

## **Comment on ‘Our Futures’**

**Teena Brown Pulu**

*What do you consider to be the major issues and trends facing New Zealand society in your area of expertise?*

I am an anthropologist specialising in Tongan ethnography; in particular, how Tonga – the ancestral homeland – sustains kinship networks and material exchanges with its overseas diaspora in New Zealand, Australia and the United States. I am currently teaching in an area studies programme at AUT University – Pacific and indigenous development – and my publications/courses focus on change and adaptation in Pacific Island states; that is, how the South Pacific sub-region is transforming to become integrated economically and Asian-oriented in geo-politics as well as Melanesian-led, i.e. Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).

In my field of expertise, areas of transformation facing New Zealand society which relate to the ‘Our futures’ project definition are first, the changing nature of migration and remittance exchanges for Pacific peoples and second, the hybridisation of ethnic and cultural identity.

For my homeland state, the Kingdom of Tonga, country-to-country relations with New Zealand have reached a low-point due to what the Government of Tonga perceives to be New Zealand’s colonial attitude towards politically and economically controlling South Pacific states. Although Tonga has re-focused on its ‘Look to the East’ foreign policy by forging closer economic and diplomatic ties to the People’s Republic of China, it maintains an interest in New Zealand’s immigration policy, particularly in temporary work visas. Next to the RSE scheme of which Tonga is a contributing country, the post-earthquake reconstruction of Christchurch is a migrant labour market that the Tongan government sees it can infiltrate with the provision of trades-people and construction hands. A new initiative the Tongan government had been advised to trial is to employ social workers to attend to the pastoral needs of RSE workers. The intention is for social workers to also be employed in the programme being developed for migrant labourers to Christchurch. Pressure on the government to adequately support temporary workers on country-to-country schemes has triggered a move to look at how social issues might be prevented such as overstaying, excessive alcohol use, the inability to save money to return home with, and low remittances.

Outward migration from Tonga is now experienced with an increasing impermanence, temporality and employment uncertainty. In relation to this, return migration and remittances to Tonga have decreased since the global economic downturn.

The second factor affecting New Zealand society and its links to South Pacific states is the hybridisation of ethnicity and culture among the Pacific peoples population. Remittances from Auckland especially to the Pacific Islands are continually driven by migrants. Auckland is renowned as the largest remitter compared to Pacific settlements in Australia and the USA because of its Pacific population density. However, with the New Zealand born Pacific population becoming more hybrid or ethnically mixed in that younger generations are more commonly claiming more than one ethnic identity, a real concern exists in homeland states that remittances, kinship connections, and travel to the Pacific Islands are diminishing and this pattern will increase with future generations. South Pacific states of Polynesia depend on their overseas communities for tourism revenue and it is in fact ex-patriates and overseas born Pacific peoples who make up the majority of tourists.

Although current studies emphasise the transnational condition of Pacific populations in diaspora, the real trend is that younger generations of Pacific peoples are not travelling to the Pacific Islands, their ancestral homelands, but to Pacific Rim countries, particularly Australia and the USA where their relatives and friends have resettled for employment and lifestyle opportunities.

*What are your expectations of where you think the census might have significance for how we should understand Pacific development in New Zealand?*

I expect the census to show an increasing tendency for Pacific peoples to identify with more than one ethnicity, and that the New Zealand born population will have increased due to natural birth rates more than migration. An area that I am interested in gathering accurate data on is the increase of intergeneration birth rates in New Zealand. By this, I mean what do the numbers look like for second and third generation Tongans born in New Zealand? I am from the first generation born to migrant parents in the late 1960s but there are two generations down from me in my immediate family who were born here too.

Another pattern I expect the census to show is an increase in temporary migration from the Pacific. What I would like to know specifically is the numbers of migrants on temporary work visas who have returned to New Zealand more than once for employment over the past five years. Also, is there is a tendency for this group to settle in New Zealand permanently, or are they satisfied with temporary work to supplement their households in Tonga?

*What do you make of the overall concept of the project?*

The overall concept of the project is comprehensive and covers a wide range of approaches to understanding what the 2013 census figures mean in day-to-day life. The two areas that interested me which related directly to my field of Tongan ethnography were, *The Auckland Effect* and *Values*. Ideas and discussions have been exchanged at Tongan government and community levels to target more out of Auckland employment for temporary workers from Tonga, and the Tongan communities of Christchurch and Dunedin have responded positively to this proposal. In terms of changing values among Tongan migrants on temporary work visas as well as the permanent settlements of Tongans in Auckland, this is an area of research that is significant to understanding ourselves. Conceptualising who we are and how we identify Tongan values and practices

in the 21st century is relevant to inclusive social and economic systems that tolerate difference and diversity within our communities in New Zealand and the homeland state.