



TE KURA KETE ARONUI

Graduate and Postgraduate E-journal – Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Volume Two

International Mobility of Recent Migrants: Theory and Application to New Zealand and British Citizens in Australia

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Abstract

International migration in New Zealand and Australia has traditionally been seen as a one-off event, with migrants up-rooting themselves from their former homes and re-settling themselves firmly in their new host country. However, this view of migration is increasingly being challenged. Although permanent migration remains a significant factor in overall population movement, temporary migration now accounts for a far greater share of migration flows than it has in the past. At the same time, falling costs and greater accessibility of international travel and communication make it possible for a growing range of people to travel regularly, maintaining relationships in multiple locations.

The growing complexity of international mobility raises a number of challenges for the traditional paradigm of settler migration. This thesis describes a tripartite view of international mobility decisions which considers the possibility of repeat or return migration as well as allowing for individuals to maintain ongoing relationships in multiple countries. The theory is dynamic, with changes in migrants' personal circumstances, the wider social and economic environment, and the information which migrants have about the host country and other potential destinations all having an impact on subsequent mobility decisions.

Statistical models for residential spells and mobility data are then used to examine the probability of repeat and return migration and ongoing mobility among New Zealand and British citizens who migrated to Australia between August 1999 and July 2002. Using a unique longitudinal dataset provided by the Australian Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) all subsequent moves of these migrants out of and back into Australia are tracked, to the end of June 2005.

The focus of the thesis is on identifying the relationship between ongoing mobility patterns, and personal and environmental circumstances, including institutional barriers to immigration and a discrete change in the social welfare eligibility of New Zealanders in Australia. The results confirm that ongoing migration patterns are far more complex than the traditional migration paradigm suggests, with repeat and return migration and ongoing mobility being an important part of actual migration experiences.