UNDERSTANDING RURAL-TO-URBAN MIGRATION WITHIN AUSTRALIA'S NORTHERN TERRITORY

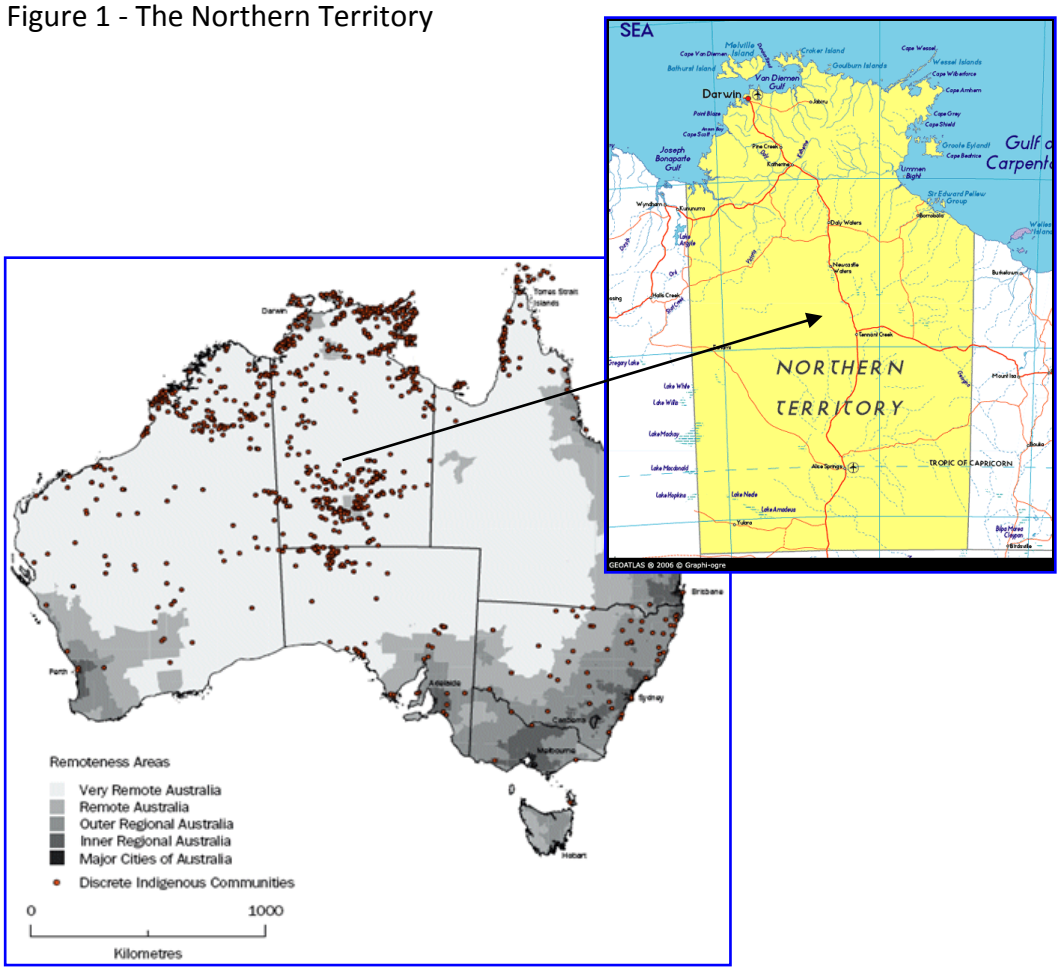
Abstract: There is a substantial body of literature examining patterns of rural-to-urban migration in industrialised and developing countries since at least the 1960s. The most widely used approaches consider migration patterns as responses to labour market conditions as described by Harris-Todaro models and their derivatives. Such models emerge from positivist traditions, and tend to deal poorly with what can be observed as negative outcomes of rural-to-urban migration. Policy makers and the media in the Northern Territory have become increasingly concerned about the social problems caused by the unwelcome rural-to-urban migration of Indigenous people, have labelled it with the term 'urban drift', and have struggled to develop effective responses. This paper examines migration data from the quinnenial Census of Population and Housing alongside survey data on the causes and characteristics of rural to urban movements sourced from interviews with Indigenous people in communities across the Northern Territory. The results detail an embedded set of drivers characterised by the interplay of social, cultural and economic push and pull drivers which mean that some degree of rural-to-urban migration is inevitable. In this light 'urban drift' can be viewed as part of a system of migration involving Indigenous people in the Northern Territory which has both positive and negative outcomes. There may be greater rewards for policy makers focusing on increasing the opportunities for welcome outcomes for migrators, and origin and destination communities.

