio-economic environments within which even further movement could take place.

During the 1980s, constant changes in the processes of mobility and of settlement reflected structural transformations apparently under way in both urban and rural areas. This was reflected, first, in the increasing urbanization of Honiara and permanent relocation of migrants on the Guadalcanal plains and in the Western and Central provinces ([see map](#)); second, in the greater permanency of residence in Honiara and Gizo/Munda (Western Province) revealed by the increasing proportion of lifetime in-migrants in these destinations. As Haberkorn's (1989:v) extensive research in neighbouring Vanuatu has shown, the rapid expansion and diversification of an urban economy meant that conditions formerly favourable to temporary and rural-based circulation were transformed into a setting far more conducive to long-term and permanent relocation.

Thus, empirical research in the 1960s and 1970s established a "new conventional wisdom" that circulation was the dominant form of mobility in Solomon Islands and the rest of Melanesia. It was valid at the time, for it captured the frequent compromise which islanders adopted to take

advantage of both their rural obligations and the benefits of introduced economic development. In that respect, this argument challenged the prevailing view that rural-to-urban migration in Melanesia had been responsible for the redistribution of its population and further held that rural-to-urban drift was not an issue since Solomon Islanders, for example, were rooted firmly to their rural origin. In the 1986 census, 87 per cent of Solomon Islanders were reported to live in rural areas, but with a key difference. Nowadays, they also are involved in rural-based, monetary activities brought about by the merger of simple (traditional) and complicated (introduced) ideas and knowledge. Hence, adult Solomon Islanders can now receive the same level of socio-economic benefits without having to go away for and into wage employment, which was and still is available only in the formal sectors concentrated in urban Honiara and the provincial centres.

The past three censuses of Solomon Islands (1970, 1976, 1986) and other cross-sectional surveys reveal that the population continues to be highly mobile (Groenewegen, 1972 and 1989; Solomon Islands, 1980/1981). (A much delayed census was undertaken in November 1999, but the final results will not be known until 2001.) The magnitude of rural-to-urban movement towards Honiara is reflected in political sensitivity about spontaneous resettlement in and around the capital city, especially since at the time of the 1986 census eight out of nine adult persons were in-migrants. In addition, the cumulative effect of continued lifetime in-migration was compounded by high urban fertility, owing to the young age structure of Honiara migrants. Problems associated with urban growth, more permanent in-migration and high natural increase raised both political and administrative concerns. The most visible problems are water shortages, rapid growth of squatter settlements, overloading of transportation facilities and the rising cost of providing services to the ever-expanding suburbs of Honiara. The level of urbanization, measured by the proportion of the population resident in all urban areas in the 1976 and 1986 national censuses, was 9.3 and 13 per cent respectively - a numerical increase of 40 per cent during the 10-year period. Infrastructural change in Honiara and the provincial centres has not matched the increase in both population growth and employment or administrative functions. In a country where the land tenure system is based on communal ownership and subsistence agriculture is the main economic activity, around 87 per cent of the total population is still rural in both location and orientation. For such people, the common pattern of movement is within the province (rural to rural) or from one province to another (rural to urban, most often to Honiara).

According to previous studies, Melanesian circulation was predominantly male in both number and socio-economic character. This is no longer

the case for rural-to-urban migration in Solomon Islands, as revealed in the rising proportion of females involved in movement since independence (7 July 1978). In 1986, the proportions of lifetime in-migrants aged 15 years and older, when compared with those of all ages, were 80.0, 72.6 and 76.9 per cent for males, females and total population respectively. In contrast, the proportions of in-migrants aged 15 and older since independence, when compared with lifetime in-migrants, were 61.7 per cent (males), 66.0 per cent (females) and 63.4 per cent (total). In recent years, it is evident from these two sets of figures that the in-migration of women has overtaken the predominantly male in-migration streams of the past decades.

There is a paradox in recent changes in both population movement and socio-economic development in Solomon Islands. On the one hand, the increasing level of urbanization and economic growth has not been accompanied by infrastructural development in Honiara. On the other, since independence, an increasing proportion of both lifetime and female in-migrants has been found in urban centres and rural destinations of Guadalcanal, Western and Central provinces ([see map](#)). If such trends in society, the economy and movement suggest that a structural transformation is occurring in Solomon Islands, they pose a question to the new conventional wisdom of circulation as the dominant pattern of population mobility.

