

Fasin Laef: Urban Women Migrant Experiences in Honiara, Solomon Islands

Michaela Knot

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Michaela Knot

In the Solomon Islands, migration to Honiara from the rural areas is pervasive. The urban world shapes and complicates gender stereotypes and identity, particularly in regards to the rural/urban dichotomy. Focusing on migrant women, and their experiences of Honiara, this thesis will discuss how urban temporality reconfigures gender. Since some migrants will enter Honiara for only short durations and others for longer periods, identity becomes performed through different language practices and enacted through personal relationships. Identity is inherently shaped by age, social positioning and class. However, competing tensions in the urban setting creates ambivalence amongst migrant women in regards to their life in Honiara.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ABC: Australian Broadcasting Corporation

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

CDC: Oil Palm plantation located east of Honiara on the Guadalcanal plains

HTC: Honiara Town Council

MIRAB: Migration Remittance Aid Bureaucracy Economy

NGOs: Non-governmental organizations

PNG: Papua New Guinea

PRCs: Pacific Rim Countries

RAMSI: Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands

SIBC: Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation

SICHE: Solomon Islands College of Higher Education

SICWA: Solomon Islands Christian Women's Association

SIDT: Solomon Islands Development Trust

SIWA: Solomon Islands Water Authority

SINCW: Solomon Islands National Council of Women

UNESCO: United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USP: University of South Pacific

VBMS: Vois Blong Mere Solomon

YWCA: Young Christian Women's Association

UN: United Nations

## LIST OF PIJIN WORDS

Aes blok: frozen fruit drink	Matron: women looking after a household
Aes loli: frozen flavoured ice	Mekrans : woven shell ornaments
Arekwao: foreigner, stranger	Mentol: crazy
Basket: backpack, handbag, woven or cloth	Moden: modern, contemporary
Bighed: conceited, unruly, stubborn	Motu: traditional earth/stone oven
Bulo: young coconut served as a drink	Neka: edible amaranth leaves
Dadi: father	Olo: old man, husband
Displei: television	Otu: mistress
Fasin: fashion	Ples: place
Folom <i>kastom</i> : following tradition	Rasta: style of urban fashion
<i>Fraet</i> : fear, fright	Sem: modesty, shyness, shame
Fud kava: food cloths	Solmata: single mother
Hilux: pick-up or truck	Swea: swearing, cursing, insulting
Homgel: home girl	Tambu: forbidden
Kabis: green leafy edible plant	Taongel: town girl, city girl
Kaikai: food	Tensions: civil unrests between 1999 to 2003
Kaset: movie, cd, dvd	Tok bak: argue
Kastom: customary rules	Tok aot: yell, shout
Krangi: crazy	Waetman: westerners
Laef: life	Waka: work, employment (formal)
Langgus: vernacular language	Wakabaot: walk, travel, explore
Lavalava: sarong	Wantok: relatives sharing the same language, village, and family network
Lokol: unsophisticated, rural	Wido: widow
Mami: mother	
Masta liu: unemployed urban youth	

## LIST OF INFORMANTS

(All names in the text are pseudonyms and are listed in order of appearance in the text. To help the reader, some bio-sociographic information is provided for each of them: name, age, language group (geographical origin), marital status, occupation, length of residence in Honiara).

Ruth, 43 years old, (Temotu Province), married with children, office worker, lifetime migrant to Honiara (permanent resident).

Anne, 40 years old, Kwara'ae (Malaita Province), married with children, market seller, lifetime migrant to Honiara (permanent resident).

Angi, 20 years old, (Guadalcanal Province), single mother, office worker, temporary migrant.

Elizabeth, 21 years old, Kwara'ae (Malaita Province), has a boyfriend, *haosgel*, recent migrant.

Rachel, 26 years old, (Choiseul Province), married with children, shopkeeper, recent migrant.

Janice, 23 years old, (Isabel Province), single, office worker, recent migrant.

Lisa, 19 years old, Nggela (Central Province), single, student, recent migrant.

Mary, 21 years old, (Guadalcanal Province), has a boyfriend, student at SICHE, permanent resident.

Jane, 21 years old, (Makira-Ulawa Province), has a boyfriend, student at SICHE, recent migrant.

Neva, 20 years old, South Malaita (Malaita Province), married with children, housewife & market seller, recent migrant.

Jean, 34 years old, Lau (Malaita Province), married with children, store owner, long term migrant.

Tina, 52 years old, Kwara'ae (Malaita Province), married, housekeeper, long term migrant (permanent resident).

Tia, 34 years old, East Kwaio (Malaita Province), married with children, housewife, long term migrant (permanent resident).

Julie, 24, (Isabel Province), engaged, journalist, recent migrant.

Beti, 24 years old, Kwara'ae, (Malaita Province), has a boyfriend, *haosgel*, recent migrant.

Cecilia, 19 years old, (Makira-Ulawa Province), has a boyfriend, student at SICHE, recent migrant.

Margaret, 24 years old, West Kwaio (Malaita Province), single, student at SICHE, recent migrant.

Alice, 24 years old, Kwaio (Malaita Province), single, nursing student at SICHE, recent migrant.

Nansi, 21 years old, (Choiseul Province), has a boyfriend, agriculture student at SICHE, recent migrant.

## **Introduction**

The initial purpose of my project was to collect and examine migration narratives with migrant women settling in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands. During the course of fieldwork these narratives of migration turned into descriptions of urbanization and its impacts on migrant women's lives in town. Urban migrant women's responses and discontents with urbanization range from excitement to despondency and from disillusionment to ambivalence. Why and how do women migrate in the Solomons. How do they experience Honiara and how does Honiara influence them. What kind of tensions do migrant women experience in the urban setting. And, why do they become ambivalent towards life in town. These are some of the questions that will be uncovered within the following pages.

In the Solomon Islands, people tend to travel away from their natal homes in search of wage labour, independence from the constraints of customary rules, and adulthood (Frazer 1981: 6). Migration is a means by which young Solomon Islanders are able to negotiate their own life circumstances. Many people travel to Honiara and visit the town as young children. Honiara is the major transit point for all the other islands in the nation (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000). In the past, migration was specifically linked to young men's desires or needs to seek employment abroad, spurring circular migration between homes and plantations (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985; 1987; 1995). It was almost specifically a male activity. However, as time passes, more and more women are migrating also--not just to follow their husbands, but to access education, information, and in order to participate in the formal economy. The 1999 population census recognizes that both women and men are now migrating at the same rate (SISO 2002). At present, opportunities for women to migrate are also increasing in other parts of the Pacific.

The first chapter opens with a theoretical discussion of migration theory. It describes the overall situation of migration in the Pacific, then bridges into Melanesia and the Solomon Islands. A historical examination demonstrates that migration has been a long standing process in the Solomons. And it concludes by noting that migration patterns are changing over time and that new patterns are emerging, which are better explored through the use of multiple theoretical models.

The second chapter examines women's roles in migration in the Solomons and other areas in the Pacific. This chapter presents historical and contemporary contexts for women's migration. At the end of the chapter, I explore women's reasons and intentions for migration in the Solomons.

Chapter three introduces urban Honiara. The social history of the town is presented and the more salient features of urbanization affecting the lives of urban residents are discussed. The chapter sets up how urban migrant women become situated in the urban world through the processes of emplacement and distanciation.

Chapter four examines some of the important concepts organizing sociality (social experience) in the Solomon Islands such as '*hom*' and '*kastom*' (home and tradition) and looks at their reconfiguration in the urban setting.<sup>1</sup> These concepts have a direct bearing on rural and urban identity.

Chapter five presents four portraits of women migrants that typify the social roles that women occupy in Honiara. These portraits emerge from the life histories that I collected in Honiara and correspond to those analyzed by Pollard (2000) in her studies of women in Solomon Islands. Women's roles in town are linked to their social standing and economic activities which they may or may not be engaged in. These portraits demonstrate that urban women migrants come to occupy multiple social spaces, and that through these social roles, they are able to engage and negotiate the complexity of the urban world.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kastom*: is a Pijin word in the Solomons referring to rules of custom, customary rules. Often *kastom* is presented in opposition in modernity and even by Solomon Islanders themselves.



Chapter six discusses some of the social and personal tensions that result from urban living which create ambivalence for urban women migrants. The chapter uncovers the specificity of these tensions, and shows how women cope with these added burdens.

Finally the last chapter demonstrates how women's roles are being curtailed by general public expectations of how women should or should not behave. This is captured through the concepts of *fraet* and *sem*, forms of discourse that encapsulate dimensions of morality, and therefore social control. These are linked to women's ambivalence about living in town. Before going further we must clarify who we are referring to as migrants and provide some background on the Solomon Islands.

## ***II Defining Migrants***

As a general analytical category all migrants inhabit specific spatiotemporal reference points. A migrant is someone who moves across various places and spaces. In migration studies, migrants have often been associated with mobility and uprootedness in contrast to sedentarism and rooted notions of personhood, identity, nationalism and society (Silverstein 2005: 366; Malkki 1995: 508). The term migrant, similarly to the term refugee, has:

analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable "kind" or "type" of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations (Malkki 1995: 496).

Clearly, a migrant is not necessarily a refugee. Yet the above definition is satisfactory in that migrants within this text, similarly to refugees, occupy different realities based upon their life circumstances despite the commonality of migrating to Honiara. The term migrant represents a social category of people who share a specific reality of movement and relocation (permanent or temporary) to Honiara. Many factors influence the course of migration and the path that one undertakes.

Historically, migration in the Pacific is a long established phenomenon. It has led to dramatic changes in the Pacific and will continue to do so as people persist to migrate, settle and resettle. In the Solomons when people move to the urban setting from their rural homes, the term immediately becomes associated with urbanization (Frazer 1981: 7). Urbanization is varied and complex (Connell & Lea 2002: 7), dependent upon individuals, their social relationships, intentions and geography. This thesis not only deals with recent urban migrant women who have settled or moved to Honiara in the past five years, but also with women who have been living in Honiara for a longer period of time. This will allow for contrasts to become more apparent between migrant women's experiences in the project. However, it is important to differentiate between long term migrants and urban residents.

The distinction between long term migrants and urban residents is problematic in that these two categories can be synonymous in the minds of some individuals. I have relied upon the migrant categories utilized in the 1999 census which distinguishes between recent migrants: anyone living outside of their province of birth twenty-eight months preceding the census; and, lifetime migrants: anyone living outside of their province of birth at the time of the census (SISO 2002: 109). However, I have altered these categories in this project. Instead of using lifetime migrant, as in the census, I will be using long term migrant. Therefore recent migrant women are between the ages of nineteen and thirty, born outside of Honiara and living in town for less than five years. Long term migrant women tend to be over the age of thirty, also born outside of Honiara and have been living in town for more than ten years. We need to keep in mind that the capital of the Solomon Islands is a relatively young city, where the majority of the population is born outside of the city (Jourdan 1985; SISO 2002). Determining if someone is a resident or a migrant in Honiara would seem to be a simple task. Yet, that was not to be the case as women themselves found it difficult to call themselves a resident of Honiara.

My inclination is to define urban residents broadly as those people who choose to reside in Honiara for six months or more (regardless whether they choose to leave or stay in town after the six months). All migrants to Honiara can become residents, but not all residents of Honiara are migrants. In any case, some of the circumstances and discussions hereto pertain to long term migrants as well as urban residents.

In an earlier work on migration to Honiara, Frazer (1981) claimed that most men migrating to town were very ambivalent about living there. Almost thirty years later, my observations are that migrant women are also very ambivalent towards living in town. This thesis will seek to understand the roots of ambivalence for the migrant women that I spoke with while in Honiara. This question will be explored through the depiction of an urban temporality fraught with competing tensions inherently shaping urban ambivalence.

### ***III The Solomon Islands***

Just off the coast of Australia and south of Papua New Guinea lies a double chain of islands known as the Solomon Islands, henceforth called the Solomons (see Appendix I for map). These islands were first discovered in 1567 by Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendaña de Neira, who named them after the famous biblical legend for Solomon's gold. The Solomon Islands are volcanic in origin, with lush tropical forests, rich in natural resources and minerals, with an abundance of marine life and lagoons. For many outsiders, they symbolize the tropical paradise that charms the imagination of holiday seekers from cold climates dreaming of green rugged hills, aquamarine oceans, colourful and fragrant flowers, and gargantuan plants that could only grow in a lost magical garden.

Once a British protectorate (since 1898), the islands achieved independence in 1978 and today remains part of the Commonwealth. The *official* language is English, however only a few

members of the elite and those educated abroad are able to speak it fluently. English is also the language of the print media and of education. Pijin, a creolized language, represents the true national language; it is based on an Eastern Oceanic grammatical structure. There are over sixty vernacular languages (SISO 2002: 45; Gordon 2005). People in town are very often multilingual. In the villages, those people who have attended primary school will likely speak and understand Pijin alongside other vernacular languages (Jourdan 1985; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000). Pijin is the primary language of exchange in the archipelago and the inescapable *lingua franca* of town.

## ***IV Methodology***

This project was designed as a qualitative study of migrant women's experience of urban life.

Two primary research methods, life history and participant-observation, were utilized to gather data between June and September 2007 while in Honiara. These methods were chosen in order to capture the richness and complexity of daily life in town.

### **IV a) Participant Observation**

The key operative in participant observation lies in contact, interaction and conversing with people in their everyday settings. This method helps in understanding a local setting and fleshes out more succinct and focused observations (Gans 1999: 540). In order to examine different cultural spheres and phenomena various research methods need to be utilized. However, the boundaries between participant observation, observation, and other methods of data gathering are often difficult to define. As Hamersley and Atkinson note even the boundaries between participant observation and interviewing can themselves be obscured (2002: 139; Watson 1999: 78).

Participant-Observation includes becoming involved with local people in the community. While in Honiara, I lived with a local family. The wife was an urban migrant from Malaita and the husband

was raised in Honiara. By their life choices, the family belonged to the middle-class. Their two children, one boy and one girl, were aged seven and nine. Living with this family helped me to become situated within the local community. The household allowed me a glimpse into the different social worlds encompassed by different women. Participant observation gave me a broader perspective in understanding the experiences of different migrant women across class and age group.

I also volunteered with a locally based organization teaching English literacy, run by the Holy Cross Catholic Church. Undoubtedly this work has shaped my own views and contact with local people. In my opinion volunteering was definitely more helpful in securing trust and facilitating access to a variety of people--especially women in Honiara; while, developing a measure of friendship and a deep respect for the strength of urban migrant women. I must note that not all of my informants are from the literacy school. Nearly three quarters of my interviews were conducted with people outside of the literacy school whom I met through friends and relations. The women represented in these pages became friends as we talked together.

Not knowing much about urban migrant women, my intention was to speak with as many migrants as possible. Consequently I did not place an age restriction on my target population. Nor did I target a specific social status, class, or ethnic group. This left me with a wide cross-section of interviews with some women in their early forties and fifties, and others in their early twenties and late teens. These wide age groups have allowed me to understand social roles that migrant women come to occupy in town. However in the course of fieldwork, women tend to classify themselves amongst two groups: those of young girls (usually unmarried women), and mothers (those who are married). This classification was used to conduct focus groups with each group of women. All participants gave oral consent with the understanding that their confidentiality will be protected. Consequently all the names given in the following pages are pseudonyms.

## **IV b) Life History**

Life history is another important methodological tool for qualitative research used in this project. Gelya Frank states that the life history is a text or document, collaboration between the consciousness of the researcher and interviewee (Frank 1979: 70). More than simply a research tool, the life history, as Angrosino points out, can be a biography of one person, a collaborative portrait (Angrosino 2002: 37). A life history is a communicative event (Jourdan 1997: 40, 41). Taken as an act of communication, constructed in dialogue, the life history can also be viewed as a monologue in which the researcher elicits and simply records a single informant's voice (Blackman 1991: 50).

There are two oppositional approaches to life histories in the human sciences (Holland & Peacock 1993). The life focus or factual approach is "regarded as a trace of some external reality that is more important than the story itself" (Holland & Peacock 1993: 368). In this approach references to historical facts give the life story validity and consequently significance (Holland & Peacock 1993: 370). Emphasis in this approach centres upon objectivity and the life history as a datum incorporated with other sources through triangulation (Holland & Peacock 1993: 368).

At the other end of the spectrum lies the story focused approach to life histories. This perspective accentuates the subjectivity of life histories and valorizes the experiences and construction of realities (Holland & Peacock 1993: 370). Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope and speech genre is relevant in conceptualizing life stories as a story (Bakhtin 1980). Indeed as the chronotope embodies time and space, the life story is itself built or rather emerges through a sphere of human activity. Therefore the life story is referential not only to the past, but also the present and the future, since human actions are rarely ahistorical. The story is not necessarily the product of

the individual, but emerges into being through the numerous dialogues people enact with each other, situated across time and space. The story is created by the collaboration between people and past knowledge, not by a single person in a single point in time. Emphasizing the subjective nature of life stories also prioritizes the individualistic construction of life histories as an individual bounded product (Bakhtin 1980).

Using Bakhtin's philosophical underpinnings one can transition away from simply looking at life stories as *merely timelines or fabrications of the ego*. The story becomes "a *window into the psyche*" (Holland & Peacock 1993: 368). Relying too heavily upon a psychological model, a more balanced perspective is needed to escape from the internalizing of psychoanalytic analysis to consider the life history in a social as well as historical context (Holland & Peacock 1993: 371). Such a synthesis is necessary to consider a life history in a macro setting. This is an important dimension to reflect upon, since this research project relies upon life histories. During fieldwork, life histories were collected to formulate a portrait of urban migrant women. Thus life histories show story elements, but are also a chronicle of urban migrants' lives. The life histories that I gathered are a synthesis of both approaches; and are the backbone of chapter five (the interview guide can be found in Appendix III).

## ***V Data Collected***

As mentioned above, some of the data collected stems from informal and semi-structured interviews and also includes ethnographic materials gained from participant-observation. Ethnographic data comes from radio, gossip, casual conversations with people in day-to-day activities, at the market, and at the church. Data also includes informal language surveys done at the market, taping of public radio programs, and observing the television viewing habits in an urban household. However, the bulk of my data emerges from the life histories and personal narratives of urban women migrants as mentioned above. Some women readily accepted to be

part of the project, while others were more circumspect about it. There were some difficulties linked to my naiveté and inexperience: I assumed everyone knew what an 'interview' was. That was not the case, and some women were clearly confused. Overall, after a few weeks of fieldwork, once people got to know and trust me, the initial shyness of some of the women disappeared and they became enthusiastic participants.

The corpus of data includes: ten video-recorded interviews and ten audio-recorded interviews. The format of the interview was to elicit narratives and life histories (see Appendix III for interview guide). The interview was a formally constructed speech event and is marked as such. All interviews were conducted in Pijin, which I had started to learn before going to Honiara. Speaking Pijin proved absolutely vital for rapport and speaking with urban migrant women. It would have been impossible to do this research in English for pragmatic and ideological issues. Presumably, if I focused on women from a particular ethnic group, I could have done this research in their home language. But I opted to understand women's experience of migration in general and not of a particular group exclusively. Thus, Pijin, the national *lingua franca* was a must to overcome the linguistic diversity inherent to such a sample of informants (nearly half of interviews were with women from Malaita, and half from the other provinces).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Provinces of the Solomons Islands include: Honiara, Central Province, Malaita Province, Choiseul Province, Rennell and Bellona Province, Makira-Ulawa Province, Western Province, Isabel Province, Temotu Province, and Guadalcanal Province.



## **Chapter 1: Pacific Migrations--Cultures of Migration**

This chapter examines the multiple theories available in order to explain migration practices. In the Pacific different migration theories help to explain different movements and population exchanges. This work uses a holistic approach and thus posits that migration in the Solomons forms a culture of migration, in that migration becomes pervasive and serves as a rite of passage for Solomon Islanders. Two case examples are used to uncover the notion of a culture of migration as it manifests in some areas of Melanesia and more specifically, in the Solomon Islands. A culture of migration is dominant in the Solomons, but yet there are other theoretical paradigms prevalent within migration studies of the Pacific. The three theoretical paradigms discussed below have played a role, in varying degrees and at different times, in explaining the process of migration in the Solomons and the Pacific. Consequently it is important to examine these models, and demonstrate their short comings, whilst acknowledging that these paradigms can and will continue to shape migrant experiences in the Solomons.

### ***1.1 Theoretical Models of Migration***

There are many theoretical trends within migration theory, and many have multiple names and dimensions. A brief overview will introduce some of the major conceptualizations of migration. The first theory, known as the Modernist theory stresses dichotomies between rural versus urban areas, the traditional versus the modern, and focuses upon people's motivations for migrating (Brettel 2008: 118-119).

The modernist theory is also known as the push-pull model which emphasizes economic, population pressures and labour motivations for migration. In this vein of research the migrant emerged as a nomad during the twentieth century, in response to the congealing boundaries of the nation-state (Silverstein 2005). More recently, Carmen Voigt-Graf's work on professional women migrating from Fiji follows this trend. She documents how nurses and teachers leave Fiji for better wages available in the Pacific Rim Countries (Voigt-Graf 2003; 2007; Voigt-Graf et al. 2007;

Rokoduru 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Similar to other regions in the world, such as in Latin America and Europe, theoretical perspectives in the push-pull model are intrinsically linked with economic factors for rationalizing migratory practices and decisions. A rationalized push-pull model emphasises individual decision-making strategies, disembodied from social pressures or even family networks (Raghuram 2006). John Connell however remarked that migration in the Pacific has been characterized by family networks (2003a: 37). Family networks in turn shape Pacific diasporas and the nature of migration in the Pacific away from an Individualistic centred analysis (Gershon 2007: 476).<sup>4</sup>

Another prominent theoretical trend in migration studies is Transnationalism. Scholars in this vein have deterritorialized citizenship from the bounded territories of nation-states (Kearney 1995; Ong 2002; Gupta & Ferguson 2002; Glick Schiller 2005; Brettell 2008). Transnationalism is the movement of people and formation of communities, the spread of ideas, information, money and credit beyond the nation-states (Calhoun 2009). Transnationalism in Pacific migration is most visible in the remittances from Samoans and Tongans who have migrated to Pacific Rim Countries (PRCs) and sent money and goods back to their relatives at home (Marcus 1993; Shankman 1993; Brown 1997; Brown & Ahlburg 1998; Macpherson et al. 2000; Brown & Connell 2005; Addo & Besnier 2008). However in the context of Melanesia, transnationalism has had more ephemeral linkages in comparison to Micronesia and Polynesia.

In Melanesia individualist motivations are not the primary factors for migration. Family networks are significantly influential. In Melanesia people are embedded within social networks and are not isolated Individuals chartering off to new destinations and lives. Marilyn Strathern points out; Melanesian concepts of sociality are sometimes not as dichotomizing as western academic

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<sup>3</sup> Pacific Rim Countries (PRC) include: Australia, New Zealand, United States of America and their protectorates, Japan, Canada, Singapore, Taiwan,

<sup>4</sup> Diaspora refers to the dispersion of a group of migrants around the world outside of their homeland or nation-state. The term was once associated with exiled Jewish people living outside of the Palestinian homeland. Diaspora was adopted in order to examine the experiences of migrant groups and the assertion and maintenance of a collective identity as a result of global linkages despite being relocated within new nation-states (Scott & Gordon 2009).

thinking--which emphasizes an individual centric approach (Strathern 1984). Extending such an approach to migrants and migration may ignore the embedded networks in which people are enmeshed both in the rural areas and in urban settings. A brief review of migration in the Pacific is presented below to demonstrate how migration in the Pacific has come to be explored from these different theoretical paradigms. And it should become obvious that multiple approaches need to encompass individual, structural, and social networks when examining migration.

## **1.2 International Migration**

Research on migration in the Pacific has fixated upon transnational migration in Micronesia and Polynesia. Migration has largely depended upon past colonial ties and administrative powers. For Micronesia and Polynesia, migration tends towards emigration to Australia, New Zealand, United States of America or American administered protectorates--Pacific Rim Countries (Connell 2003a: 35; McCall 2006: 39; Ware 2005: 437). These emigrations have been in part explored through contentious population movement paradigms.

This theoretical rationalization of migration for the Pacific has focused upon migration as a 'safety valve' to relieve population pressures on island nations with limited land and natural resources (Connell 2003a; 2007b; Ware 2006). The movement and resettlement of people, as well as increased fertility rates have all been attributed to social, political, and economic upheaval in the region (Ware 2006). As populations double and densities continue to rise migration and emigration become a safety mechanism for mitigating the toll of overpopulation in some countries of the Pacific (Connell 2003a).

Over population has been one reason for the dispersal of Micronesians and Polynesians. As they settle in PRCs, these migrants send money back to their homes in the form of remittances. In the late 1960's and 1970's, Shankman describes young male migrants who left their villages in Western Samoa in order to increase their families' material wealth and social standing at the village level (Shankman 1993: 159). Using the push-pull model, some push factors for migration of Samoans, as Shankman identifies, include: population growth, limited education opportunities, stagnation of

the local economy, and an overall lack of opportunities for young people in the villages (Shankman 1993: 158). However, once landing overseas young migrants would enact their kin networks. This mobilization of kin networks led to chain migration as migrants followed each other's patterns of settlement (Shankman 1993: 160). Young Samoan migrants then sent home parts of their incomes to help those left behind to deal with stagnant island economies, in turn developing a new type of economy.

These types of island economies are known as MIRAB: Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy based economic systems (Betram & Watters 1985). MIRAB economies are largely associated with Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, and other Polynesian and Micronesian states (Lee 2007). Relatives in these island nations migrated away from their families to pursue higher incomes and lifestyles not only for themselves but their families as well (Shankman 1993; Marcus 1993; Brown & Ahlburg 1998).

These remittances are argued to be sustainable and beneficial to island economies, and have not decayed over the course of generations because families continue to maintain their connections with their homeland and invest in future human capital (Brown & Ahlburg 1998). Remittances have not strictly been used to increase the consumption of material goods by family members in the home island, but have been forms of investment in local organizations such as churches, schools, community development, and the sponsoring new migrant generations (Brown & Ahlburg 1998; Brown & Connell 2004). Brown and Ahlburg note that through official figures (such as through formal banking services) the level of actual remittances being sent home by migrants have not only been severely underestimated but have unaccounted for the remittances which pass as gifts to families in the form of actual goods (Brown & Ahlburg 1998). The amount of remittances is now so high that some Pacific countries have become dependent upon the wages from these migrants. Furthermore, such countries are also dependent on foreign-aid granted by more developed nations such as Australia and New Zealand (Piorine 1997; Ahlburg & Brown 1998; Connell 2007b: 121). MIRAB economies demonstrate that Pacific diasporic communities have been largely transnational in nature for some time.

Transnationalism is slowly emerging in the Solomons, unlike Samoa or Tonga. International migration opportunities for Solomon Islanders have largely been curtailed by international restrictions, especially since the 1960's. Predominantly, current migration in the Solomon Islands is circular in nature ( Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985; Alasia 1989; Berg 2000). Groenenwold et al. (2007) note that international migration in the Solomons is low because many people are engaged in sustainable livelihoods and do not have strong pressures to settle outside of the Solomons. However, transnational migration is more commonly associated with the elites of the Solomon Islands, in particular with businessmen and with students seeking education opportunities in other Pacific countries (Jourdan 1985; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Groenewold et al. 2007).

Migration can be a means of supporting the development of island nations. And, “[m]igration is primarily a response to real and perceived inequalities in socio-economic opportunities that are themselves a result of dependent and/or uneven sectoral and regional development” (Connell 2003a: 350-6). MIRAB economies have not developed in Melanesia to the same extent as in Micronesia and Polynesia. Nor has there been the same type of international foreign-aid investment (Connell 2003a; McCall 2006).

Historically, the Solomon Islands were intricately and heavily involved in international migration, more specifically to Queensland during the nineteenth century. The closing of transnational migration opportunities since then has been due to the fall of the British Empire and the disappearance of other colonial regimes and their labour networks (Jourdan 1985; Bennett 1987). In the Solomon Islands labour migration is not a single coherent process. It has changed over the course of time being influenced by global forces. The remaining section presents a short history of labour migration in the Solomon Islands demonstrating that transnational migration has long been part of the small archipelago's history.

### ***1.3 The Labour Trades Abroad and Inside the Country***

The labour trade was one of the major events that defined and shaped migration in the Solomon Islands (Corris 1973: 195; Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985). We must distinguish two periods: 1) the second part of the nineteenth century that saw the development of international labour migration (mainly to Queensland); 2) and the first part of the twentieth century during which internal migration developed. These two periods are presented below chronologically.

Labour migration was initially associated with 'blackbirding'—the kidnapping of young men for recruitment. However, the practice was eventually curtailed through British colonial policies (Corris 1973; Frazer 1981). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Solomons were a major source of labour for other areas of the Pacific (Fiji, Queensland, New Caledonia, and even Samoa), which had developed large plantation economies and consequently required a large labour force (Corris 1973: 147). At one point in the trade, the Solomon Islands provided up to eighty percent of the plantation labour in Queensland. Between 1870 and 1906, labour recruitment took Solomon Islanders to overseas plantations on two year contracts. Although the majority of these migrants stemmed from Malaita, people were also recruited from other islands. Single males above the age of sixteen were primary recruits. Young men would seek out the recruiting vessels and could end up staying abroad for many years (Corris 1973).

In 1906, following the promulgation of the White Australia Policy (after the signing of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901), plantation workers were expelled from Queensland. Some 7,000 people were sent back to be repatriated to Malaita and the Solomons, despite having lived in Queensland for many years. Few workers were exempt from the deportation. Only those people who faced death by returning home, were too sick to make the voyage, or lived in Queensland for over twenty-five years could remain (Corris 1973: 149). As Queensland closed its borders to migrant labourers from the Solomons, Fiji absorbed some of the more experienced plantation workers, while the remainder of migrant labourers were sent back to their homes despite their individual

circumstances, after repatriation in 1904. And by 1920, the first major period of the Labour Trade closed off international migration opportunities, precipitating the development of internal migration during the second phase of the Labour Trade.

After the establishment of *Pax Britannica*, a local plantation economy developed in the Solomon Islands.<sup>5</sup> It required large amounts of labour. Some of the old returning migrants from the Queensland plantations settled back in their home provinces and became leaders in their communities.<sup>6</sup> They established land ownership and cash crops such as copra or coconut plantations. These former migrants were already familiar with the knowledge and techniques of crop harvesting from their days in Queensland and were the first ones to enrol in the local plantation economy developing in the Solomons as of 1920. As well many returnees were well versed in the 'ways of the white man' and served as intermediaries between the colonial administration and their fellow islanders. Some returnees became prominent local politicians. Their children, who received formal education, would later become doctors, teachers, lawyers and members of a new elite class in the early days of the young nation (Corris 1973: 146).

It has to be said that the colonial government was eager to help the planters with their need for labour. When the British administration imposed a head tax on Solomon Islanders. After 1920, many Solomon Islanders had to go away to plantations so as to earn the money that they needed in order to pay the head tax (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985; Bennett 1987).<sup>7</sup> The need for plantation labour and the imposition of the head tax on Solomon Islanders spawned the second period of labour migration. Internal migration continues today in the Solomons, with the search for access into the cash economy. Besides the economic ramifications of the Labour Trade, significant social changes also occurred through these periods of movement.

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<sup>5</sup> Pax Britannica refers to the period of British imperialism, when the British established peace in Europe after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. During this period Britain controlled the majority of naval trade routes and foreign markets due to their naval supremacy.

<sup>6</sup> After repatriation, not all migrants fared the same. Some become ill; others were unhappy with village life, while others were not accepted back by the community or faced punishment for past transgressions.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to suggest that Solomon Islanders did not travel. For it is well known that many Solomon Island people travelled amongst different islands in wide-spread trade networks (Alasia 1989).

Sam Alasia points out that:

the effects of the trade both on the recruits and on those they left behind were probably equally as varied, although several broad consequences can be identified. In introducing large numbers of Solomon Islanders to the world and way of life and ideas and goods of the *araikwao* (*white man*) the Labour Trade probably exerted a more profound influence on Solomon Islands life and society than any other single episode in our history. Not only did our people acquire a more intense desire for new things but they became familiar with alternative ways of thinking and acting, ways that were sometimes at variance with traditional culture (Alasia 1989: 115).

Immediately the tension between *kastom* (tradition) and modern life becomes apparent in this quotation. This tension continues today. However, it is not necessarily the Labour Trade itself that shaped Solomon Island culture but rather those migrants going abroad and returning.

