

The Risks and Uncertainties of Migration: an Exploration of Recent Trends amongst the Wosera Abelam of Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on ongoing research on migration and circulation between the Wosera sub-district, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, and the island province of West New Britain. We examine the pressures contributing to increased family migration and longer-term, possibly permanent, migration from the Wosera. While rising resource/population pressure and stricter forms of land tenure arrangements are altering patterns of out-migration, *the situation for long-term and temporary migrants in West New Britain is becoming less certain as land shortages begin to limit opportunities for further settlement and indigenous landowners become less tolerant of migrants from other provinces.* We discuss these influences on migration patterns within the context of emerging social stratification of Wosera society, and consider the implications for both migrants and non-migrants.

INTRODUCTION

Migration studies in PNG have yielded important insights into the complex processes of socio-economic change in rural areas. For example, studies on rural to urban migration have revealed how communities have responded to colonialism, capitalist incorporation and growing inequalities between rural and urban areas (Curtain 1980, 1981; Morauta and Ryan 1982; Strathern 1982; Connell 1988, 1990; Boyd 1990; Zimmer 1990). Research has also revealed how migration has been used as a strategy to diversify and increase incomes, to escape sorcery and other village conflicts, and to overcome problems associated with resource scarcity and access (see Curtain 1980, 1981; Gewertz and Errington 1991:107; Curry and Koczberski 1998). Shifts in established migration patterns are equally important as they often reveal much about continuing change and adaptation to broader structural forces. The growing trend of urban permanence in PNG, for instance, is particularly telling of the economic and population pressures in many rural areas because, as studies in PNG and elsewhere suggest, those more likely to become permanent migrants or undertake permanent migration are landless or lack adequate access to resources in their home villages (e.g., Nelson 1976; Garnaut et al. 1977; Ryan 1989; Morauta 1981; Zimmer 1990).

Given that some rural societies in PNG are becoming more stratified in response to rising population and resource pressures, it is worthwhile to examine how migration patterns and migrant decision-making are adjusting to these pressures. It is probable that as resource pressures in rural areas continue to rise, the context for migrant decision-making will change too, thus creating new risks and opportunities for migrants and potential migrants. Village out-migration is not necessarily risk free, nor are the risks likely to be the same for all individuals or households, particularly where differential access to resources is emerging. For example, households with insecure access to village resources may face expropria-

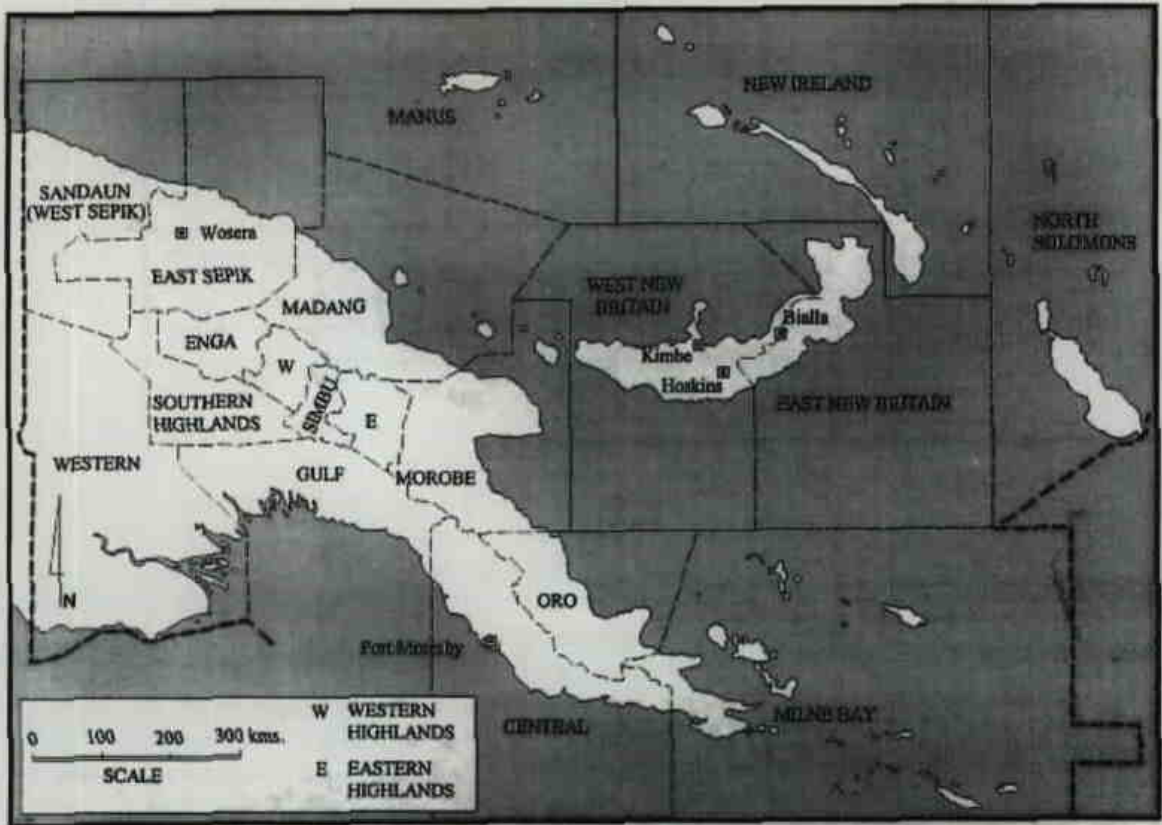


Figure 1. Study site locations

tion of their access rights during an extended absence from the village. The question then arises as to how resource scarcity and security shape the migration strategies of individuals and households differently positioned in village society.