What census-based evidence exists of such key changes? This paper is guided by the proposition that, in Solomon Islands, the process of circulation is receding while permanent migration is becoming the dominant form of mobility. It focuses on both the Malaita-born population and those kinds of movements captured in the 1986 national census in order to both measure and compare levels of circulation — here synonymous with “return migration” — with those of permanent migration. The choice of Malaita Province reflects its large area and considerable population. In addition, the wide distribution in 1986 of the Malaita-born throughout all seven provinces makes it more representative of both the “mobile” and “immobile” population in Solomon Islands, while the focus on Honiara reflects its urban primacy. The analysis will consider all movements between rural origin (Malaita) and urban destination (Honiara) and between rural (Malaita) origins and other rural destinations (other provinces).

Data and methodology

For this analysis, the level of circulation and migration in Solomon Islands will be assessed in terms of the mobility of the Malaita-born at both the provincial level and for three “migration divisions” ([see map](#)): namely

Auki (urban), the rest of Malaita (Melanesian) and the Polynesian outliers of Ontong Java and Sikaiana. In the absence of direct migration statistics, data are drawn from the 1986 national census and compared with data from the 1970 and 1976 censuses. The 1986 census recorded each individual's birthplace, residence at independence (1978), and usual place of residence (1986). From these, different types of movement can be defined for the Malaita-born population. "Lifetime migration" is determined by the age of individuals involved, although the time when the move was taken and the number of possible movements are not captured in a census operation. "Migration since independence" is when residence at the time of the census (1986) was not the same as usual residence at the time of independence (1978). Again, this does not account for the time of movement nor the number of movements made by a Malaita-born individual.

For persons born prior to independence, the time-period in which they were at risk of movement is the same. This is also valid for those born after 7 July 1978, except that only lifetime and recent migration can be determined. To overcome the problems of using two different population bases to consider lifetime and post-independence migration, in this analysis the adult population aged 15 years and older was chosen to determine the pattern of movement and to enable comparative analysis of the Malaita-born population over time.

Using residence at independence as the reference period, individuals born on Malaita were placed in the categories of "lifetime migration" or "migration since independence".

Lifetime migration

For those born on Malaita before independence (Friesen, 1989:50), this includes three kinds of movers. "Past migrants" are defined as those whose residence at independence and at the time of the census was the same, but not on Malaita (the birthplace), thus showing movement before July 1978. "Recent migrants" are defined as those whose residence was the same at birth and independence, but different at the census, thus showing movement in the previous eight and one third years. "Multiple migrants" are defined as those born on Malaita, with different places of residence at independence and at the time of enumeration.

Migration since independence

The category "migration since independence" includes both recent and return migrants. "Recent migrants" are defined as those Malaita-born individuals whose residence at the time of the 1986 census was not Malaita,

Table 1. Population of Solomon Islands by province: 1970, 1976 and 1986 censuses

Province of enumeration	1970			1976			1986		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
	Western	16,876	14,977	31,853	21,198	18,760	39,958	28,955	25,962
Isabel	4,522	4,080	8,602	5,266	5,130	10,396	7,319	7,284	14,603
Central	5,737	5,055	10,792	7,255	6,228	13,483	9,770	8,592	18,362
Guadalcanal	12,855	10,972	23,827	16,771	14,672	31,443	26,144	23,526	49,670
Honiara	6,362	3,225	9,587	8,014	5,259	13,273	16,720	12,743	29,463
Malaita	25,470	26,096	51,566	29,614	30,308	59,922	39,553	40,391	79,944
Makira	6,636	5,710	12,346	7,755	7,083	14,838	11,155	10,619	21,774
Temotu	4,497	4,561	9,058	5,486	5,420	10,906	7,260	7,512	14,772
Total	82,955	74,676	157,631	101,559	92,860	194,219	146,876	136,629	283,505

thus showing movement in the previous eight and one third years. “Return migrants” are defined as Malaita-born individuals who, at independence, were resident elsewhere but enumerated in 1986 on Malaita as the usual place of residence — showing a return to province and place of birth. “Non-migrants” include those whose residence at birth, at the time of independence and at the 1986 national census continued to be on Malaita.

In this paper, internal migration refers to the movement of individuals and groups of people from Malaita within Solomon Islands, across political and administrative boundaries defined as province in the 1986 census ([see map](#)), plus “the taking up of residence of a non-temporary nature” captured by census questions on place of birth, residence at independence and place of usual residence. Thus, out-migration refers to Malaita Province as the place of origin, while in-migration is the movement of the Malaita-born to destinations in Malaita Province. In-migration refers to that portion of the population who lived elsewhere in the country at the time of independence, but in the 1986 census was enumerated as with usual residence being on Malaita. This paper considers only return in-migrants, that is, those who were born in Malaita Province and lived elsewhere in the country just before independence but returned to the province (place of birth) on or before enumeration in the 1986 census. In the category of out-migration, only those born in Malaita Province but resident in another province just before independence and at enumeration are included.