During the 1930's the global depression affecting westernized countries stagnated labour migration in the country. During this era there was an excess of labour and many migrant workers returned to their home islands. In 1942, when the Japanese invaded the Pacific, these labourers were recruited into the allied army and fought alongside American forces until the end of World War II.

The capital of Honiara was established after the Second World War and during this period a new labour recruitment emerged with the burgeoning nation and its economy. In the 1960's Honiara expanded, along with mining and plantation work opportunities. New migrants flooded the capital in search of economic prosperity, and the thrill and excitement of a new urban life (Corris 1973; Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985, Bennett 1987). And this urban migration continues today.

The Solomon Islands are entrenched within the global system, environmentally, culturally, economically, and politically. The Labour Trade and migration epitomizes this connection. Labour migration networks are changing once again. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly on the High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in September 2006, the Permanent Representative of the Solomon Islands to the UN, Collin Beck, remarked that the Solomons do not have a large migrant population and that there is an over abundance of labour, which at the present the government, the single largest employer, cannot absorb. Therefore:

the government is examining all economic opportunities to guarantee our population a



secure future. Solomon Islands cannot agree more to establishing an adequate and transparent mechanism especially for short term contracts that will ensure workers are documented and legally processed to avoid workers working outside the system that places them in a more vulnerable position (Beck 2006: 2).

The Solomon Islands are on the cusp of reworking labour migration once again in the twenty-first century. New agreements with New Zealand allow for seasonal workers to go to that country for four months of the year to work in agriculture. Young and older Solomon Islanders are eager to go away, looking for the job opportunities they cannot find in their country. And in the same instance, new transnational networks are sure to emerge.

### ***1.4 Internal Migration: Culture of Migration***

Internal migration is often discussed as circulation. Circulation implies continual movement without the intention of permanently settling (Chapman 1985: 1). "For the people who circulate, the basic principle involved is a territorial separation of obligations, activities and goods" (Chapman 1985:1). Andrew Strathern and Gabriele Sturzenhofecker go further in defining circulation as "a total concept of movement of persons, practices, ideas, objects, cultigens, and so on, along tracks and pathways that can be at least partly delineated" (Strathern & Sturzenhofecker 1994: 3). They stress that circulation does not necessitate points of origin or cultural centres. Circulation avoids over emphasising the core and periphery relationships (1994: 3). Nowadays, circular migration or internal migration replaces the term circulation.

As will be made clear through two case studies below, reasons behind internal migration are complex and have shaped a culture of migration in some parts of Melanesia. For instance, Jacobsen's work in Papua New Guinea (PNG), demonstrates that the Dom are economically self-sufficient. As such Dom parents are reluctant to encourage their male children to leave when cash is locally available by selling coffee, establishing small shops and selling produce at the market. The parents of potential migrants lose valuable labour when their children leave. Consequently an economic rationale (push-pull model) for migration does not explain why young Dom males want to migrate from their local village.

Another explanation is necessary using multiple migration theories. Young males migrate to urban settings to escape adult responsibilities, prolong adolescence, or to evade kin responsibilities (Jacobsen 1996: 105). However, the lures of migration mentioned above are strong factors enticing young Dom to the urban setting. In these types of circumstances there is a negotiation of individual desires and family obligations.

Jacobsen's (1996) novelty in examining internal migration amongst the Dom in PNG is his claim that migration was always a part of reality and is not a recent phenomenon. For the Dom he points out that:

two different types of migration co-exist among local communities today; one that reflects articulation among local communities themselves, and another reflecting the articulation between local communities and the emergent nation-state. This co-existence constitutes a basis of individual socio-political strategies for enhancing social position within the local community, and it provides a new range of possibilities for young men, who will not or cannot fulfill the social duties demanded of them by their kin (Jacobsen 1996: 101).

Migration can be considered commonplace in some areas of Melanesia. Therefore internal migration has various consequences for both the migrants and those who continue to reside at home.

Another factor affecting internal migration is access to land, which in many parts of Melanesia usually passes through complex descent networks. Descent systems impact and can control peoples' movements and accumulation of social prestige. Migrants can invoke their kinship networks if they desire to migrate. These networks and strategies extend the rural setting into the urban world (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985; 1995; Gooberman-Hill 1999). Not all migration strategies are equally available to everyone. Undertaking specific movements are increasingly becoming circumscribed by class.

[M]iddle class migration is significantly different .... In order to find good employment, and hence become middle class, both men and women are mobile in pursuit of education and subsequently for work opportunities. Their migration often lasts for long periods of time, and so they are more likely to meet spouses from other ethnic groups than those who migrate on a very short term basis for wage labour, or for wakabaot (Gooberman-Hill 1999: 64).

Gooberman-Hill points out that the middle-class have different patterns of migration. Gender, for

the middle class, does not necessarily restrict mobility. What Gooberman-Hill's quotation leaves out is that those people with tertiary education are able to migrate internationally, which is much more difficult, if not nearly impossible, for someone without such a level of education.

Another case in point from the Solomons is that of the To'ambaita, from Malaita. Ian Frazer details the migration of To'ambaita in the late 1970's from Malaita to Honiara. He examines the social and cultural circumstances influencing the decisions leading to individual migration (Frazer 1981: 11). Frazer not only links economic opportunities and employment advancement in Honiara, as a lure to young male migrants, but parallels these factors alongside stages in one's life cycle. During the 1970's, age and employment were two primary factors influencing the migration strategies of young To'ambaita men (Frazer 1981: 13).

Two stages in the life cycle drastically shape migration. These are bachelorhood and marriage (Frazer 1981: 159). Bachelorhood takes shape around mid to late adolescence, a time when young males are separating themselves from their natal household, and even leaving their home villages. They are free of social responsibility and commitments (Frazer 1981: 165). In the village male youths may not completely separate from the support of their family and may be subject to their authority until after marriage. Therefore as with the Dom, migration to town acts as a rite of passage and an escape from the social controls of the elders.

For young males, the transition to an independent adult life can be attained through economic independence.

From the point of view of short term benefits, wage employment gives young people immediate economic equality with adults living at home; in many cases, depending on the work that they are able to get, it often makes them better off. For this reason, and because it also represents productive activity, it is a form of independent action which fits in closely with adult attitudes and adult values (Frazer 1981: 188).

Commenting on the transformation of self that often accompanies migration, Frazer notes that people in town come to look stronger and cleaner than those who stay in the village (Frazer 1981: 189). Through the consumption of material goods and because of employment, young To'ambaita

males are able to make themselves different, thus enhancing their personal identity and self-esteem accordingly (Frazer 1981: 191). For young men, migration is often experienced and seen as a rite of passage and a source of freedom. This independence, Frazer mentions, was related more to males than females during the late 1970's. Because women and young girls are caregivers and food providers, they cannot escape their social responsibilities as the young men can.

Looking after younger siblings is the most onerous task. Where possible the responsibility is given to girls, rather than boys. In fact, boys are given very few tasks and unless they go to school, have a great deal more freedom than girls. This is the case even as they get older and become capable of doing the same kind of work as their parents, it is much more common for girls to make this kind of contribution than boys (Frazer 1981. 163).

Gender differences in migration emerge as women's and girls' movement is more restricted and controlled in comparison to that of their brothers. Frazer notes that there is "a much greater interest on the part of parents, elder siblings and elder guardian relatives, in restricting the unsupervised interaction of girls outside the immediate family. Girls need to be protected and supervised, kept within the purview of those who have responsibility over them" (ibid). Once again, these observations are specific to the To'ambaita of the late 1970's.

While migration for men serves as a rite of passage into adulthood, marriage for women served this purpose in the past. In the past both men and women married earlier (SISO 2002). And marriage and motherhood exclusively marked the rite of passage into adulthood for women. But today, migration for young women is also a rite of passage into being a modern and sophisticated Solomon Island woman. Thus migration for women signifies women's entrance into modernity. Although marriage is a pivotal criterion for the rite of passage into adulthood, it still remains an influential marker of sociality for women today.

With the rise of urban migration Frazer remarked upon a new social category of *Liu* taking shape in Honiara. Later, Jourdan (1995) unpacked the social category of the *Masta Liu*. *Masta liu* are urban youth who come to occupy a specific social space and identity. Marginalized economically with high rates of unemployment they continue to carve out their own identity--balancing the expectations they had from coming to town and coping with the scarcity of the urban world (Jourdan 1995: 210).

Some young migrants were sent by their families to secure employment with their education levels, but cannot find a job in the limited job market. Others came to experience Honiara's allure, and may have dropped out of school and dream of making money to take part in the consumption of material goods (Jourdan 1995: 210). Both young men and women enjoy town life because they can escape the labour from the village life and control of their families and *kastom* (Jourdan 1995: 210-1).<sup>8</sup> Many young people come to town and stay with relatives or *wantok*.<sup>9</sup> Although they can gain freedom in town, *wantok* relations can serve to limit these freedoms by watching over the young people in a parent-like role and expecting them to make contributions to the household, whether through tending the garden, running errands, or purchasing food if one is employed (Jourdan 1995: 218-9).

Furthermore, Jourdan notes that *masta liu* stem from different islands and provinces and vary in age from fifteen to twenty five years old. They play a central role in redefining popular culture and even reshaping *kastom* practices in the urban setting for making money. Although town residents stigmatize the *masta liu* for causing social problems they are also accepted as part of the urban world. Thus they occupy new spaces in town as they encounter the hardships of unemployment, lack of food and overall poverty in town life.

Increasingly Jourdan notes, women and girls are coming to Honiara, and are present amongst the *masta liu* (Jourdan 1995: 209). This is due to wage labour, and people's increasing need for money. In comparison to boys, the *masta liu* girls: "are more subdued in their behaviour, even though some of them have recently taken to wearing make-up and sporting a fancy hairstyle, they also enjoy the freedoms and pleasures of town life" (Jourdan 1995: 210). Girls and women are part of a social category that once was only associated with men. From this example Jourdan shows that the urban context is changing. As well women's roles are also becoming more evident. What role do women have in migration in the Solomons? This question will be explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>8</sup> *Kastom*: is a Pijin word in the Solomons referring to rules of custom. Often *kastom* is presented in opposition to modernity even by Solomon Islanders themselves.

<sup>9</sup> *Wantok*: is a Pijin word that means people who speak the same language or those who live in the same village and can be related thorough kinship ties.

## **Chapter 2: Migration, Women and Social Transformation**

Gender and migration are increasingly being explored amongst migration scholars and anthropologists. Feminist Marxist scholarship has tended towards uncovering the labour employment of migrant women, examining aspects of income on domestic roles, health issues, and the rising political consciousness of migrant women (Brettel 2008: 127). These issues remain associated with access and subjugation to sources of power, production, and reproduction (Brettel 2008: 127). This frame of reference examines the dichotomy between the domestic and public spheres, and is a means of critiquing hegemonic sources of domination and subordination. However beyond this framework, gender and migration are also a means of examining drastic cultural change amongst varying social contexts and networks.

Irrespective of gender, most people are caught within a network and set of relationships that informs one's actions and decisions regarding migration. In Melanesia, women represent a complementary role to men, both in gender relations and in constructions of sociality (Strathern 1984; Sillitoe 1999). It is not surprising that a person's gender influences the type of migration one undertakes and what options are available to and for women to explore.

In an early article, John Connell examined the overall situation of migration in the Pacific. He points out that:

Almost all migration research has been carried out with male migrants.... Since there is no research on women migrating there is little information on which women are migrating, why they are moving and where they are moving to, how autonomous or passive their migration decisions are..., what impact this is having on the women themselves ... and on the village or national economy and society (Connell, 1984: 964-5).

Connell notes that migration is not the same across different regions, and that migration complicates and challenges social systems and cultures (Connell 1984: 977). Migration is the movement of people, ideas, and things—synonymous with change and discontinuity. However, in light of my own data, migration is also a response to cultural change, to increased economic and political competition and social stratification. Migration alongside other cultural phenomena has transformed gender roles in the Solomon Islands. Since academic scholarship on women's

migration in the Solomon Islands is scarce, I will look to sources from other areas in the Pacific on the nature of women's migration.

More recently, John Connell and Carmen Voigt-Graf (2006) have examined international migration in Fiji. They note that international migration in Melanesia is largely absent. However, in the Pacific there is a new trend developing in international migration: in that men are no longer being favoured for migration, and women are just as likely to migrate. Furthermore there is a growing demand for educated women migrants, heading to the Pacific Rim (Connell & Voigt-Graf 2006: 45). Women's international migration in the Pacific is overwhelmingly accessible by education and occupation. And there are specific flows that women migrants undertake in international migration: 1) as unskilled labourers who serve as undocumented caregivers in the United States; and 2) as skilled migrants (those who are teachers and nurses) and migrate to other areas; such as Tonga, the Cook Islands, or the Marshall's (Connell & Voigt-Graf 2006: 47).

A case study of Fijian migrant women by Connell and Voigt-Graf shows that, if Pacific women migrate as unskilled professionals, they can find employment in informal sectors, where unfortunately, they are at greater risk of being exploited (Connell & Voigt-Graf 2006: 46). Since 2002, there has been a significant increase in the number of women seeking to work abroad, both amongst Fiji-Indians and Fijians (Connell & Voigt-Graf 2006: 48). These women may have families, however the prospect of obtaining work abroad and a higher income is a strong enough of a lure that women are willing to make the sacrifice and leave their families. International migration will most likely continue, especially the movement of skilled professionals, as they become a targeted class for immigration (Connell & Voigt-Graf 2006: 58). However, the increasing levels in international migration will only become more apparent and influential as women take on more formal sector employment in the Pacific.

In the Solomons, the only women who are likely to migrate are those who are further pursuing tertiary education degrees or those who marry expatriates and follow them back home. It is difficult

to claim that those women going abroad for education purposes are actually migrating. Yet it is just as clear that while abroad, they may cultivate networks and opportunities for migration while at the same time, they may also develop a more cosmopolitan ethos that is likely to value out-migration in the future.

## ***2.1 Changing Gender Roles due to Migration***

Trends in migration do not remain isolated and unique to one geographic region. Jourdan noted that women have started to migrate to Honiara rather late (1987). Despite their late entrance, their presence is ever increasing in town. What has accounted for the increase in women migrating? And how is this associated with broader cultural transformations occurring within the Solomons.

In the Solomons there are two constraints upon women's migration. As was seen earlier, these include: (1) household responsibilities or obligations to family, and (2) control or lack of control over their own movements. These two factors are highly contingent upon one's status and age. As much as these two factors can serve to limit women's migration, they have also led to overt rejection and sidestepping of parochial delineations of gender roles.

Women can negotiate and circumvent traditional gender roles through migration. Jourdan remarks that women migrate to Honiara for different reasons (1987). Firstly some women come to Honiara to seek the rewards and advantages of the urban life, and in the process systematically sever their ties with their village. Others migrate to town for the material, financial and educational opportunities available to them. These women will not sever their ties with their village, but hope to return home at a later date. The last group comes to Honiara for short stays, to wander and explore the infamous town. They may purchase some merchandise and set up small businesses in their home villages after sojourning in Honiara (Jourdan 1987: 4). Although women are increasingly migrating to town, historical roots have come to shape women's movements in the Solomons today.



## **2.2 Historical Women's Movement**

Historically in the Solomon Islands, women would follow the men in settlement and migration (Alasia 1989: 113). In the oral tradition of East and West Kwara'ae, as presented in *kastom* stories or origin myths, women are said to accompany their husbands in the primordial peopling of Malaita (Alasia 1989: 113-4). However a change is taking place as women are moving in new fashions, and no longer strictly accompanying their spouses (Jourdan 1987; 1995). How then has the situation changed to allow for this scenario?

During the nineteenth century Labour Trade, women did not play a significant role (Corris 1973; Jourdan 1987; Alasia 1989; Keesing 1989). In historical renditions of the Labour Trade women were occasionally present (Corris 1973). However, for the most part women were often left at home, unless they were married as evident in the quotation below:

The chastity of single girls was, on most of the islands in the Solomons, of great importance to their marriage prospects and, therefore, to the interests of their sponsors. Upon marriage, a bride price was paid, and a female kinswoman represented a significant investment which had to be protected, as the maximum sum could only be commanded by a virgin bride. There could, therefore, be no question of permitting single girls to leave the island on recruiting ships aboard where women frequently became prostitutes to Europeans and Melanesians for the duration of the voyage. Even where their virginity was not of such great importance, young unmarried girls were nevertheless of value to their kin, who were extremely reluctant to allow them to be recruited. Queensland regulations stipulated that women were to be recruited only in the company of their husband ...The illicit recruiting of women was almost certain to cause the islanders to turn against the recruiters (Corris 1973: 44-5).

Women's places focused heavily upon the family back in the village, as their brothers ventured off into the Labour Trade in search of social prestige and luxurious gifts for bride price and raising their family's status. The Labour Trade was one of the most powerful forces that transformed Solomon Island societies, alongside Christianity and missionization (Alasia 1989; Keesing 1994).

In the Solomon Islands, Christian missionaries instilled new ideals and gender roles through their teachings. Some Christian values were introduced by Europeans missionaries, others by returning labour migrants setting up their own missions and mission schools (Corris 1973; Bennett 1987). Although early Christian missionaries were single males, European women later came and taught

local Solomon Island women home economics, cooking, sewing, child rearing and care of the infirm (Jolly & Macintyre 1989; Pollard 2003: 47; MacDougall 2003). These missionaries helped foster a service-oriented approach: working towards the benefit of the collective congregation and caring for all people (Jolly & Macintyre 1983; Pollard 2003: 47; Douglas 2003). In the last five years, scholars have noted the impact of Christianity on gender roles, the formation of women's groups and consequently women's roles in Melanesian cultures (Jourdan 1987; Pollard 2003; Douglas 2003; McDougall 2003; Scheyvens 2003).

Jolly tells us that men actively discourage and prevent women from seeking migrant work. They thus inhibit women's contact with outsiders. This action sustains claims to male dominance (men are regarded as more able to withstand dangers than women); and men appropriate access to the outside world just as they do a leading role in ritual and exchange. Yet there may well be a further dynamic to the relation between gender and the conceptualization of traditional society. Thus in the context of male migration, not in others, women at home can represent the enduring relationship to land that is held to characterize a *kastom* way of life as a whole (Strathern 1984: 81-82).

Women were at once fixed, rooted, and tied to the land. They were discouraged from migration, similarly during the Labour Trade. Women's roles remained within the private sphere, whereas men occupied the prestigious public sphere (UNESCO 1996: 3). Women's roles are centred upon the wellbeing of the family: raising children, providing food through gardening or going to the market (Jourdan 1987; Pollard 2000; 2003; Douglas 2003; McDougall 2003). Their place was associated with the village and the perpetuation of the lineage and *kastom* even to this day.

### **2.3 Contemporary Women's Migration in the Solomons**

The primary point of reference for most Solomon Islander migrants, irrespective of gender is the town, Honiara. Many urban migrant women I talked to had previously visited Honiara with their immediate family or other family members, such as Uncles, Aunts, and brothers. Some women came as young girls and others came for a holiday or to explore the urban world, while other people came to Honiara, en route to visit relatives on other islands.

Short term migration includes those who come to stay for a short period of time from two weeks to a

month, or even six months. They do not intend to permanently settle, and have a purpose or business to conduct in town. When speaking with local urban women about migration, their assumption was that women will come to town if they are going to the hospital to have a baby, check on a health concern, and to visit or take care of a sick relative. These instances are not surprising considering that access to healthcare is best in Honiara, serviced by the Central Hospital (referred to as *Namba Naen*). There are provincial hospitals, such as the Kilufi hospital in Malaita, however health services are much more reliable and plentiful in Honiara. Health concerns are one of the primary reasons that urban migrant women come to town, and one of their foremost worries next to economic inflation.

Other temporary migrant women come to Honiara to sell their vegetables, shell money and jewellery, coconut oil and hair tonics in the Central Market. For instance Guadalcanal is known to have some of the richest soil. Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) and sweet potatoes (*Ipomea batatas*) grow well on the island and are renowned in the other provinces. On the other hand, certain fruits are sweeter when they grow in other provinces, for example pineapples (*Ananas comosus*) grow better in Malaita and families will send their crop for sale in Honiara's market during the harvest season. The sale of produce tends to be the domain of women, and Pollard richly describes the politics and tribulations that women face by having to commute with their children and produce, sitting under the hot sun, being harassed by Honiara Town Council (HTC) officers over market prices, and the overall lack of facilities available in the markets (Pollard 2000: 67-80). Anne from Langalanga, on Malaita, came to Honiara to sell her shell money and jewellery at the Central Market. Anne said that she could spend between two weeks and one month in town, depending on how long it took to sell all her goods. For the duration of her stay she would remain with *wantoks* (relatives) and then head back home to make more shell money and jewellery, which itself was a timely process.

Urban migrant women may also come to Honiara to help with and take part in fundraising events. For instance some women came to help with the fundraiser for victims of the 2007 Tsunami or to find information on income generating opportunities. Rosie came to the Vois Blong Mere Solomon

(VBMS) office in Honiara because she was setting up a typing school in Malaita and wanted information about keyboarding, computers, and software applications.<sup>10</sup> She did not have access to this information on Malaita, and asked the organization for help in obtaining it. At the same time she was visiting her son who had undergone surgery in the hospital.

Short term movements are not necessarily situated around information and economics. Young girls for instance will travel if they compete in sports, such as handball, at the secondary school level. They come to Honiara and other provinces for competitions. Many women are able to travel to attend church gatherings and conference. The Methodists and Anglican Mother's Union held conferences on violence against women and the role of the church in 2007. Women came from other provinces to attend this conference in Honiara. National holidays and large events such as Women's Week can also draw women from different islands to come and share information, and sell their woven baskets, shell decorations (macramé), and food. In September 2007, the Women's Week included many stalls that were run by women from different islands. They came from the Western Province, Rennell-Bellona, and Malaita to sell their food and specialty goods. Because the stalls were quite expensive that year, many women shared the cost of the stall and divided the interior by creating boundaries of cloth or leaf and sold their own materials in their section. Alice in her thirties, from Malaita, rented a stall with her sister for the week at the cost of SI\$50. They split the stall down the middle with a plaited leaf barrier. Alice's sister sold her macramé and *lavalavas* (sarongs) on one side while Alice sold packets of peanuts and betelnuts on the other. In another stall, a woman in her fifties came from the Western Province. She was preparing food with her daughters. Her daughters lived in Honiara, and they all worked together in the stall. Women's Week was another reason to come and see her family, alongside doing some fundraising.<sup>11</sup> Such events spur short term migration, income generating activities for entrepreneurs and can be used as an excuse to visit family.

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<sup>10</sup> Vois Blong Mere Solomon: (VBMS) is a local NGO based in Honiara that deals with women's issues in both the urban and rural contexts.

<sup>11</sup> Such events can be huge attractions, since they are held at the Town Grounds. There can be a live stage setup for music and performers come and play, singing contests are held, and people come to hang out in the shade and peruse the stalls. Children can play and eat candies and treats if their families can afford to spend the money.

However, sometimes people's short term migration can end up being longer if they miss the return boat or find it overcrowded. In other situations people may not have accomplished what they needed, such as waiting for further tests at the hospital. And other times migration can end up being shorter than intended. A person's money may run out and they will have to return to their respective island or village (Jourdan 1995). Short term migration can become an impetus for a more permanent stay in Honiara through developing a familiarity with town life.

## ***2.4 Long Term Migration***

Long term migration instils a sense of settlement and permanency on the part of the migrant. This type of migration decision varies from short term migration. Long term migration can include lifetime migration, multiple migrations, rural-urban and vice versa. Long term migration plays a prominent role in the Solomon Islands, because nearly one in six Solomon Islanders lives outside of their province of birth (SISO 2002: 121). Furthermore, the number of people migrating is dramatically increasing over the years (SISO 2002: 109). In 1999 a conservative estimate suggests that seventeen percent of the population are lifetime migrants (SISO 2002: 109). However, long term migration is more appropriate considering peoples' rate of mobility can vary.

As the 1999 statistics report demonstrates, long term migration has had drastic impacts on the social setting of Honiara, influencing the composition of the population being born in Honiara (Jourdan 1985; SISO 2002: 120). At 1999, slightly more than sixty percent of Honiara's population was born outside of town. The percentage of those born in town is slowly increasing, as the population born outside of town slowly decreases (Jourdan 1985; SISO 2002). The census also notes that there are more long term migrants than recent migrants in Honiara. And Honiara, in 1999 was also subject to high rates of out migration in part due to the crisis occurring at the time.

There is a minimal gender bias present in long term and recent migration with fifty-six percent of men migrating in comparison to fifty-five percent of women. According to the 1999 census the majority of migrants are between fifteen and twenty-four years of age. However, the provinces of

Temotu, Malaita, and Makira-Ulawa have higher rates of male migration (SISO 2002: 125).<sup>12</sup> And more male lifetime migrants are attracted to Western Province, while more recent male migrants are attracted to Central and Guadalcanal Provinces. Finally only female lifetime migrants head to Malaita and Temotu (SISO 2002: 125). These types of migration revolve around specific points of reference, including family, employment, and education.

## **2.5 Family**

Some of the underlying causes for women's migration belie the same issues as for men. Where circumstances differ is in the relationships through which people negotiate their personal desires and family or kin obligations. During an interview, Elizabeth a twenty-one years old Kwara'ae woman from Malaita, was working as a *haosgel* (house girl) for her sister (see Chapter five for discussion). She explained that she migrated because she was unhappy with her responsibilities at home. She was the oldest daughter out of eight siblings (five sisters and three brothers) and her mother had kept her from attending school in order to help look after the family and work in the garden back on Malaita. Falling behind her classmates in school, she became frustrated with school and left at Class Three (primary level). She ran away from Malaita to work for her sister in town. Her sister managed to obtain a Form Five education and was working in Honiara as a secretary. As she states:

I don't go to school anymore. I ran away to come to Honiara. When I was small we stayed here for a while. When I was not in school. I was born at home and then we came to Honiara. I had to go back home to go to school, but my mom said to go to work in the garden. I was tired of working in the garden, and was unhappy with my schooling. So I ran away to Honiara. I came to Honiara in 2000 and I have stayed here until this time (Elizabeth, 21, Malaita).

She was able to do this because she had a purpose in Honiara. Elizabeth was adamant that she did not want to return home to her family and the responsibilities that it entailed. Running away from her family was her primary motive for leaving. After spending time in Honiara, she settled into a new lifestyle. She was engaged to a boy who did not have the money to pay for her bride price

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<sup>12</sup> Whether the picture remains the same needs to be explored in the up and coming census.

(at the time SI\$1,000 & 10 shell money).<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, she was not completely content with her life in town. One source of her frustrations was with her boyfriend. She found that he drank too much and expressed that he was of questionable character. Her uncertainty about her own relationship and future nevertheless overrode any feelings of going back. Life back home in the village, she felt, was too strict. However, she did not completely break away from her family and wanted to go back for Christmas. She was able to go to Honiara and escape her life in the village only because of her family network. This would have been more difficult had she lacked this network. It allowed her the freedom and means of staying on in Honiara as a *haosgel*.

Remittances for families are another increasing incentive for sending their daughters to Honiara. Amongst young working migrant women interviewed most would remit almost half of their wages back home to their families. In these cases some women were not necessarily single but may have a child back home in their village. Beti, twenty-four years old from Choiseul, was the only person in her family working in Honiara as a shop girl at the time. The rest of her family remained in Choiseul. She had a young boy in Choiseul and would remit SDB\$200 of her SDB\$400 monthly wages back to her family in Choiseul. While she was working in Honiara her mother was looking after her small baby. Beti's husband was working in Honiara as well, and they had another child living with them. In another example, Janice, twenty-three years old from Isabel also had a small boy on Isabel. Her mother was also looking after him, while she was working in Honiara. She was recruited by an Aunt who had an opening for an office worker in the Prime Minister's office. Similarly, she sent a portion of her wages home to her family. These remittances can be a significant benefit for rural families when young unmarried women migrate for employment opportunities.

## **2.6 Employment**

The second most prevalent factor for the movement for women in the Solomons is employment.

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<sup>13</sup> Ten shell money is the traditional money used on Malaita for formal exchanges such as bridewealth and compensatory payments. There are different types of shell money, but the most valuable are made with the lip of the spondylus shell. Some elaborate shell valuables consist in ten strands of red shell money, each of them about 1 fathom long, and gathered together with meshing and decorated with dolphin's teeth and cowry shells. Each strand can be bought from the market for about SDB \$60.00. Full necklaces can also be made or bought from the local market for SDB\$1,000. They are used in compensation payments and the appeasement of *kastom* taboos in order to restore harmony.

Employment motivates not just women but men as well since both men and women equally contribute to the labour force (UN 1996: 34). However, the type of employment available to women and men will vary, as well as the distances that men and women will be able to travel in search of employment opportunities. Men have greater mobility in pursuing economic opportunities in comparison to women.

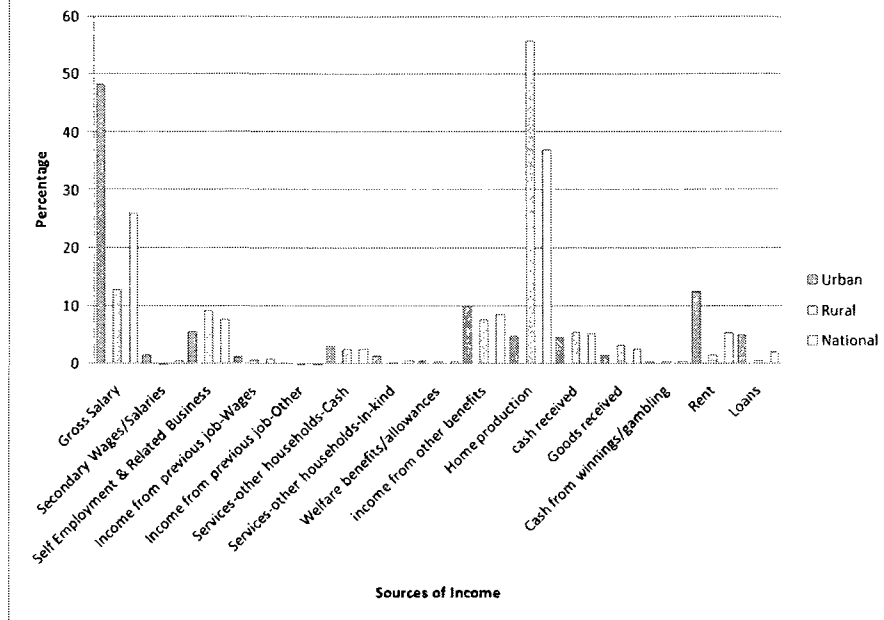
Employment can be divided into the formal and the informal economy. The formal economy in the Solomons is limited and situated in Honiara and other provincial urban centres.<sup>14</sup> In town wage employment predominantly sustains urban households. The top four sources of income in urban households are: 48.3 percent from gross salaries/wages, followed by 12.4 percent from rent, 9.9 percent from other income benefits, 5.6 percent from self employment, and the remaining 23.8 percent of income sources come from other sources such as loans, secondary wages, home production, etc. (SISO 2006: 39). Women's participation in paid employment has remained lower than that of males, with thirty-one percent of men gaining paid employment in comparison to only fifteen percent of women (SISO 2002). Families in the urban settings are reliant on cash, and as inflation rises families need to rely on more than one source of income, as is evident in Table 2.1. Thus more urban women require entering the workforce in order to obtain cash (UNESCO 1999).

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<sup>14</sup> Provincial capitals of the Solomon Island Provinces: Gizo, Western Province; Auki, Malaita,; Tulagi, Central Province, Kirakira, Makir-Ulawa; Buala, Isabel; Taro, Choiseul; Lata, Temotu; Honiara, the Capital (SISO 2002: 122).



**Table 2.1: Sources of Household Income in the Solomon Islands**



Source: SISO 2006, HIES.

In terms of formal employment, women predominate within the nursing and education professions (Pollard 2000: 11). However, men continue to dominate within managerial and higher administrative positions within these professions (UNESCO 1999; SISO 2002). There are a few pioneering women embracing new career opportunities and entering into the trades such as motor mechanics.

Hilde Taroni is an Isabel woman becoming the first women to become a licensed motor mechanic and graduate from SICHE in the trades (Mamu 2007, August 7, Weekend Magazine: 2).

Although this can be an exceptional case, the door is opening for women to take on greater diversity in the formal sector. Since the statistics show that a small amount of women take part in the formal economy, women contribute to their households through other means.