This paper explores these issues by examining migration in two different rural contexts: the Wosera sub-district, East Sepik Province (ESP) where rates of out-migration are relatively high; and the island province of West New Britain (WNB), an important destination for migrants from the Wosera sub-district. In an earlier paper we explored how circulation between the Wosera and WNB draws simultaneously on indigenous socio-cultural and modern elements for its forms and meanings, and how, through exchange, migration is intimately bound up with notions of individual and group identity (Curry and Koczberski 1998). This paper, which complements our earlier paper, adopts a more economic perspective as it examines the relationships between resource security and access and changing patterns of migration. By adopting a strategic perspective, we are not underestimating the role of non-economic values and motivations in migration. Nor are we suggesting that migration strategies are fully formed from the outset of a decision to migrate. Instead, we seek to highlight how migration, representing a radical break with the taken for granted flow of everyday life, entails risks and uncertainties that change through time. Thus migration strategies are not fixed, but are constantly evolving in response to perceived opportunities, risks and uncertainties in both source and destination sites.

The first part of the paper discusses the likely factors contributing to increased family and long-term migration, particularly how growing resource pressure is leading to the emergence of a more rigid form of social organisation in which birth in 'core' subclan lineages is assuming more importance for determining access rights to resources (see Curry 1997). The paper then discusses the situation in WNB for existing and potential migrants who now see an insecure future in WNB as relationships between themselves and indigenous landowners

deteriorate. While migrants now feel less secure in WNB than they did a few years ago, they can pursue a range of strategies to preserve their access rights to resources in their home villages. Many long-term migrants hold an ideology of returning home at some indeterminate time in the future and therefore maintain strong social and economic ties with their home villages. Most are confident that by maintaining these ties, often for many years, they are assured an unproblematic re-integration into their home societies. Whether this confidence is justified is discussed within the context of recent changes in the Wosera, and by drawing on evidence from similar situations elsewhere in PNG. By examining some of the pressures emerging in migrant source and destination sites and the strategies that migrants employ to maintain access rights to resources in their home villages, the paper explores the relationships between migration, indigenous social and economic relations, and resource security.

Data are drawn from Miko 2 Village (hereafter called Miko) in the north-east of the Wosera, and the Wilelo subdivision of the Bialla Oil Palm Resettlement Scheme on the north coast of WNB where the authors worked for two months in 1995/1996 (Figure 1). Additional data were collected by the authors during 18 months fieldwork in the Wosera in 1988/89. Miko is typical of Wosera villages with a heavy reliance on subsistence production for household food consumption, high infant mortality and morbidity rates, limited cash earning opportunities and low per capita incomes (Curry 1999).

WNB is one of the more economically developed provinces in PNG with large-scale plantations of oil palm and copra and agricultural resettlement schemes based on oil palm. *It is an important destination for both long and short-term migrants from elsewhere in PNG.* Large resettlement schemes were established in the 1960s and early 1970s with preference given to applicants from land-short areas such as Maprik district (including Wosera sub-district), ESP, Chimbu and Wabag in the Highlands, and the Gazelle Peninsula of East New Britain (Hulme 1984). *Large numbers of people from these areas have since settled in WNB, and leaseholders now provide a very important base for visitors from migrant source areas.* Twenty-six per cent of the WNB population are immigrants, over 7,000 of whom were born in ESP (1990 Population and Housing census). The Bialla Oil Palm Resettlement Scheme was established in 1972 following government acquisition of land from the indigenous Nakanai landowners. Settler holdings are held on 99 year leases and are approximately 6 to 6.5 ha in size, of which a mean block area of 4.4 ha is planted to oil palm — settlers' primary source of cash income. Supplementary cash income is earned by marketing garden produce from the fairly extensive food gardens that settlers cultivate largely for household consumption.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF WOSERA MIGRATION

Although labour migration from the Wosera was well established before World War II (Roscoe and Scaglione 1990: 419), it increased in scale in the 1950s with the implementation of the Migrant Labour Scheme (MLS) (Curtain 1980). Most labourers were young men working on coastal and island plantations on short-term contracts. Wosera Patrol Reports of the 1950s document village out-migrations of 30% of the male population, and McGuigan (1992: 53) notes that in 1954, 26% of Wosera 'labour potential' (male) was estimated to be away as indentured labour. By the early 1960s, labour migration from the Wosera had declined, and was only of 'minor importance' until 1968 (Lea and Weinand 1971: 130). Yet, despite the relatively short life of the MLS, it has had an enduring influence through almost institutionalising short-term labour migration as a rite of passage for young males (Curry and Koczberski 1998).

Towards the end of the 1960s long-distance migration changed considerably following the introduction of government policies of resettlement. Throughout the 1960s the Australian colonial administration was concerned at reports of overpopulation in the Wosera

TABLE 1
Number and Percentage of Miko Absentees by Destination Site

LOCATION	1989 Numbers Absent		1996 Numbers Absent	
	Persons	Households	Persons	Households
WNB	21	4	62	10
Madang	6	1	7	1
Manus	6	1	6	1
Wosera	0	0	9	2
Lae	0	0	2	1
Highlands	0	0	1	0
Total and per cent	33 (13.4%)	6 (12.5%)	87 (30.5%)	15 (28%)
<i>De jure</i> population	246		285	

Source: Fieldwork data from 1988/89 and 1995/96

(e.g., Redmond 1961; Corrigan 1963; Forge 1963; Schofield 1963; Lea 1964, 1965; Bureau of Statistics 1965; Whiteman 1965). In the late 1960s/early 1970s, the administration encouraged migration from the Wosera to the new resettlement schemes opening elsewhere in PNG. Many Wosera families were resettled on schemes in WNB and Gavien, ESP.¹ At the Gavien Scheme, 19% of settlers were from the Wosera-Maprik area. The WNB schemes also took large numbers of people from the Wosera-Maprik area. It is difficult to obtain data on the number of Wosera people who moved to the resettlement schemes when they were first established, although the sub-district's unusually low annual rate of population growth of 1.3% between 1962–1980 has been partly attributable to high rates of out-migration (Heywood et al. 1986). A 1995 census of the Wilelo subdivision, Bialla Resettlement Scheme shows 40% of leaseholders are from ESP, 78% of whom are from the Wosera-Maprik area (OPIC 1995).