The Malaita population

In 1986, Malaita, which is the most populous province in Solomon Islands, comprised 28.2 per cent of the total population. Around 97.8 per cent of Malaita’s population are Melanesian, 2.1 per cent Polynesian and the rest include people of Kiribati origin (iKiribati) and ethnic Chinese. Among the total Solomon Islander population, half are younger than 15 years, which closely resembles the pattern for the whole country. The total land area of Malaita is 4,225 sq km; in the three national censuses of 1970, 1976 and 1986, Malaita was the most densely populated province and by 1986 had reached a density of 18 persons per sq km ([table 2](#)). Densities for the ward (next lower administrative unit) range from 5 per sq km in Ward 25 (Aisisi) to 977 in Ward 15 (Sulufou). Based on census data, the average annual growth rate for Malaita in 1986 was 2.7 per cent and the infant mortality rate 47 per thousand for females. The total population had grown by 33.3 per cent since 1976, of which “new” in-migration accounted for only 3.1 per cent. Had an out-migration of 22.4 per cent not occurred (see next section), then by 1986 the total population of the Malaita-born would have been 97,472 — an increase of 40.6 per cent during

Table 2. Households and population by sex and population density, Malaita Province, 1986

Migration division	Number of			Percentage distribution			Sex ratio	Area in sq km	Density (per sq km)	
	House- holds	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females				Total
Auki ^a	500	1,661	1,588	3,252	4.2	3.9	4.1	105	9.5	342
Malaita (rest) ^b	11,642	37,189	37,926	75,115	93.9	93.8	93.9	98	4,204.9	18
Ontong Java and Sikaiana ^c	275	752	913	1,665	1.9	2.3	2.1	82	10.3	162
Total	12,417	39,605	40,427	80,032	100.0	100.0	100.1	98.0	4,224.7	19

Source: 1986 population census.

^a Ward 1.

^b Wards 2 to 38.

^c Wards 39 to 41.

a period of 10.8 years. Thus, the process of population movement, coupled with mortality, provided an effective check on the provincial growth rate (2.7 per cent per annum), but the 1986 population would still double in size by the year 2012.

Another feature of Malaita's population, also characteristic of all provinces, is that half the population is in the age group 0-14 years. This youthfulness is found in all three "migration divisions" — urban (Auki), Melanesian (rest of Malaita), Polynesian (Ontong Java and Sikaiana) — and reflects a high fertility rate. The sex ratio from 1986 data for Malaita as a whole was 98.0 males per 100 females (table 2). This level reflects the apparent loss of males from the overall provincial population, since a sex ratio at birth of 109 and very similar values of life expectancy after age 25 (42.7 for males, 41.4 for females) indicate little influence from mortality. In only 12 out of 41 wards in the province were sex ratios equal to or greater than 100, whereas between the "migration divisions", only urban Auki had a ratio greater than 100. With males comparatively absent in 29 of 41 wards, the greatest deficits in the Malaita-born population suggest which areas have the highest propensity to migrate. The sex ratio for Auki, as the main town and major centre of wage employment, is not surprising.

Lifetime interprovincial migration

In the 1970, 1976 and 1986 national censuses, Malaita is outstanding as the province where most out-migration originates and little in-migration has occurred (tables 3 and 4). For many years, there has been an increasing shortage of land for agriculture (Sanders, 1983), but to associate people's movement with their overall density is too simplistic. Out-migration, which is seen as a "rite of passage" for many young people and as a means by which individuals and households diversify sources of income and improve living standards, when coupled with other social and economic factors, is important in explaining levels of movement among those born on Malaita (Frazer, 1981). In some sense, the out-migration of people from Malaita was inevitable, given inadequate avenues of paid employment on the main island, government policies of equal employment for all Solomon Islanders and improved transport service to and from the province.

In contrast, Malaita has experienced little in-migration and from 1976 to 1986 registered the highest net loss of all seven provinces (tables 3 and 4). In a decade when the Malaita-born population increased by 41 per cent, the net migration loss more than doubled to 104 per cent. Based on lifetime interprovincial migration, these losses of the Malaita-born (9,499 in the 1976 census and 17,665 in the 1986 census) were nearly matched by the net gains of Honiara and Guadalcanal (table 3).