Women predominantly contribute to their households through the informal sector. Small private ventures such as selling crops in the market, baking buns and selling them to neighbours, farming, selling betelnut, and selling jewellery, can all be fruitful income generating practices and part of the informal economy. However, women are likely to engage in such activities throughout the

Solomons. "Young women also migrate temporarily: especially to Honiara to work in houses as domestic 'house-girls' (hoas-gele), or to Noro, in Western Province, to work in the fish processing factory" (Gooberman-Hill 1999: 64). Although wage employment has prestige and requires education, women will migrate for employment in both the formal and informal economies. As Gooberman-Hill discusses, for middle-class nuclear families, the *haosgel* is becoming a formalized occupation. However, this does not suggest that wages and workloads, as well as time-off and holidays are being standardized (Gooberman-Hill 1999). For many young girls being a *haosgel* still falls within the informal sector as they can be compensated for their work in many ways (see Jourdan 2005). Taking up a position as a *haosgel* is perhaps one of the foremost means of migrating for young unskilled women in the Solomons.

## **2.7 Education**

Alongside family and employment, education is another strong instigator of women's migration. Throughout the Pacific "[t]he largest and most consistent movement would be for education, not only on a country basis, as outer Islanders move to educational centres, but the largest flow is a temporary one: Islanders coming to study at The University of the South Pacific (USP)" (McCall 2006: 37-8). Thus people have and will continue to travel within their own country and abroad--if possible in order to advance their education credentials.

In Honiara, families are obliged to take in kin coming to Honiara to complete their education, especially when it comes to pursuing tertiary education (Jourdan 1985; 1987; 1996; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000). Reaching Six or Seven are considered achievements, and many families choose to send their children to urban centres once they reach secondary school levels.<sup>15</sup> Lisa, nineteen years old and in Form Five, was annoyed with her teacher's consistently missing class on her home island of Nggela. At home she faced repeating another academic year. Subsequently her family sent her to Honiara to finish her education. She came to Honiara and was staying with

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<sup>15</sup> Not all students and families choose to go to Honiara for secondary schooling. There are provincial secondary as well as missionary boarding schools throughout the Solomons, and some are more prestigious than others. Students can choose where they wish to attend depending upon their scores on their Form five examinations.

extended family. Her brother was able to take care of the administrative details so that she could attend school and no longer postpone her education, while her parents were paying for her school fees, uniforms and study materials.

Back on Nggela, Lisa's sister was already a teacher and supporting her family's economic needs. Lisa's older sister who was educated undoubtedly influenced Lisa's desire for attaining a higher level of education. She enjoyed school and if she could pursue any profession she wanted she would become a doctor. In contrast to her life on Nggela, Lisa enjoys her life as a student in town, playing with fashion and meeting new people. As a result of migrating to town in the pursuit of education, she has the ability to shape a new identity. And due to family connections she was able to continue her studies in Honiara, rather than delaying for another year.

Traveling for education purposes also leaves room to expand one's network of friends as well as employability. Mary from Guadalcanal, and Jane from Makira-Ulawa met while in an Anglican Mission Secondary school on Makira. Mary could go on into Form Seven, however the cost was too high and she decided to study agriculture at SICHE instead. The following year, Jane came to Honiara to study agriculture at SICHE as well. They were close friends, and Jane's boyfriend came from the same island as Mary. As well that year, they also met a new friend from Choiseul. Because these students were all attending the same educational institution and program, they were able to become fast friends.

When speaking with male students, many of them would dream of going abroad, whether on a permanent or temporary basis. However this would hardly arise when talking with female students unless prompted. Women's migration becomes also more prevalent in families that have more girls than boys (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Lawson 2000). Migration for education remains a safer prospect for some women who want to travel. And the education of young girls is also representative of a rising middle-class ideal.

## 2.8 Class

Earlier in this chapter migration was linked with education. However, education levels are also coupled with class and consequently migration. Class differentials are relational categories of grouping people, and travel with people across space and time (Barber & Lem 2008). Gooberman-Hill points that there is a “correlation between [the] level of education and propensity to migrate” (2000: 38). Higher educated women tend to marry men from other islands, because they are able to migrate for longer periods of time and across larger distances. Class configurations are complex and sometimes difficult to articulate. How then does class influence migration?

In the Solomons women of upper classes are able to move internationally more readily than those of lower classes with family obligations and lack of financial resources. This type of migration is reserved more for the elite, well educated and *bigwuman* working for NGOs, church groups, and the government.<sup>16</sup>

Amongst women of lower classes there is a fear towards international movement as particularly evident in the following example.

*Neva, from South Malaita, has a daughter with an Australian pilot (Pat) who worked for Solomon Airlines. Their daughter was fifteen years old and was attending King George Secondary School.<sup>17</sup> Neva was not married at the time. But she received child support from Pat, who was married to another woman from the Philippines. Earlier in their relationship Pat asked her to go with him to Australia, but she said: “mi fraet fo go” (I was afraid to go). Most people are extremely aware of the benefits of living abroad including the economic advantages and prestige added to one’s family. However, there are more complicating factors that shape one’s decision to leave.*

Neva was uneducated, never having gone to school and unable to read and write. She felt ashamed of this and of her lack of English-speaking ability. More importantly she is embedded within a world of relations, where she has and can invoke kinship ties when necessary. She knows her place, her status, and her identity remains secure. Living abroad would put all of these into question, and being uneducated she imposed upon herself a discourse of inferiority and

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<sup>16</sup> *Big wuman*: is someone who has garnered status and prestige in the urban setting. She is usually someone exceptional, well educated, and respected amongst members of the community.

<sup>17</sup> King George Secondary school is considered one of the premier academic institutions in the Solomons. And scholarships are offered by the government to attend the school.

consequently never left.

One's class is likely to determine if one has the opportunity to travel internationally. As Goberman-Hill points out that the middle-class in Honiara clearly attempt to make links to international countries, both symbolically and physically (Goberman-Hill 1999; Jourdan 2007). The attitude of another urban migrant woman, Jean, demonstrates leanings towards urban middle-class cosmopolitanism.

*Jean, thirty four years old from Lau from Malaita came to Honiara, to work in a Chinese operated office. Working at this office she married a Chinese man. They had two girls that were seven and nine. She lived in the Chinese inner suburb of Chinatown. When rioters rampaged through Chinatown in 2006, Jean's house was burnt down.<sup>18</sup> Being concerned for the security of their daughters, Jean and her husband sent their two children to live with their paternal grandparents in China. Jean was having a hard time being separated from her two girls. Before they left their daughters with their grandparents, they spent one month in China. She was amazed at how different it was, but enjoyed her time there. She was eager to go again; unfortunately the cost of airfare would not allow them to visit any time soon.*

Jean, unlike Neva ran a small convenience shop, and her husband continued to work for Tom's Company, and was more financially secure. They sought a middle-class lifestyle by heading to the beach every Sunday, and her husband has a *hilux* (pick-up truck) and would go fishing. Neither went to church on Sunday, but would bring the neighbouring children with them to the beach since their neighbour was a single mother raising three children. Jean said she enjoyed bringing the children for company, since her two girls were away. Although Jean was undereducated, she was keen to learn English, in order to speak with different customers in the shop. They were aspiring towards the middle-class ideals by embracing international connections, unlike Neva who shied away from such experience. For the majority of urban migrant women in this project, migration has taken place largely within the confines of the country. Rarely did urban migrant women speak of visiting different countries, unless they had family to visit. International mobility for lower class migrant women was almost unfathomable.

Although initially some women are reluctant to consider traveling abroad, they can do so through

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<sup>18</sup> In April 2006 during a vote of non-confidence, Chinese stores and homes were burnt down by mobs of young men in protest to the increasing land being bought up by foreign businesses. They viewed new Chinese immigrants as bribing the government and consequently burnt down many shops in Chinatown in April 2006.

women's networks, NGOs, and church affiliations. Religious networks are a strong means of linking women from different provinces and even nations in the Pacific (Douglas 2003). During Women's Week held in Honiara in 2007, a group of Vanuatu women came to Honiara for a meeting and concert. Religious networks may not allow for international migration, but facilitates the attainment of the cosmopolitan ideal of the middle-class to be accessible to more people. Thus for the middle and upper class there is a desire to engage within the global landscape, which lower classes and many urban migrant women shy away from.

Late nineteenth century missionaries along with the Labour Trade served to transform cultures in the Solomon Islands, and consequently gender roles. More recently Pollard notes that the domains of education, employment, and the formal sector serve to redefine gender roles.

It is also apparent that education, employment and the availability of cash are among the principal factors generating change. Education and employment have not only taken women away from the home, but they have also exposed them to the new values and ideas of modern society, in which women expect equality in all aspects of social life, from domestic to national. (Pollard 2000: 15).

Pollard further implies that these factors actually also contribute and shape women's migration. I have attempted to demonstrate that these factors indeed dramatically shape urban women's migration.

Women's migration has been somewhat postponed and consequently has taken on a specific character. Unlike men, who have a history of moving transnationally, and are constantly in motion, women are now beginning to take an active role in circular migration. Undoubtedly women's migration will extend into transnational migration over the course of time. However, at this crucial juncture, we are still in the beginning stages of documenting women's movements in the Solomons. These movements are associated with the changing nature of the social, political, and economic context of the Solomons. As such women's gender roles and status have also undergone greater complexity and will continue to do so.

Women's migration questions conceptions of sociality (living in a social world). As they move to

new places independently, or through family networks, in search of education, or navigating the sea of employment opportunities, women migrants loosen the roots that have held them in the village. This is not to suggest that all rural women are imprisoned by domesticity in the villages. Women are proud of their roles and their family obligations (Pollard 2000). Women's migration revolves around very specific points of reference, and social expectations and migration are becoming a new means by which women fulfil their roles.

## **Chapter 3: Contextualizing Honiara**

An urban culture holds the promise of fulfilling dreams and the flight of romantic hearts, in contrast to the despair and depravity of hunger and social stratification. Honiara represents the confluence of competing people, families, businesses, and ideologies. The presence and negotiations of not only dichotomies but multiple party interests, and their arising contradictions is a fundamental characteristic of most people's realities in Honiara. Urban Honiarans are entwined by the roots of *kastom* and crisscrossed with the strands of a modern life, simultaneously reworking the meaning of home. But Robert Foster points out that not everyone can easily find the balance between opposing forces, such as those of *kastom* and the market economy (Foster 2005: 210). This chapter introduces Honiara as an urban centre where women migrants reformulate their place in the urban setting in relationship to their home.

### **3.1 Urbanization in Honiara**

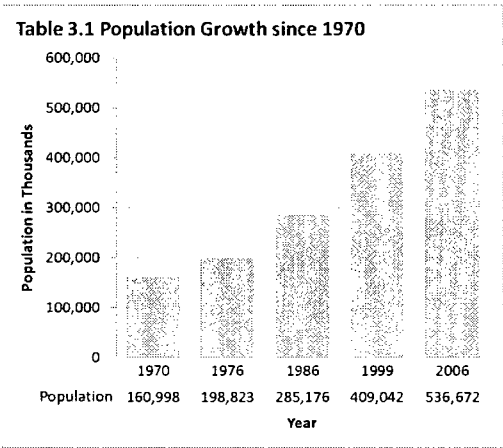
Urbanization in Melanesia is a recent phenomenon (Brookfield & Hart 1971; Brookfield 1973; Philibert 1986; Connell & Lea 2002: 32). In the Solomons, urbanization did not occur until the founding of the new capital Honiara. Tulagi, the former colonial capital was located on the island of Nggela, and destroyed by Japanese bombers because of its natural harbour (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985; Bennett 1989). In 1953 on Guadalcanal, Honiara was established as the new capital on the remnants of the American Army base near Henderson airport. Irrespective of the town's late birth, the capital has undergone drastic social, economic, political, and cultural change. Since the sixties the population has dramatically increased, and continues to flourish through urban migration and its natural population growth.

Honiara has a growth rate above the national average. Honiara's growth rate is 5.7 percent in comparison to the annual growth rate of 4.4 percent between 1999-2005 (SISO 2006: 20). However, in new and established urban centres in the Solomons, the population increase was measured at 4.3%. During this period in Honiara in 1999, a conservative estimate of 3.8% was due



to the massive movement of people during the Tensions (SISO 2006: 20).<sup>19</sup>

The majority of the Solomon Islands population is rural based, and the concentration of power and prestige lies in the hands of the urban elites. Out of a population of 533, 672, 85,485 people reside in urban centres and 448,174 reside in rural settings. This amounts to 12,488 urban households comprising sixteen percent of the population and 74,246 rural households comprising eighty-four percent of the rural population in 2006 (SISO 2006: 20). Furthermore three quarters (77%) of all urban residents reside within the Honiara Town Council boundary (SISO 2006: 7). As such "Honiara has the status of a formal and geographic entity (SISO 2002: 7), represented as its own province amongst the ten provinces of the Solomon Islands.



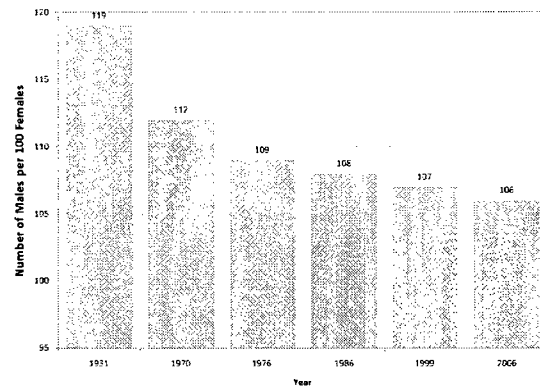
Source: SISO 2007, website

The census notes that the sex ratio is equalizing over time (SISO 2002: 21). The sex ratio at the national level was 107 males to 100 females, while Honiara's sex ratio was 129 males to 100 females in 1999 (SISO 2002: 22). However since the 1976 census the sex ratio in Honiara was 148, which then dropped to 131 in 1986, and further declined to 128 in 1999 (SISO 2002: 22). By 2005/6 the sex ratio in Honiara was on par with the national sex

<sup>19</sup> Tensions: refers to the socioeconomic and political upheaval that swept the Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2004 in which Malaitan Eagle Force militants opposed Guadalcanal Istambu Freedom Movement. Along with a coup that toppled the Federal government (2000), the tensions traumatized the national consciousness because of the violence, extortions, political chaos, collapse of the economy and massive displacement of people that lasted for a couple of years (Moore 2004).

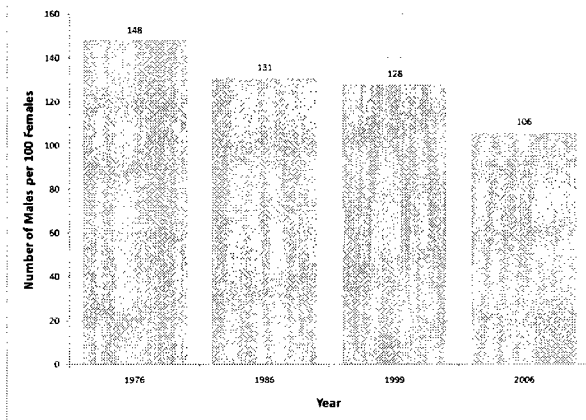
ratio of 106 males for every 100 females, representing a significant drop from the 1999 census. These numbers confirm why women keep saying that there are *staka wuman lo taon* (there are a lot of women in town).

Table 3.2a: National Sex Ratio from 1931 to 1999



Sources: SISO 2002; SISI 2006, HIES.

Table 3.2b: Honiara Sex Ratio from 1976 to 2006



Sources: SISO 2002; SISI 2006, HIES.

As to why the sex ratio is equalizing can be attributed to two phenomena: firstly that people are increasingly raising their children in town, and secondly that the number of women is increasing as they migrate to Honiara. It has been estimated that nearly 33,525 women and 35,665 males live in Honiara (SISO 2006: 20). Consequently the total population of Honiara would be 69,190. Considering that the urban population grows at 5.7% per annum, the population may likely exceed

75,000 people in 2007/8. These figures show that the configuration of the urban population has changed since the late eighties.

With an increasing urban population, land becomes a major issue. Geographically the Solomons are largely mountainous, with limited land sustainable for large urban settlement. Most of the population lives on ten percent of available flatlands, lagoons, coastal plains, and atolls (SISO 2002: 8). Although the population density in 1999 was reported at 13 persons/km<sup>2</sup>, population densities vary amongst the different islands, with Central Province 35 persons/km<sup>2</sup>, Malaita 29 persons/km<sup>2</sup>, and Temotu 22 persons/km<sup>2</sup> being the highest populated areas. In Honiara the population density was reported at 2,224 persons/km<sup>2</sup> during the 1999 census, which is significantly higher than the most populated provinces (SISO 2002: 8).

To establish the capital, the British Colonial Administrators appropriated land from Guadalcanal people. Unfortunately, the colonial administration ignored customary land payments. During Honiara's expansion period, many migrants from Malaita began to settle on land owned by Guadalcanal people. Since land was leased from the Guadalcanal people, land ownership has required careful negotiations by the national government and has been a contributing factor for civil unrest. Unresolved land disputes have hindered the rebuilding of Chinatown, leaving some large empty plots of land in central Honiara. In Honiara land is a contentious issue for all people, for local Guadalcanal land owners, and new rural migrants, as well as long term immigrants.

Land and land ownership is a powerful source of identity, pride, and security. Many Solomon Islanders constantly reaffirm their access or potential access to land, whether through traditional kinship ties or by purchasing government lands. For example, the Sikaiana migrants acquiring land in other parts of the Solomons is an important phenomena (Donner 2002: 33). Leasing land is an important source of identity and allows people to settle in a group, to cultivate food, keep animals, and commute to waged employment in Honiara. Tenaru, located fifteen kilometres to the east of Honiara, was an important place for the Sikaiana to host various events for fundraising and

weddings, as well as church services (Donner 2002: 34). Some urban residents attempt to procure land for their children and family, through their kinship ties, and through the purchase of government land. Eventually as the population continues to climb, more people will be excluded from land ownership as sources of land are limited.

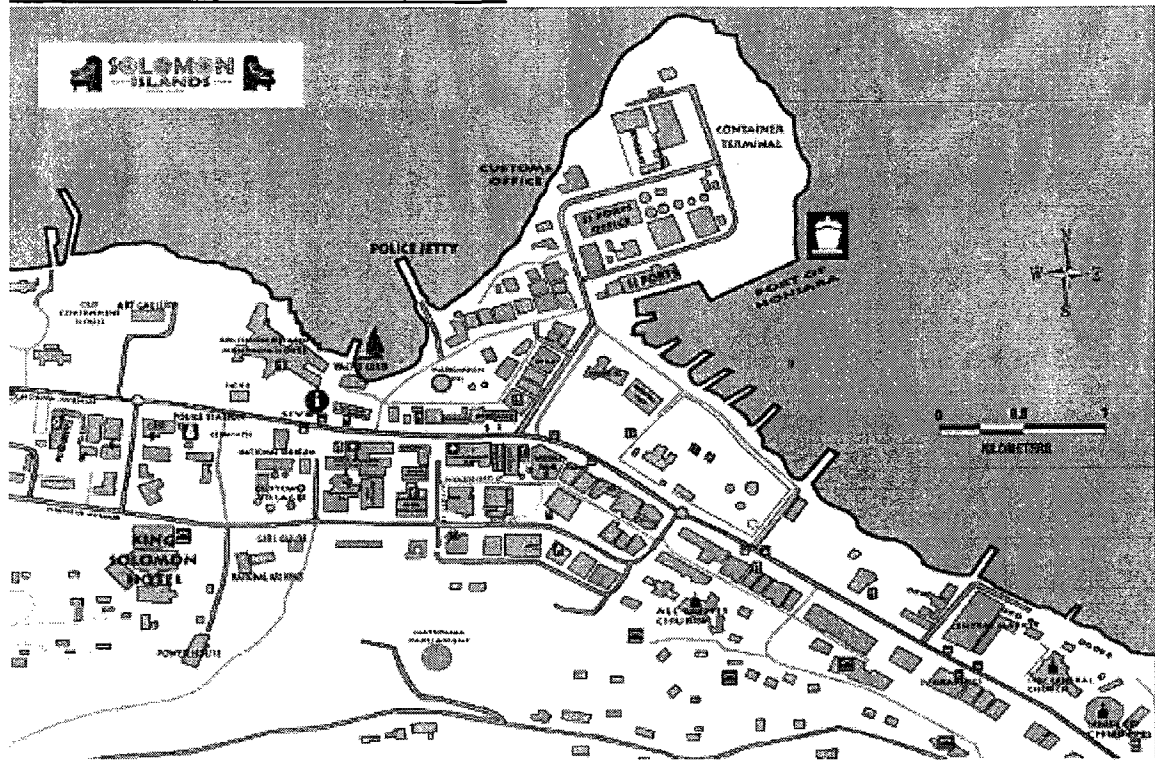
Housing is closely connected to land ownership. In Honiara, the amount of physical space both on land and in terms of building occupancy is extremely limited. In 2005, out of a total of ninety building permits, only fifty-eight residential permits and nineteen commercial or industrial were granted (SISO website). Specific neighbourhoods, especially those originally built for expatriates (Lengakiki, Ngosi, Panatina), and those established by the Honiara Housing Authority (Naha, Vura, Mbumburu, etc) contain cement houses, and have running water (when the water is available) and electricity (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985; Gooberman-Hill 1999). Permanent housing is a luxury. Many urban residents reside in wooden houses, built out of natural materials and raised on stilts. These are particularly prevalent in some areas, such as the squatter settlements south of Honiara, and around White River and Burns Creek. As well, Government ministries, some large companies such as the Tobacco Company, the hospital, and police service provide housing for their employees (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1985). However, not all employees can receive subsidized housing. Furthermore the lack of housing also strains urban households not only as they must look after rural *wantok*, but young urban residents are not able to find a place of their own, staying longer at their parents' home even after they have married. Households are cramped and three generational households are common, even though the preferred pattern of residence is that of the nuclear family. However, no matter if people become emplaced within the urban setting.

Honiara itself also transforms across time. Some measures of emplacement are linked to the location where one decides to settle. Urban migrant women may settle with *wantok* (relatives) in specific areas of town where members of their ethnic group tend to congregate. That is the case for the Lau of Malaita and people from Polynesian islands who create ethnic based settlements. Recent urban migrants rarely settle in central Honiara. And the highest rates of migration

settlement occur at the outskirts where land is more available for construction.

Given the rate with which the population increases (as mentioned above), urban sprawl is on the rise (see Diagram 3.3 and 3.4). Jean Mitchell, in reference to Port Villa, Vanuatu, notes that long term settlement is complex because of the nature of land ownership alongside colonial and postcolonial developments (Mitchell 2004: 363). Many urban settlements have a transient nature: they are spaces of transgressions and criminal activity, and above all these settlements become the representations of the type of inequalities occurring at the national level (Mitchell 2004: 36). Some areas around Honiara, such as Lungga and White River, and inner suburbs such as Koa Hill and Filisango are similarly viewed and known for theft and violence. The Honiara police have difficulty holding authority over such jurisdictions located on the boundaries of the authority of the Honiara Town Council (HTC). The police have acknowledged that gangs are able to network across the boundaries more easily than the police. In a recent report, crime occurs in Honiara primarily amongst youth between the ages of twelve to thirty-five who were unemployed, dropped out of school, and those from broken homes, as a result of the lack of opportunity and idleness (Jourdan 2007: 16-17). Thus the increasing crime rates are a manifestation of urbanization and growing inequalities in town, see table 3.3.

**Diagram 3.1: Map of Downtown Honiara**



**Diagram 3.2: Map of Eastern Honiara**

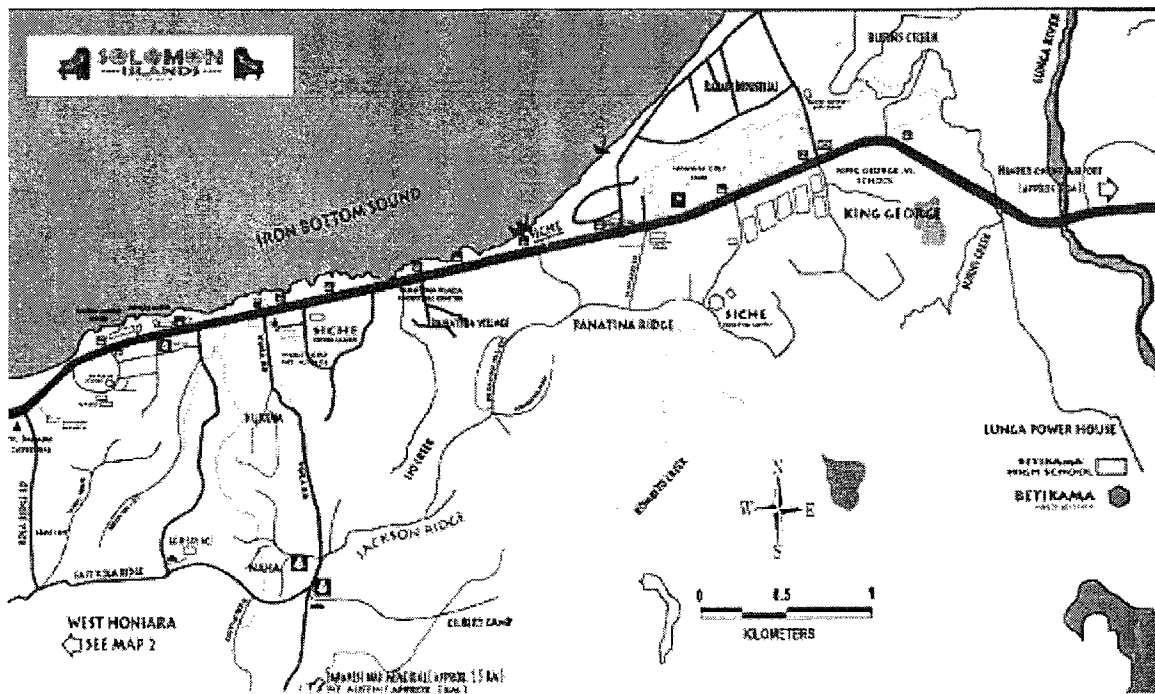


Diagram 3.3: Satellite Images of Downtown in 1943, 1984, and 2003

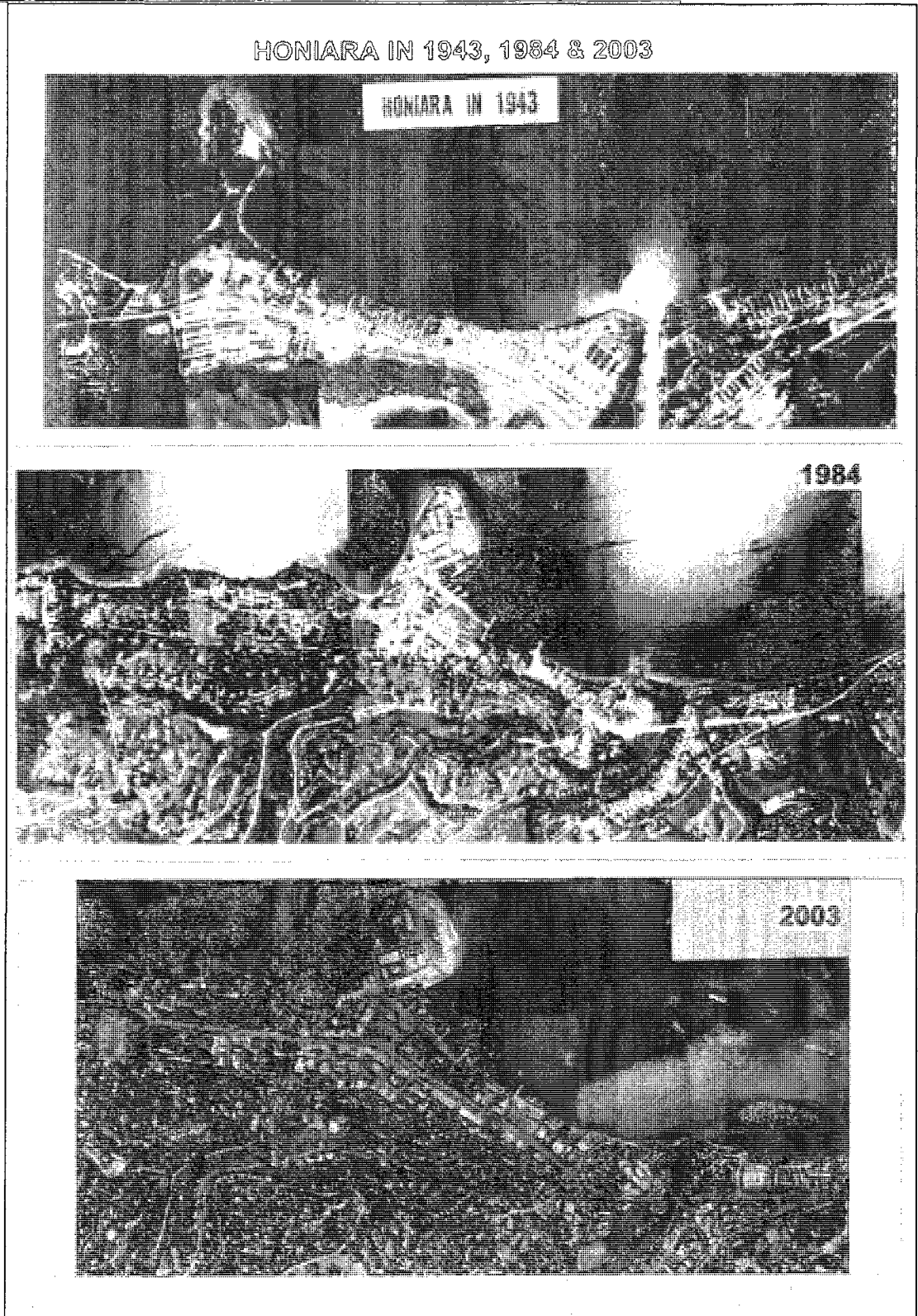
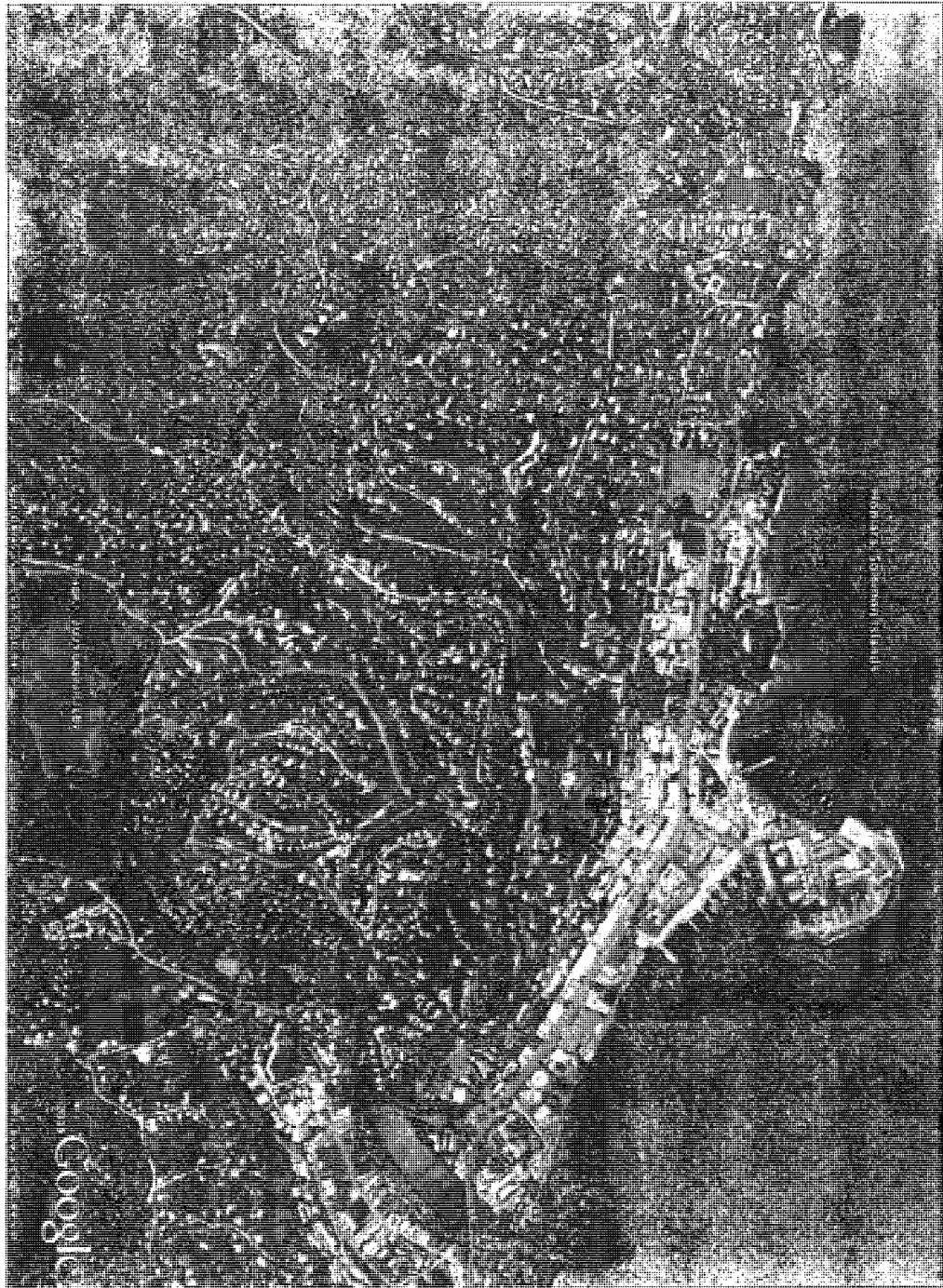


Diagram 3.4: Satellite Image of Honiara in 2007





**Table 3.3 Reported Crimes in the Solomon Islands between 2004-2006**  
Solomon Islands

	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
Person	2,045	2,159	1,957	35.2%	34.5%	34.7%
Property	1,914	2,617	2,284	35.2%	41.8%	40.5%
Public Morality	492	274	308	8.5%	4.4%	5.5%
Lawful Authority	1,353	1,216	1,127	23.3%	19.4%	20.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,804</b>	<b>6,266</b>	<b>5,646</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Jourdan 2008b.