Recent mobility data from Miko and the Bialla Resettlement Scheme indicate that migration continues to be an important component of the Wosera lifeworld. In 1986 between 15% and 20% of the sub-district's population was estimated to be residing elsewhere (Heywood et al. 1986: 46). Our data from Miko suggest that absentee rates may be increasing. For example, the proportion of absentees of Miko's *de jure* population increased from 13.4% in 1989 to 30.5% in 1996, the majority of whom are in WNB (Table 1). Not only is WNB the primary destination for Miko absentees, but its importance as a destination is increasing. Also of note is that no Miko absentees are living in the East Sepik provincial capital of Wewak despite the Wosera being only three hours away by road, and only a few migrants are residing in the provincial towns of Lae and Madang.² Social and kinship networks are an important source of information about migration opportunities, and such networks facilitate migration and reinforce migration patterns initially established by the resettlement schemes.

While some Wosera have settled permanently on resettlement blocks and squatter settlements in WNB, most migration from the Wosera continues to be short-term circulation by males to find work and/or visit kin. For example, a November 1995 OPIC survey revealed that 76% of Wosera-Maprik resettlement blocks in Wilelo subdivision had visitors from the Wosera. Of the 33 working age men (15–50 years) present in Miko in 1996, 58% had spent some time outside the province since 1989; all but two individuals had been in WNB. Young married and unmarried men are characteristic of this group of absentees. All young men aspire to leave the village to visit distant locations and experience the wider world. Indeed, it is uncommon to find a young Miko male who has not visited or worked in another province. Most young Wosera men arriving in WNB for the first time plan to sign

on for a three year labour contract on a plantation. Older married men tend to visit for shorter periods, typically from several months to two years, if they find work. A few migrants may stay more than three years, but these longer stays are usually associated with a serious dispute with village kin and/or the threat of sorcery if they return home (see below).

Thus, long-distance migration, focused on WNB resettlement schemes, has become a significant variable in Wosera population dynamics over the past two decades. Resettlement schemes have created new opportunities and conditions for extensive circulation to the extent that it is now a well entrenched social phenomenon. Indeed, migration and circulation are now an integral part of the socio-economy of the Wosera with significant spiritual, emotional and cultural dimensions (see Curry and Koczberski 1998).

Not only has there been a sharp rise in the number of absentees and an increase in the importance of WNB as a destination for Miko migrants, but perhaps the most significant trend to emerge is the growth in the number of families leaving the village for extended periods. In 1989 only six households were absent but by 1996 this had increased to 15 households. Now an astonishing 28% of Miko households are living elsewhere. Most households that migrated from the village since 1989 are in WNB. Only two households moved elsewhere in the Wosera since 1989: one family moved to the wife's natal village following a family dispute, the second to the deceased husband's natal village after an unsuccessful attempt lasting many years to settle the family in Miko — the wife's natal village (see below).

Furthermore, the six households absent in 1989 remained absent in 1996, and of those households that had left since 1989, none had returned by 1996: all but one household had been away for at least three years. Longer absences from home are usually associated with serious village disputes over land, sago, pigs, inter-group jealousies, or fears of sorcery — though sorcery is often associated with disputes. All five Miko families settled in WNB since 1989 claimed WNB offered a refuge from a major dispute or sorcery at home. One family told how they fled during the night to avoid further fighting over a disputed compensation claim. Two other related households left the village following a sorcery assault on their patrilineage: one household now resides on an estate plantation, the other in a squatter camp. Two of the five households have each acquired an oil palm block on the Bialla Resettlement Scheme, while another household made an unsuccessful application for a block. *Disputes and sorcery are often cited as explanations for migration, but the intensity of these disputes together with attempts to secure land at WNB suggest that these moves may be related to resource pressure at home. Competition for village resources like land and sago may be expressed indirectly through sorcery allegations and in generally antagonistic relationships between individuals and groups.*

Recent increases in household migration may represent a departure from the established pattern of short-term circulation of males by signalling a trend towards family-orientated long-term/permanent migration. It should be added here that distinguishing between long-term and permanent migration is difficult as few Wosera households in WNB view their move as permanent, despite some living in WNB for over 15 years and acquiring oil palm blocks. For some families, especially those with children born in WNB, a return to the village is unlikely unless their circumstances in WNB became intolerable. Overall, therefore, signs are emerging that Miko migration to WNB may be becoming more like patterns of rural to urban migration elsewhere in PNG, i.e., increasing family migration and a trend towards permanency (Connell 1997).

These recent changes to Miko mobility patterns raise several intriguing questions: does the recent trend towards longer absences and more families migrating represent a fundamental break with established migration patterns, or is it merely an aberration in the dominant pattern of short-term circulation by males? If the trend is enduring, how are population/resource pressures influencing this trend? The following section offers a preliminary exploration of these issues by examining population and resource pressures in the Wosera.

GROWING POPULATION AND RESOURCE PRESSURE

Despite the colonial administration's efforts at population redistribution in the 1960s and early 1970s, and high rates of out-migration from the Wosera, population densities remain high at up to 200 people per square km in some northern villages (Lea et al. 1988). These densities are very high for an economy based largely on swidden agriculture. Over 18 years to 1979 out-migration is estimated to have accounted for 9–11 years' worth (50–60%) of population growth; yet over the same period availability of land in the greater part of North Wosera (one of the most land short areas) fell by 25% due to population increase (Heywood et al. 1986). To explore the relationships between population pressure and Wosera migration, some of the key changes that occurred in the colonial and post-colonial periods are outlined. These issues are discussed at length elsewhere (Curry 1997), so a brief overview only is provided here.