Table 3. Interprovincial lifetime internal migrants and non-migrants, Solomon Islands, 1976 and 1986 censuses

Province of birth	Province of enumeration							Total out-migrants		
	Western	Isabel	Central	Guadalcanal	Honiara	Malaita	Makira		Temotu	
1976										
Western	35,339	76	238	315	1,287	333	64	21	37,673	2,334
Isabel	122	9,532	179	114	721	62	49	35	10,814	1,282
Central	136	46	10,491	342	747	135	71	72	12,040	1,549
Guadalcanal	320	97	250	25,581	939	255	72	14	27,528	1,947
Honiara	515	283	482	1,643	3,092	908	220	132	7,275	4,183
Malaita	1,686	237	1,111	2,991	5,023	57,977	261	59	69,345	11,368
Makira	99	56	104	133	485	120	13,714	105	14,816	1,102
Temotu	63	51	583	152	554	56	359	10,456	12,274	1,818
Total	38,280	10,378	13,438	31,271	12,848	59,846	14,810	10,894	191,765	
In-migrants	2,941	846	2,947	5,690	9,756	1,869	1,096	438		
Net migrants	607	-436	1,398	3,743	5,573	-9,499	-6	-1,380		0
1986										
Western	48,929	171	364	725	3,336	617	122	76	54,340	5,411
Isabel	281	13,124	366	298	1,056	70	62	50	15,307	2,183
Central	276	141	14,204	735	1,450	291	101	201	17,399	3,195
Guadalcanal	579	236	364	38,123	1,935	667	142	132	42,178	4,055
Honiara	1,315	470	516	1,853	8,053	2,233	378	320	15,138	7,085
Malaita	1,811	253	1,723	6,943	10,655	75,599	369	119	97,472	21,873
Makira	173	68	227	253	960	236	20,091	163	22,171	2,080
Temolu	266	86	524	511	1,074	94	470	13,690	16,715	3,025
Total	53,630	14,549	18,288	49,441	28,519	79,807	21,735	14,751	280,720	
In-migrants	4,701	1,425	4,084	11,318	20,466	4,208	1,644	1,061		
Net migrants	-710	-758	889	7,263	13,381	-17,665	-436	-1,964		0

Source: 1986 population census.

Table 4. Rates, lifetime interprovincial percentage movement, Solomon Islands, 1970, 1976 and 1986

Province of enumeration	Out-migrants as percentage of population born in province			In-migrants as percentage of population born in province		
	1970	1976	1986	1970	1976	1986
Western	4.3	6.2	10.0	7.2	7.8	8.8
Isabel	11.2	11.9	14.3	7.8	8.2	9.8
Central	12.2	12.9	18.4	20.2	21.9	22.3
Guadalcanal	^a	7.1	9.6	^a	19.7	22.9
Honiara	5.1	57.5	46.8	29.0	76.0	71.8
Malaita	15.5	16.4	22.4	1.3	1.8	5.3
Makira	6.6	7.4	9.4	7.8	7.4	7.6
Temotu	14.0	14.8	18.1	2.0	4.1	7.2
Average	10.5	12.0	17.4	10.5	12.0	17.4

Source: 1986 population census.

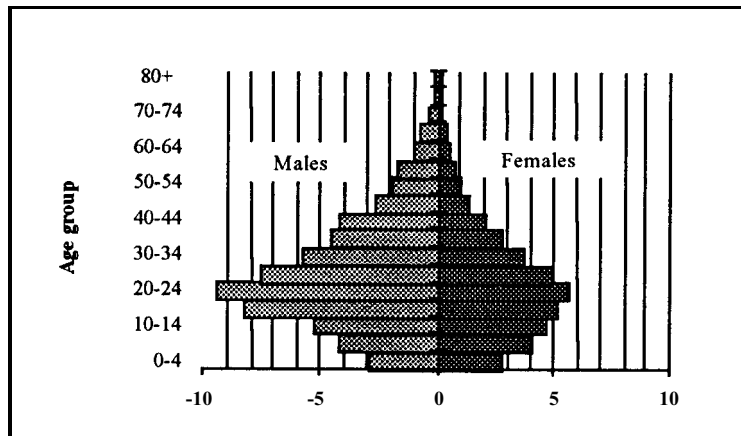
^a Rate for both Guadalcanal and Honiara combined.

The rate of lifetime interprovincial migration (table 4) reveals the impact of population movement on the Malaitan population. On the one hand, in consecutive censuses out-migrants as a percentage of those born in the province have steadily increased — second only to Honiara — while, on the other, the proportion of return in-migrants began to rise more recently but at a very much slower rate. Even so, the rate of return in-migration for Malaita is still the lowest in the country (table 4) and the reasons for the high propensity to move away are quite different from those in the Central and Western Solomons. In what the 1986 census report termed the “economic provinces (Western, Central, Guadalcanal and Honiara — the provinces with high levels of wage employment opportunities)” (Friesen, 1989), rates of out-migration reflect more the turnover effects of major or important areas of wage and professional employment. That the percentage of return migrants increased during the most recent census also indicates the beginnings of a “return home” movement and perhaps a signal for the future (table 4).