**Table 3.4: Reported Crimes in Honiara between 2004-2006**  
Honiara Town

	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
Person	997	811	761	36.0%	31.1%	33.8%
Property	1,043	1,306	1,059	37.6%	50.1%	47.0%
Public Morality	144	50	27	5.2%	1.9%	1.2%
Lawful Authority	587	440	406	21.2%	16.9%	18.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,771</b>	<b>2,607</b>	<b>2,253</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Jourdan 2008b

In the Solomons the population distribution favours the young generation with those under 30 comprising nearly 67% of the total population (SISO 2005/6: 21). Urban youth and similarly urban migrants must reformulate Honiara from a space to a place. The *masta liu* youth culture, young men and women between the ages of fifteen to twenty-five, visit or *wakabaot* in the capital to experience the excitement of the urban world (Jourdan 1995: 210). Many lack the money and employment prospects to participate in the *fasin laef* (fashion life): buying nice clothes, foreign food, listening to the latest music, watching movies, and even continuing their education. Facing physical deprivation and estrangement from their homes, they often cruise the streets of Honiara, and socialize at the markets. Through their actions they reformulate and emplace themselves into the urban settings in an individualistic framework. In Port Villa, Mitchell notes that due to the rise in unemployment large numbers of young males walk the streets as a means of redefining place, and claiming their own urban space in town (Mitchell 2004: 365). By walking around town, notions of place centre upon identity as it becomes reworked. It is not a means of re-establishing linkages with island sociality, but is marked by unemployment and a means of passing time in the city and a method of combating boredom (Mitchell 2004: 365). However the unequal access to economic opportunities for young people in Honiara and Port Villa are increasing signs of growing societal inequalities (see Table 3.5).

**Table 3.5: Unemployment in the Solomon Islands**

Indicators	2002	2005/6
Unemployment Rate	15.20%	
Unemployment amongst 15 to 19 years old	59.20%	73%
Unemployment amongst 20 to 24 years old	59.20%	49%

Source: Jourdan 2008b.

Honiara is the centre for the legal system as well as the centre for commerce and business. Various international banks have been opening up in the capital, such as ANZ and WestPac, alongside the National Bank of the Solomons. The Solomons run a trade deficit of nearly SI\$ 219,100,000. The country imports more than it exports (SISO 2006). Major imports include minerals and fuel lubricants, food and live animals, and beverages and tobacco (SISO 2006). Major industries include: logging, cash crops (copra, cocoa, and coffee), palm oil production, and a growing mining industry (EUI 2007). Consequently it is not surprising that the majority of the income is generated in the urban setting (SISO 2006: 36). The concentration of the sources of income in the capital and other urban centres has led to the rapid urbanization of Honiara, and as such an influx of rural migration which still continues (UNICEF 1999).

To help alleviate the pressures of growing inequality, urban couples are only having a small number of children; whom they are keen on sending to at least primary schooling. However with the rate of inflation, school fees are becoming extremely problematic for everyone.<sup>20</sup> Parents both in rural and urban settings make strategic decisions regarding education and future job prospects (Jourdan 2007). And, these strategies tend to favour male offspring with the result that they are more likely to attain higher levels of education than girls, obtain scholarships, and even secure better paid employment opportunities.

<sup>20</sup> Secondary school fees can be from SID\$ 500 to 1,000. (UNICEF 2005:23).

The majority of students attend school between the ages of six to fourteen. Because the education system works on passing examinations in order to continue, there are specific points at which students drop out from formal education.<sup>21</sup> Nearly half of all students will drop out of formal schooling by the age of fourteen. The highest rates of students leaving school occur between Preparatory and Standard One, between Standard Six into Form One (Secondary Level), and from Form Three to Form Four. For both boys and girls the highest dropout rates of over 80 percent occurs from Form Six to Form Seven. In 2005, from the total student body of 122,513 (amongst primary and secondary), only 18.4 percent of students continued at the secondary level in 2005. In 2004 the sex ratio in primary school remains on par with national standards but then begins to rise by the age of ten, of 115 boys to 100 girls, and continues to dramatically rise to 137 boys to 100 girls by the age of fifteen (SISO 2008). Looking at the figures between 2005 and 2004 suggests that there is a gender bias towards males in the education system. And young girls are more likely to drop out of school, in particular around the age of ten. However the dropout rates also demonstrate that students have a difficult time pursuing their education especially once reaching the secondary level. These figures are national figures, and do not address whether the dropout rates would remain the same if compared between rural and urban settings. And although the government has attempted to eliminate school fees for students up until Form Three, students are dropping out of school earlier.

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<sup>21</sup> Apparently there is evidence that the education system will be reformed so that education becomes more accessible to everyone. School fees will be abolished for primary schools. The current exam schedule is to be altered so that more students continue (Solomon Star, 2008).

**Table 3.6: Solomon Islands Secondary Enrolment by Class, Year, and Sex in 2003-2005**

<b>Form 1</b>	3,097	2,632	5,729	2,930	2,479	5,409	3,261	2,706	5,967
<b>Form 2</b>	2,855	2,303	5,158	2,634	2,246	4,880	2,905	2,379	5,284
<b>Form 3</b>	2,735	2,058	4,793	2,491	1,934	4,425	2,468	1,954	4,422
<b>Form 4</b>	1,870	1,307	3,177	1,746	1,367	3,113	1,927	1,375	3,302
<b>Form 5</b>	1,441	1,009	2,450	1,634	1,099	2,733	1,609	1,056	2,665
<b>Form 6</b>	454	219	673	403	200	603	458	274	732
<b>Form 7</b>	77	30	107	53	30	83	78	37	115
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,529</b>	<b>9,558</b>	<b>22,087</b>	<b>11,891</b>	<b>9,355</b>	<b>21,246</b>	<b>12,706</b>	<b>9,781</b>	<b>22,487</b>

Source: SISO 2007, website.

Reasons why girls are pulled out of school vary upon individual circumstances. Some girls are pulled out of school by their mothers, who need help raising their children and tending the garden-- more typically in the rural settings. Others choose to no longer continue because they missed classes and can no longer keep up with their classmates.

Furthermore, other young girls may not attend school because they were sent to other family members to serve as a *haosgel*. Yet in other cases where the mother was sick or has died, a daughter would take on the responsibilities of their mother and raise their brothers and sisters. Finally, school fees are such a financial strain on families that children have to be pulled out of school when their family cannot keep paying them. Most often, if a choice has to be made to remove a girl or a boy from school, the girl will be removed, even if she is a better student. Young female students are also refusing to continue into secondary schooling because they feel they are poor students and feel better to discontinue.

Education levels especially in Honiara are a means for obtaining higher paid work. A shop owner told me that, when they are hiring someone new, they prefer a person with at least a Form Three education (third year of secondary schooling). As the job market caters more to higher education levels, employment opportunities will become available exclusively to an elite few, and thus encourage further stratification in the urban context.

### **3.2 Honiara's Fragile Stability**

Honiara is similar to other Melanesian towns such as Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea and Port Villa in Vanuatu; in that rarely are these urban centres bastions of equal opportunity where migrants live out their own and their family's expectations (Strathern 1975; Ryan 1993; Connell & Lea 2002; Mitchell 2004).

The growing literature on Melanesian urban centres (Gewertz and Errington 1999; Goberman-Hill 1999; Jourdan 1996; Mitchell 2004; Barnèche, 2005) show that they are epitomized by inequalities such as: class, access to employment, material goods, education, living accommodations, freedom of movement, and adequate access to infrastructure. Such inequalities can be perpetuated by urban Town Council initiatives in restricting access to adequate sanitation, waste disposal, electricity, and access to land which has been documented in Port Moresby during the 1950's (Oram 1976; Ryan 1993: 222). Access to these resources allows for establishing roots in the urban world rather than floating through the homes of *wantoks* and peri-urban settlements. As urbanization is bound to continue, restricting access to urban infrastructure is a poor and ineffective mechanism for curbing rural-urban migration and, as documented for Port Moresby.

Poor urban infrastructure also compounds the difficulties and grievances that urban migrants and residents face. These infrastructures include lack of running water, adequate sewage disposal, decent road networks, and solid waste management. Honiara is frequently subject to water shortages. According to the 1999 census only sixty-one percent of household have access to safe and clean drinking water, and only twenty-three percent have access to sanitation (SISO 2002: Key Stats). For instance, SIWA (Solomon Islands Water Authority) regularly turns off water to various urban neighbourhoods causing many difficulties for urban families. And even those families who are fortunate to have a water tank suffer during prolonged periods of drought. Furthermore water shortages for many urban women interferes with the management of the household.

Waste disposal and untreated human waste pose serious health risks for the urban population.

Diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid, cholera are linked to poor waste disposal and can lead to premature death amongst children (Oram 1976). Solid waste in Honiara was particularly problematic with rubbish strewn across the streets. Often the rubbish bins can be difficult to find or are overflowing with rubbish. Urban residents living in various neighbourhoods may receive garbage pickup twice weekly by a privately contracted family run operation. However if disputes arise and people have not paid for garbage removal the rubbish can be left for days on end. When this happens many urban residents will burn their rubbish, which pollutes the air.

Roads and transportation in Honiara are slowly developing. Specific roads in Honiara, which connect Honiara from East to West, are paved and then circle from the main road into the hills to Naha (see Diagrams 3.1 and 3.2). Many roads in Honiara are mud and become seriously washed away and are treacherous after the rains. When the roads wash away, this can impede some people from going to work, and during heavy rains, people stay away. Better roads will facilitate the movement of people in Honiara and ameliorate the daily living standards for all residents.

Public transportation in Honiara is minimal. The local transportation system consists of a fleet of minibuses that are run by private owners and operators. This system is quite efficient and productive. There are privately run taxis, which are expensive, and a few buses that run along the paved main roads. Unfortunately bus services do not run late at night, requiring people to take taxis.

Media and telecommunications are developing, and in 2007 trenches were being dug by the road to the Henderson airport for communication purposes. Telekom, a Solomon Islands company runs the telecommunication networks, such as telephone landlines, as well as internet services, and wireless devices. According to the Telekiom annual report, internet and GSM cellular phones have been dramatically on the rise since 2005 (SISO & Telecom 2008).

Honiara is going to require a great deal of resources and support from the government in order to

improve local services. The emphasis upon the urban setting has led to tensions with provincial governments and rural residents, as they view that the urban centre is siphoning away resources which should go to rural areas.

At the national level, tensions between the provincial and national governments continue. These tensions stem from the allocation of financial resources, distribution of health services, access to information, as well as banking. Within public discourse, the political inequalities between the rural and urban centres have spawned meetings calling for the curtailment of migration to Honiara. And these discussions have been directed towards Malaitans, suggesting that they should go back and develop their own Island rather than continuing to migrate to Honiara. Even recent women Malaitans migrants perpetuate this discourse. Despite Honiara being the hub of the Solomons, rural ties continue to make their presence in urban places.

After the Tensions (1998 to 2000) that opposed Malaitan and Guadalcanal people, and the Honiara riots (April 2006) against Chinese businesses in Chinatown, many people in Honiara are highly mistrusting of each other. Although the political structure follows the representation of the colonial powers, politics remains highly entrenched within Provincial mediations and discourses of development (Connell & Lea 2002: 6). Government officials no matter how they are elected become ultimately viewed as corrupt and ineffective, blatantly favouring their own *wantoks* (Fraenkel 2004).

### **3.3 Honiara as a Chronotope**

Honiara's colonial legacy informs and shapes urban reality (Jourdan 1985). Many people who experienced Honiara before and after independence (1978) commented that Honiara looked better under British rule. Both urban men and women have said that the town was shady and green, there were no Betelnut (*Areca catechu*) stains in the streets and the town was not as dusty and dirty--

strewn with rubbish.<sup>22</sup>

Tina in her early fifties from Malaita, was part of the generation that first settled in Honiara during the 1960's. Spending the majority of her adult life in town and ten years on Isabel, she explained how Honiara has changed since of independence. When she first arrived in the 1960's, Honiara was but a small colonial town.

Tina perceived that there were fewer expatriates during British rule in comparison to the current era. One reason for this could be the influx of RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands) personnel.<sup>23</sup> According to the Solomon Islands Statistics Office the number of international business visitors fluctuates yearly (SISO web). There was a significant number of expatriates, foreign delegates, and development workers working in Honiara. In addition, the tsunami on April 2, 2007 that hit the Western and Choiseul Provinces, further brought more development workers into the country to help out with the relief work and the rebuilding of infrastructure in the affected areas. During the second quarter of 2007, out of a total of 3,854 visitors to the Solomons nearly 1,786 visitors came for business purposes, with the highest numbers coming from Australia, PNG, NZ, and other Pacific countries (SISO).<sup>24</sup> Thus her observation can be justified by the figures and circumstances above. However in terms of immigration, the situation may not be the same, as figures show that immigration rates are declining (see chapter one).

Another difference between colonial and postcolonial Honiara, as Tina mentions, is in regards to the atmosphere of town. Under British rule, she notes that people had to constantly work, and would only have an hour break for lunch and then continue to work. She remarks that people's work ethic

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<sup>22</sup> Betelnut or Areca nut comes from the palm of the Areca tree. The seed is cut and chewed it is a mild stimulant, if chewed with lime and causes the teeth and gums to become bright red.

<sup>23</sup> RAMSI: Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands. RAMSI was invited by the Solomon Islands government in 2003 to help restore law and order, rebuild the economic stability, and to help foster responsible government. Members come from the 15 nations in the Pacific and include police, military personnel, and civilians to help rebuild the Solomon Islands after the political conflicts of 1999 to 2003. For more information see [www.ramsi.org](http://www.ramsi.org). However critiques and opposition to RAMSI forces are present within Honiara.

<sup>24</sup> Solomon Islands Statistics Office: website for Visitor Information.  
<http://www.spc.int/prism/sbtest/Migration%20and%20Tourism/Tourism/Purpose-new.htm>



has changed over time. She stated that after independence people became relaxed, because people no longer needed to work as hard.

Alongside work ethic, Tina observes that the aesthetics of Honiara have changed. When the British were in power the streets of the town were clean, free of garbage and betelnut. Asking whether she preferred the British administered government or the Solomon government she makes the distinction, simply in the cleanliness of town. She supports the Solomon government even though she recognizes the efficiency of the former British administration in keeping the town clean. Implied in her comments and reminiscences on colonial Honiara is the demonstration that the colonial government was strict in its administrative policies in the Solomons. As mentioned, the dirtiness of the town is a serious problem of urbanization and bound to be more problematic as the population continues to grow.

In the early part of Honiara's history, people's movements were largely controlled by the policies of the colonial government (Frazer 1981: 12; Jourdan 1985; Bennett 1987). As was shown above, some people I spoke with expressed a slight romantic nostalgia about the initial founding and to some extent, lament the transition of Honiara from a colonial outpost into a postcolonial town. Problems of urbanization are not a recent development; but stem from a history of Town council initiatives as well as social change and lack of funding (Oram 1976). The founding of Honiara was not prepared for vast amounts of people to come and settle. Thus poor infrastructure and urban development has stretched the limits of the Honiara Town Council's administrative capacities. Honiara is the national capital and thus carries a symbolic role as a national symbol. Honiara's image has changed from a quaint colonial town to a gritty, poor and overpopulated national capital. Why then are people continuing to live and come to town?

### **3.4 Place and Home: Grounding Honiara**

*All over the world, people objectify their sense of being and belonging in images of place" (Jackson 1995: 19).*

Place is generative and regenerative from which experiences are continually born and reborn. People return to place for empowerment and a sense of connection and groundedness. Places have the power to gather personal lives and objects, wrapping them together within the fabric of a specific time. It is important to note that place is not strictly physical--a geographical location--rather it continually inhabits new forms of understanding, being shaped and reshaped. These properties are similar in comparison to Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope, and its dialogic nature with time (Bakhtin 1980).<sup>25</sup> The chronotope and place function in similar ways, grounding experiences across time such that the memories of the past come to occupy a space in the present.

Home as a place and as a trope is pervasive within urban migrants' women's discourse (Jourdan 1985; Goberman-Hill 1999). Between town and village, home is where one is connected, the central link and presence of one's identity. In the Solomons everyone has a *ples*, a home; where they belong to a family, a village, and province. As Tia, a thirty-four years old Kwaio woman, said it was important for her children to know where they came from, to know their home. When I asked if the children were born in Honiara and belonged to Honiara she started laughing. Apparently Honiara does not qualify as home, in a symbolic sense of rootedness, but rural islands connected to ancestral lineages do. Women also embody home as they are responsible for teaching of *langgus*, another maker of home, and culture to their children. Amongst recent migrants Honiara is rarely equated with being home. Instead Honiara is viewed as an ephemeral and degenerative space, where conflict and tensions are obscured in uncertainty. In the past, Honiara was not associated with the space for family, and is only being recently associated with family as noted by Jourdan (1985; 2007) and Goberman-Hill (1999).

### ***3.5 Rural versus Urban Distanciation***

Some migrant women use their family to ground their identity, as they perceive the urban setting to break down espoused values such as family, sharing, and communalism. However conceptions of

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<sup>25</sup> Bakhtin's chronotope is the representation and intersection of space and time within an action or event, dialogue, piece of writing, or art (Bakhtin 1980: 46-50).

home and family do not completely breakdown but are redefined by urban migrant women when they experience distancing from home after migrating to Honiara. Responses to distancing depend upon a number of factors, such as permanent residency in town, age, social status, class, family networks, employment, etc.

One powerful form of distancing is emotional. Away from home, the place becomes idealized and romanticized. Home is the place where life is innocent, free, and in many ways stable. Women's roles are clearly defined in the village. And some urban migrant women lament leaving their home or village for various reasons. Rachel twenty-six years old from Choiseul speaks about home with a hint of nostalgia:

*Hom, hom iu go wokaboat, pikinini go fising, padol lo kanu, wokaboat lo saetsi olsem. Honiara, iu laek go fising, bae iu go lo trak, den jas go daon lo saetsi, den trak moa* "At home you can walk around freely, the children can go fishing and canoeing. You can also walk along the beach. In Honiara, if you like to go fishing, you will have to go by truck to the beach, and come back by truck once again (Rachel 26, Choiseul).

For her, life in Choiseul was more carefree. One can walk around freely, and children can go fishing and canoeing. She suggests that at home people have free access to the sea, while in Honiara access to the pleasures of the sea have to be obtained by going with a vehicle which requires money and connections. There is a hint of romanticism and idealism in her depictions of home.

At the same time, the urban world offers a new reality. And for many migrant women distancing allows them to shape a new identity while exploring new possibilities. Jourdan notes that:

inevitably new kinds of social networks based on neighbourhood, work place, church membership, and friendship cut across the traditional kinship and *wantok* ties and allow new social relations to be established. To the permanent town dwellers this is an important aspect of urban life. It is the proof that one's urban social participation is a success. It is at the same time an affirmation of the independence one has acquired from the omnipresence of the village social order, its structures of kinship and affinity. This newly acquired social (and to a lesser extent economic) incorporation into a very much valued way of life, serves to reinforce the town dweller's ties to the urban environment and contributes to a loosening of his/her ties with the village (Jourdan 1985: 72).

Similarly, Frazer illustrated that To'ambaita migrants initially relied upon kin networks in order to become settled into the urban environment (Frazer 1981). And earlier still Marilyn Strathern made

the same observation in regards to Mount Hagen migrants in Port Moresby, PNG (Strathern 1975). The reliance upon family or *wantok* networks diminishes in importance as new friendship networks and allegiances emerge through meeting new people in town. New friends are an assertion of an urban identity and a method of emplacement (see chapter 7).

Emplacement refers to the experience of being in a place through the physicality of the human body within a specific time. Thus the lived body and place become interconnected and co-dependent upon one another for expression. Emplacement is then the gathering properties of place, being able to compress both space and time in an event (Casey 1999: 24, 38), such as in a migrant's experience of Honiara. Distanciation on the other hand refers to the loss of physicality with place and the body, the expansion of place across vast spaces, such as memory or geographical landscapes. Distanciation is also the marking of boundaries in defining categories in highlighting exceptionality and otherness, in positive and negative ways. An obvious marker of distanciation is the reminiscences of a person's home. These two processes have the ability to occur simultaneously and independently of one another.

William Donner (2002) focuses on Sikaiana migrants and their mediation between urban life and their rural island. He examines the negotiations between the formation of an urban community, whose cohesiveness is shaped by shared values of working together and participating in a moral framework of shared institutions. He suggests there is a clear distinction between a modern urban life, which erodes communal living and shared ideologies (Donner 2002: 24). However, he juxtaposes urban life with traditional Sikaiana rural life--between the individual and the communal, between the west and the Solomon Islands, and between the modern and the traditional. Through his work we can see methods of distanciation.

On the other hand, Richard Feinberg working with Anutans in Honiara, demonstrates that the separation between home and Honiara is not as easily dichotomized (Feinberg 2002: 48). Through the process of resettlement Anutans must balance their home cultural values and understandings,

along with the incorporation of new ideas, economic practices, and urban experiences (Feinberg 2002). These incorporations occur consciously and subconsciously for urban residents and recent migrants and are characteristic of emplacement.

For Anutans and similar to other ethnic groups, the demands and obligations upon urban households between their own desires and social responsibilities to rural relatives strains urban residents (Jourdan 1985; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Feinberg 2002). Kinship practices pervade economic and social organizations, resulting and dictating resource sharing and cooperation (Feinberg 2002: 47). Visiting relatives staying with urban households rarely contribute financially to the household by replenishing food, such as *taiyo*, rice and petrol. Rural visitors in some cases can stay indefinitely and because of their higher rank it is the obligation of the wage earner to support their guests (Feinberg 2002: 55-56). Unfamiliar with the costs of urban life, the expectations of rural guests upon their urban relatives can be unrealistic.

Those without money look to those who have it for assistance and, according to the older value system, negatively evaluate those fellow islanders with access to cash income who are reluctant to share what they have. By contrast, those with paying jobs are caught between a wish to help their kin, thus meeting their customary obligations, and the knowledge that if they do not place limits on their generosity, they cannot succeed in the new economic order. These contrary pressures generate confusion with regard to goals and strategies, and mutual suspicion on the part of people who find that one another's actions both fall short of the traditional ideal and are internally inconsistent (Feinberg 2002: 67).

In Honiara, people begin to realize that they must limit *wantok* obligations especially for economic reasons (Donner 2002: 34). In this manner, through participating in the cash economy, people become emplaced within Honiara, in turn recasting their rural connections to home and to relatives (Gooberman-Hill 1999: 95). Since the question of survival in the urban setting is linked to money, the accumulation of money has been unfortunately, perceived as greed by rural relatives. Therefore, the quest for financial resources and keeping them within the nuclear family is also a marker of distancing between rural and urban relatives.

Incidentally, many urban middle-class women claim to have knowledge of activities associated with

the rural setting such as gardening and cooking *motu* (stone oven in the ground), but that they would rather not get their hands dirty from the labour and so they have their *haosgel* perform the task according to their specifications (Gooberman-Hill 1999: 100). For a few women, Honiara becomes a place where they can distance themselves from the physical dirt and heavy labour of a rural woman. These attitudes emerge in the urban setting as a result of new ways of living, such as using gas cookers and ready-made food known as take-away. It is not that urban migrant women no longer wish to work, but that the expectations of town life have changed, and so have dramatically altered conceptions of work.

Honiara, allows for the effacement of communalism and the erosion of island lifestyles. “The Sikaiana community in Honiara is not simply a residual one derived from a common ancestry on the atoll; it is also one that is constructed and developed” (Donner 2002: 38). People become emplaced within the urban setting as Honiara becomes experienced as a place rather than a space. Thus people idealize the practices that they no longer can sustain, such as the practice of cooking in the motu (earth/stone oven).

For those of differing classes, ‘home’ manifests itself and becomes enacted through different practices. For recent migrants, the link to home continues to influence their reality in the urban setting. Thus for them Honiara becomes a place partially influenced by home. Town may not become home, but transforms into a place through the manipulation of *kastom* (tradition). As women negotiate and redefine conceptions of home, urban migrant women also begin to try and limit *kastom* rules from their rural homes while in town—a form of distancing.

## Chapter 4: The Articulation of Gender and *Kastom*

### 4.1 *Kastom* as Theory

Rural women come to Honiara mostly through family networks, out of obligation, and sheer curiosity. The world they knew in the village stays with them despite their new urban surroundings. This is possible through the intersections of the past and the present, the rural and the urban, ancestors and Christianity, and between *kastom* rules and urban morals and values. How these intersections are managed varies upon urban migrant women and their emplacement within urban space.

*Kastom* carries a long and rich history in Melanesian cultures. In Pijin *kastom* can be translated as customary rules or tradition. However, such a simple translation does not capture the richness and the reality of *kastom* in the Solomon Islands and of urban migrant women in particular. *Kastom* is a complex term used both by local people and scholars (Akin 2004: 300). This chapter explores *kastom* as a means of cultural change, and how urban migrant women negotiate, understand, change the interfaces of *kastom*, and disentangle the hold of *kastom* on their lives.

The usages and deployment of *kastom* are not always the same and are often complex. *Kastom* represents ideologies and activities that have been used for the legitimization of indigenous identity and cultures (Akin 2004: 300). Between the 1980's and 1990's *kastom* was predominantly examined as a reified and objectified political tradition, affirming national identity and responding to capitalist hegemonies in the face of indigenous revitalization movements (Keesing 1996; Akin 2004: 300).

Sahlins notes that *kastom* is used to refer to 'tradition' in opposition to modernity. And western scholars have continued to maintain this distinction between the two dimensions, which in actuality complement each other as tradition extends from the periphery into the core of the global capitalist system (Sahlins 2005: 34). *Kastom* as

[t]radition' is not static, nor is it opposed to 'modernity.' In recent times, 'traditional' most

appropriately refers to a mode of cultural change characterised by a rigid and exclusive distinction between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' ... Also then in question is the way we perceive the 'traditional': as authentically belonging only to the past, an unchanging legacy, which in the present has the status of a cultural 'survival.' But 'tradition' is not the dead hand of the past. On the contrary, 'tradition' is precisely the way the people always cope with circumstances not of their doing and beyond their control, whether acts of nature or of other peoples. Hence tradition has changed in the past, and, by encompassing the goods and relations of the market in its own terms, it would continue to do so (Sahlins 2005: 34-5).

Following such logic, *kastom* is neither static nor frozen in the past. *Kastom* continues to evolve as it is influenced by people's actions and practices within and beyond their control. These properties of *kastom* shape cultural change. Roger Keesing argued that *kastom* as a political symbol has antecedents to anti-colonial resistance movements (1982). Both Keesing and Tonkinson concluded that *kastom* can be reified, but that *kastom* is also able to smooth over contradictions stemming from pre-colonial realities. Consequently *kastom* can simultaneously serve as lived experience and as an ideological symbol (Keesing 1982; Tonkinson 1982). Through these competing tensions *kastom* serves as a means of exploring cultural change.

Sahlins' theoretical framework of cultural change is relevant to an urban Melanesian context. There are three underlying principles to his framework: firstly that there is continuity in change, second that indigenous people have or hold a degree of cultural integrity, and lastly that indigenous people are active agents in the process of change (Jourdan 1996; Robbins 2005: 5). These points are relevant to Honiara because the town has undergone a series of cultural changes that stem from local inhabitants rather than strictly being associated with outside forces. As Sahlins states: "traditional cultures are as resilient as they are permeable in the face of drastic change" (Sahlins 2005: 28). Sahlins' theory of cultural change valorizes indigenous cultural production and change above global or foreign processes.

This framework of cultural change can be used to understand urban Honiara. Firstly Honiara is a site of change, whether for better or worse. Since Honiara is a site of change, there is continuity as per Sahlins' first premise. Second, the local inhabitants respect and have a strong sense of cultural integrity. In my opinion, there is an urban culture that is just as valuable as other cultures. This leads to the last point. Local inhabitants, Honiara residents themselves (longstanding and recent)



are responsible for the changes taking place in the Solomons. Thus Sahlins' framework fits well with exploring Honiara through a model of cultural change. However this change becomes more evident through *kastom*. The two interfaces, *kastom* as political symbol and lived experience, are examined below since they are highly interactive and in actuality are difficult to disentangle from each other. And they are deeply embedded within Honiaran's urban reality.

## **4.2 *Kastom and Hegemony***

Celebrating local production of cultural change does not mean that change affects people in the same manner. Keesing points out that cultural change and *kastom*, despite being locally shaped—melding together the past and the present, the traditional and the modern—can be used with exploitative purposes. The invoking of *kastom* practices can create and perpetuate social stratification and inequalities.

These rhetorical valorisations of tradition disguise as well the class relationships and conflicts being played out, since they proclaim unities in terms of common culture where there are in fact growing gulfs between rich urbanites and poor villagers, between centre and periphery. ... It would seem that we need a kind of multiple imaging, a split perspective that brings into focus both centres and peripheries, both class and culture, both regional patterns and local patterns particularities, both hegemony and creative resistance, both the voices in the towns and the voices in the villages (Keesing 1996: 165 & 167).

More recently and similar to Keesing, David Akin notes that *kastom* ideology can become a hegemonic force created by dominant urban elites, which will eventually trickle down into rural settings. In response to Akin, Badadzan comments that *kastom* ideology is not just strictly informed by historically localized understandings, but has been influenced by outside forces such as Christianity, missionaries and more recently international development discourse. He argues that such outside sources will continue to be shaped and re-interpreted at the local level (Burt 1982; Jolly 1982; Badadzan 2004: 326; Fraenkel 2004). Thus all these factors resides within *kastom* ideology.

How *kastom* is evoked by urban migrant women in town can reflect such political influences. Julie, in her early twenties, a young journalist, from Isabel remarked that women seeking a modern life were forgetting *kastom*. She associated *kastom* with the rural setting, and dichotomizes between

*kastom* and a modern life. "Women are exposed too much to modern lifestyles. It is a bad thing because women are forgetting their cultures" (Julie 24: Isabel). Aspects of a modern lifestyle include: wanting and accumulating material goods, using technology, and appropriating western feminist discourse of equality, as well as becoming selfish and simply wanting money. A well educated and working woman, she epitomizes the aspiring elite urban woman. Julie lived independently at the YMCA, where she shared a room with another woman from Isabel. She had a secure job working as a journalist for a prominent local newspaper. Her boyfriend at the time was working for the police. And together they wanted to buy a house and settle down in Honiara.

Julie's attitude exhibits elitist discourse towards women in the rural setting in that they should not pursue an urban way of life, but rather they continue following their *kastoms*. The reason is that, in her eyes, an increased number of women in town would mean increased urban competition. And, similar to more affluent urban women, she would like to maintain her status and economic advantages while in town. However, she states that rural women should be given access to education and information to help better their circumstances in the village instead of coming to Honiara.