With the imposition of Australian colonial control in the 1930s the Wosera socio-cultural environment changed dramatically. Warfare was suppressed and the 1937 territorial boundaries of villages became the cadastral boundaries accepted by the colonial and post-colonial administrations for settling subsequent land disputes. These changes together with relative improvements in health and a growing awareness of resource limitations have had major impacts on population growth/land pressure. The Wosera have responded in several ways including agricultural intensification, resorting to the courts to settle land disputes, tightening rules of group membership and resource access, and out-migration.

Agricultural intensification has occurred since the 1960s. Lea (1964) while not differentiating between new and re-used gardens, implied that a single planting of yams was the norm in the early 1960s: '[t]he garden usually has a life of about two years, but it is only intensively cropped for about nine to ten months.' (1964: 80, 107). More recent studies have indicated that garden re-use is common through double cropping of yams (Curry 1992; McGuigan 1992). Also, sweet potato and peanuts are recent introductions that have been incorporated into the gardening cycle. While they are sometimes cultivated in gardens separate from traditional subsistence crops, sweet potato is often planted in old yam gardens as a third crop, and peanuts as a first crop in new gardens before yam planting. Moreover, the introduction and rapid expansion of export cash crops like coffee since the late 1950s (and more recently cocoa) has meant a decline in the area of land available for subsistence production. The evidence suggests that agricultural intensification has occurred since the early 1960s, through an extension of the cultivation period, expansion of the area under cultivation, and the removal of land from subsistence production for cash cropping.

The increasing frequency of Wosera land disputes provides further evidence of growing resource pressure. Patrol reports of the 1950s and 1960s repeatedly mention land disputes which patrol officers had to settle. In the early 1960s, Lea noted that the Wosera appeared 'obsessed' with land disputes, much more so than surrounding areas (1973: 67). Rates of land and sago disputes in the Wosera doubled from 0.98 per 1,000 population per year in the early 1960s (0.06 for the rest of the Maprik district), to 1.95 per 1,000 population per year between 1978 and 1983 (Ross 1984).

Rising resource pressure is also reflected by a general tightening of the rules governing group membership and hence resource access. With group strength no longer an important consideration (cessation of warfare) and more males surviving to marriageable age, opportunities for the incorporation of 'outsiders' (three generations or less of village residence of refugees, adoptees and in-marrying males) are becoming scarcer. In Miko this has led to an increased emphasis on birth in 'core' subclan patrilineages for group membership and hence access rights to resources (Curry 1997). Villagers now identified as outsiders, despite having up to three generations of village residence, are having their membership of resource-holding groups challenged to the extent that many are finding their agnatic rights to resources steadily being eroded (see below). Thus, a stratified society is emerging in a society previously described as 'aggressively egalitarian' (Forge 1970: 270).

Reduced flexibility of social organisation is also having an impact on intra-Wosera mobility patterns. The high levels of spatial and social mobility that characterised the pre-colonial Wosera no longer apply. Whilst outsider lineages are identifiable in most Wosera villages, most of these lineages settled in their host villages more than 30 years ago. For instance, there has been only one incidence of an immigrant male settling in Miko 2 since the late 1950s/early 1960s, and only one Miko male appears to have settled permanently elsewhere in the Wosera within the last three decades. The two intra-Wosera moves in Table 1 are instructive here. One man and his family moved to his wife's village following a dispute with his brother. It is unlikely that his family's move is permanent. Even if he were granted lifetime residence in his wife's village it is improbable that his sons would be permitted to stay because agnates of his hosts would question the legitimacy of their access rights to resources. In the second instance a male married into Miko in the late 1930s and attempted to establish his family there. Since his death in the late 1970s his sons have been unable to secure sufficient agnatic rights to resources: two of them have left the province permanently and the third, together with his mother, moved back to his father's natal village where he has been able to assume some of his patrilineal rights to resources. All other long-term or permanent moves from Miko have been long-distance movements out of the province. These restrictions on intra-Wosera spatial and social mobility are symptomatic of increased resource pressure, with extra-Wosera movements now the only remaining migration response to these pressures.

Increasing stratification of Wosera society might be expected to lead to differentially distributed pressures on individuals and groups to migrate with proportionately more resource-poor outsider households migrating. The Miko data suggest a more complex picture when village resources of the six households that migrated to WNB since 1989 are compared with resources of households remaining in Miko (Table 2). For comparative purposes, household smallholdings of coffee, the numbers of coconut palms owned, and the numbers of sago palms given through indigenous exchange are used as indicators of household resources. The first two are straightforward indicators, but the third is a surrogate measure for household sago holdings. Sago is an extremely important food in the Wosera and is the primary staple between January and June when yams are in short supply. Sago palms are felled just before they begin to flower at about 10 to 15 years when starch reserves are at their maximum. Because starch is used up during inflorescence (Barrau 1959: 155), it is critical that palms are harvested at the appropriate time. Households with sago palms surplus to their subsistence requirements can invest this surplus in exchange networks to generate return flows of wealth and labour (see below). Therefore, the numbers of sago palms given in indigenous exchange networks provide an indicator of household sago holdings.

TABLE 2.

Summary data and Wilcoxon rank-sum tests for significance of differences between village resources of households that migrated to WNB since 1989 and households remaining in the village.