Keywords: rural-to-urban migration; Indigenous mobility; urban drift; Harris-Todaro models

INTRODUCTION

Australia's Northern Territory (NT) is a remote, sparsely populated district covering nearly twenty percent of the continental land mass but housing just two percent of the population (Figure 1). Previous research has described the key demographic conditions as including a relatively young population (compared with the rest of Australia), a relatively high proportion of Indigenous people, and high rates of population turnover (ABS, 2008a, ABS, 2008b). Population mobility is a central feature of NT demography, but most academic research in this area has focussed on movement into and out of the NT (particularly interstate migration), with little attention paid to internal migration. The long term migration patterns of Indigenous people have also been largely overlooked in the academic literature.

Figure 1 - The Northern Territory



By contrast, internal migration, and particularly the mobility of Indigenous people are high priority issues for policy makers in the NT. Increasing attention is being paid to the potential for the phenomenon to impact on service delivery and on the socio-economic wellbeing of the transient cohort. Research on the

topic has been limited to isolated case studies and mentions in government reports and reviews of funding programs and services (Prout, 2009; Taylor and Bell, 2004). In 1999, for example, a Northern Territory Government review of Indigenous education (Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1999) highlighted the potential for student mobility to impact on the educational outcomes of the mobile student cohort. The purpose of this paper is to provide a baseline analysis of Indigenous rural-to-urban migration in the NT using data from the 2006 Census and explore results from interviews with residents of remote Indigenous communities to identify its drivers. Central to the discussion is to what extent these drivers are a reaction to policy and prescription like those which transpired in the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) in 2007. Within this context we postulate that public focus on the negative outcomes of what labelled as 'urban drift' is detracting from a systemic understanding about Indigenous rural-to-urban migration and how it might impact on future settlement patterns in the NT.

Indigenous mobility has long been conceived as a 'problem' resulting in undercounting at Census time (and hence under-allocation of Commonwealth funds to the NT), and difficulties in population monitoring (see for example, Taylor and Carson 2009). In a similar way the movement of Indigenous people from rural and remote areas into urban centres has been labelled a 'problem' which has manifested in anti-social behaviour, homelessness, and substance abuse (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2006; The Age, 2008). In early 2008, the NT Department of Justice convened a workshop to examine rural-to-urban migration of Indigenous people under the banner of 'urban drift'. Participants spent their time describing why urban drift was a problem, who it was a problem for, and how it might be managed. It became clear that there was only fragmented information available that described the extent of 'the problem', and a priority action from the workshop was to identify what information was available. The task of understanding the information is additional to the task of collating it, and this paper tries to address the former challenge.

While it has been difficult to attract and retain population in the Northern Territory at all, it has been particularly difficult to do so in areas outside the two major urban centres of Darwin (which has more than half the total NT population of 220 000 people) and Alice Springs (with a population of around 25 000). The recruitment and retention of population in the urban centres or elsewhere is prioritised by the NT Government according to the expected economic contribution of various populations (for example, DBE, 2005). Recently, the Government has conducted a strategic planning process with a horizon to the year 2030 which envisions progress in five key areas of education, society, prosperity, health and wellbeing, environment and knowledge creativity by the year 2030. Known as the *Territory 2030* strategy (Northern Territory Government, 2009) its aims include developing major

remote communities as 'economic centres' (Ibid. pg.11) and ensuring communities have access to appropriate levels of services and infrastructure (Ibid. pg 32). Inherent in the aims are proposals for attracting and retaining non-Indigenous, skilled labour to all parts of the NT, but also delivering incentives for Indigenous people to remain in their remote communities and engage in economic development based on the arts, tourism, and agriculture.