Sources of out-migration on Malaita

At the national level, Malaita is the dominant province of origin for migrants, destined mainly for the capital of Honiara and both Guadalcanal and Western provinces (table 3). Levels of out-migration for people of all ages and those aged at least 15 years show that Auki town, as a migration division, is a place of much inward and outward movement, for a great many born there subsequently return to their home villages and small islands or take up residency elsewhere in the Solomons. This phenomenon is part of a

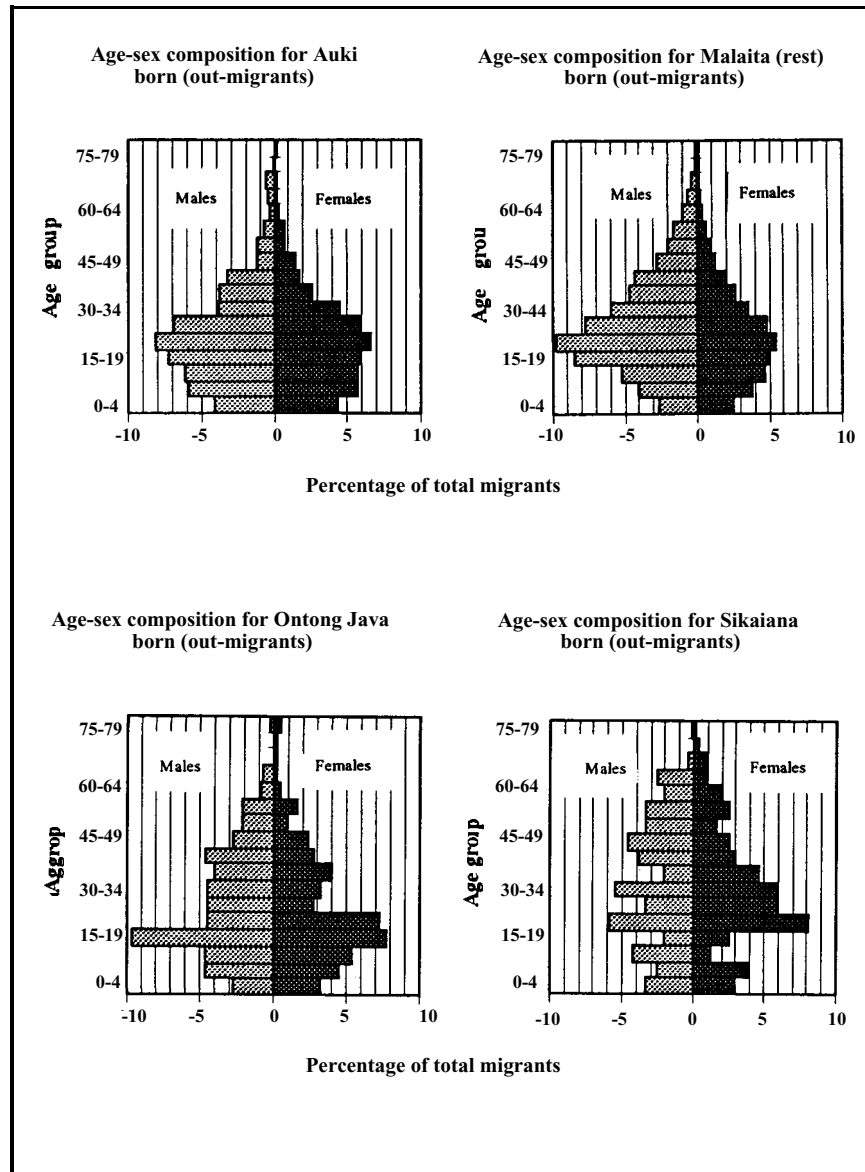
Figure 1. Age-sex structure of lifetime out-migration



national pattern found in the 1986 census, which reported the highest rates for both total and adult (15+) lifetime out-migration in the larger towns of Honiara, Auki and Gizo, and Western Province. Of the two other “migration islands”, Ontong Java and Sikaiana had the highest incidence of out-migration compared with the rest of Malaita.

Over a lifetime, men moving out from Auki slightly outnumbered women, but for the province as a whole, the rest of Malaita, and Ontong Java and Sikaiana, this process is dominated by males (figures 1 and 2). Whether expressed in terms of all ages or persons of at least 15 years, the sex ratios for the number of Malaita-born enumerated in other provinces of the Solomons and the out-migration rate for each migration division in Malaita Province are all heavily weighted towards males. This process is captured in the population structures of lifetime out-migrants for each migration division of the province (figure 2). Especially in the cohorts aged 10 to 49, males dominate in the migrant population; females dominate to a considerable extent in the non-migrant population — a pattern also found on other islands of the country (Friesen, 1989). The crucial role that adult females play in the subsistence sector of Malaita and the predominance of males in the money economy, often as migrant workers, are influential reasons for the age-sex structures of the migrant and non-migrant populations being mirror images of each other. Thus, the deficit in the number of Malaita-born for each part of the province is nearly matched by their respective populations reported in the “economic provinces” of Central and Western Solomons.