	COFFEE (sq. metres)		COCONUT PALMS (No.)		SAGO PALMS (No. Given)	
	WNB	MIKO	WNB	MIKO	WNB	MIKO
Min.	0	0	10	2	0	0
Max.	1785	2535	43	30	0.58	4.33
Median	746	710	18	10	0	0.49
Mean	768.7	945.6	20.2	11.2	0.097	0.85
n	6	25	5	25	6	26
p-value	0.6527		0.038		0.071	
Significance Level	NS		p<0.05		p<0.1	

Table 2 data do not provide conclusive evidence of the disproportional out-migration of resource-poor households. There is no statistically significant difference in coffee holdings between the two groups, though families absent in WNB own significantly more coconut palms than families remaining in the village. The situation with sago resources is less clear. Absent families appear to have less sago than resident village families, but the difference does not reach significance at the 0.05 level. The evidence taken together would suggest that migrating families are not the most resource-poor of village families. These data suggest that while the pressures to migrate are differentially distributed, the opportunities and risks associated with long-term family migration may be distributed differently. For example, migration costs may be higher for resource-poor outsider families because they risk expropriation of their already insecure and marginal rights to village resources during lengthy village absences. Given the growing marginalisation of outsider lineages, re-integration of an outsider household after several years of village absence could prove difficult.

The key variables of support and resource security in the village that enable migration are not as readily available to outsider households. Outsider lineages are often split between village subclans which prevent them from becoming dominant numerically and hence politically in any one subclan. Segmentation between subclans effectively precludes them from achieving independence as political and economic entities in their own right. Geographically and economically dispersed, they remain politically weak relative to other lineages which are able to concentrate both political and economic power within their own ranks. Therefore, politically weak outsider lineages resulting from divided affiliations and allegiances would be weakened further by out-migration leaving them vulnerable to further marginalisation. Resource-poor outsider lineages are in a double bind: by remaining in the village they carry disproportionately the impacts of growing resource pressure; if they migrate they face a greater risk of losing their existing rights to village residence and resources. This suggests that only permanent and not circular migration is an option for resource-poor outsider families. The resource-poor family's decision to migrate is, therefore, likely to be a decision carrying much greater risk and uncertainty.

Resource Access and Indigenous Exchange

Given the growing pressure on Wosera resources leading to a more stringent form of social organisation that disadvantages outsiders, resource-poor lineages can perhaps minimise these uncertainties by residing in the village and adopting exchange strategies that conserve or improve access to village resources. Amongst the Abelam the indigenous exchange relationship between lineages related by marriage (affinal exchange) provides a culturally sanctioned means by which resource-poor lineages can access resources on an ongoing basis. This exchange relationship is asymmetrical and provides wife-givers with certain material advantages, including a flow of wealth and labour in return for access to land, sago and other resources. Indigenous exchange transactions were examined in a weekly survey of 32 Miko households over 12 months to October 1989 (Curry 1992). The patterns of exchange of core and outsider households are important not only for what they reveal about the processes and mechanisms of social stratification, but also for how they provide insights into the migration strategies of differently positioned households in village society.

Through indigenous exchange, outsider households are net givers of garden labour while core households are net recipients. The latter households are also net recipients of cash circulating in indigenous exchange, much of which is re-directed to the market economy to provide them with disposable cash incomes nearly twice that of outsider households. Because the subsistence production of core households is subsidised with net inward flows of garden labour through exchange, they are able to invest their surplus labour in forms of exchange that strengthen their own lineages and/or generate return flows of wealth. For example, they invest more garden labour with close agnates which serves to define and

strengthen the corporate identity of their lineages by bonding constituent households more tightly as political and economic units *vis-à-vis* other village lineages. In contrast, outsider households are less inclined to adopt such strategies, opting instead to invest labour with those kin most able to grant them resource access, i.e., resource-rich, wife-giving lineages. They invest almost 40% of their out-going garden labour with wife-givers compared with 26% of the out-going garden labour of core households. Further, they give wife-givers almost twice as much garden labour as do core households, and give wife-givers three times the amount of labour they receive from them. Core households, on the other hand, are net recipients of garden labour in their exchanges with wife-givers. Thus outsider households choose to forego co-operation with close agnates in order to pursue exchange strategies that enhance resource access. Moreover, the abnegation of exchange relationships with close agnates is occurring in a society where agnatic relationships have tremendous social, economic and spiritual significance, and where, ideally, the patrilineage is the focus of one's economic and social activities.

The labour exchange strategies of core and outsider households captures the key differences between the two groups, and reveals indirectly how they might influence their respective migration strategies. Households with secure and adequate access to resources are better able to capitalise on migration opportunities in WNB. Migration of some members whether individually or as households may be an effective strategy to diversify income sources and minimise sorcery risks. These strategies are akin to Curtain's (1981) concept of the 'straddled' peasant household in which some members remain in subsistence production while others support the household through labour migration. As 'gatekeepers' to resources core lineages have less difficulty recruiting labour to compensate for the loss of labour of absent lineage members. Also, they can convert their excess sago palms into a labour or cash subsidy by unloading surplus palms in indigenous exchange, often to resource-poor outsider families. So, for resource-secure lineages the absence of some member households and individuals may confer benefits on remaining households by increasing the surplus of resources to be deployed in indigenous exchange to extract a labour and/or wealth subsidy. Furthermore, migration costs and risks are lower for these households, because their relatively secure tenure of village resources is less likely to be eroded by an absence from the village. Only by failing to meet exchange obligations or by severing all ties with the village would claims to village resources be weakened or invalidated. The incentives and opportunities to migrate are arguably greater for households with village resources in excess of their subsistence requirements than for households reliant on other lineages for subsistence resources. Thus we can begin to see why the poorest and most marginalised village households are not more likely to migrate than wealthier households.