Elite urban dwellers' discourse attempts to dissuade permanent rural to urban migration. Discouraging migration into Honiara further widens the gap between the rural areas and Honiara. *Kastom*, for upper-class migrant women, becomes a means of steering people towards the rural setting; where the urban elite valorize rural lifestyles while pursuing their own agenda in town.

Keesing remarked that:

Culture has become a smokescreen as well as, increasingly, a myth. In areas where precolonial societies were structure hierarchically, culture-as-ideology serves to reinforce the power and privilege of chiefs in modern contexts, even though the lifestyles and modes of power and control over resources sustained by these ideologies have changed radically (Keesing 1996: 165).

The discourse implies that modern life should not and cannot be accessible to all. People should continue to stay in their rural setting, following their traditional culture, in an attempt to assuage the increasing urban poverty exploding in Honiara (Alasia 1989). Curbing rural to urban movement is

also being argued as a means of mitigating urban poverty, but does not address the increasing need people feel to come to Honiara and the inequalities already present there.<sup>26</sup>

### **4.3 *Kastom* and Identity: Reconfigurations**

*Kastom*, in the everyday discourse of urban migrant women, is linked to one's home village or island. *Kastom* becomes associated with nostalgia, because in town women speak of *lusim kastom* (losing *kastom* or the lack of *kastom*). This statement proliferates urban dwellers' discourse on the immorality or corruption of urban culture, stigmatizing the urban world as a profane place (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000; Stritecky 2001).

*Kastom* ideologies have a significant role in the lives of Melanesian people in profound and subtle ways (Akin 2004: 301). Jourdan noted that urban youth renegotiate *kastom* practices in Honiara (1995). "For many youth, *kastom* has become instrumental to their life in town. They do not bend customary rules; rather, whenever they have an opportunity to do so, they select and follow the aspects of *kastom* that can be read in urban terms" (Jourdan 1995: 211). Similarly Mitchell found that in Vanuatu, young people also use *kastom* as a reference point for the fashioning of urban identities (Mitchell 2004: 369). Mitchell notes the lack of respect for *kastom* is a manifestation of urban alienation, and that the garden becomes the locus for groundedness and connection to *kastom*: counteracting the anonymity of urban life (Mitchell 2004: 369). *Kastom* then becomes a pivotal symbolic force for the reconfiguration of identity, amongst youth as well as recent urban migrant women in Honiara.

Generally, women are subject to *kastom* rules on a stricter level than men in Honiara and the Solomons (Jourdan 1987). In working with the Kwaio on Malaita, Akin notes that *kastom* has been a means of controlling women and their behaviour. "This scenario of female taboo violation and male repair is ubiquitous, and it powerfully shapes the general position of women vis-à-vis men in

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<sup>26</sup> The government is trying to curb urban migration by promoting the development of rural provinces, especially Malaita, in hopes that this will keep people in their province

Kwaio society. It also operates more specifically to mould dyadic hierarchical relationships between individual men and women (Akin 2004: 310). Such ideas of *kastom* are shaped in the village and then transplanted to the urban setting, where they are may or may not be adhered to. However this is not strictly related to Kwaio women.

Beti, twenty-four years old from Kwara'ae, Malaita Province, has been living in Honiara for a year. She was working as a *haosgel* for her brother, who was working in Fiji in 2007. Beti explains that *kastom* came from her home island of Malaita. *Kastom* in this manner serves to reinforce her ties to her village, and a particular understanding of *kastom* experienced in Malaita. Although *kastom* may be grounded in a very local understanding, this does not suggest that *kastom* is static and uniform in the rural settings. As Beti states, attitudes towards *kastom* are also changing in rural villages:

Dialogue: 4.1 Beti, 24, Kwara'ae, Malaita

Q: Girls from the village, do they like to follow *kastom* or not?

B: Before they followed *kastom* but not today.

Q: Not today.

B: Not anymore.

Q: Are things changing in the villages?

B: Yes, it is changing there too. Every child goes to school so

Q: Ah, children go to school, so

B: Yes, before there was no school, at the time when there was no school. So then they would follow *kastom*, but no longer today.

She equates *kastom* with a form of education, or knowledge. And she suggests that as people go to school they no longer have the need or desire to follow *kastom* in the same fashion.

When talking about *kastom* some urban migrant women said that the chief of their village determines and shapes *kastom* practices and ideologies. For Beti, it was important to show respect for her father, whom she associated as the arbitrator of *kastom*. She also distinguishes the roles of uncles, who are in her opinion stricter in regards to *kastom* rules. For this reason, she was extremely grateful towards her father for being more relaxed regarding *kastom* rules. *Kastom* rules can be imposed upon women and associated with male authority at a village or family level.

*Kastom* is fluid, because the knowledge and experience of *kastom* is grounded in specific localities and cultural settings. Provincial islands act as sources of *kastom*. Consequently there are multiple

sources and origins of *kastom* in the Solomon Islands (Keesing 1982: 1996). How can *kastom* be flexible when it can also so rigidly dictate urban migrant women's behaviour. The fluidity of *kastom* stems from two fronts, one from authority figures and on another level from women themselves. This is visible with Beti and her father. Beti claims that her father is more relaxed towards *kastom* in comparison to her uncle's especially in consideration that she resides in Honiara while he lives in Malaita.

For example, to redress the moral ambiguity of wearing trousers in town, Beti's father reworks the *kastom* rule in light of her personal safety allowing her to wear trousers. How *kastom* is reworked in the urban setting ironically is explained through a localized formulation of her father's rationalization. To further complicate matters she emphasizes that *kastom* is lost in Honiara. This is true if one considers *kastom* belonging to one's village. In town the notion of *kastom* becomes much more difficult to articulate; because of its convoluted nature, which is why many urban migrant women may reference to *kastom* as found in the rural settings or their home province.

Lisa, a student from Nggela in Honiara Secondary High school, described the situation with *kastom* in this manner: "At home girls are no longer following *kastom*. But girls who can come to town, they go back to the village and they do not hear *kastom*, they break *kastom* rule" (Lisa, 19, Nggela). She points out that *kastom* is located at home in her island of Nggela. And that once some girls return from town to their village they no longer want to follow *kastom*. However the implication is that they also no longer want to live a rural lifestyle. Lisa went on to describe that girls from the town, and including herself no longer want to work in the village. She said that girls who go to town are spoiled, because they no longer follow *kastom* rules and respect village life. They do not want to do any work that is required of them in the home and in the garden. For her, Honiara is a place of change where *kastom* weakens because of the distance from home and from experiencing an urban lifestyle. Urban migrant women's attitudes are changing because of a number of factors: movement, exposure to popular culture, peer groups, education, and global images. Travel or movement gives urban migrant women new experiences and shapes new

attitudes towards rural life.

However, town is not just the last or lost place of *kastom*. *Kastom* can be changed and grounded at the same time. Sara's case illustrates this tension: Her mother is from Tikopia and her father is from Guadalcanal. Sara, twenty-one years old, was born in Honiara but identified herself as Guadalcanalese. She grew up and lived most of her life in Honiara. However, she traveled to other islands such as Makira and Tikopia to visit family and to go to school. She worked for the Anglican Church ministry as a Sunday school teacher every Saturday from ten in the morning to one in the afternoon and on Wednesday evenings. In 2007, she joined the Companion for the Melanesian Brotherhood. And as a young urban woman she was extremely aware of following *kastom*.<sup>27</sup>

In regards to *kastom* she situated it within the family. Sara viewed her father as the head of the household and felt obliged not to argue with him, as it would make her feel shameful if she did so. She had three sisters, and the younger one would talk back to their dad, but she would not. As an example, she said that, her father was strict in terms of letting them go out with friends and that they should be home by four in the afternoon. Sara qualified that because she and her sisters were going to school and no longer living at home, some of the restrictions placed upon them by their father were no longer applicable. Despite growing up in Honiara, she was deeply conscious of *kastom* especially at the family level. Sara equated following *kastom* as respecting her father's rules.

Elizabeth, twenty-one years old from Malaita, considered herself *hafhaf* (half Kwara'ae and half Lau). Elizabeth points out that *kastom* emerged from her village community. She preferred town life to the village, which she left behind in Malaita. Elizabeth presents *kastom* in this manner.

No matter you, you are a girl from town or you arrive in the village or go home you must wear a skirt. If you go back to town you wear trousers. If you arrive in town you can wear pants. You go to the village or home, there some villages that do not stop it and others allow it. Some places they stop it, they have strict rules, where they are very strict. So they say, if a girl wears trousers, they will fight with her.

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<sup>27</sup> Melanesian Brotherhood is religious community associated with the Anglican Church. They are primarily situated within the Solomon Islands. And take vows of piety and community service.

But I just asked why do they stop the wearing of trousers, then they say: 'eh. The community does not allow it. The chief stops the wearing of trousers in the village'. So ok. Then this time they wear skirts. If trousers you will have to wear them underneath the skirt. One time we were mad we said if you strip don't want us to wear trousers, you pay you trousers for our trousers to change them to skirts. So they said you guys have a big head you girls. I said, eh they are only trousers, that's what I think they are only clothes nothing more. True they are the same as skirt. Also the big men of the family/house, he doesn't allow it so it must be followed. He's the chief that's it (Elizabeth, 21, Malaita).

She is critical of the rules that she is subject to comply with. She blatantly points out that trousers are both simply articles of clothing. In the narrative, she gives voice to both the arbitrators of *kastom* and her own opinion. She narrates that if the elders want them to wear skirts then they should take their trousers off and put skirts on them. She uses humour as a means of questioning authority, even though it puts her in a vulnerable situation. The girls are criticized for having a *bighed*, meaning that they have their own opinions and disregard elders and *kastom*. Wardlow also notes in PNG that *bighed* when applied to women, "implies defiance, vanity, and self-importance" (Wardlow 2006: 26). However, near the end Elizabeth must acquiesce to authority and concedes to the demands made of her by the community leaders--the *bigman* or male authority figures in the village. She further notes that *kastom* rules are strictly enforced in her village. In a joking fashion she critiques the practice, the authority and ideology in her village, but does this through appealing to a collective 'we' rather than asserting herself as an individual in the debate. Appealing to a collective voice grants some young women the ability to voice their opinions and even objections, especially considering that young women are subject to stricter rules of authority and respect, which can render their voices mute. The passage also demonstrates that not all villages are the same. In terms of *kastom*, some villages can be more relaxed than others.

These urban migrant women represent varying understandings and interfaces of *kastom* in the urban setting. In the lives of migrant women, *kastom* has a very particular relationship to the rural village setting. The urban setting complicates *kastom*, simultaneously creating and even smoothing over contradictions in everyday life. *Kastom* no longer holds the same power as they become attributed to new authorities and reference points. And in some cases urban migrants wish to completely distance themselves from *kastom* practices.

#### **4.4 *Kastom and Language***

A generation ago, in the Solomon Islands women were socially restricted by language. Women's increasing participation and acquisition of Pijin, demonstrates that women are more mobile and have need of the national *lingua franca*. Some older rural women do not know Pijin because they have no need for it, because they remain in the village for the majority of their lives (Jourdan 1987). Some migrant women mentioned that there are still old women in the rural settings who do not know Pijin. However nearly all younger urban migrant women believed that everyone spoke Pijin, which was learned in primary school and from schoolmates. Urban Pijin also remains highly marked by one's *langgus* (mother tongue), which is more evident when people recently come to town from other [provinces (Jourdan 1985). However there are some complicating factors between *kastom*, language and social behaviour. Urban migrant women are subject to *kastom* rules through language and compensation payments for, knowingly and unknowingly, transgressing language related *kastom* rules (Jourdan & Keesing 1996; Berg 2000). The complexities of *kastom* and language become particularly apparent within marriages of interethnic couples.

When urban migrant women marry they may learn both the culture and language of their husband. If they marry in the urban setting interethnic couples are likely to use Pijin (Jourdan 1985; Jourdan & Keesing 1996). Mothers are responsible for their children's education. Women highly value their mother tongues, but also enjoy learning new languages. Because of the ethnic and linguistic plurality in town, urban residents are adept at distinguishing an individual's identity through their accent in Pijin and their physical appearance (Jourdan 1985; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000; Stritecky 2001). Because of the complex ethnic politics in town (see Berg), some people, especially those from Malaita, are reluctant to have their ethnic origins known to the wider public (Berg 2000). For instance, Kwaio women in town can refrain from using their *langgus* in public settings. And urban residents perceived Kwaio as being violent and bush people, unsophisticated and brash (Berg 2000). People openly joked about Kwaio people carrying knives. Kwaio women who are shy about speaking Kwaio in public would rather use Pijin or another *langgus* (local language), because



of the negative stereotypes floating in town about being Kwaio.

When it comes to language and *kastom* women must show respect by not speaking or talking back to male members of their kin groups. Although women may talk back or *tok aot* (loud, yell, shout) during an argument with their husband they will rarely do so in public. This does not mean that women never *tok bak* or argue with their male counter parts and are always submissive to male authority.

Joking and teasing is an effective means of addressing ambiguous, exceptional, and inappropriate behaviour especially between friends and acquaintances of equal status. People will not openly criticize someone of higher standing in front of them, but will do so through gossip. Friends will tease each other calling someone *krangi* (crazy) or *mentol* (dumb), as well as using swear words. But many women do not like the sound of people swearing saying it '*saon rabis lo mi*' (that it offends me). Most urban migrant women regardless of province were reticent when asked to divulge swear words.

*Kastom* becomes more evident through language in acts of swearing (Jourdan 1987; Berg 2000). When asked about swearing some urban migrant women flatly refused to say any of them out loud, especially in a public area. Women were extremely cautious if anyone were to overhear them using bad language regardless of their province of origin. Other urban migrant women relented and whispered them quietly and quickly for fear of someone demanding compensation. Women also commented that swear words can be used between women, couples, and directed towards men or women of the opposite sex. These *swea* (swear words) are parallel to English swear words.

A second dimension of swearing attacks a woman's moral standing. This is evident in the following passage: "Swear words in Pijin, I don't want to say them. Ok. Swearing in Pijin. I will just swear to you only. You are shit. Another one. Sometimes guys call you names. They swear at you and call you a prostitute, or something like that" (Alice 24, Malaita). This quotation represents two

types of swearing practices. Cato Berg made the same observation about town residents that swearing covers both cursing and sexual innuendos as well as overt fraternizing with a married person (Berg 2000: 150). However, some informants claimed that *taongel* (town girls) are increasingly swearing, using *sit* (shit), and *fakem iu* (fuck you) to each other even as jokes.

This second dimension of swearing, Berg mentions is a serious offence. Urban migrant women mention that being approached by a married man who tells a woman he likes them is an act of swearing. Calling a young girl a prostitute and other names is another act of swearing. These acts of swearing are taken seriously by people and can result in compensation demands on behalf of a woman's kin (Berg 2000: Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003). Acts of swearing threaten a woman's moral standing, which *kastom* is meant to protect. This act of swearing concerns urban migrant women more than actual cursing. In the urban setting urban migrant women were extremely concerned with acts of swearing as it made them feel badly. This is not surprising since women have a hard time to redress acts of swearing, without relying upon male relatives for demanding compensation from an offending party. But if *wantoks* are not willing to confront such accusations women are left with little recourse. Consequently women are left with feelings of belittlement and shame. *Kastom* in this regards fails women and leaves them vulnerable. The articulation of *kastom* for migrant women in the urban setting can be a contradictory experience as a result of the various meanings of *kastom* floating through town. *Kastom* can be perceived as a burden, holding women to archaic gender roles and rules of comportment that are antithetical to the discourse and experience of town life.

The urban setting becomes more complicated and competitive. Town becomes an amalgamation of *kastom* rules entwined with modern trends.

What is required is a clearer recognition that *kastom* and culture are highly interactive, each continuously shaping the other over time. Anthropologists have for the most part examined only one side of this relationship. That is, with our attention so focused on the objectification of culture as *kastom*, we have neglected the concurrent subjectivization of *kastom* as culture. The two processes are constantly in play, making it impossible to fully understand either by itself, and indeed it is sometimes problematic to starkly differentiate *kastom* from culture except as analytical constructs (Akin 2004: 303).

As rural women come to Honiara, *kastom*, as a culture they grew up with, takes on new shapes. Some of the rules, which can be strictly maintained on the home island, become lax due to the lack of authority and sometimes out of sheer desire to explore new meanings and experiences in the urban world. Many urban migrant women experience some degree of agency in regards to *kastom*, while others retaliate against strict interpretations of *kastom* rules. At the same time, this does not mean to suggest that *kastom* practices are fixed and static in the villages either. As some informants pointed out, not all villages in the rural setting adhere to the same rules to the same degree. *Kastom* rules shape urban migrant women's behaviour by dictating the type of language they use in socializing with authority and male members of society, attire, marriage rituals, divorce, movement and compensation demands. Although only two dimensions of *kastom* were explored, there are more areas through which the interfaces are evident. But these are not presented as my project did not intend to address *kastom* at the time.

Since *kastom* shapes patterns of behaviour amongst women, their roles in the urban setting undergo changes as well. Where continuity becomes more apparent is in the debate upon culture and tradition, as it becomes a means of excluding rural villagers from the advantages of the urban town. Town, for new urban migrant women, transitions from a space into a place as *kastom* becomes problematized in their urban reality. The problemization of *kastom* produces ambivalence towards town life and women's roles. Urban migrant women find *kastom* hinders them, despite wanting to follow the rules of *kastom*. They have a difficult time articulating it because it fundamentally questions the nature of the social structure in the Solomons. The next chapter will explore the gender roles in the urban setting that migrant women encounter.

## Chapter 5: Gendered Spheres and Roles

This chapter explores the types of roles and spheres that women occupy in town. Victoria Lockwood notes that “In islanders’ rapidly changing worlds, those things that once provided cultural definitions of self, identity, and personal worth—gender roles and ideology, principles of family and kinship, work roles, avenues to social prestige and status, and so on—are all being transformed by the rapidly modernizing and globalizing world” (Lockwood 2004: 32). This observation is accurate for Honiara. However this does not suggest that outside sources or foreign influences are strictly responsible for the transformations occurring in the Solomons. These transformations also stem from the Solomons themselves, as people interweave new social practices into their everyday reality.

Traditional gendered spaces for women once included the market, the home, and the garden (UNESCO 1996: 3). Women’s identity was rooted to home and their family—the private sphere—which it still is to some extent. However, town life is associated with public space more so than in the village. “In town, involvement in the life of public places has grown and evolved as a way of taking advantage of multiple opportunities that arise in the urban environment” (Frazer 1981: 13). Urban women migrating to town must find their space in the public arena of Honiara. As will be shown below, how they occupy this new space varies upon age, education, and personal networks.

When directly asked, most of the women I spoke to claimed an equal status with men. Urban women see themselves in a better position than their rural counterparts. Women in the rural setting are not equal to men, and thus need more support from the government in regards to access to education and information. The assertion of equality weakens as urban migrant women describe their roles and responsibilities in their household. They hold the burden of the entire household and workload on their shoulders. Boys can enjoy socializing, drinking, and playing football, while their sisters work at home preparing the evening meal and babysitting their younger siblings.

Equality dissipates as the level of restrictions placed upon women and young girls is greater than those for their male counterparts. A play presented in September 2007 at the Central Market on Literacy Day, demonstrates such a restriction. In the play, a woman wanted to learn to read and write, but needed to ask her husband's permission first. To convince her husband she explained that being illiterate impeded her ability to take care of her children, which only caused her husband more aggravations as he had to attend to their needs. This fictive drama was created through the collaboration of many urban migrant women relying on their social experiences. They acknowledged their husband's authority by asking permission to attend a literacy school. The play demonstrates that women are inherently responsible for the wellbeing and harmony of the family. Predominantly men are the heads of the household while women are the managers. However there are some husbands who work outside of the country, which results in the presence of female-headed households (SISO 2006).

We can see that urban women are negotiating the complexities of the urban world, in particular those associated with their roles in the family. Despite that some people deride the urban setting because of the benefits and pleasures that town provides, diversification of gender roles is inevitable and will necessitate that women have a greater public presence in town life. Nonetheless there are other domains through which women migrants experience the urban world.

Alice Pollard states that three factors have greatly changed women's roles in the Solomons: education, employment, and the economy (Pollard 2000:15). The four portraits of women she presents typify Solomon Island women according to economic participation. These four portraits are: the student, the *haosgel*, the worker, and the *matron*. In this chapter, I choose to use her classification, but do not focus on the economic role that women occupy, but on the various social spaces migrant women inhabit within Honiara. Other categories that should be included are *bigwuman*, informal and formal workers, widows, divorced women, and so forth. These other categories are missing from the analysis because they were not clearly presented in my corpus of

data. This does not suggest that they are any less important. Nor does this classification suggest that people occupy a single role, as people can hold different roles at different times and at the same time.

## **5.1 The Student**

*Margaret is twenty-four years old and single. She is from East Kwaio, Malaita province and has four brothers and two sisters. As a child, her family vacationed in Honiara, but they never lived there. She currently lives in Honiara and stays with wantoks. However, her living arrangements can be free floating, as she has a number of different wantoks with whom she can sleep and eat. At the time she was staying with her uncle who had three children, in a house without electricity.*

*She is a student at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) finishing her education certificate. Margaret finished the last grade of secondary education (Form Five) and wanted to further her studies in hopes of becoming a secondary school teacher in her home village, assuming finances allow her to continue. In 2007 she was taking a break from her education in order to help her sister with her school fees at SICHE, who was studying to become a nurse.<sup>28</sup>*

*Back in Malaita her family were pineapple farmers. When the pineapples were ready one of her brothers or sisters was obliged to travel from Malaita and bring the pineapples to the Central Market for sale in Honiara. This usually begins in late September or early October and until December.*

*Initially when Margaret came to Honiara she worked in a video rental shop. With this part-time job, and when the weather did not impede her from coming to work, she could earn a top wage and save up for her own school fees. She enjoyed her job, where she learned new words for*

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<sup>28</sup> Sometimes within large families not everyone can attend school. Students become responsible for their own school fees when their families can no longer financially support them. Margaret, the eldest was obliged to help her sister with school fees at SICHE.

*creating slang, and got to use a computer. Unfortunately, the shop was run by a Chinese immigrant and was burned down during the Riots of April 2006.<sup>29</sup> Despite the benefits of the job, she was reluctant to return to it when the boss re-opened the video rental shop. She would only return if she continued with her studies.*

*She has an effervescent personality. She, perhaps out of kin obligation and work ethic, volunteers at a church run literacy program, where she teaches English and literacy using her old school textbooks. Sometimes on the weekends she heads out to meet her friends and together they go to the beach outside of Honiara.*

Students are a prolific social category in Honiara. Honiara is by and far the best place to obtain access to education because of the number of schools, access to information, and libraries. Postsecondary students, as well as some secondary students, can live with either their *wantok*, on campus, or at home. Students especially females are able to obtain a degree of freedom while living in town, especially if they are able to obtain a cramped room in campus dormitories. One student mentioned that she enjoyed Honiara because of the libraries and the ability to complete her research, which was much more accessible in Honiara than in Malaita. "What is good about Honiara, is that you can go anywhere you like to do your research, or something similar it is really easy to do it" (Alice 24, Malaita). She also enjoyed the fact that when one has friends across town, people have the opportunity to explore new places and learn new languages from their friends. She stated: "Honiara is good because if you have lots of friends, you can go visit them, and visit places you could not go and see otherwise (Alice 24, Malaita). As a young woman, she is able to enjoy the freedoms and convenience of town. Not only in terms of her studies but also in terms of the diversity of people she can meet.

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<sup>29</sup> In April of 2007, after a vote of non-confidence, and perceived influx of Chinese illegal immigrants groups of Solomon Islanders burned down many Chinese owned shops and houses in Chinatown. (See Clive Moore 2004 for a more detailed description).

Students, and in particular urban migrants, are likely to incorporate and become exposed to new slang and words in Pijin after coming to town. Some of this new slang comes from English, their own mother tongues, and from other areas in the Pacific. Margaret said that by working at the video store she would use movie titles as sources for new words. One example she gave was *psycho* to describe someone who is crazy, a word usually rendered in Pijin as '*krange*', and more recently as *mentol*.

Being a student, unless one is not able to continue their studies, is a prestigious social status, particularly if one is able to enter Form Six and Seven (the equivalent of CEGEP One and Two, or the last years of high school) and thus have the opportunity to go on to post secondary education. Many young urban migrant women students are serious about their studies and believe that their education will ultimately help them obtain a government position, whether in Honiara or in their home province. Many students attend school in Honiara in order to help out their families in the rural villages, and intend to go back home when they have finished their studies. Some female students will try to become secondary school teachers because they make more money than primary or early-childhood teachers. With such a position they will be able to better support their entire family in the future.

Students who drop out of school have a precarious status, since they can be viewed as *masta liu* if they cause too much trouble or are not able to find work. Jourdan notes that students are frustrated with the education system, the demands of their families, and the lack of employment opportunities afterwards (Jourdan 2008: 34-35). These factors lead to and perpetuate the *masta liu* phenomenon. However, many students also claim there is nothing to do when they have time off, and thus town is boring if one has no money. And paradoxically some young women also miss the pace of life in their home village.



## **5.2 The Haosgel**

*Beti is from West Kwara'ae in the Malaita Province. She is twenty-four years old and was living in Honiara for two years and looking after her brothers' house and children. Although she lives alone, she has many friends from different islands, including Isabel, Nggela, and the Western Province. She speaks at least three languages, Kwara'ae (her mother tongue), Langalanga, and Lau, all from Malaita. She is also able to understand some Are'Are, Baegu, and Kwaio. Her mother tongue is her favourite language, but enjoys learning the languages of her friends as much as she enjoys teaching her own language to them. She learned Pijin with her friends after she arrived in town when she was small.*

*In public she is nicely dressed, wearing her skirts just below the knees when she goes around town, thus abiding by rules of propriety. She is quiet, poised, and soft spoken. Her family, while she was growing up, was very mobile. They lived in the Shortlands (Western Province), and came to Honiara when she was a baby. Her family has a house in Honiara. When her dad stopped working, the family went back to their home village in Malaita when she was seven or eight years old. Later on, her oldest brother came to Honiara, where he found a job and married a woman from Are'Are.*

*In 2007 one of her brothers was working in Fiji and Beti was staying in his house, which was initially her reason for coming to Honiara. She has five brothers and one sister. All of her brothers and sisters had the opportunity to obtain an education. She is the only one without formal education and as a result she has limited access to the economic sector. Her parents apologized to her for keeping her out of school and consequently allow her the freedom to pursue her own education and future in the capital. She talks about growing up with a hint of sadness when she compares herself to her well-educated and employed siblings. She thinks about her parents, and sends money when she can as well. When she finishes her literacy schooling, she would like to obtain any type of paid employment in order to help her parents back in the village.*

*Beti did not hold a steady job. She worked as a haosgel for her family. She looked after a brother's children and earns a meagre income of SI\$100 or SI\$50 a fortnight, when and if she gets paid at all. Like many young urban migrant women in the Solomon Islands, she embroiders "fud kavas" (food cloths that covers the food from flies), and dyes 'lavalavas' (sarongs) to sell for extra money. If the sun is strong she can make ten 'lavalavas in one day and then sells them for SI\$35 apiece. For the "fud kavas" she can earn SI\$100 for a large one and SI\$50 for a small one. She works on these when she needs to supplement her income or when she has some free time.*

*She is keenly aware of her own obligations to her family. Her grandmother is still alive, and she feels obliged to look after her. When her father became ill she went back to Malaita to look after him in the hospital. Although she may live in Honiara, she remains obligated to look after her parents and grandparents back at home.*

*At the same time, she is now able to settle and work on her own future, which is yet uncertain. While in town she remains highly dependent upon her brothers for support for basic living expenses and school fees. She has a boyfriend who is from the Western Province and a nursing student at SICHE. He noticed Beti at her neighbours' house and asked the matron to speak to her. The matron mentioned to Beti that he was interested and the next time the two talked with each other. They had been going out for nearly a year.*

Because Solomon Islanders move quite frequently, as demonstrated by Beti's family, many young women have opportunities to visit Honiara as young girls even before they decide to migrate or take employment in the town. Many young women are recruited by their families to work in urban households, where they will help to look after children, do the cooking and cleaning, and help out the *matron* (even replace the *matron* in case of illness or death). Some young urban migrant women have been taken out of school and their education sacrificed for the

family's benefit. However, many young urban migrant women in their twenties mentioned that they would rather work as a *haosgel* rather than fall behind their classmates in school. Because some *haosgel* did not have formal education, many with no further than fifth year of primary education (Class Five), they were not able to read and write. However a *haosgel* may receive some form of monetary compensation from her family or *wantok*. In many cases, they do not. Often they are provided with accommodation in the household, in exchange for cooking, cleaning, and looking after the house (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Jourdan 2005). In town, a *haosgel* is one of the few occupations uneducated women can pursue.

A household receiving a *haosgel* would have some form of income and resources in town (Gooberman-Hill 1999). The *haosgel* is becoming a profession, accessible to women of lower classes who are uneducated and excluded from other types of salaried employment. Some young urban migrant women who served as *haosgel* will return to Honiara a number of times to seek new positions. Young rural women are also recruited by urban households, and may have no choice but to work for urban relatives. These upper class urban families increasingly want young women with education and who are hard workers (Jourdan 2005).<sup>30</sup>

However, at times there can be politics involved with having a *haosgel*. Husbands have been known to make advances upon young *haosgel* working in their house (Gooberman-Hill 1999). This has been mentioned many times by both *haosgel* and other *matrons*. For example Tia is a matron who preferred not having a *haosgel*, since this girl would come from her husband's family and stay with them. As well there are instances when the matron of the house and the *haosgel* would actually fight with each other. This can also cause domestic trouble for the husband and wife, since the husband may side with the member of his own clan. Thus the wife has the potential to be alienated in her house under such circumstances.

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<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed examination of a *haosgel* see Jourdan's paper (2005).

### **5.3 The Worker**

*Janice is twenty-three years old. She is the second oldest amongst four siblings. She came from Isabel in 2007 to work in the Prime Minister's office after being recruited by a relative. She mostly does filing and photocopying in the office. She earns SI\$200 a fortnight and sends money back home to Isabel. She was unmarried and had a three year old boy who stayed back in Isabel with her family. Back on Isabel, she had to drop out of school at Form Two due to lack of finances. She was now trying to finish her Form Three and enter into SICHE to take a computer class or enter into an office administration program.*

*Janice came to Honiara with her family in 1999, but left due to the Tensions that very year. The next time she came to Honiara, she was living with 'wantoks'. The house was overcrowded with people, and she was arguing with the matron. She wanted to leave the house, but did not have any other place to stay. Despite her tumultuous living arrangements with her "wantoks," she preferred town life in comparison to her life back on Isabel. She spoke Pijin, and her mother tongue was Areka, but used Pijin with her parents on Isabel. At her work in Honiara people mixed between English and Pijin.*

*Similar to most women, she wanted everyone to have an easier life. As much as she enjoyed the benefits of town, there were aspects of town life she did not appreciate. In particular she noted that she wanted to close the nightclubs because of the violence and delinquency occurring around such establishments.*

*Janice also mentioned that employment opportunities are unequal between men and women in town. She noted that men have an easier time finding work in town, in comparison to women. Men could work for the Honiara Town Council, for instance, picking up rubbish. In contrast, jobs open to women were primarily store keepers and haosgel.*

Young women who come to town and who have employment sometimes have trouble finding accommodations. This is even more problematic if they do not wish to rely on, or do not get along with, their *wantoks* in town (Jourdan 1995). To further exacerbate the situation, there is a housing shortage in Honiara due to an ever increasing amount of rural push and urban pull described in chapter three (Jourdan 1985; UNICEF 1999). For young women coming to Honiara for employment, housing options include a small selection of locally run institutions, such as the YWCA and the (Solomon Islands Christian Women Association) SICWA who provide rest houses for young women. If young women have issues with the household in which they stay, finding another place to live in town can be extremely problematic and can cause friction with their relatives if they cannot resolve the tensions. In Janice's case she would rather go over to a friend's place than head straight home after work.