Figure 2. Age-sex structure of lifetime out-migration, Malaita Province



Compared with Melanesian Malaita, high out-migration is also characteristic of Polynesian people on the small atoll outliers of Sikaiana and Ontong Java (the migration division in [figure 2](#)). The out-migration rate for those Polynesians born in the province and aged 15 years or more is 405 per thousand — exceeded only by that for Auki town (545 per thousand). The reasons, however, are very different from the rest of Malaita and tied to population densities in atoll environments. In towns, this has meant that daily survival is heavily reliant on a vulnerable economic base of marine products, *copra*-making and subsistence agriculture (Bayliss-Smith, 1973; 1975; 1986; Christiansen, 1975), with a lack of local wage employment and other essential services being reflected in high levels of movement off Sikaiana and Ontong Java in the past three censuses (1970, 1976, 1986).

Malaitan out-migration and in-migration

Based on 1986 census data, the pattern of movement from Malaita is similar to that for lifetime migration ([table 3](#)). The province is again the single greatest source of migrants in the country but, compared with lifetime rates, levels of out-migration for those aged 15 or more years have declined since independence. The impact of the resettlement of many out-migrants in other provinces and larger islands since 1978 has also contributed to a lowering of lifetime rates. For 1986, census data and lifetime calculations show very similar degrees of movements back to Malaita (“return in-migrants”). In absolute terms, the province is the third most important destination in the Solomons, but most of this consists of a return of the Malaita-born. The level of lifetime in-migration was 5.3 per cent ([table 4](#)) and, in the eight years since independence, rates of return stood at 5.3 per cent for all those from Malaita ([table 4](#)) and 8.9 per cent for the adult population.

Place of residence at birth, at independence in 1978, and usual residence in 1986

A complete picture of Malaitan mobility requires details of all “significant” moves made by individuals. Since these are not available from national censuses, place of birth for the Malaita-born population was linked with places of residence at independence (1978) and in the next enumeration after independence (1986). Such sequences of movement not only can suggest underlying reasons but also help to assess implications for planning. This flow of migrants from Malaita Province as a birthplace ([tables 3 and 4](#)) to three provinces (Central, Guadalcanal, Western) and Honiara (the capital) for the years of independence and the 1986 census is depicted in [figure 3](#).

Figure 3. Sequence of residence at birth, independence (1978) and usual residence (1986)