Migration studies in PNG and elsewhere lend support to the resource security hypothesis. For example, Nelson (1976) in her study of temporary and permanent migration in developing countries, argues that circular migration is less prominent in countries where landlessness is greater (see also Connell et al. 1976). Landlessness and insecure land tenure inhibit circular migration as resource security is a pre-condition for circular migration. Nelson's observations have relevance to contemporary migration patterns in Miko and in PNG generally, where migration is steadily becoming a long-term phenomenon (Connell 1997: 286, 289; Curtain 1980). For example, in a study of two East Sepik villages, Curtain (1980: 195-203) reported that while one village had high levels of male circulation, the other was characterised more by family-orientated permanent migration of both males and females. The difference between villages, Curtain argued, could be explained partly by differences in resource and land availability between the two villages: households in the former village were maintaining a strategy of dual dependence, and were able to undertake such a strategy because on-going access to land was assured. The extent to which this strategy was open to all villagers was not explored in detail, though Curtain suggests 'wealthier' households were more likely to adopt a dual dependency strategy. Several other studies on

urban migration reach similar conclusions about the importance of resource security in facilitating circulation. These studies suggest, *inter alia*, that those more likely to remain in urban centres (i.e., to become permanent migrants) lack access to resources in their home villages (e.g., Garnaut et al. 1977; Ryan 1989; Morauta 1981; Zimmer 1990).

While we would not argue that Miko's core lineages are pursuing a dual dependence strategy in the strict structuralist sense implied by Curtain, they are, because of their advantageous position as gatekeepers to resources, able to adopt a dual strategy whereby some lineage households and individuals take advantage of the income-earning, educational and social opportunities available outside the village. This dual strategy is not wholly open to outsider households because they are not assured of an unproblematic re-integration into Miko society. It is likely that in Miko, many outsider families are not yet ready or able to make the leap to committing themselves to a long-term or permanent move from the village. The risks associated with being absent from the village are much higher for this group, so conditions in the village would need to reach some critical threshold before they were induced to leave. Yet, at a time when the pressures to migrate from the Wosera are increasing, there is also discontent and resentment towards migrants emerging in Miko's preferred destination site of WNB.

WEST NEW BRITAIN: THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The political and economic environment in WNB appears to be deteriorating for non-indigenous residents. Tensions between the indigenous Nakanai and the large numbers of resident in-migrants (*vaira*) have escalated in recent years, erupting occasionally in ethnic violence. Growing intolerance and fear of migrants is fuelled to an extent by provincial leaders' criticisms of criminal gangs living amongst the migrant population. Such criticisms are legitimising antagonism towards settlers and are contributing to migrants' sense of insecurity and uncertainty, especially over the issue of land availability for second generation settlers. These recent developments in WNB pose problems for existing migrants and cast doubt over the future viability of further resettlement in the province. Recently, for example, indigenous landowners in the Hoskins and Kimbe areas demanded that the National Government compensate them for land alienated for resettlement schemes (TPNG: 17 June 1993, p21), and some have demanded the return of these lands and the forced repatriation of settlers (TPNG: 30 July 1992, p9). Many indigenous landowners believe they were inadequately compensated for land appropriated by the National Government in the 1960s and 1970s, and that the alienation of this land may lead them to experience land shortages in the future. Their fears are perhaps justified. Between 1980 and 1990, WNB's annual rate of population growth averaged 3.9%, second only to the National Capital District's 4.6% per annum. The increase is due to in-migration and a high rate of natural increase. With a total fertility rate (TFR) of over 6, WNB (along with East New Britain) has the highest provincial TFR in the country (Connell 1997: 168–170).

Ethnic tensions erupted violently in May 1993 when Kavugara settlers on the Talasea Peninsula fled their oil palm blocks following violent harassment by local landowners (PNGPC: 20 May 1993, p2; TPNG: 17 June 1993, p21). Within a few weeks local landowners had removed houses, water tanks and other assets from the blocks. Evicted settlers returned to their home provinces or moved to live with relatives elsewhere in WNB or PNG (see also PNGPC: 3 February 1998, p13). Immediately following these evictions a rally of around 1,000 people was held in the provincial capital of Kimbe to highlight the plight of settlers. A petition was presented to Opposition Leader, Jack Genia, seeking compensation for settlers wishing to sell their oil palm blocks and demanding settler grievances be put to Parliament, 'especially the continuous threats by landowners' (PNGPC: 20 May 1993, p2). Petitioners claimed 'block-holders in every other settlement in the province were also living in fear'. The conflict has generated great anxiety amongst settlers concerning the security of their leases.

Community and smallholder organisations on some resettlement subdivisions continue to lobby the government to purchase their leases as they fear further evictions without adequate compensation. During fieldwork in December 1995 the Bialla Oil Palm Growers Association (BOPGA) met to discuss lobbying strategies for the coming year. Lease security for settlers was prominent in discussions at the meeting as were lobbying strategies for compensation of settlers wishing to return home. Members also raised the possibility of approaching Hargy Oil Palm Pty Ltd, the joint partners in the Bialla Resettlement Scheme, for funds to help compensate blockholders wishing to leave. BOPGA members with whom we spoke, reported that they previously approached the national and WNB governments, as well as their home provincial governments for compensation and assistance with repatriation. Many settlers thought it inevitable they would eventually be forced off their blocks, and were therefore working towards securing compensation for their leases and return passage home.

Feelings of unease and uncertainty are compounded by a largely unfounded, but widespread, perception amongst settlers that the provincial administration discriminates against them in education, employment, land and oil palm production. Some settlers also believe that the provincial administration is supporting Nakanai claims for land and compensation. In 1995, WNB Governor, Lucas Waka, reported to parliament that evicted settlers 'were experiencing financial problems because the Government had given them only K600 to return to their home provinces.' (PNGPC: 5 December 1995, p2). The issue appeared to be not one of providing greater security for settlers, but of adequately compensating them for their blocks so that alienated land could be returned to its traditional owners:

Another reason why we are concerned is that they [settlers] still hold titles to their blocks of land. ... The traditional landowners and the company cannot redevelop the blocks until they are paid their compensation money and move out. ... While they still have title to the land, redevelopment will not take place. (Lucas Waka cited in PNGPC: 5 December 1995, p2)

Given the tense relations between evicted settlers and local landowners, it would have been very difficult for the authorities to reinstate evicted settlers on their former blocks. However, such comments are sometimes interpreted by settlers as an attempt to undermine the security of their leases and as a ruse for the return of alienated land to its traditional owners.