Employment in town is extremely difficult to obtain for most young people and students (Jourdan 2008). Janice was lucky because she was recruited for the position by her aunt. Women working in the formal economy tend to work as office workers such as secretaries and in lower level service industries. They are rarely visible at higher levels of business (UNESCO 1996: 7). However these formal opportunities require high levels of education. Professions open to young women who may not have finished their secondary school are limited. These include domestic workers, such as in a hotel or hospitals, store clerks, and *haosgel*. Although women are slowly entering into the trades and other professions, specific trades and professions are still viewed as only available to men. These are in security, working for the town council cleaning rubbish, and construction work. Women are reshaping their roles in town as they must find a means of securing an income. These changes are also spreading across to other urban areas rather than strictly being a phenomenon localized to Honiara. Honiara is a space where life is changing for young women.

## **5.4 The Matron or Mami**

*Tia is West Kwaio and thirty-four years old. Her household can be classified as a middle-class household, with a small number of children, and a secure source of income. Since her husband is a lecturer at SICHE, her family is living on SICHE campus. They have two children, one boy and one girl. As a matron or mami, she works in the house, keeps a supsup garden (small vegetable garden), drops off and picks up her children from school, washes the family's clothes and prepares the meals. She is responsible for taking care of wantoks when they come to town from the Provinces.*

*Some matrons will have a haosgel to help with the household chores. However, Tia had trouble with the last haosgel and prefers not to have one, since it required showing the haosgel around town and how to do the work. They live off of one income.*

*Many of her siblings currently reside in Honiara, and her parents in Malaita. She attended primary school in Malaita and finished her Form Three in Auki. After finishing school she worked for a foreign shop owner in Auki. She then came to Honiara and worked at a shop commonly known as DJ. In Honiara she met her current husband who is from the Western Province.*

*Tia wants to become an early childhood teacher and is working on a certificate program out of the University South Pacific, but she hopes to transfer into SICHE.<sup>31</sup> Their future is uncertain and they manage day-by-day, mitigating the cost of living in Honiara with the demands of their wantok responsibilities.*

In the Solomons, the *matron* is someone who looks after a home and family. The term in Pijin comes from English "matron" which was used to refer to the elder women in charge of dormitories in boarding schools around the country. The term is also used as a designation to an older

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<sup>31</sup> The University of South Pacific (USP) is based out of Suva, Fiji. They have a number of satellite campuses throughout the Pacific, including the USP Solomon Islands Campus in Honiara.

women and a sign of respect. However, age cannot be strictly used to determine if someone is a matron. Sometimes the term is also used synonymously with *mami* (*mother*), which urban women tend to ascribe to themselves. The term *matron* indicates that a woman is in charge of a house. And you can be a *matron* without having a garden.

However as the cost of living continues to rise, people are having fewer children, only two or three, especially amongst the middle-class (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Jourdan 1985; 2008). Matrons may or may not have a *haosgel* for help them with the daily chores but take pride in raising their family and fulfilling their obligations such as sweeping and keeping the house clean, cooking the meals, and maintaining a garden if possible (Gooberman-Hill 1999). Household aesthetics, such as having potted plants, and decorations such as *mekrans* (shell ornaments) inside the house is a measure of a good matron (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Stritecky 2001). However one of the primary roles of women is to have children (Jourdan 1987; Alasia 1989). Some matrons may not have their own children, but adopt them from immediate family members and raise the children as their own.

Many urban matrons may not formally work and the husband may be the only income generator. Matrons will have to ask their husband for money for the household and children. Urban women will often ask on behalf of the children if they need something. However, this is not to say that matrons do not contribute financially to the household, as many women engage in market practices to supplement and even sustain their household income when and or if their husband becomes unemployed (see chapter three). A small number of matrons who earn money decide on how they will spend the money, giving them a sense of independence. Other urban migrant women will combine their earnings with their husbands and decide together on how best to manage their household expenses. And lastly some women directly give their earnings to their husband and then must ask for it later. Out of a focus group with thirteen matrons, only three women said they were in charge of the money they earned. The majority of women in the focus group stated that their husband controlled the household income.

Slowly some *matrons* or *mamis* are realizing that with the rising inflation they need to seek out further education and vocational training to upgrade their skills in order to obtain work. Many *matrons* are doing early childhood education, and view it as a natural profession. Incidentally, the women I spoke with say they are bored in the house, as they spend time alone, especially as their children grow up. They enjoy learning and would like to work, as some urban migrant women may have worked before when they were younger, but then took time off to raise their family. As inflation continues to rise, women must work alongside their husbands to sustain their urban families. And in some cases a husband may determine whether his wife may work or not.

There are other categories of women's roles which are not represented in my data. These include professional working women and community leaders, as well as *bigwuman*. These women undeniably have a profound influence in Honiara, both in positive and negative ways. They have demonstrated and pressured the government to take notice of women and their issues, with varying levels of success. Some of these women are able to take the benefits of education and find work and even travel abroad for postsecondary education and conferences (whether government or religiously affiliated). However, their success has also been a source of hostility as they enter into new domains of work, and continue to seek the advantages of their efforts. A community leader mentioned to me that one of the biggest issues for women, besides representation at the governmental level, was the level of jealousy amongst urban women. Jealousy is directed more acutely towards professional women and to those who appear to flaunt their success in front of others. Resentment towards the success of fellow women shows that there is growing inequality between professional women and matrons. And the disparity is occurring along the lines of education.

Many urban migrant women first travel to Honiara with their families as young girls. Some migrants may stay longer while others are keen to leave. Their purpose for migrating influences and reshapes their social roles in the Solomons at the same time reconfiguring gender as they



seek out employment and a source of income in order to obtain a living and support their families both in town and back in their home island. The student is young, someone filled with hope and promise of finding a successful future. With the freedom acquired in town they can play with fashion, *kastom*, and popular culture—in essence following new modern ways. A working woman can vary in age however she is more likely to be someone who has obtained at least secondary education and directly supports her family. Becoming a *haosgel* is another means for young women to migrate to town, and is itself a growing profession. Women and even young girls, who occupy this social role, hold a precarious situation as they can be exploited by their relatives and lack the formal education necessary to seek out other employment. Many will end up marrying in town and becoming a *matron* or *mami* or go back to their home village. This last social role of *matron* or *mami* is perhaps one of the most common social roles defining women across the Solomons. She is someone usually married and has children. Her primary role is to look after the wellbeing of her family and household. Those who have migrated will either follow their husband, or have come to Honiara single with their family and worked as a store keeper or *haosgel*. They will marry in Honiara, and many choose to stay in order that their children will have access to education. However, women are also taking more active roles in the public sphere of Honiara as they seek out incomes to buffer the increasing inflation rates in town. They are consequently learning new skills, working in the informal economy, and seeking out vocational training to enter the workforce.

What emerges from these portraits is that there are real tensions that women face in regards to urban life. In the opening of the chapter, the 'traditional' Solomon Island woman was responsible for bearing children, feeding the household and maintaining the family by working in the garden. In the urban world, she is still primarily responsible for the majority of these tasks, although through different methods. By working and seeking education opportunities women are entering in the public domain of urban life, where once they remained in the private sphere. These new activities and expectations complicate their relationships within their family, their husband, and even other women. Urban migrant women continually think about their rural ties to home, in

many respects the root of their identity. However as they navigate the urban setting their identities become more complicated as they encounter the tensions of the urban world.

## **Chapter 6: Urban Dynamics and Tensions**

The urban world promises linkages with the outside world, to new people, provinces, and institutional structures such as the formal economy. However, “[i]t is important to pay attention to the ways in which differences and disparities are produced and enforced in this era of intense circulation, interconnectedness, and flows” (Mitchell 2004: 361). Underlying this chapter, and the entire thesis, are the disparities which inherently come to shape urban ambivalence. This chapter explains some of the factors that strain migrant women’s lives. People’s testimonies show that ambivalence emerges as a result of irresolvable tensions running counter to a person’s expectations and their experience of town life. Furthermore, in the face of increasing disparity, urban ambivalence is linked with the length of time one stays in Honiara, and how one responds to urban pressures.

### ***6.1 Population Tensions***

The population influences the urban setting, as urban migration continues to grow. An increasing population stresses the urban landscape as housing needs and an increased access to infrastructure are required in order to cope with the expanding urban population (explored earlier in chapter three). With more people new methods of social cohesion and interaction create a more complex urban sociality (Berg 2000). As a result of social pressures, urban sociality becomes associated with increased competition and animosity, in light of accentuated difference.

Nansi, twenty-one years old from Choiseul, mentions that Honiara has many different people. Different people include people from different islands and people from outside of the country, such as Australians, Chinese, or other regions in the Pacific. According to Nansi having different people in town is a good quality as it allows people to experience diversity. However she emphasized that too many people can be problematic.

#### Dialogue 6.1: Nansi, 21, Choiseul

Q: How is Honiara from what people told you? Is it the same or a little bit different?

Na: Here there are a lot of people, too many people. But there are many different kinds of people here too. In some ways it’s a good thing because different people get to know each

other. And in some ways it's not so good because all kinds of trouble can happen when there are too many people around.

Problems arise with large amounts of people from different islands in town, in particular when competing cultural practices are introduced, such as understandings and negotiations of bride price or land tenure (Jourdan 1995). Other manifestations of population tensions are evidenced in the rising crime rates (Tables 3.2 and 3.3) and social exclusion taking place in town--hardening class inequalities and antagonisms.

According to some community leaders and *bigwuman*, class antagonisms are detrimental and divisive between urban women and hinder the advancement or status of women in the Solomon Islands. These antagonisms are expressed in jealousy towards women from other classes. During the 2007 Women's Week celebrations, some urban mothers refused to attend the event because the prices of the stalls were too high, and because of the presentation of lilies brought into the country by the Prime Minister's wife. Some urban middle-class women viewed the sale of the lilies not as an achievement or as ingenuity of the Prime Minister's wife, but rather as an opportunity available to her because of her husband's standing. Thus some urban mothers would not support the women at the celebrations.

As a result of the rapidly increasing population and nearly equal sex ratio, competition for scarce resources and employment affects both men and women in town. However, increased competition contradicts discourses of opportunity and egalitarianism underlying people's expectations of town life. Urban women face competition from each other in finding a boyfriend or partner for marriage. Married women fear the competition from young girls as they are able to entice their husbands, and quite possibly break up their families. More people in town also means less access to local infrastructure, such as electricity and water, increased garbage and sewage problems, and a lack of access to land for growing small vegetable plots. Urban migrant women may have a harder time preparing family meals, keeping their house clean, and completing basic household chores such as laundry without running water. In terms of employment, increased population means that the level of education required for some jobs is increasing, and many women who are un-educated and

illiterate will have a difficult time finding employment (as was visible in chapter five). Competition creates tensions for new migrants who dream of landing an excellent job in order to support themselves and their rural families, while enjoying a modern lifestyle similar to the *masta liu* (Jourdan 1995). Migrant women become ambivalent as they realize some of their aspirations will not come to fruition, simply as a result of the population dynamics. Furthermore, they may have trouble finding work because of their lack of education and *wantok bisnis*.<sup>32</sup> Recent migrant women in general may wait a long time for health resources and have difficulty finding a place to live, which are also manifestations of population tensions. Therefore recent migrant women must find where they fit within the complex urban setting.

## **6.2 Family Tensions**

Academic literature has shifted to using the term household in place of using the word family as an analytical unit (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000; SISO 2006). Household is rarely used by Solomon Islanders when they speak about their rural relatives and urban immediate family with whom they reside. Therefore, I will use the term family in my own analysis of an urban household.

The following portrait demonstrates the strains of urban life in Honiara and how urban migrant women cope with these burdens in their everyday world. Family and family networks play a pivotal role in the composition of sociality in the Solomon Islands. With the increased movement of women the nature of the family is changing. Colonialism and Christianity have also created the conditions for emphasizing the nuclear family model (Jolly & Macintyre 1989). And Jourdan has documented the shift from the traditional family household organization to the rise of the nuclear family (1985; 2008).

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<sup>32</sup> *Wantok bisnis*: *Wantok* business means the favouring of *wantok* relatives or other members of the general public especially in terms of granting employment or scholarships.

## 6.2.1 Portrait of an Urban Family

*In the morning Tia is the first to rise. She prepares boiling water for breakfast and begins the laundry. It is a weekday and so she wakes up her two children and sends them to wash up by the laundry sinks. While the two children wash each other, Tia prepares their uniforms. The children finish dressing, and come to the table for breakfast. Tia has set out a packet of crackers (biscuits) on their plates, and prepared their Milk Tea as they like it.*

*An empty cup sits at the table where Tia's husband has finished his breakfast. Tia needs some money for bus fare and quickly speaks to him before he leaves as the children munch on their crackers. He gives her a bill from his wallet, and then he leaves for work through the front door.*

*It is nearly seven thirty and Tia tells the children to finish up. They sip up the last of their tea and leave everything on the table. Tia tells them to grab their backpacks and get ready to leave. While on the front porch they put on their white shoes, and ask for money for the class contribution. But she has already given them money earlier this week. And does not want to give them more money because her son keeps buying popsicles and he has been constantly coughing the last couple of weeks. The children keep trying to convince their mother as they all leave for school.*

*Tia returns home around nine in the morning, after taking the children to school. There is no more running water, and she cleans up the table and leaves the dishes in the sink. Having filled the laundry sinks in the morning, she does some more laundry before the sun becomes too hot. When it gets hot outside she comes inside and works on her coursework at the table. She prepares a fast lunch and leaves to pick-up the children around twelve-thirty. They come home shortly after one thirty and the children eat their lunch.*

*Tia has left the tap open in the kitchen, waiting for the water to come. The water has not come, and so she goes into the bedroom to rest for a while. An hour later she continues with the housework and then heads off to the garden. The children play around the house. It is nearly four o'clock and Tia goes to the market to buy food for dinner.*

*Edward comes home around five in the evening, after socializing with his colleagues and picking up some small groceries. At home Edward does some yard work, works on his lawnmower and chops some firewood. When Edward comes inside Tia is already in the kitchen preparing dinner. She has a gas stove top, but also uses the fire for cooking, especially since Edward prefers sweet potato to rice. She usually has to wait for water to come, in order to prepare dinner.*

*Around six Edward goes inside and listens to the news on SIBC and then maybe watches the BBC. Because it is dark outside, Edward has called the children inside in order that they complete their homework, and to avoid mosquitoes. Just before dinner Edward takes the children outside for a shower. They do not have to go to his work for a wash today because water has finally come.*

*Dinner is usually around eight or nine at night. Today it is white rice, neka (cabbage boiled in coconut milk), with taiyo (canned tuna). Lately the family has been sitting down to eat together, but Tia often eats later. When company or Edward's family comes to visit, he eats outside with his relatives and they stay out talking late into the night. If this happens, Tia keeps boiling and refilling the thermos with water for them.*

*After everything is cleaned up, Tia sits down and plays cards with the children, or works on her sewing projects or macramé. Around ten o'clock the children start to fall asleep on the floor. She goes to prepare the bedroom and takes the children to bed. She comes back and continues to work and may talk with Edward. Edward mostly sleeps alone in the living*

*room or the veranda. Before heading off to bed, he will turn on the taps and fill up the buckets for the laundry and for the household for the following day.*

Looking after any household is a busy and taxing job. Edward and Tia lived in Kukum in a permanent cement house. They were married ten years and have two children. They have no vehicle and consider their home Gizo in the Western Province. Tia was from Malaita and Edward was raised in Honiara. After their concrete house in Gizo was destroyed in the 2007 Tsunami, the entire family was concerned with rebuilding their lives. Everyone in the urban household dreamed of Gizo, singing along to the chorus "*Gizo hem naes tu mas*" of a popular song. They did not live in Gizo, only vacationed there for Christmas and holidays.

Tia, the *matron* (lady of the house) worked long hours. Often she rested in the early afternoon because there was no water, making it difficult to accomplish everything she needed to do. Some Friday's Tia would have a day off and spend the night with her family. However if she needed to leave she asked permission from her husband to whom she referred to as *dadi* or by his first name. Sometimes women can refer to their husband as *olo* (old man) in a joking and endearing manner.

Edward was the primary financial earner as a lecturer for the college. He was well traveled and gained formal education in Australia as well as attended workshops in PNG, Taiwan and China. Tia on the other hand never left the Solomons. She was seeking vocational training in early childhood education. Being the wife of a lecturer Tia was eager to transfer to SICHE after she finished her courses at the USP. She wanted to become either a teacher or a secretary, if and when they moved to Gizo and the children grew up. Because husbands have the possibility of working, or traveling for education overseas, these extended international stays can cause tensions within a marriage, despite the economic benefits to the family.

Similarly with other urban middle-class families, *wantok* appeared and stayed anywhere from a couple of days to over a month or more. Edward preferred to have only his side of the family stay with them rather than Tia's relatives. Many of Tia's brothers and sisters resided in town, while her parents lived in Malaita. Out of the three months during which I visited them regularly, only Tia's

father stayed over for one night and a day to negotiate a dispute. Edward's family lived further away in Roviana. Visiting *wantok* included two of Edward's elder brothers with their daughters, his elder sister who came to town for a conference, and Ben. Edward's youngest brother, Ben, was married to a Guadalcanal woman, and they just had a baby. He lived in the Guadalcanal village with his wife, but frequently visited Honiara. As a carpenter he came to Honiara to take on contract work and stayed with the urban family. Relatives often showed up unannounced and those relatives coming from long distances are a cause of joviality upon their arrival.

Edward and Tia rarely talked or worked side-by-side. Tia was busy looking after the household and children. Edward was busy working to earn enough money for his family and kin. Being from the West, Edward never paid any bride price to Tia's family. Strain in their marriage would occasionally manifest in late night arguments while the children were sleeping. Even when Tia was sick she would not stop and rest for the day. Edward never seemed happy. Sporadically Tia would disappear, which angered Edward and scared the children that they would lose their mother. Marital tensions can emerge with bride price, whether it is paid or the symbolic nature is disregarded by members of different ethnic groups (Jourdan 1987; Berg 2000). However, bride price is only one factor that may cause tensions in urban marriages.

Tensions between rural and urban relatives can also strain marriages, especially in regards to gift giving and exchange (Jourdan 1985; 1987; Donner 2002; Feinberg 2002). This is apparent when one spouse favours their side of the *wantok* network over the other. If this happens a spouse may view some gift exchanges as detrimental to the immediate family in the urban setting, such as sending away higher quality goods to rural kin, while keeping cheaper materials in the urban setting. Tensions also emerge if rural kin receiving gifts do not return the favour, by sending food stuffs to the urban family in Honiara. Tensions can also develop if only one side of a couple's *wantok* network is involved in gift giving, consequently isolating the other spouse from their family (Jourdan 1987). Thus if a husband does not wish to send gifts to his wife's family, she may become alienated from them (Jourdan 1987).



Another major source of tension between spouses is the raising of the children and disagreements in the management of the household. Urban women can be dissatisfied with the amount of money for which they are expected to take care of their household and feed the children. When one party is responsible for money, how families manage money can become an issue between couples. Some urban women complain that their husband can squander money necessary for the household and children on themselves. Thus money is also a cause for marital tensions as well as selfishness. On the other hand, a husband may disapprove of the appearance of their house, if the house is not swept or the laundry is not completed. Marital tensions manifest in different ways, such as alcoholism, infidelity, domestic violence and abuse, separation, and divorce (Jourdan 1987). Table 6.1 demonstrates the ramifications of domestic violence which results from family tensions. Tension between couples and family break-ups are fodder for local gossip, often categorized under going for *outu*:

Journal Entry August 14, 2007

Yesterday was a long day and it seems like everyone had a bad day. Edward told me about the head of school who has been having affairs and on the weekend his wife threatened to go out drinking and meet young boys. He flew into a jealous rage and broke the doors and windows in the house along with all the clothes she bought him in Australia. As he did all this he went to look for her and she was the whole time at the neighbours. (Book 1: 161-162).

Thus family and marital tensions occur at multiple levels, between rural and urban relatives and between the couples themselves.

**Table 6.1: Affects of Domestic Violence on Family and Children?**

	WOMEN	CHILDREN
Break up of the family	27%	31.40%
Child is badly affected psychologically	29%	22%
The family is stressed and worried	13.50%	18.50%
Mother/children commits suicide	10%	7.40%
Poverty	0%	11.10%

Source: Jourdan 2008b.

### 6.2.2 New Families: Divorce, Separation

The nuclear family has begun to take on a more active role in Honiara. However the very conception of a nuclear family is also being renegotiated by urban women and young women migrants. The prominence and symbolic nature of the family, serves as an ideal of unity, at the national level--the Solomon Islands are one big happy family (Jourdan 1996). And this discourse is commonly associated with women (Pollard 2003; Douglas 2003). For instance in an opening prayer song the lyrics emphasize this very notion:

Prayer Song: We are one big Happy Family Lyrics:

We are one big happy family  
Gods Family, God's family  
We are one big happy family  
God's family are we.  
She is my sister. And he is my brother  
Our father in heaven, who loves you and me  
We are one big happy family  
God's family, God's family  
We are one big happy family  
God's family are we.

Although this discourse in Honiara emphasizes peace, harmony, and unity within the family, families rarely are the vanguard of these values, either at the national or personal level. Ideas of family have changed, more so through people's actions, rather than in people's nostalgic imaginations: as domestic violence is increasing; marital indiscretions are also increasing so much so that many couples end up divorcing under the strains of infidelity; some families become dysfunctional when parents take up drinking or gambling. As the women I spoke to explained many times, families can become undone. Through the reworking of their own social roles, women are redefining conceptions of family. As we can see below, this is visible through the adoption of new terminology to refer to new social roles.

The term *wido* (widow) can be used to describe oneself as separated from their partner. *Wido* is mainly used to describe a woman whose husband has passed away. However the term is being used facetiously by young women to describe themselves as divorced or separated from their partner. This is apparent during an interview with Alice from Malaita (twenty-four years old, Kwaio)

as we were joking around.

Dialogue 6.2.2: Alice, 24, Malaita

Q: Do you have a boyfriend now?

A: Eh, not anymore. I got rid of him in 2003, so today I am a widow. (Laughing) He died in the tensions.

Q: Oh yeah?

A: No no, I am just kidding!

As to whether there is stigma associated with divorced women was not explored for this project. However if women feel the need to describe themselves as widows, whether it is in a joking manner, one can attribute that there is some stigma attributed to being divorced. By self-ascribing this title, young urban women are figuratively taking on the social status of widows, which can be more prestigious and accepted in comparison to being a single woman.

Besides divorce, urban women who are separated from their husbands and are in charge of the children may use another term to describe themselves. The term *solmata* is emerging in Pijin and used to describe single mothers in Honiara. Angi, in her twenties from Guadalcanal, stated: "*mi no garem boefren, mi marit wetem three kids, And mi solmata*" (I do not have a boyfriend. I was married with three children. And I am a single mother)." She described herself as a *solmata* because she divorced her husband and was looking after their two children on her own. Whether the rate of single mothers comes from divorce or separation, or from teenage pregnancy is hard to elucidate without actual figures. The rates for teenage pregnancy are quite high in the Solomons, both in the rural and urban settings. And young girls lack access to sexual education, family planning, let alone contraception (UNESCO 1999; Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003; UNIFEM 2007). Whether there is a link between teenage pregnancy and single mothers is another prospect for future research. However, using these terms is also a means of avoiding being called a *iang gele* (young girl).

In other instances, some young urban women can refuse to stay with someone who cannot support them or who they no longer find suitable--this is dependent on numerous factors, whether a formal marriage was arranged, bride price was exchanged, peoples' education levels, province of origin,

and their own and partner's adherence to *kastom* practices. An article by Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. argue that girls in Malaita in particular may be forced to marry a sexual partner if they find themselves pregnant (2003). Women and young girls in their discussion are represented as passive agents. However urban women speak actively about their choices, selection, and separation with sexual and marital partners. Interestingly some urban migrant women claimed that they left their husbands or partners.

However marital separation and divorce through *kastom* is a difficult matter. The complex situation of marital tensions in the urban setting are explained in the following interview summary with a community leader:

The rate of spousal abuse in the Solomon Islands is quite high, however as more women learn about their rights, they are willing to take action against their husbands. However there is confusion about whether it is better to go through the judicial system or seek traditional compensation. Many people prefer using the traditional system, as this settles the conflict and allows people to talk with each other afterwards. The judicial system on the other hand tends to ostracise one party resulting in resentment and bitterness between people. Compensation for separation is still demanded, and the exchange of shell money and food can help resolve many problems, and placate relations. (Interview summary with Rebeka, Kwaio, Community Leader).

Some urban women claimed that resolving domestic violence and marital issues through the judicial system was ineffective and left feelings of resentment amongst everyone involved. According to popular media discourse reconciliation can be better through *kastom*, which supposedly may leave more cordial relationships and reduces grudges. However this may only appease the situation for a time. Informally women stated that they preferred to follow *kastom* exchanges rather than pursue a divorce through the court of law or make claims of domestic violence against her husband in public. Reasons for this include embarrassment, lack of faith in the police, feelings of shame, losing respect in the community, losing one's children, and facing alienation. .

Bride price is another matter that can complicate separation and divorce. Women's marriage and the giving of shell and cash money as bride price is a dimension of *kastom* and an elaborate affair. Because bride price can be more affordable, from SI\$700 and 5 red shell money or more extravagant in SI\$2,000 and 10 shell money. Some young couples will not marry right away because of bride price demands. And people may have two marriage ceremonies: one through

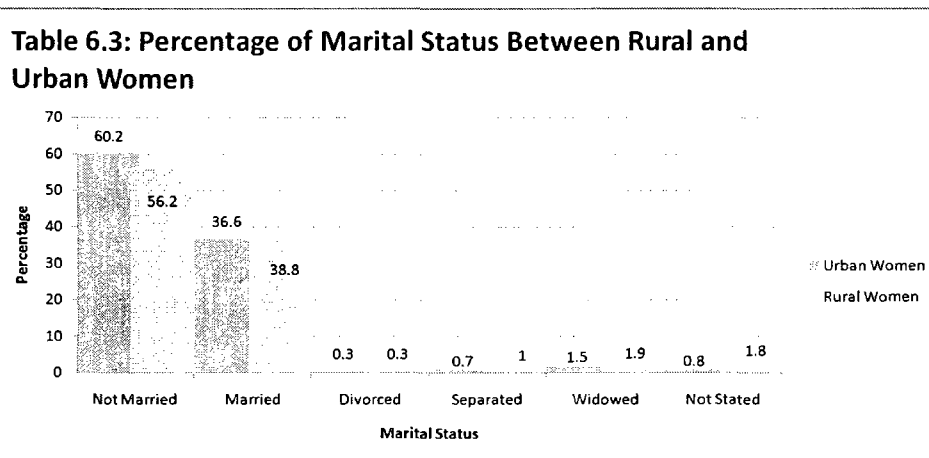
their church, and then postpone their second *kastom* marriage for a later date, when bride price can be paid. Some people may completely avoid paying bride price, which can occur between interethnic couples, and those attending different churches (Jourdan 1987; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000; Pollard 2000). Unfortunately I did not collect data on divorce and separation through *kastom* and this could be a project for further study.

Whether rates of divorce and separation are increasing is difficult to determine without continuous data. Looking at table 6.2, the rates of divorce in the urban setting are only slightly higher (by 0.1 percent) than in the rural setting. Incidentally, rates of separation are higher in rural settings than in urban areas (SISO 2006: 22). Marital status does vary between urban and rural settings. Table 6.3 compares the marital status of rural and urban women. More urban women are not married in comparison to rural women, while more rural women are married in comparison to urban women. The rates of divorce are equal between rural and urban women, while rates of separation and widowhood are higher amongst rural women.

**Table 6.2: Percentage Distribution of Population by Marital Status, Area, and Sex**

Area & Sex	Marital Status 2005/6						Solomon Islands
	Never Married	Married	Divorced	Separated	Widowed	Not Stated	
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Males</b>	60.8	35.7	0.2	0.9	0.7	1.7	100
<b>Females</b>	56.8	38.4	0.3	0.9	1.9	1.6	100
<b>Urban</b>	<b>61.5</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Males</b>	62.7	35.1	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.9	100
<b>Females</b>	60.2	36.6	0.3	0.7	1.5	0.8	100
<b>Rural</b>	<b>58.4</b>	<b>37.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Males</b>	60.5	35.8	0.2	1.0	0.7	1.8	100
<b>Females</b>	56.2	38.8	0.3	1.0	1.9	1.8	100

Source: SISO 2006; HIES



Source: SISO 2006, HIES

Urban divorced women can end up alone and without a family and home if their relatives are unwilling to help them out. A woman will go back to her kin for support during marital trouble. But if her family blames her for the argument or situation they will send her back to her own household (Jourdan 1987; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Pollard 2000). Urban migrant women may have no place to go if their family lives in another province, leaving them isolated and vulnerable in an abusive relationship (Jourdan 1987). These ramifications can lead women to despair, depression and eventually suicide (Jourdan 1987; 2007). In some cases of divorce, the children and the house may remain with the father. However this is directly linked to the payment of bride wealth and whether the children stay with the father or the mother after divorce (Jourdan 1987: 2008). For example,

Joy was in her fifties and divorced for a half a year. Her husband took the house and the children. As such she was staying with *wantoks*, and was extremely worried about finding a new place to stay.

In another instance, Joyce, from Malaita was recently divorced from her husband. She said he was no good and drank too much alcohol. Together they had no children, but adopted two boys. She rented a small flat from a Chinese owner in Ranadi. She was worried because her ex-husband was threatening to take the children away. Divorce leaves women in a difficult situation. Tensions in families are becoming increasingly complex, especially as new forms of family are emerging. And family tensions are further exacerbated by economic factors.

### **6.3 Economic Tensions**

The monetary system has radically transformed the lives of many Solomon Islanders. Although the formal economy has garnered much attention in lieu of development, the informal economy also plays a pivotal role in contemporary Solomon Islands.

In recent years, however, the transition from a traditional subsistence to a 'modern' cash economy is exerting increased pressures on women not only by changing their role and influence in subsistence sector but also by increasing their workload. Wage labour, migration and the growing demand for cash have tended to increase women's role in both food and cash crop production. While women retain high participation rates in subsistence sector, there is however, a growing pressure on women to enter wage labour as the need for cash increases with the socio-economic and cultural changes (UNESCO 1996: 3).

These two forms of economic exchange have their own particularities, however, their intersection affects and causes tensions for both urban residents and recent migrant women. Unlike the quotation above, which suggests that the formal economy is replacing the informal economy, the two supposedly antithetical economic models interact and co-inhabit the urban setting. Thus it is important to examine both systems of exchange.

#### **6.3.1 The Formal Economy**

Although *kastom* shapes sociality, the formal economy cannot be overlooked as it further shapes and codifies urban reality. You cannot do anything without some sort of financial resources and

reserves (Frazer 1981; Jourdan 1996; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2001) "Becoming wage earners in a market economy is among the most challenging changes associated with town life, and in some respects, the shift dominates individual choices and lifestyles" (Donner 2002: 39). Access to money and obtaining paid employment is easier to come by in the urban setting than in rural homes, according to recent urban migrants. As a result many young women are willing to leave their children with their families in the villages. No matter that entrance into the formal economy can be an exclusive dream, with one's entry dependent upon knowing relatives or attaining the appropriate secondary and even postsecondary education (UNESCO 1996; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000).

Rachel, twenty-six years old from Choiseul, was working in town as a store keeper. She demonstrates the pervasiveness of money in town in the following manner:

In town, when you go around town everything requires money. At home no. At home for the same things they are free. In town if we go anywhere you must have money, to go to the bank money first (Rachel, 24, Choiseul).

Although she appears to favour rural life, she prefers living in Honiara as long as she has a job and can make money and send a remittance back home.

Recent women migrants are astounded by the variety of consumer goods available in Chinatown and Honiara. One can buy gum from China, medicine from Pakistan, second hand clothes, books, and toys from Australia and New Zealand.

A man who had money could buy anything he wanted: different varieties of food, a radio, land, and other consumer goods. Life on Sikaiana provides a person with the resources to live, but there is limited opportunity; life in town can be more exciting with more diversity, but a person is dependent on earning money to survive (Donner 2002:28).

Urban migrant women make the same observation. People coming from outlying provinces, such as Choiseul and even Western Province (which can take at least three days by ship), also note that the price and quantity of consumer goods available in Honiara is better and cheaper than in their home province. Thus to take part in this wonderland of consumer goods, recent migrants must have access to money. And urban dwellers can rely on the formal and informal economy to secure an income.