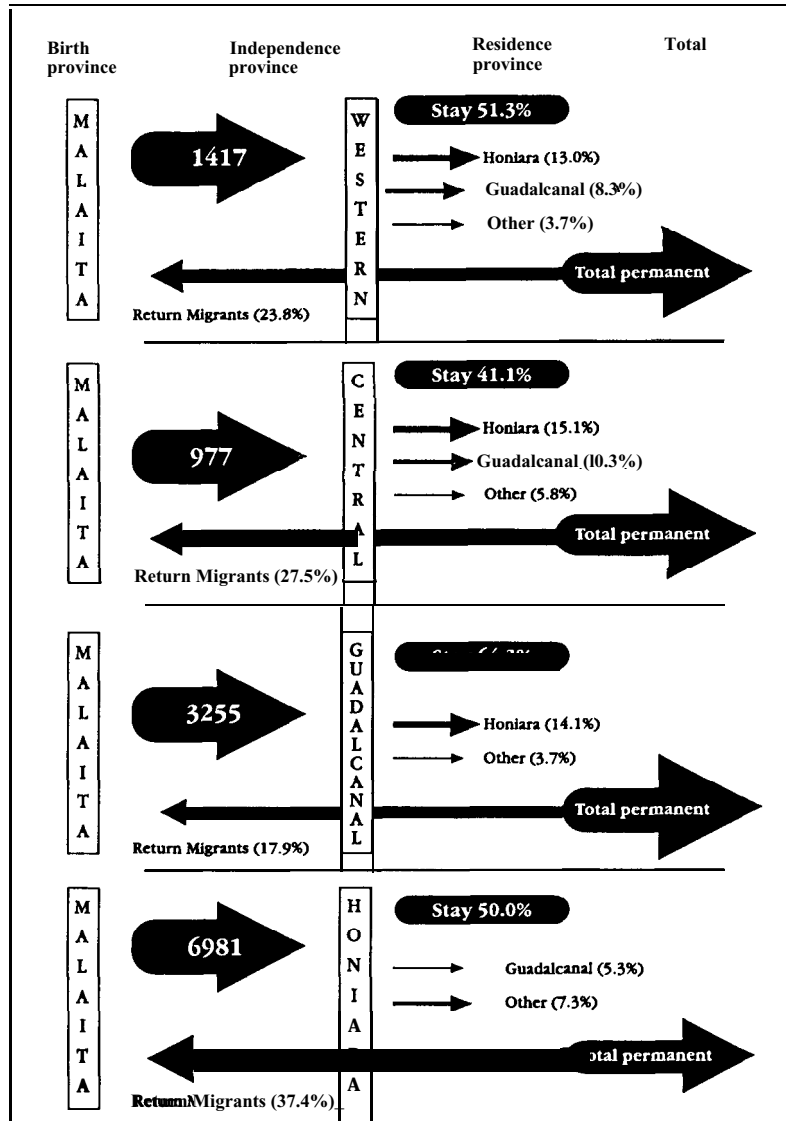


Table 5. Malaita-born 15 years and older by province at independence (1978) and by province of enumeration in 1986, classified by employment status (percentage employed) and sex

	Western		Isabel		Central		Guadalcanal		Honiara		Malaita		Makira		Temotu		Not born/not stated		Total		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
A. Province at independence (1978)																					
Employer																					
Self-employed	18.2	43.8	19.4		8.5	10.7	11.2	18.5	10.6	10.7	14.5	31.1	8.6	23.5	13.5	75.0	9.3	1.0	0.2	0.2	0.2
Wage earner	80.0	47.9	80.6	100.0	91.0	88.0	87.4	79.8	88.4	86.6	83.2	65.1	91.4	70.6	86.5		87.6	100.0	85.1	71.7	71.7
Other ^a	1.8	8.3			0.5	1.3	1.1	1.7	0.5	2.1	2.2	3.7	0.0	5.9	0.0	25.0	2.1	1.5	3.2	3.2	3.2
Total	559	48	62	7	365	75	1,066	302	2,490	561	5,313	1,643	58	17	37	4	97	6	10,047	2,663	2,663
Population	1,043	281	104	26	592	290	1,816	1,087	4,087	2,279	20,534	422,430	118	86	54	23	128	41	28,476	26,543	26,543
B. Province of enumeration in 1986																					
Employer																					
Self-employed	14.9	44.6	19.6	5.6	8.3	6.5	6.7	14.2	7.6	2.7	26.4	53.0	13.0	31.6	12.5	80.0				0.2	0.2
Wage earner	82.6	39.3	80.4	94.4	96.1	93.5	92.4	83.8	91.2	94.3	70.5	42.8	81.2	52.6	87.5	20.0				85.1	71.7
Other ^a	2.5	16.1			0.6		0.8	1.6	0.7	2.7	3.0	4.2	5.8	15.8						1.5	3.2
Total	713	56	97	18	642	138	2,129	612	3,512	857	2,853	958	69	19	32	5				10,047	2,663
Population	1,149	359	151	50	797	413	3,105	1,939	5,151	3,211	17,927	20,437	149	105	47	29				28,476	26,543

Source: 1986 population census.

Note: M = Male; F = Female.

^a Other, plus those not stated.

Half the Malaitan-born residents in Honiara at independence were still there eight years later (1986 census), more than one third had returned to Malaita, and about 13 per cent of the original group had continued on to other provinces (multiple migrants). In terms of the numbers involved, the stream between the provinces of Malaita and Guadalcanal is the second most important, but it is less than half that of the stream to urban Honiara. Almost two thirds of Malaitan migrants who resided in Guadalcanal in 1978 were still there in 1986 (ignoring mortality); the likelihood of long-term settlement was reflected in a small percentage of return migrants (17.9 per cent); and Honiara was the destination preferred by multiple migrants, often en route to other provinces.

As with Honiara, half the Malaitan migrants to Western Province remained there (1978, 1986), almost one quarter went back to their home province, and both Honiara and Guadalcanal were the most important destinations for multiple movers. Three quarters of those who went to Western Province were males, a proportion much higher than for movement through Honiara and Guadalcanal, which involved far more females. An influential factor in this gender differential was that primary-sector projects weighted employment prospects towards males, compounded perhaps by the monetary and physical cost of travelling to these western islands.

Sequence of residence by occupation

To increase understanding of the nature of Malaitan out-migration between the years 1978 and 1986, a retrospective analysis was made of the adult population (15 years or older) in terms of census information on employment status. Both at the time of independence (1978) and the 1986 national census, four out of five Malaita-born males resident in each province were wage earners (table 5, panels A and B). Although not as dominant for females, the same employment pattern held in 1978 for all provinces (panel A). By 1986, this had changed because, in both Western and Temotu provinces, a larger proportion of out-migrant females were self-employed than earning wages (panel B). If, before the declaration of independence, all Malaitan adults were classified as either employed or non-employed in all seven provinces, less than half of the men and around three quarters of the women had no gainful employment, suggesting that most females follow their husbands to places to work.