Threats by the authorities to crack down on crime by evicting squatters are adding to the feelings of insecurity amongst settlers who feel they are also identified as part of the crime problem. Just before the 1993 Kavugara evictions the provincial government vowed to repatriate squatters in WNB (TPNG: 27 May 1993, p5; see also PNGPC: 8 February 1994, p5 and 17 June 1994, p31). Escalating tensions between Nakanai and *vaira* appear to be creating new risks and insecurities for both short-term and long-term migrants, which in turn are encouraging settlers to seek compensation and repatriation. It is possible, therefore, that the Wosera sub-district may experience occasional influxes of returning migrants if sporadic evictions or repatriations of squatters and settlers occur. But what are the implications of forced or voluntary repatriation for certain categories of migrants, and what repercussions would this have on different groups within the Wosera?

Going Home?

Almost all long-term Wosera migrants interviewed at Wilelo hold a strong ideology of return, despite many being absent from their home villages for over 15 years. Most maintain ties with home, and view their participation in indigenous exchange as reinforcing their social identity at home and hence legitimising their rights to village resources. Many

assume that when they or their children return to the village their rights to resources will be intact due to their continual participation in exchange. Some blockholders make occasional short trips home primarily for social and family reasons. Such visits home reinforce their social identity and claims to village resources, particularly when wealth items are brought home to invest in networks of indigenous exchange. Also, some blockholders send their older sons home to learn their clan stories and the boundaries of their patrilineal and sub-clan resources such as land, sago and perennial cash crops. Blockholders are therefore investing considerable amounts of time, cash and other wealth items in their village exchange economies to prevent the erosion of their social and political identities at home. It is likely, therefore, that forced or voluntary repatriation from WNB would see, at least initially, the return of these migrants to their home villages.

Only a small minority of long-term migrants claim a permanent commitment to WNB and acknowledge that due to the absence of strong ties with their home villages, re-entry and validation of resource claims would be difficult. Whether these 'permanent' migrants would return to the Wosera if forced to leave the blocks or squatter camps is unclear. What is clear, however, is that it is unlikely that they would regain access to village land, particularly given the pressure on Wosera resources. Studies elsewhere in PNG indicate that returned migrants who did not maintain exchange relationships with home and failed to fulfil social obligations risk foregoing access rights to land and other resources (e.g., Morauta 1981; Curtain 1980: 54–55; Morauta and Ryan 1982). Often these people join the ranks of the 'urban dispossessed' (Morautu and Ryan 1982: 39). A recent example was the evacuation of 8,000 Sepiks following the 1994 Rabaul volcanic eruption (Neumann 1997). Many evacuees found they were unwelcome in their home villages and some were called *vaira* by fellow villagers. Long-term migrants found their land had been taken over by others, and village relatives often asked '[w]hy should we give you food or let you sleep in our house ... [a]fter all you never thought of us when you lived in comfort in Rabaul' — a reference to their perceived failure to fulfil exchange obligations. The majority of those repatriated had returned to East New Britain by the beginning of 1996. After years of village absence they had become *vaira* in their home villages and 'home' was now Rabaul.

It appears, therefore, that the maintenance of exchange relationships with home is a precondition for the resumption of resource rights for migrants returning home after a long absence. But while exchange may be a necessary prerequisite for making claims to village resources it may not always be sufficient for the successful re-activation of those rights for two reasons: migrant exchange strategies may be targeted inappropriately at one or two individuals (Morauta and Ryan 1982); or, because rising resource pressure in migrant source areas is leading villagers to contest the meanings of their exchange relationships with absent kin (Carrier and Carrier 1989). For example, on the former point, Morauta and Ryan (1982) report that because Malalauan migrants in Port Moresby maintain ties with village-resident parents rather than a range of kin, they are highly dependent on their parents to sponsor their return to the village. If the parents die or join their migrant children in town, then the likelihood of an eventual return to the village is greatly diminished (see also Ryan 1989). Thus there are inherent risks associated with maintaining an exchange strategy narrowly focused on one or two village-based individuals.

On the second point, there is also evidence that where resource pressure exists in migrant source areas, the maintenance of exchange relationships with home does not necessarily mean an unproblematic re-entry to village society. Carrier and Carrier (1989) report that while long-term migrants returning home to the small and resource-poor island of Ponam putatively hold inalienable rights to land, reefs and sea by virtue of their membership in resource-holding groups, they sometimes have difficulty activating these rights. Because land is in short supply there is an incentive for non-migrants to challenge migrant genealogies and hence the latter's membership of land-holding groups. Importantly, the probability of this happening to returning migrants is not restricted to those who failed to maintain

exchange relationships with island kin: 'the generous migrant of good repute who returned regularly to Ponam was not immune to the dangers threatening his status and property in the village, but certainly he was threatened much less than the stingy migrant who stayed away from the island.' (Carrier and Carrier 1989: 193). The significance of the Carriers' study is that even those migrants who assiduously maintained exchange relationships with home were not exempt from challenges to their claims to village resources. In a similar case, Zimmer-Tamakoshi (1997: 70) reports how a Gende migrant returned home after thirteen years absence to find that his uncles would not support him in a land dispute, despite 'entertaining and feeding them for months at a time whenever they and their families had visited'. The returned migrant mistakenly believed that his earlier generosity in hosting visiting relatives would partly repay his debts to his uncles; they on the other hand, only remembered his inadequate repayments on his brideprice debts for his first wife. These two examples reveal considerable flexibility in how villagers interpret their exchange transactions with absent relatives, and may reflect increasing resource pressures in migrant source areas.