Those who do not earn salaries look for alternative ways of finding money. Many urban migrant married women are concerned with being able to pay for their children's school fees, and will use the informal economy if they do not have sufficient funds for school fees and other family expenses. On an outing in the market, I saw Lois selling *aes bloks* (flavoured frozen water served in a plastic wrap, similar to a popsicle) and juice. I asked why she was in the market and she said that she needed money for her boy's school fees. Many urban women do not have access to a *supsup* garden<sup>33</sup> and cannot grow food. As more families settle into Honiara, land ownership and squatting are serious issues in town, forcing people to purchase food for the family instead of growing it.

### **6.3.2 The Market: The Heart of the Solomons**

Honiara can be epitomized by its markets. These include: Kukum, the Central Market, the Lau fishing village, and White River market. The main market, the Central Market, is a busy place and pivotal for many town people. The market represents the intersection between the formal and informal economy, between the rural and urban worlds and residents. For many people and especially temporary visitors, the Central Market is a lure, a social hub, where people come to sell their goods and foods. Women predominate in the market which can be viewed as a gendered space. However, men will help with the setting up and unloading produce into the market (Pollard 2000). And more men can also be seen selling food in the Central Market as well as socializing.

Located in a permanent covered building, the market usually opens around eight in the morning and closes at six o'clock in the evening. The Central Market is the cheapest place to buy food and other goods. Produce is sold on both sides of the permanent building with *bulo* (coconuts selling for S1\$2, are chopped open with a machete so that one can drink the sweet juice directly from the husk or with a straw) around the periphery. Tubers and other root vegetables are sold under the walkway

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<sup>33</sup> Susup garden is a small plot of land where vegetables are grown for family consumption in the urban setting. This was a UNESCO funded project, which began in 1986 to help urban people to enrich their diet by growing vegetables that can be used to make a soup. The program was mainly targeted towards women because they are the ones who garden and cook food in families. The program taught: composting, crop rotation, mulching, pest control without chemicals, methods of fencing, trellising, and terracing (Bennett 2000: 273).

directly on the ground or on a blanket. Fruit is sold on the other side of the walkway under the eavesdrop of the market building. Guadalcanal is the main source of vegetables. Many Guadalcanal women selling vegetables in the market travel from outside of the city. Finally, closer to the sea is where fishermen bring in their fresh fish. Women sell the newly caught fish under multi-coloured umbrellas, shading them from the heat, and waving banana leaves to chase away the flies.

The market is not just for food. Women have been complaining that clothing coming from China does not fit them. And the second hand clothing shops sell more trousers than skirts. Many women prefer wearing skirts in rural areas. Visitors to Honiara often buy clothes in Honiara for their rural relatives, and skirts are in high demand. To compensate for the lack of second hand skirts in merchant shops, local urban women buy pants and refashion them into skirts. They sell these re-stitched skirts in the market for the women needing skirts in the rural villages. In the Central Market, one can also buy coconut oil. Coconut oil is used for the body and the hair. Women from Temotu or Rennells are renown for making a special tonic or formula from coconut oil that can make hair grow longer and look nicer, which is also punctuated with enticing floral scents. Small snacks, drinks and *aes lolis* for children are also sold at the Central Market. Shell money (used for formal customary exchanges) and jewellery, sold by women from the LangaLanga lagoon in Malaita Province, are also found in the Central Market sold nearest the clothes closest to the main road.

Furthermore, the market is a place where people spend their free time and come to be seen. Besides shopping, the market is infamous for the *otu* drama, unusual characters, and even religious sermons (Stritecky 2001). Young female students have a place to shop and socialize before heading home after school, young men hang around cruising to be seen and sip a cold drink. The Central Market also has an ominous reputation for petty theft by opportunistic thieves, according to local gossip. Some urban residents accuse the police of avoiding the Central Market. And, local people are extremely wary while shopping, slinging their *baskets* (handbags) across their necks for safety rather than over the shoulder. Honiara's Central Market is awash with people and activity, on

economic and social levels.

### 6.3.3 Informal Economy

The Central Market is a means by which urban migrant women gain access to the cash economy. In the context of Gilbert camp, a neighbourhood in Honiara, Stritecky noted in 2000, that women used a combination of methods in order to sustain their households. This included relying upon salaries and gardening activities (Stritecky 2001: 261).

In order to make a living, some urban women will buy vegetables in bulk from the Central Market. They will then take the food to one of the smaller markets to sell. The movement of food to these smaller local markets, results in higher prices for the same foods. For instance a small heap of Ngali nuts (*Canarium Indicum*, a local delicacy) would cost SI\$2 at the Central Market. At the Fisheries Market—located at the Lau Fishing village on the eastern side of Honiara—the same packet would cost SI\$3. Local cabbage can cost SI\$3 at the Central Market, which is SI\$4 at the Fisheries Market. Prices are controlled by the HTC<sup>34</sup> at the Central Market (Pollard 2000), and by an organizing committee at the Fisheries Market.

The rising cost of food is a particularly sensitive issue for urban women (Gooberman-Hill 1999, Stritecky 2001). The foodstuffs, especially the staples of the urban diet: *taiyo* (the local brand name for tinned tuna, which comes in a red can SI\$4 and flavoured with chilli, and the second grade Solomon Islands tuna in a blue can SI\$2), *kabis* (any kind of green leaf vegetable), white rice (Solrais is the most prolific brand, sold in 10kg or 20kg yellow bags that people re-stitch into handbags), instant noodles SI\$2 a package (Mamee brand noodles are popular and available in three flavours).<sup>35</sup> *Lokol kaikai* (local food) such as cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), *kumara* (*Ipomoea batatas*), bananas, coconut, fish, and *kabis* are said to be more nutritious than imported foods such as rice and biscuits. Ideally urban parents would like to have their children raised on both diets so

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<sup>34</sup> HTC: Honiara Town Council

<sup>35</sup> Mamee Brand Instant noodles are imported from Malaysia. And is one of the most common brands of noodles in the Solomon Islands.

that they can later choose for themselves (Gooberman-Hill 1999: 55-56).

In 2007 a 20kg bag of Solrais was SI\$100, and in April 2008 the price had risen to SI\$118 in Honiara (Mamu 2008). Rice is considered a staple of Solomon Islander diet, and the government sought to reduce the taxes on rice to alleviate the burden upon poorer families (Solomon Star, Mamu April 09, 2008). Because inflation is so pervasive, local residents' develop strategies against the rising food prices, as well as the costs of urban living.

One such practice was most evident in the rising bus fare. The local bus owners and drivers wanted to increase the bus fares to SI\$3 because of the rising cost of petrol in 2007. Urban residents were upset, refusing to pay SI\$3 and would only give exact change of SI\$2. However, if someone did not have exact change and gave a SI\$5 note, the conductor would return only SI\$2 and charge the SI\$3 fare. Conductors do not want to cause conflict and never pressed any passenger for the full SI\$3 bus fare.

Using *wantok* relationships is another manner by which some urban residents attempt to circumvent the ramifications of inflation. When someone does not have money for bus fare, they can wait for a specific bus where the driver or the conductor is their *wantok* (relatives). They can ask for a ride either from the conductor or driver. However, the driver or conductor may be extremely unhappy about the situation. When this happens they may not stop or avoid announcing where the passenger requests to get off. Some bus drivers will avoid bus routes where they know their *wantok* reside, because they would never make any money by giving free rides to *wantok* and using up their expensive petrol.

*Wantok* relationships can also be enacted at the market. Urban women who are related to each other may come up and talk to each other in *langgus* and then take one of two items from a vendor. And urban women related to someone can come by and take food as a gift from a market vendor. As Donner noted, *wantok* relationships can have drastic impacts and create tensions for market

sellers and small shop owners, as they cannot turn a profit by giving away items (Donner 2003). Prices, both in the Central Market and at other markets are usually marked and people will pay the exact amount. Bargaining is not a common practice. Only when women are willing to leave will they reduce the price of their goods (Pollard 2000).

Cooperation exists between market women under to guise of 'sisterhood' (Pollard 2000). For instance, women will watch over each other's stalls while one goes to do errands. Or, in the event a woman has some other obligation but also needs to earn some money, she can ask a friend at the market to sell her goods for her. Then at the end of the day she will give her friend a small service fee for helping sell the goods. Since people need money in order to sustain their families, more urban women are turning to the formal economy, if they are well educated, or creating new market opportunities.

Small-scale entrepreneurial endeavours include chicken farming, selling *aes bloc* (popsicles), baking buns, making baskets, cooking fish and chips. In a focus group with thirteen women, from different areas of Malaita, each described their own marketing ventures. Depending upon the market day some women reported collecting a decent amount of money. Urban women can also sell vegetables, cigarettes, betelnut, and even crabs, etc. Ironically many urban women do not classify these types of marketing activities as work. *Waka* in Pijin implies paid formal employment. Many urban migrant women possess a practical skill in case they need to make some extra money. These skills include sewing, dyeing *lavalavas* (hand dyeing sarongs), crochet and embroidery projects as well as macramé. Although urban women are highly skilled, this does not preclude that they can easily earn the money they need. Many urban women have similar skills and necessities. Consequently there is a great deal of competition amongst market women and a keen desire to learn new skills to gain a competitive edge. Therefore women are keen to seek out new ideas for prosperous and unique income generating opportunities.

The diversity of these women's marketing activities, including the incipient list above, demonstrates

that women are savvy in regards to small business ventures. In a letter to the Editor of the Solomon Star, Ella Kauhue (SINCW secretary) notes that women have the expertise to be involved in business, and that more opportunities need to be created in order for women to take part in the business world (Kauhue 2008). More importantly market women need to be considered as business women in their own right. Their marketing activities represent the bottom-up approach so highly touted in government discourse. Market women, sitting in the hot sun as Pollard noted (2000), feed the nation and help to educate future generations by supporting their families. Economic tensions emerge out of the formal economy. And under-educated migrant women use the informal economy in order to take part in the formal economic urban structure (UNESCO 1999). However tensions shaping women's ambivalence also comes from insecurity due to violence and social tensions. These will be explored in the final chapter.

## Chapter 7: *Taongel kam ap*: The City Girl Arises

### 7.1 *The Taongel*

This chapter explores how recent urban migrant women negotiate urban social stratification. Urban ambivalence manifests through the rural and urban dichotomy, represented by the social categories of *Taongel* and *Homgel*. *Taongel*, town girl or city girl, can also be referred to as *gele long taon* or *gele lo taon* (girls from the town). A *homgel* can be referred to as a girl who lives at home and follows the rules of *kastom*, their family, and respects authority whether located in the village or urban setting. However, a *homgel* (home girl) does not appear to be synonymous with a *kastomgel* (traditional ceremonial bride). As with many social categories *taongel* and *homgel* are not strictly codified, and are often fluidly applied to and by young urban migrant women. And both terms of address can be laden with positive and negative values.

The usages of *taongel* and *homgel* are context dependent. Amongst young recent migrant women interviewed, not one confessed to being a *taongel*. Young urban migrant women mentioned that their families and friends back at home joked that they were a *taongel* coming back to the rural village. However, recent urban women migrants viewed a *homgel* in a more positive light than a *taongel*.

Descriptions of *taongel* by urban migrant women can vary. Some urban migrant women mentioned that a *taongel* lacks respect for others, and other descriptions focus on the physical appearance of a *taongel*. Two interpretations of *taongel* are presented below. The first description is given by Rachel from Choiseul. Rachel begins her description in a neutral fashion by explaining that a *taongel* is a resident of Honiara. She remarks that people from her village use it as a joke. However, she also points out that a *taongel* is free to do what she wants, such as going out dancing to clubs and wearing the latest fashions. Implied by these freedoms is that *taongel* have money in order to take part in these activities. *Taongel* are free to have and enjoy a social life, because she may have grown up in town.

A town girl stays and lives in town. They are the same as *masta liu*. People from home call you this and it is not good. *Taongel* do not stay quiet, they go out. They go out and drink, wander around, go to nightclubs, go dancing, dress up, and do anything (Rachel: 26, Choiseul).

A second description is given by a *matron* from Malaita. Anne, forty years old Kwara'ae from Malaita, notes that *taongel* are disrespectful. They also dress up and show off and ignore *kastom* rules and prefer to follow fashion or a modern lifestyle. Anne even associates *taongel* with being prostitutes, and states that they are quite young, in their early teens.

Dialogue: 7.1: Anne, 40, Malaita

A: Town girl oh it's not good because they, they do not follow *kastom* rules. They will not follow them. What they do is they follow fashion. What they look like this time. They are different now. When their mom says something, she says to her: I don't care. She talks back. This is a town girl, they go to the club. Some of them don't stay quiet at home, they go out at night. Today there are a lot, not as before

M: Taongele is it the same as Masta Liu?

A: Yes they are the same. Some that don't have any money, so they go and ask money from men who work. They sell their body for money.

M: So they are little bit ... what age?

A: 15 years old. 15, 13, 12 are their ages. There are too many now. I can recognize them when they walk around town. They show off (Anne 40, Kwara'ae).

Anne's description is more negative than Rachel's. This may be because of their different ages and social standings. Whereas Rachel is only twenty-six and a recent urban migrant, Anne is forty, a matron, and a lifetime migrant to Honiara. They both compare *taongel* to *Masta Liu*. Since immoral behaviour is usually related back to sexual behaviour, *taongel* can be called prostitutes irrespective of whether they actually engage in actively selling their bodies for sex. As we have noted in chapter four, calling a urban woman a prostitute is an act of swearing and a serious insult. These negative dimensions of a *taongel* address the moral ambiguity and the difficulties young urban migrant women face while in town. Young urban migrant women are caught between the adult world without the means of securing their expectations and opportunities, which were discussed earlier (Jourdan 1995; 2008).

A *taongel*, lost her ways in the fashion of the *waetman* (westerners). She is chastised for overtly flouting Solomon Island *kastoms*--of being shy and respectful of authority. She views herself as better than others, because she is modern. She goes to clubs, dances, wears western clothing,



and styles her hair. A *taongel* does nothing with her time, but chats with her friends and causes trouble. For older mothers, she occupies a new social space and personifies the corruption of the town and a fashionable life. She steals away husbands and breaks up families with her sexy ways. She has no morals and is selfish, a quality associated with urban town and considered somewhat antithetical to Solomon Islands values of sharing and giving (Jourdan 1987; Pollard 2000). She is the *Masta Liu*, admonished but free.

## **7.2 The Homgel**

More recent urban migrant women may prefer to associate themselves or fall into the category of a *homgel*. To claim of being a *homgel* suggests a morally grounded social standing. A *homgel* is "rooted in a set of core values including modesty, self sacrifice, and working hard in order to support a harmonious family life" (Pollard 2000). These values follow traditional gender norms in the Solomon Islands (Jourdan 1985; 1987; Keesing 1996; UNESCO 1999; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Douglas 2003; McDougall 2003; Pollard 2000; 2003). Lisa, nineteen years old from Nggela states that a *homgel*: "it is a good thing, a *homgel* does housework, and she works in the garden and at home. A town girl is just too lazy" (Lisa, 19, Nggela). These values are evident in this quotation. Furthermore she notes that *taongel* do not like to do the work expected of them, and thus become criticized for being lazy.

Because a *homgel* is associated with traditional gender norms, a *homgel* can also be criticized by *taongel* as being *lokol* (provincial or unsophisticated). Donner points out that:

There is a Pijin word, *lokolo*, derived from the English word "local," which describes a kind of provincialism or lack of sophistication. A person who fumbles with technology or is unfamiliar with current fashions may be derided as *lokolo*. Although most often used jokingly, the term reflects a real concern with the modern and sophisticated. People, especially women, who have been raised on Sikaiana are sometimes teased for being to *lokolo*, that is, for being unsophisticated about modern practices (Donner 2002:30).

Although Donner speaks of Sikaiana, the term *lokol* continues to be used rather than *lokolo*. Consequently, in Honiara young urban migrant women do not want to appear *lokol*, nor does one want to surpass or look exceptional amongst their peers. Thus they carefully follow fashion and

mediate *kastom* rules to deter teasing, criticism and moral attacks (Jourdan 1996).

Young urban migrant women would rather admit to being a *homgel*; as someone who is situated within the urban world, traversing a fashion life and the demands and expectations of the local or rural world. These two social categories can create significant stress on young urban migrant women since they can be criticized by other urban and rural women of different generations and class backgrounds, as well by their own relatives at home, jeopardising not just their own moral probity, but their families as well (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Pollard 2000; Stritecky 2001; Jourdan 2005).

### **7.3 Fraet**

Since the Tensions the threat of violence remains an undercurrent in town life. *Fraet* emerges as stresses increase between the familiar and the unfamiliar. In town for some young urban men, fear is a means of achieving ones objective, such as obtaining compensation payments through the threat of violence (Jourdan 1995; Berg 2000: 180). Men, especially for Polynesians and some groups from Malaita are supposed to show a lack of fear (Berg 2000). *Fraet* is a common social phenomenon amongst recent urban migrant's women's discourse. Not only is it a marker of women's sociality, but *fraet* also acts as a social mechanism for controlling young women and recent migrants in town. Consequently young urban migrant women are more readily subject to *fraet* in ways that can serve as markers of being a *taongel* or *homgel*. Strongly subscribing to *fraet* will keep urban migrant women from exploring the opportunities Honiara has to offer. But the stress upon *fraet* by urban migrant women themselves suggests that women's public social roles are somewhat tenuous in the urban setting. *Fraet* is not strictly an emotional feeling, but also a means of emplacement into urban discourse.

People who reside in Honiara speak of life in town before the Tensions as much more relaxed than it is today. Furthermore, continuous issues with land-use and land tenure between local Guadalcanal social groups and urban settlements have created a turbulent urban atmosphere

(UNESCAP 1996; Moore 2004; Fraenkel 2004). These issues restrict the movement of peri-urban and urban residents to specific tracts of land on Guadalcanal. For instance in 2007, buses with Honiara license plates could not travel east into CDC (Commonwealth Development Corporation) territory located twenty kilometres from Honiara for fear of reprisals by local people.<sup>36</sup>

*Fraet* and violence are real tensions that urban migrant women must contend with if they choose to settle in Honiara. Women can then be afraid of multiple things, the new hustle and bustle of the urban town, the diversity and strangeness of town and its residents, fear of sexual violence and losing moral standing, and fear of being viewed as backwards and unsophisticated. On one level *taongel* and *homgel* negotiate *fraet* in different manners. *Taongel* will be familiar with these restrictions while a *homgel*, recently coming from the provinces, may be unaware and limit her own movements because of *fraet*.

*Fraet* can also be a reaction to new social experiences. New urban migrants learn the politics of movement through their acquaintances. Women who have recently arrived were, at first, afraid of Honiara. They did not venture out alone and stayed mostly in the house. This is characteristic of a *homgel*. On the other hand *taongel* are already familiar with Honiara, and do not feel the same *fraet* of the urban world as recent migrant women. *Homgel* can transition into a *taongel* as they become familiar with town and their initial *fraet* dissipate. They are no longer as afraid because they know Honiara better. Nansi, a twenty-one year old women from the island of Choiseul, explains how she came to Honiara and describes her feelings.

My first time in Honiara was in 2000. I came with my brother. We came for a vacation to Malaita over Christmas. His wife is from Malaita, so we came to Honiara and then took a ship to Malaita. Honiara was nice. It was... It scared me. But now it is all right. This year, I came for school, my second time. It is ok. This time I came alone, and because I know where to go and know some places, I am free to move around and so I can stay here (Nansi 21, Choiseul).

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<sup>36</sup> CDC is the acronym for the Commonwealth Development Corporation located outside of Honiara and owned by an Oil Palm Company. It is located in Guadalcanal territory and employs labourers coming from all islands of the country, but mainly from Malaita.

Women speak of having *fraet* when they first come to town. *Fraet* keeps women from exploring town unless they have relatives or friends in other neighbourhoods and surrounding territories. In the following excerpt, Celi, nineteen years old from Makira-Ulawa, speaks about her experience and feelings upon first coming to Honiara.

So when I came I was afraid: 'like what is this.' I only stayed in the house. Yeah, one just stays in the house. So this year I came alone to Honiara. This time, it is a little bit, it's really nice! Yes. It's good because I know more places in town than the first time I came (Celi 19, Makira-Ulawa).

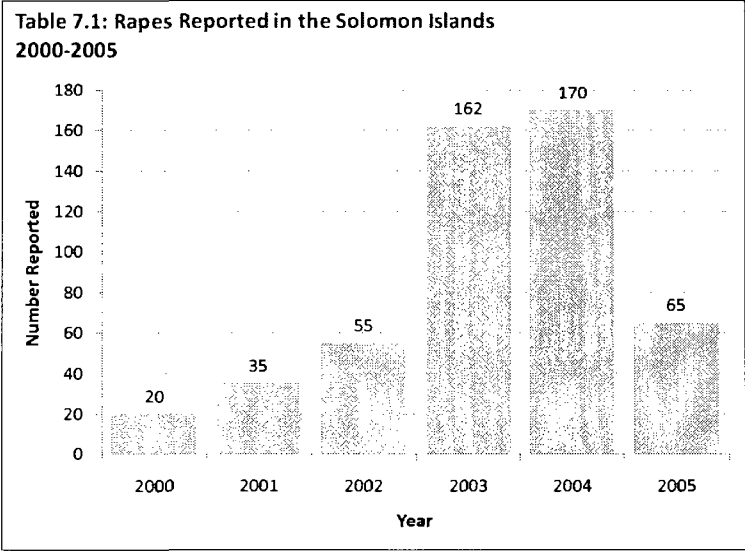
The term *Fraet* shapes the urban social world for both *taongel* and *homgel*. It keeps women quiet in the house, and leaves their morality intact as evident above. Sometimes when women speak of having *fraet* it is also a means of sequestering oneself from the public nature of town life. However different dimensions of *fraet* affect both *homgel* and *taongel* differently.

### **7.3.1 *Fraet* & Substance Abuse**

An undercurrent of violence and fear circulates under the veneer of excitement in Honiara. *Fraet* is not surprising considering that all residents face some real dangers in town. Drinking and drug use is a part of urban life, more openly visible in the streets after nightfall, and after Thursday and Friday when people finish depositing their pay at the banks. Groups of men roam the streets exuberant with drink and high from marijuana. Excessive drinking and drug use, in the opinion of some urban migrants, leads to violence and makes town sordid for people to move around, especially after nightfall (Goberman-Hill 1999; Stritecky 2001). This darker side of urban life is evident in Rachel's narrative regarding movement and personal safety. Because Rachel works late after dark, she does not feel safe in town. She is afraid to walk around alone.

I do not go walking around town too much. Because we who work until evening, go back to the house, we arrive at home at six or half past six around then. I am scared to go around at night. I am scared because of people drinking. What's more... Sometimes I walk with other people, sometimes with my friends. Sometimes I walk around by myself but I am scared when I walk around by myself. (Rachel 26, Choiseul)

Night time is an especially dangerous time for urban women to be outside alone. Urban women are vulnerable to rape, being seduced, or attacked by malevolent people and magical powers (Goberman-Hill 1999; Berg 2000; Stritecky 2000). Young urban migrant women must be vigilant and protect themselves from being raped. Unfortunately as more women are present in town, the number of rapes will likely increase which can be seen in Table 7.1. The rise in the incidence of rape may be the result of more women reporting the crime. And the situation can be further complicated in that women can be discouraged from reporting rape by their male relatives. Moreover women may feel ashamed in reporting rape, especially in a public setting, and the latter reasons may account for the sudden drop in the cases reported in 2005. However local understandings and stigma associated with rape may also impact the levels of rape cases reported, which is also further complicated by mistrust of the police force.



Source: Jourdan 2007b

Nightlife in Honiara is slowly increasing as well as the number of nightclubs and casinos, which are being built and rebuilt.<sup>37</sup> Nightclubs and casinos are a cause of urban friction for many residents and young women. The dominant view in Honiara is that nightclubs and casinos lead to licentious behaviour, promoting drinking, gambling, and even the sex trade (Goberman-Hill 1999). More

<sup>37</sup> Most casinos and nightclubs are owned by Chinese businessmen. During the 2006 riots, groups of young males went on a rampage against the Chinese community and destroyed many properties. Prime targets were the nightclubs and casinos.

dramatically, murders and rapes are associated with these establishments in Honiara (Kauhue 2008). The media notes that there is increasing public pressure to close such establishments (Solomon Star Sept 11 2007: 7). The government is also taking notice of the crime rates and alcohol consumption surrounding nightclubs in Honiara (Solomon Star Sept 3 2008). These types of incidences make Honiara unsafe at night. Although these types of dangers are on the increase, they do not stop *taongel* from frequenting nightclubs and going out at night (Gooberman-Hill 1999; Stritecky 2001). And some *taongel* enjoy going out at night. These *taongel* are at greater risk of being raped if they are out late at night than during the day. Women only nightclubs, such as Sundowners, have appeared and are an excellent venue for women to enjoy a safe night out.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, *homgel* are more constrained by *fraet* and morality, and will stay quiet at home. To avoid the shame of a possible rape and sexual attention, family and women place social controls upon their own movements (Gooberman-Hill 1999).

Overwhelmingly the majority of urban women of all ages do not like to walk alone (Jourdan 1987; 2005; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Stritecky 2001). Most women prefer to be home by dark (six o'clock in the evening). Young girls often will be seen walking the streets together holding hands rather than alone. Celi, describes her first visit to Honiara:

I was in Honiara in 2004. I came with my auntie. We came together, and now live together. The first time I came, I remember hearing about town at home. People told me that lots of things happen in town, lots, and lots of vehicles. Anytime I go to town or go out alone, I must go with someone and have them come with me. (Celi, 19, Makira-Ulawa).

Jourdan has also commented that *fraet* is used as a means of social control to restrict the excessive movement of young house girls around town (Jourdan 2005). Gooberman-Hill points out how families keep young house girls safe in town.

Householders say that [they] must ensure that younger relatives are controlled: especially in their movements around town, and who they associate with. Therefore, they feed, clothe and keep a close eye on the behaviour of house-girls, to make sure that the call of Honiara's night-spots and urban youth do not lead them astray (Gooberman-Hill 1999: 102).

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<sup>38</sup> see Gooberman-Hill 1999 for a detailed description

Families can attempt to control with whom and how long their daughters and *haosgel* associate with friends. They try to make sure that their daughters are in the house before four in the afternoon, helping their mothers with the household chores. Elizabeth, who is twenty-one and from Malaita, lives with her sister in town. Her urban family will not let her hang out around town or behave loosely. No matter the restrictions placed on young urban women, they enjoy spending time with their friends, including going out at night.

*Fraet* makes urban migrant women reliant upon their family and later on the friendships they make in town. Friendships are a powerful force that bring about social cohesion amongst urban young women from different provinces. It is also a means of escaping the limitations of *fraet* and the control of families. In some respects, *homgel* initially rely upon their families to mitigate *fraet*, while *taongel* use their friendships.

## **7.4 Loosening the Hold of *Fraet***

### **7.4.1 Language**

Through language and communicative behaviour women maintain *kastom* and their moral standing as a respectful woman. *Fraet* not only limits movement, but keeps urban migrant women from speaking to new and unfamiliar people. In particular, speaking to strange people may violate norms of acceptable behaviour. It can put a woman's status and reputation into question, not to mention becoming exposed to compensation demands by male *wantok* who may happen by and witness what they perceive to be a breach of *kastom*.

For women in terms of language it is important to follow *kastom*, even more so when the interlocutor is in a position of perceived authority. Most women, especially young women will not speak to men and boys in a public setting, especially anyone associated with authority or someone they do not know. When speaking with an outsider many women initially speak quietly and avoid eye contact.

Furthermore, urban migrant women's attitudes towards English demonstrate another level of *fraet*. Because of shyness and fear of outsiders, migrant women, unless highly educated, were extremely reluctant to speak English. Nearly all women expressed a desire to learn English, and some of them had a limited knowledge of it. In general, women learned English through the education system while others said they learned English in Honiara through listening to imported news programs such as ABC or the BBC News on the SIBC, from the government, and even from life in town. In some cases they were keen to learn English in order to read the bible themselves. Some women claimed English as their favourite language, while the majority of women favoured their *langgus* (ancestral language).

Amongst the women I spoke with, English is glorified, and remains the language of the elite and outsiders. By using English, *taongel* and members of the upper class demonstrate that they are well educated and comfortable in a modern lifestyle. However, *taongel* can further play with English in the formation of slang, mixing between English and Pijin words with their friends, as they similarly play with fashion and pop culture. *Homgel* on the other hand will use Pijin, which can be highly inflected by their provincial accent and grammatical structure (Jourdan, 1985; Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003).

Another dimension of *fraet* that *homgel* encounter is the sheer diversity of different languages present in town. As Celi, nineteen years old from Makira states: "In town in comparison to home it is a little bit different. Because I mean in town there are many more languages people speak in town. And at home, there is only one language" (Celi 19, Makira). However, *taongel* make attempts to learn new local languages, especially those of their friends and even languages from people from other provinces. Sometimes it can be a few words, other times some try to learn the language especially if their partner comes from the same island as their friend.

Nearly all women I interviewed were keen on learning new languages. The languages people wanted to learn depended upon one's circle of friends, those whom lived within proximity, and those which they liked the sound of. On average (n=12) women in my sample spoke four languages, and



could understand another two more languages. Although many urban women may use *langgus* with their *wantok*, some urban migrant prefer not to use *langgus* (local languages) in front of speakers of other language groups. As Tia from Malaita states below:

I like Pijin because, sorry, everybody uses Pijin. And I like Pijin. We, everyone in the Solomons should use it. Langgus is good but it can cause some problems between some people. Sometimes no matter you talk truthfully in *langgus* then some people won't know. They become jealous. They do not know what I was talking to you about or the conversation you all are having within a group of people. But for the sake of other people who do not know *langgus* they may misinterpret that you are talking about them or that we are gossiping about something which is inappropriate. That is what I do not like about *langgus* (Tia 34, Kwaio, Malaita).

Tia mentions that it is rude to use *langgus* in front of others. However, there are other women who have no qualms using *langgus* in front of non-native speakers when they encounter their *wantok* in public spaces (Stritecky 2001).

Tia uses *langgus* as a means of communicating with her daughter. At home they played a language game, in which Tia would say something in East Kwaio and then ask both of her children to guess the meaning. The eldest daughter knew some of the mother's language because they spent time in Malaita during the Tensions, where she learned it from other children. Ironically neither of the children spoke the father's language. Most mothers acknowledged that it was important for their children to learn their mother tongue (Jourdan 2007). This is particularly true of the middle-class. An interesting note is that some young women mentioned that they spoke *langgus* with their mother, but spoke Pijin with their dad. When this occurred the family lived outside of Honiara, and the father worked away from the family, on another island, in another Province, or abroad.

Pijin is viewed by migrant women as the national language, but also as a means of equalizing Solomon Islanders. Especially since nearly everyone in the country now knows this language, except some elder women in rural areas. Language politics emerge both in the public and private sphere. Through the learning of *langgus* urban children have a link to a rural home. However, whether one chooses to use *langgus* in front of non-native speakers, or to learn the languages of

their migrant friends, or to speak Pijin or English, creates numerous linguistic tensions in urban reality (See also Jourdan 1985, Angeli 2007). Urban migrant women are at least all bilingual (vernacular plus Pijin); many are multilingual (two vernaculars, plus Pijin and sometimes English). Acquiring new languages is also a means of acquiring social prestige, and gives one the ability to understand various languages while people speak with *wantoks*. In order to mitigate *fraet* and the family restrictions, *taongel* acquire new languages alongside new friends as a marker of urban life and sophistication.

## 7.5 Friendships

In Pijin the term *fren* literally means friend. However the term more frequently refers to a boyfriend or girlfriend, more so than a casual acquaintance. More commonly urban residents will extend kinship terms to close friends. As Cato Berg states:

In Pijin 'friend' (*fren*) is usually applied to those persons outside of the network of kinship. But I found that the uses of *fren* were far less frequent than the practice of extending kinship terms to everyone qualifying as *fren*. I take this to be another indication that the notions of nearness is far more adequately expressed in kinship terminology than through the meanings implicated in the term *fren*. The uses of *brata* is apt as an illustration of this. *Brata* is the most polysemic term in the Pijin kinship vocabulary and used according to perceived distance in the relationship in question. As such *brata* may refer to the "real brother" of the person. It may then be extended to include both first cousins and "cousins" of ego according to kinship structure in his vernacular language. A further extension takes us beyond the realm of kinship and into friendship. *Brata* is used to designate close friends as a honorific term and indicates sentiments and affection in the relation. Then the usages of *brata* as "friendly" becomes obvious. It is not far from using *brata* regarding friends to use it in a "friendly" manner. This was particularly evident among speakers' of Rennell and Bellona. I seldom heard them refer to members of own ethnic category as *fren*. Even when referring to people who are usually called *wantok* they would use *brata*. (Berg 2000: 109)

However this is true for both terms *brata* and *sista*. Friendships are essential for urban migrant women since they help to combat boredom, loneliness, and the hardships of urban life, especially for *taongel*. Friendships are equitable to a form of urban sisterhood. Friendships are strong and young female friends can spend the night in each other's house because it is difficult to get around late at night. Elizabeth, twenty-one years old from Kwara'ae explains that she goes out with her friends from Lungga and Kukum (two neighbourhoods on the eastern side of Honiara, see diagrams in chapter three). She spends the night at her friends' homes, joking and talking about their boyfriends.