For everyone born in Malaita Province, distinctions between “past migrants” (before 1978) and “recent migrants” (1978-1986) help to shed further light on the link between movement and economic opportunity. Migrant employers, found only in urban Honiara and Guadalcanal

Table 6. Province at independence (1978), by province of enumeration in 1986 for Malaita-born population (per cent)

Province at independence	Province of enumeration in 1986							Total	Total Malaitians	
	Western	Isabel	Central	Guadalcanal	Honiara	Malaita	Makira Temotu			
Western	40.1	3.2	1.9	1.7	1.7	0.4	2.2	2.5	1.5	1,417
Isabel	0.2	30.0	1.0	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.1	142
Central	1.9	4.7	23.3	1.5	1.4	0.4	1.4	4.2	1.0	977
Guadalcanal	2.3	5.1	2.1	30.1	4.3	0.8	6.2	4.2	3.3	3,255
Honiara	13.4	14.6	9.6	5.3	32.8	3.5	12.2	15.1	7.2	6,981
Malaita	34.1	34.0	47.4	48.0	48.6	65.3	29.5	29.4	61.1	59,580
Makira	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.1	30.6	4.2	0.2	242
Temotu	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.8	21.0	0.1	139
Not born	7.6	7.9	14.2	12.9	10.3	29.4	17.1	18.5	25.4	24,739
Total (per cent)	1.9	0.3	1.8	7.1	10.9	77.6	0.4	0.1	100.0	97,472
Total Malaitians	1,811	253	1,723	6,943	10,655	75,599	369	119	97,472	

Source: 1986 population census.

provinces, have become lifetime migrants, since return to Malaita has been negligible (table 6). More than half those males categorized as “self employed” were past migrants, except for Central and Temotu provinces, to which Malaitan movement has been more recent. Apart from a more pronounced preference for urban Honiara, self-employed females show a similar pattern. Among the self-employed, those returning to Malaita accounted for 18.7 per cent (males) and 10.6 (females).

In all provinces, past rather than recent out-migrants from Malaita are found mainly among wage earners, the most numerous of those employed. Return lifetime migration among these workers, especially from Honiara and Makira provinces, which have a higher proportion, was 24.7 per cent for males and 13.2 for females.

Discussion

Based on analysis of the 1986 census, the movement of those born in Malaita Province shows a general pattern of longer and longer periods of time spent in the provinces to which they went. Both census data and lifetime calculations detect rates of return in-migration for Malaitan adults at only 5.3 per cent. Notable changes in the character of Malaitan movement are seen in a comparison of the 1970, 1978 and 1986 censuses. Not only have absolute numbers of out-migrants in the total natal and adult populations of Malaita Province risen substantially, but also this process has been mirrored in intercensal rates of migration and a change in age/sex ratios across three recent censuses. From a cross-sectional inspection of the Malaita-born in the 1986 census, the rate of return in-migration for the adult (15+) population (8.9 per cent) was only marginally higher than for those of all ages (5.3 per cent), indicating the influence of long-term, permanent moves undertaken during a lifetime. Malaita remains by far the most important source of migrants for all seven provinces in Solomon Islands, with urban Honiara and the provinces of Guadalcanal and Western being the most common destinations.

Overall, the location of professional and wage employment opportunities and of educational and social services beyond Malaita Province are the most obvious explanation for high rates of interprovincial out-migration among the Malaita-born. However, other factors, such as shortage of land, are more important in some parts of Malaita (“migration districts”). This is especially so in the Polynesian outlier islands of Ontong Java and Sikaiana, as well as for those living on the small, artificial islands close to the main island. The increasing proportion of out-migrant females from Malaita may signal a change in the process of internal movement, because circulation in

the Solomons is known for being dominated by males. Similarly, intercensal rates of return migration have been very low compared with those for out-migration and imply that a great proportion of residential change eventually became permanent. Conversely, the sequence of movement before independence (1978) among the Malaita-born to the capital of Honiara and three major provinces (Guadalcanal, Western, Central) document degrees of return, varying from 17.9 per cent to 37.4 (figure 3).

Despite considerable change in movement processes since the 1970s, from this census-based analysis it can be deduced that both circulation and migration remain important in the mobility patterns of Solomon Islanders. Further research is needed to determine the national influence and socio-economic significance of these two patterns in the overall mobility of the country. This would parallel movement research by Haberkorn (1989) in the neighbouring Melanesian country of Vanuatu, where migration has been suggested to have greater influence than circulation in the movement and redistribution of the ni-Vanuatu population.

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