The increasing ambiguity of exchange may mean that the exchange strategies migrants have pursued over the years to maintain their social identities at home and to keep their return option open, may no longer be appropriate nor valid in contemporary Wosera society where the rules governing social organisation and resource access are tightening in response to growing population pressure. If the temporal, spatial and social contexts of exchange assume increasing importance for the meaning of exchange, migrants and village-resident kin may come to hold different expectations concerning exchange and attach different meanings to specific transactions. For short-term visitors to WNB, exchange with migrant kin residing there may become generalised in meaning and disconnected from issues of resource security — precisely the opposite interpretation of exchange of long-term migrants seeking to retain the option of an eventual return to the village. The ambiguity concerning the nature of extra-village exchange would provide villagers with greater flexibility in negotiating/contesting the rights of returned migrants, and probably enable them to extract more wealth from returning migrants than would have been the case with extra-village exchange more specific in meaning.

Should an extra-village generalised exchange and intra-village specific exchange distinction exist or emerge, then this would present a dilemma for some lineages, especially those that are resource-poor and have insecure resource tenure. It may provide additional incentives for them to remain in the village. If they migrate and follow exchange strategies to conserve their access to village resources, with whom should they develop exchange relationships? It would make little sense for them to enter exchange relationships with households from their own lineages because they are also resource-poor and not in a position to further their access to village resources. On the other hand, extra-village exchange with village lineages that are resource-rich may not be risk free, because the ambiguity of this form of exchange might mean that their investments are not reciprocated with enhanced access to village resources. In contrast, village-based exchange between resource-poor and resource-secure households is more likely to contribute to a shared understanding of the meaning of exchange so that, for example, exchange in association with resource access comes to validate resource access.

In summary, as resource pressure continues to build in the Wosera leading to more rigid and exclusionary forms of social organisation, returning long-term absentees are likely to experience the adverse effects of such changes. Resistance to the resumption of rights to village resources by returning migrants may be expressed through the re-surfacing of long-standing inter-group grievances, challenges to migrant genealogies and assertions about the 'stinginess' of migrants, all of which may jeopardise returning migrants' chances of re-establishing themselves in their home villages. Moreover, if the meanings attached to extra-village exchange become more generalised and less tied to issues of resource access, their 'insurance' value for a successful re-integration into village society is likely to decline, further weakening

returned migrants' negotiating position in relation to resource access. While some migrants who have maintained strong ties with their village kin may still make a relatively unproblematic re-entry into their home villages, especially those from resource-rich core lineages, it is likely, given the pressure on Wosera resources, that a difficult transition awaits many settlers now pursuing government compensation for their leases and assistance with repatriation. Like the Sepiks repatriated following the Rabaul eruption, some Wosera migrants may also be 'made welcome but not for long' by fellow villagers (Neumann 1997: 187).

CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested that current migration patterns in Miko may represent a departure from established patterns of short-term circulation towards family orientated permanent/long-term migration, which may reflect rising resource pressure within the Wosera. However, as the paper shows, whilst the pressures to migrate are differentially distributed between individuals and groups, trends in migration patterns are not a direct reflection of these pressures. Rather, the picture is complicated by a range of migration strategies employed by differently positioned households in which migration is undertaken or not undertaken for different reasons and in different contexts. Indeed, the migration inertia of resource-poor outsider households is in sharp contrast to the active migration strategies of resource-secure households as they exploit migration opportunities in WNB.

One major dilemma within this context of increased pressure to migrate is the growing uncertainty over migration in the preferred destination site of WNB. In the event of an exodus of settlers and squatters from WNB following a rapid decline in the situation there, the situation for outsider migrants and their non-migrant agnates could become acute. Returnees from core lineages probably would gain preferential access to resources over returnees from outsider lineages, and they may also have priority to resources over non-migrants from outsider lineages. An influx of returning migrants, especially from core lineages, would mean that resource-poor outsider households would be competing for a smaller share of the available resources, leading inevitably to inflation in the indigenous exchange economy through increased demands on their wealth and labour in return for access to resources. In effect, outsider lineages provide a buffer to absorb the brunt of the effects of a decline in migration, and they also disproportionately carry the costs of events occurring elsewhere.

The research identified some of the pressures emerging in rural PNG. The increasing difficulty of re-integration of returning migrants (and their offspring) into their source villages, the problems and conflicts over land tenure in WNB, and the pressures to migrate in many rural areas of PNG are symptomatic of the mounting competition over land and the economic hardships in many rural areas. Associated with these pressures, as in the Wosera, are significant changes to social organisation and indigenous exchange which, in effect, are creating stratified societies as particular groups and individuals strive to gain exclusive control over resources to the detriment of 'peripheral' group members. With these changes, the context for migrant decision-making is changing too. While some blockholders and squatters may return home, for many Wosera, the return option is too difficult, or impossible. For example, the 'permanent' migrant who has failed to maintain exchange obligations, outsider households who having left the village have lost their tenure rights to village resources, and the children of migrants who know only WNB, no longer have a village 'home' to which to return. These migrants are in a very vulnerable position given the growing intolerance of *vaira* and possible restrictions on further settlement in WNB. If the situation in WNB were to worsen to the extent that large numbers of Wosera were forced home (and from elsewhere if recent reports are accurate), members of resource-poor outsider lineages may be displaced altogether. They may have little option but to join the ranks of the urban dispossessed, constantly threatened by eviction and harassment by local landowners and the authorities.

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NOTES

1. The administration also acquired an area of sparsely populated land in Gawanga (Kwanga) to the south-west of the Wosera (Lea n.d.).
2. No migrants from Miko reside in the national capital of Port Moresby.

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