I have one friend in Lungga, sometimes I can go sleep over with her and another friend in Kukum whom I spend time with as well. I will tell my family in the house that I will go to my friends and they say ok you can go to your friends. If I all the time go out around town too much, they will stop me from going out. They will say: 'you stay here, you do not go all about.' But if I say that I will go out with my girlfriend they say: 'ok go, you go.'

The two of us will go out and we will talk and joke about her boyfriend. At night we sleep and talk to amuse ourselves and make jokes. We will get together and sometimes she says: 'eh, my boyfriend.' And then we talk about him, if they have a fight or something like that. That is what she will tell me. We will go sleep and talk together about their fight she had with her boyfriend. (Elizabeth 21, Kwara'ae, Malaita)

As a *taongel*, Elizabeth is able to escape the constraints of her family, by having friends in different parts of Honiara. Young urban women who migrate as students enjoy relatively more freedom and fewer restrictions than they may experience in the rural settings. Alice from Malaita was a nursing student at SICHE and described that she was isolated and bored at home.

At home you just stay in your own village and you can't go anywhere. If you go anywhere you just go to church, go to play a game or sport, or watch a drama. Anything like that. But most of the time we just stay at home alone (Alice: 24 Malaita).

She enjoys town much more than home, because she can visit her friends and see new parts of Honiara. Alice could not move around as easily in her village as in town. On the other hand, *homgel* are isolated because they stay at home. Without friends, a *homgel* is likely to experience greater restrictions on her movements and isolation, rather than a *taongel* who has more freedom. *Taongel* have friends beyond one's family relatives and so have a means of escaping boredom of staying at home. *Taongel* also have greater freedom in regards to following urban culture: such as fashion and popular culture.

## **7.6 Fashion and Pop Culture**

Honiara is a place of global flows as movies and television serials are available in Chinatown: shops are selling the latest Hollywood blockbusters, Hong Kong Kung Fu movies, and African television serials. Popular culture remains an urban phenomenon, a system of shared meanings detached from ethnic and generational boundaries. Popular culture holds a neutral and generic status, giving urban youth creative autonomy in carving out and shaping an urban social world (Jourdan 1995). Jourdan further points out that popular urban culture is generated locally and imported from outside

sources; including, recreational activities, advertising and marches, restaurants and fast food, style of dress and hair, social dances and concerts, radio and cell phones, music and videos, and as well slang and body language (Jourdan 1995 204-5). In the afternoons, video stores in Chinatown can be filled with young students perusing the video and music collections after school.

Students concerned with fashion use popular media at their disposal for creating it, incorporating global influences and local sources such as listening to various radio stations and singing to local and foreign top music hits. For example, in Honiara there are over half a dozen radio stations (Paoa FM, Zed FM, *Wantok*, Christian Radio, along with the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation SIBC) and a few newspapers. Recently, a television news program called One News was introduced. One News gives local news at seven in the morning and at nine in the evening. They may show government debates, weather, business reports, local stories, along with music videos in Pijin and English.

In talking with young urban migrant women, it became clear that they favoured different radio stations, such as *Wantok* FM, Zed FM, Paoa FM for the latest hits. They also preferred listening to a variety of styles of music, including local and foreign pop hits, country music, and even gospel music. For instance, local bands such as Wantoks and Nate appeared with North American pop stars such as Rihanna and Nelly Furtado on radio countdown programs. The lyrics to local pop music can be in numerous languages, including English, Pijin, and *langgus* all within a single song. Considering the sheer plurality of local music, I have often witnessed women singing local pop music and more traditional songs while working at home and doing chores. Urban migrant women greatly enjoy the variety of music stations open to them in Honiara. And they are not just consumers of popular culture, but also taking a more public presence in pop culture. In 2007, a group of female pop singers called Sisiva (group of four girls who sang in Isabel), could be heard on the local radio stations. They produced a music video and enjoyed a measure of success. Thus *taongel* are also shaping urban popular culture. However it must be mentioned that amongst young *taongel* musical tastes vary. *Taongel* and *homgel* prefer different musical styles, watching different

videos such as High School Musical, and listening to multiple radio stations, when and if access can be arranged.

Music videos have been recently introduced into the Solomon Islands, and enjoy a popular audience amongst middle-class children and wives, known as One News *singsing* (song or music videos).<sup>39</sup> However watching a *displei* (Television) is another marker of middle-class, and quite a few recent migrant women mentioned that they did not have access to a *displei* or watch a *kaset* (movie). On the other hand, *taongel*, were extremely keen to watch cassettes and learn about new technology, such as computers and the Internet.

Both urban men and women follow fashion and there are different types of fashions in Honiara. Some people follow *rasta* and will wear corn rolls in their hair and specific headwear, listen to island music and reggae (Jourdan 1995). Fashion in Honiara can be experimental and an overt marker of class. Urban women from the upper classes can be distinguished by their clean, neat, and sometimes imported clothes. Often urban professional women may choose to decorate their hair with hibiscus flowers and foreign bought jewellery.

*Taongel* can wear nicer and newer clothes than other town residents. Some *taongel* dress provocatively, wearing short skirts or trousers with a tight top. Other *taongel* wear modern fashions conservatively, with a skirt to the knees and a long and loose fitting shirt. *Taongel* may wear make-up, jewellery such as bracelets and earrings, trim their eyebrows or wear braids in their hair. And other *taongel* can also wear loose fitting trousers and can appear similar to a boy. The wearing of trousers by young urban women is a statement of independence and rebellion against *kastom* and being *lokol*. "[M]any people argue that woman and girls should not wear any sort of trousers. They say that this contradicts *kastom* norms that indicate that only men should wear trousers, because they over-emphasize a woman's shape and therefore sexuality" (Gooberman Hill 1999: 216). Trousers can be worn because they are comfortable. Thus the wearing of trousers is also a sign of

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<sup>39</sup> One News is a media group established in the Solomons in 2007

quiet resistance as well as a fashion statement of being a modern urban woman (Gooberman-Hill 1999: 215).

It can happen that young urban women take fashion to extremes. As in the case on August 29, 2007, as I reported it in my fieldnotes:

[O]n the way home, I noticed that women were talking and everyone was staring at something up ahead. It turns out that three girls were walking together and one girl [had] a g-string and her pants below her bum. ... [I]t really was such a strange event. Everyone was talking, people from across the street were shouting things, and even boys from the trucks were whooping at them. It was crazy. I kind of felt bad for the girl and then I kind of couldn't believe it either. Whether she was imitating something she saw or not [is impossible to determine]. (Fieldnotes book 3: Pg 17).

This girl's attire was extremely provocative by Solomon standards. The passage demonstrates how differently men and women react to urban fashion. Women reacted quietly and talked with their neighbour in hushed and disapproving voices. While men, some angry and others excited, shouted and hissed at the passing girls. The attention the group of young women attracted was not positive in nature. However, the young women were laughing at the attention and simply continued walking more mindful of their conversation than the drama ensuing around them.

Urban fashion does not always dramatically breach social propriety as in the case above. Lisa, attending Honiara Secondary High School, stated that doing fashion was particularly popular at school in that "staka fasin lo dere" lots of fashion is visible there (Lisa 19, Nggela). In terms of influences on fashion, she said that they followed their own ideas about what looked good but also used videos and magazines for inspiration. She suggests that there is a sense of play attached to fashion, and consequently the creation of new urban women.

Doing fashion is a sign of being modern but is also a sign of being a *taongel*. Young women's ability to be fashionable also depends upon financial resources, the restrictions placed on them by their families and their own intentions. *Taongel* are at the forefront in the promotion of popular culture and music and solidifying a public space. However, the freedoms that *taongel* have managed to wrestle away in the urban context are also constrained by values of modesty and social propriety

called *sem*—which is closely entwined with *fraet*.

## 7.7 Sem

Despite many urban women appearing ‘modern’ not all young urban migrant women are comfortable with urban trends. *Sem* is a cultural phenomenon affecting women in Honiara. It encompasses rules of propriety and improbity as well as norms of shyness and modesty. Appealing to *sem* maintains one’s moral standing, and complicates urban reality (Gooberman-Hill 1999). As *sem* becomes imbued with rural connections and *kastom*, urban migrant women use *sem* to juxtapose rural and urban values. There are some *taongel* who flout *kastom* and disdain appearing *lokol*, consequently they become targets of malicious gossip by neighbours and relatives for supposedly lacking *sem* (see Gooberman-Hill 1999: 215-6; Stritecky 2001). Although some *taongel* appear to lack *sem*, many urban migrant women are extremely sensitive to and aware of *sem*.

*Sem* keeps urban migrant women from completely adopting urban practices. Maintaining their rural ties takes the shape of different practices: attending the same church in Honiara as in their province, following *kastoms* from family relatives in Honiara that come from home, staying quiet, not talking to strangers, dressing modestly, working at home, and following traditional gender roles, as well as subscribing to *fraet* and *sem*.

*Homgel* are unlikely to view themselves as being modern. Claiming *sem* demonstrates not only modesty but also respect for *kastom*. The following dialogue with Alice, twenty-four years old from Malaita, and Sarah, twenty-one years old from the Western Province, demonstrates that *sem* is recognizable to people even when they are from different provinces. They demonstrate that *sem* inhabits both moral propriety and shyness. *Sem* provides a common reference point for women in the urban setting. This is most apparent in the attitudes of recent migrants towards wearing of trousers, commonly associated as an urban practice

Dialogue 7.2: Alice 24, Malaita and Sarah, 21, Western Province

A: ehh, I always, I always wear a skirt when I go to town, I must wear a skirt, when I stay in the house, I wear trousers.

S: Me too. I do the same too.

A: Because I feel Ashamed

S: Me too, We are the same, We do exactly the same.

A: But before I looked to local Anyway with trousers a skirt must go on top, must cover up. So this time if I wear trousers they must be a little bit long.

Q: Short trousers are no good?

A: eh, that one I would be ashamed even though you are inside the corridor I will be afraid to go outside in those. So I have to wrap a towel around

Q: But it's just girls, why are ashamed with other girls?

A: Because I am afraid if they look at my body, so I am afraid.

Alice displays respect for her body and shyness in that she does not want other girls looking at her. On the other hand, she was sensitive of appearing *lokol* (rural, unsophisticated, and backwards) by wearing the wrong clothes. Alice does not want to appear ignorant to her acquaintances. Therefore she may wear trousers around the dorm and campus. But if she goes into town she will wear a skirt. Many recent migrant women prefer to follow *kastom*, even when they are in town. They will thus redefine *kastom* practices in town to maintain a sense of congruity with home especially on public observation. Regardless of their province of origin women migrants employ *folom kastom* (follow customary rules) in the same manner. Many young recent migrant women coming to Honiara comment that *kastom* relates to the wearing of trousers. Trousers in Honiara, for the most part for both young men and women are surfing shorts that fall below the knee. The wearing of pants signifies an adoption of urban culture and values when worn in public. Mothers and older women will more likely wear skirts in a public setting, but may wear trousers at home. However, nearly all migrant women claimed, if they attend formal ceremonies, travel back home to the village, go for prayer or to church, or even go into town, they will almost certainly wear skirts.

*Sem* can also relate back to *kastom* through Christian values as well as signs of respect. *Sem* is a means of protecting oneself from critique in the public space. *Sem* can affect urban migrant differently. As *sem* is a means of controlling young women's moral standing and family name and is clearly linked to a means of regulating the behaviour of single young urban women. Thus women must avoid bringing shame upon one's family. Nonetheless some young urban migrant women may prefer not to follow church teachings and focus their energies on acquiring higher level education. They are able to loosen the concept of *sem*, which keeps them from taking part in the



urban public space, such as seeking formal employment or speaking to new people.

*Sem* has multiple layers of meaning. A more rigid form of *sem* is held on to by *homgel*, while *taongel* attempt to pluralize restrictions and the rigidity of *sem*, which stems from religious and conservative expectations. *Homgel* can use *sem* in retaining their rural knowledge and rules of comportment, while *taongel* use *sem* to curtail extreme behaviour such as in the case of urban fashion mentioned earlier in this chapter. But, one of the easiest means of negotiating the restrictive dimensions of *sem* and *kastom* is through being or becoming educated. Unfortunately, the language of morality serves to pass judgment, constrict, and ultimately divide urban migrant women amongst themselves.

### **7.8 Refining Taongel**

*Taongel* are refined as they mitigate the ramifications of *fraet* and *sem* in the urban context. As they do this they garner some freedoms making them special and a source of intrigue and target of jealousy. Richard Feinberg describes "the city girl, as one who is literate, sophisticated, intelligent, and outgoing (Feinberg 2002: 53). He goes on to explain that a city girl has assimilated western values of independence (53). She associates with her own friends, attends concerts, dances, and shows independently, wearing pants and shorts. *Taongel* as a marker of western values is a problematic interpretation; rather they are markers of an urban creolized space contextualized in Honiara which is being shaped and created by Honiarans and urban migrant women themselves.

Education is becoming a marker of class, especially in Honiara, (see Jourdan 1985; 2004; 1995; Keesing 1996; Gooberman-Hill 1999; Watson-Gegeo 2004). Pollard reminds us that: "Modern education is targeted not at the improvement of village life but at future employment in towns" (Pollard 2000: 49). The valorization of education is problematic considering that accessibility to education is highly gendered biased, restricted by financial resources, and finally dependent upon personal success on examinations (see chapter three). Valorizing education is a means of changing one's own and family's status, not only in Honiara but in the rural setting as well.

However if women drop out of school or are pulled out they do not have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Hindering women's development, hinders family development and subsequently national development in the future. Furthermore, as large segments of the population are uneducated, they may be excluded from economic prosperity, which will further perpetuate class antagonisms, resentments, and social fragmentation across age groups, classes, and sexes.

Women have a lower literacy rate in the country (57% (SISO 1999) and more likely to drop out of school or be pulled out. Quite recently, some young urban migrant women who did not come to Honiara as students have little or no education. These women may not have even passed Class Three of primary school, and their only option for survival in Honiara is to marry and be dependent on their husband, or to work for small wages as a *haosgel* or a sales clerk. Uneducated urban migrant women feel that because of their lack of education they do not have the status to discuss politics with their husbands or those they view as of having higher status. Urban migrant women may have less confidence than those who are educated in voicing their opinion. Thus in this instance urban migrant women become hindered by *sem* as they impose the discourse upon themselves.

Education levels are further stratified across age. Pollard notes that women in the Waisisi village on Malaita expressed alienation from their children, who attend school and become educated in modern practices and knowledge, while their mothers are not (Pollard 2000: 49-50). As their own children head to school, these women find that they are not able to respond to their children's needs, such as helping them with their homework, reading notices that come home from school, and even their children's progress reports. Education for them, even simply being able to read and write, becomes an issue of family life and wellbeing. Consequently this distance between age and education levels also creates tensions between older and younger generations as they are alienated from understanding each other's worlds. Some urban migrant women recognize this gap created by a lack of education between their children.

To cope with this situation, urban migrant women attempt to make sure that their children attend school, and seek opportunities to develop some basic literacy skills. That was the case of the women who came to the literacy classes. For many urban women, education levels become a measure of self worth and *sem*. Ruth, forty-three years old from Temotu, states: "I think school is better for making one to know something. If women do not have schooling then it is hard for knowing what to do with oneself. Because one cannot go around and do things" (Ruth 43 Temotu). She believes that education is part of the identity of a modern woman, because without education a person is aimless and lost. However at the end she states that education is a form of independence. Thus urban women migrants have the means of improving their circumstances while spending time in Honiara. Many of them want the government to help bolster the standard of living for rural women through providing education and access to information. *Homgel* may lack such freedoms especially if they live in the rural settings or do not pursue education opportunities, or are denied the possibility, thus they may not be able to improve their future prospects.

Young urban migrant women are susceptible to the dreams and promise of a modern life epitomized by the urban world. Unfortunately, the town is a space from which urban migrants can be excluded from through high unemployment rates and social restrictions placed upon them by their families. Urban migrant women transition into *taongel* as they negotiate the various facets of a *taongel* persona. The immoral dimensions of a *taongel* are dramatic and a means of allowing young urban migrant the ability to negotiate the urban world. However, if they disregard the urban social world, they can be called a *homgel* or be viewed as *lokol* and unsophisticated. Young people become categorized as *masta liu* if they fall out of normalized or acceptable social roles. *Taongel* embody both negative and positive dimensions of town life. They also contrast with the rural setting.

Urban migrant women are caught negotiating the promise of the urban world and the demands and constraints of their rural homes. Consequently urban migrant women become highly ambivalent about town life in general. Despite the ambivalence there is also a great deal of fluidity and plurality.

To bridge the restraints of *fraet* urban women migrants begin to develop friendship networks under the guise of sisterhood. As such friendships are a means of safely escaping the social controls imposed by family. Buchanan-Aruwafu et al note that the “boundaries between ... different identities become difficult for some young people to maintain and this caused conflict, personally, with their families or in the wider society, as they juggled *kastom* and religious moral standards that they could not or did not live up to” (Buchanan-Aruwafu et al. 2003: 231). This is also similar with migrant women, especially when the boundaries of a modern life are curtailed by *sem*, resulting in ambivalence to urban life. And young urban migrant women's concerns can be easily overlooked if urban migrant are overly silent.

## **Conclusion: Wan Big Hapi Famili**

This thesis has attempted to document the particularities and tensions that migrant women face when coming and living in town. But ambivalence is also a reaction and formulated through indeterminacy in the social world, and in the case of urban migration indeterminacy in the urban town. No longer is ambivalence a reaction for past colonial hegemonies, which do still linger in contexts, but now a reaction to urban cosmopolitan ideals (Gmelch & Zenneer 2002).

Ostensibly, the naming/classifying function of language has the prevention of ambivalence as its purpose. Performance is measured by the neatness of the divisions between classes, the precision of their definitional boundaries, and the unambiguity with which objects may be allocated to classes. And yet the application of such criteria, and the very activity whose progress they are to monitor, are the ultimate sources of ambivalence and the reasons why ambivalence is unlikely ever to become truly extinct, whatever the amount and the ardour of the structuring/ordering effort (Bauman 1991: 2).

In the last chapter, with the category of *taongel*, we can see this precise dilemma being played out. The reformulation of *kastom* in the urban setting sets up the intertwining and perpetual dynamics of categorization and recategorization of the social world. Urban migrant women face ambivalence when their own individual realities come to interfere with wider kin or social obligations and moral discourse. Ambivalence also emerges out of the fractured dream of idealism: not being able to support one's family due to the limited job market in town, their lack of education, the shortage of urban housing, the necessity of money for survival in town, and the boredom from being isolated from their family. Not all urban migrant experience ambivalence to the same extent. Urban migrant women find Honiara a place of excitement, a reprieve from arduous labour in the garden, all the while curtailed by values of social obligation and rootedness.

Despite women being associated with creating harmony and peace, the urban social world is not a harmonious place. Family plays a central role in the shaping of women's migration patterns and the social world. Individual agency is played out within family networks. Migrating from the rural setting women distance themselves from traditional gender constructs, such as working in the garden, staying at home, and following *kastom*. Instead they are working, seeking education, and reshaping *kastom* in the urban settings, not only for the benefit of themselves but their entire

families as well. These new realities cause urban ambivalence as rural and urban expectations intersect.

Women's migration is beginning to be explored. Looking back to the Labour Trade and the nature of the economy in the Solomons, men principally have been the financial earners for families along with holding the ability to raise one's social standing. An unprecedented change is taking place in the Solomons and women are gaining and demanding equal potential not only in sustaining their family's social standing, but also in acquiring wealth and a measure of social prestige themselves. This is evident as young girls are sent to Honiara to improve their education, or to seek a new life and employment, and marriage prospects. And a new dimension is taking shape in the culture of migration in the Solomons.

For women, a rural identity is linked to the garden and hard work, where one's position is clearly located in relation to the family and village. Urban life complicates this set of relationships and prioritizes financial and material success. Women are subject to *kastom*, and their behaviours are especially subject to compensation demands. This fear of compensation in town, for women migrants, internalizes behaviour that is associated with rural life, and is transformed into the urban context through *sem* and *fraet*. *Fraet* and *sem* can restrict mobility and attire, but can take on new meanings in the urban setting. As Beti said, her dad prefers her to wear trousers in town as it will protect her; whereas in the village she must wear a skirt as a sign of modesty and to show respect to *kastom* and the village leader.

The latter half of this thesis presents the roles urban migrant women occupy in town. These roles have historical antecedents, but have also taken on a distinctive shape. Town is viewed as place that is immoral and violates *kastom*.

[P]eople feel that life in towns can lead to immorality and social disintegration. The excitement of town life is often described as corroding traditional practices, including knowledge about indigenous traditions, sexual propriety, obedience toward elders, and willingness to work (Donner 2002: 31).

This leads to women becoming ambivalent about the urban setting. Town life is confusing for people because of the contradictions between opportunity and scarcity, between the rural and urban

worlds, men and women, young people and elders. Whereas *kastom* may have akin to knowledge in some settings, it has now also become a means of critiquing the urban world (Mitchell 2004: 369).

Urban ambivalence is created through residence in Honiara, and the attempt to mitigate the disappointments with the urban environment, such as realizing the pervasiveness of competition, lack of employment opportunities, difficulty in finding housing and spouses, the reworking of *kastom*, and alienation from the rural world. Nostalgia creates a stable and secure rural setting. And ambivalence becomes a means of resistance to the moral corruption of the urban town.

These tensions serve to cause further problems and crystallize class structure between long time and recent residents. Writing about town life in Papua New Guinea, Gewertz and Errington say that:

While it is true that many in the town and in the villages came to view the other as more backward or less grounded, their lives remained both mutually affecting and affected. Their lives were still influencing each other and were still influenced by the same deeply penetrating global forces, primarily those of cosmopolitanism, Christianity and class (Gewertz & Errington 2004: 274).

Urban life in Honiara, for some people is slowly becoming the only life they know of and will continue to be in contrast to the majority of the population for Solomon Islanders. Town life creates tension because of the uncertainty and the reformulating of sociality. These tensions emerge across various levels of social life between people and their social reality and other people. As urban migrant women use *kastom* to ground themselves in town, town life reminds urban migrant women that new social pressures need to be addressed if one is to survive.

The formal economic sector implemented through the colonial era still continues and is gaining in importance for not just urban but rural people as well. Not all urban migrants choose to stay in Honiara. Many migrant women, in particular those unmarried, continue to hold social and economic obligations to their families at home. Students speak of heading home and helping their home village by implementing what they learned or sending remittances back to their families. Women migrants remain connected and vital contributors to their families as their brothers since they

contribute to the wellbeing and success to their family. As young women take up the discourse of development, they continue to shape and negotiate their urban and rural realities, since neither can be completely abandoned. Urban sensibilities are changing as they are perched upon the hub between the rest of the country, the Pacific, the world, and future.

### ***Directions for Future Research***

The emergence of women migrants is increasing in the Pacific especially as economic networks continue to expand. The urban identity is not rooted in standard notions of place and land, because these are located in the rural world. One shapes urban identity through the relationships with new friends, alongside *wantok*. For young women, social networks are essential for the successful negotiation of an urban life. As in the case of house girls and the restrictions that women face, loneliness and despair will also manifest in poor health and even higher rates of suicide. Women and urban migrants are the backbone of the nation. They are the ones raising the future generation.

There are new questions that this research has raised. More importantly it is necessary to uncover a more detailed pattern of movement in the Solomons amongst women at the national and international level, captured in statistics. Who is migrating to Honiara, from where, at what age, and for what purpose? How is family both in the rural and urban settings changing as a result of women's movements?

On a more general level within Solomon Island society, how is divorce perceived in the urban and rural settings? Is there a rise in single mother or single parent families? Is women's jealousy a marker of class tensions, such as between elite women and middle-class matrons? Or does it stem from the lack of access to resources necessary for life in town? Could family restrictions on young women be one of the causes for the higher incidence of suicide? As women take on more formal employment are they also likely to seek international migration opportunities?





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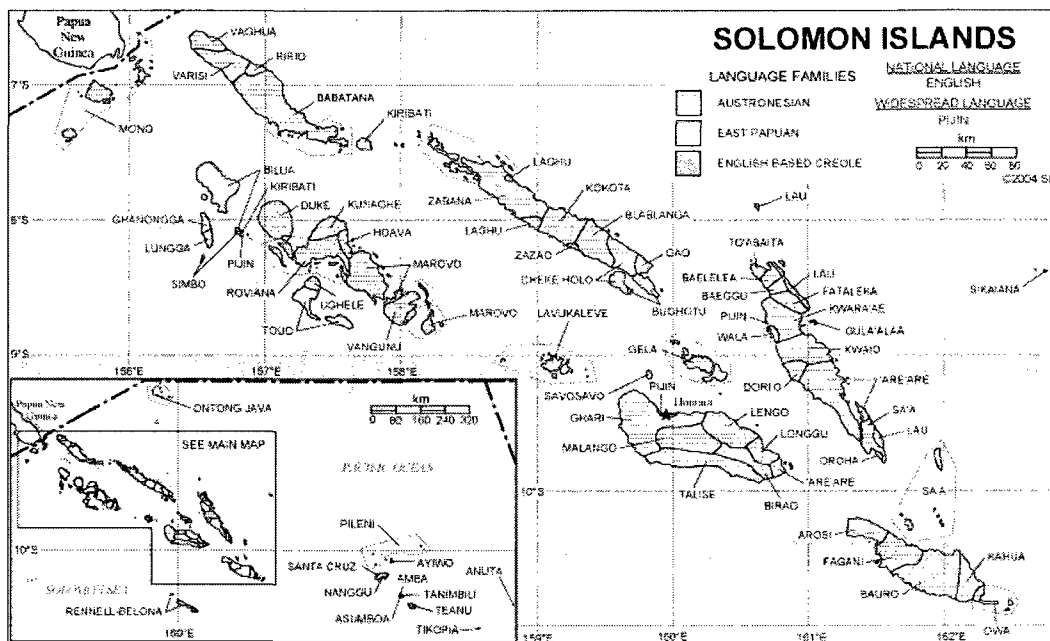
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix I: Map of the Solomon Islands



Courtesy: SIL Ethnologue, website



## ***Appendix II: SINCW: Media Statement***

### **Solomon Islands National Council of Women: Media Statement on Women's Safety in Honiara**

SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN, PO .BOX 1830

HONIARA TELEPHONE: 27529 EMAIL: [sincw@solomon.com.sb](mailto:sincw@solomon.com.sb)

#### **Media Statement:**

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women is concerned about the escalation of rape cases among its women population in this country especially in and around Honiara. The Council is appealing to women and young girls to ensure that they are safe if they are out at night or in the early hours of the morning.

Isolated areas around some of the night clubs are havens for criminal activities to take place. These are places where women and young girls can often be sexually violated and brutally attacked. It is most frightening because such violent and brutal attacks that happen to women and young girls often also happen so close to home.

“Whilst it is important that women act to keep themselves safe, it is indeed a sad reflection on society that this is even necessary in the first place. Every woman has the right to feel safe in public places and should not have to feel threatened or that she has to keep herself safe.”

Women and young girls have become targets of rape by men perpetrators who have no sense of respect for cultural values and for humanity. These are criminals who have formed as Gangsters whose purpose only is to carry out criminal activities such as rape, murder and burglary in suburbs of Honiara.

These evil activities can also generate remorse and hatred among different Island groups living in Honiara and the settlements. The Council appeals to relevant authorities such as the Government, Police and Leaders within communities to find better ways to effectively address these issues or else it will destroy the process to building peaceful relations within many diverse communities in Honiara.

There is need to strengthen Community Policing initiatives in areas where there are problems especially on weekends and near nightclubs would help the communities to work with the police to make their areas safe and this could attract more people to be part of community policing. People in the community that are still not part of the Community Policing will become so disturbed at what they see coming out of those nightclubs that they themselves will campaign the relevant authorities to get them shut down like the Twin Towers one at Town ground.

Women in Honiara, we do need to have the capacity to speak out effectively and widely when terrible things happen, but also to work together in the interim to make sure that there are active campaigns in place in our neighborhoods to combat

growing gang problems and drinking, and the rapes and other violence that erupt from the increase in alcohol abuse, kwaso, and marijuana use.

Honiara city has a critical and a very serious issue on its hands and it must find effective ways of addressing it and to make this city much safer for its women population. Women and young girls have the rights to live in an environment that is free from any form of violence.

Mean while the Solomon Islands National Council of Women has commended the work of the Solomon Islands Police Force under the leadership of the Deputy Police Commissioner Mr. Peter Marshal for the closing down of the Twin Tower Night Club at Town ground. This is a step forward and it should give a clear and a strong message to people who are operating illegally as night club owners that such operation cannot be tolerated.

The Solomon Islands National Council of Women thanked organizations such as SPC Solomon Islands and Christian Care Centre for their concern by supporting the Council in making such a statement.

Ella Kauhue

General Secretary

END:

## **APPENDIX III: Interview Guide**

### **Research Questions (English):**

#### Life History

1. What is your name?
2. Can you spell your first & last name for me?
3. Where are you from (Island, Province, Village)?
4. When were you born? (month, day, year—estimate ok)
5. How old are you now?
6. How many brothers & sisters do you have?
7. Are you the oldest/youngest/middle?
8. Where is the rest of your family?
9. Where did you grown up?
10. Did you go to school? What level did you obtain (Form/Standard)
11. Where did you go to school?
12. Do you work for money, and what job, where?
13. Do you stay at home and work? Do you have a garden? How much time do you work in the garden?
14. Do you buy food in the market? What kind of food do you buy?
15. Do you grow your own food? What foods do you normally grow?
16. What do you eat normally? For breakfast, lunch, and dinner? How long have you lived in Honiara?
17. What is your language?
18. What is your husband's/partners language?
19. What language do you speak together?
20. Do you talk with your husband's/partner's wantok? If so what language do you use?
21. Do you speak p=Pijin at home?
22. When did you learn Pijin?
23. Do you speak Pijin with you brothers & Sisters?
24. Do the children speak your/husbands (partner's) language? When, and how well? Can they understand, can they reply? Or do they just know some words?
25. How often do you use Pijin?: All the day, only when going out, church,...
26. What language do you use in church?
27. Do you listen to the radio/watch TV/ watch movies? What language do you watch them in?
28. Can you read and write in Pijin, English, and other?
29. What do you think is the nicest language you know?
30. How many languages do you know?
31. If you could chose one language as the national language which would it is?
32. What language do you like speaking best?
33. Does it matter the gender of the child in regards to the language they learn, do daughters learn the language of the mother, and do boys learn the language of the father?
34. What languages do the children learn in school?
35. Do you help them with their homework?
36. How many people do you talk to in one day (number)
37. Is Pijin a real language? Does everyone in the Solomons speak Pijin? Should they?
38. Should schools teach their classes in Pijin?
39. Should the church sermons be filly in Pijin?
40. Do you read the newspaper?
41. Where do you live in Honiara? What district?
42. Do you like living in Honiara? Or do you like Honiara?
43. Where in Honiara do you want to live? Where would you prefer to live in Honiara?
44. How long have you been as this location?
45. What do you like about Honiara & Dislike?
46. How long do you plan to stay in the town?
47. How does Honiara compare with your home town? How is it different?

48. What church do you belong to?
49. Where do you go to church? Have things gotten better for you in the Solomons since the crisis? In what way/Why?
50. Who are you closest with? Friends, Family?
51. Whom do you wish you could talk to more?
52. If you could go anywhere in the world where would you go?
53. Have you been to other islands? Countries?
54. Would you want to go back to school?
55. On what do you spend most of your money?
56. Do you make enough money for your family (immediate)?
57. How much do you spend on your wantoks?