The study of patterns of rural-to-urban migration has been greatly influenced by the ideas of Harris and Todaro who, in the early 1970s, proposed that labour market conditions arising from the transition from agrarian to industrialised economies served as the driving force for internal migration (Harris and Todaro, 1971). In essence, urban centres were seen to be able to out-bid rural areas in the competition for labour. The Harris-Todaro (HT) models have been refined over time with the core assumption shifting from the assumed **existence** of higher returns for labour to the **expectation** that better conditions would ultimately be available in urban centres (Petrov, 2007). This shift is significant, because it allows models to consider trade-offs made by migrating individuals including sacrificing secure employment in the rural location for uncertain employment outcomes and remittances in the urban destination (for example, Fields, 1975; Kritchel and Levine, 1999; Raimondos, 2003). An important aspect of HT research has been the finding that urban centres are attractive not just because of the expectation of increased rewards for the same unit of labour (i.e. using the same job skills), but because they provide alternative employment options. Rural areas, on the other hand, are perceived as providing limited choice even if some skills are highly valued (Rhoda, 1983).

HT models have, among other things, shown themselves able to predict who will migrate, when they will migrate, and where they will migrate. They have been able to explain circular and seasonal patterns of migration, and have identified how origin and destination communities may benefit from the process. More recently, they have proven able to deal with internal migration patterns in developing and under-developed nations, and have been able to explain counterurbainsation trends emerging in some places. HT models link prevailing (largely economic) conditions to the probabilities of migration. They have been criticised, however, as being too simplistic in reducing patterns of migration to "worker's estimates of the probability of acquiring… employment" (Ranis and Stewart, 1999: 286).

More recent research has attempted to incorporate factors other than employment probabilities and wage differentials into HT models, including the role of informal networks in facilitating moves that, in the short or medium term, may provide limited access to formal employment and increased wages. Haan (2002), for example, emphasized the role of family and cultural factors for drawing Indian citizens to cities and then, that the same reasons generated return migration to the rural towns of origin. More and more post-productivist

literature is emerging in support of non-economic rural to urban push factors. In Latin America Morrison (1993) has proposed that the fear of political violence is a major push factor. Meanwhile Bhattacharya's (2002) identification of the existence of two streams of rural to urban migration with different incentives led him to question the carte blanche application of HT models and their derivatives to the analysis of labour migration.

In general, acknowledgement of shortcomings in HT models have lead researchers to add components to their HT functions rather than to look for new explanatory models. Expectations become tempered by spatial, social and cultural factors, but are still at the heart of the models. An interesting example of how this plays out is the work of Petrov (2007) who examined rural-to-urban migration in the northern frontiers regions of Canada. Petrov acknowledged that less than one third of the migration of Indigenous people that he observed could be accounted for by labour market conditions as expressed in the HT models (even when he included tempering components). However, Petrov's approach was to investigate the migration which could be so explained, and assume that the remainder was linked through family or cultural ties. No attempt was made to explain what these family or cultural conditions were or how they influenced migration decisions and outcomes.

The conditions that apply in Australia's Northern Territory bear strong resemblance to those observed by Petrov in terms of Indigenous populations, remoteness, and high levels of mobility. This paper is concerned with accounting for the migrations (perhaps as much as two-thirds of the total) that were not been readily explained by Petrov's version of HT model. It is largely a conceptual paper, and further work will be required to operationalise the concepts for inclusion in predictive models. It is likely, however, that the conditions in the models will need to be expanded from the current brace of economic ones to include social, cultural and environmental factors. While the paper is inspired by the NT's concern with the 'problem' of Indigenous urban drift, it conceives of a system of internal migration with urban drift as one of many components.

THE ATTRACTION OF CITIES

Increasing rural-to-urban migration has been a characteristic of all industrialised nations, and has also been observed in developing countries as diverse as including India, Mexico, Africa, and of course China over the past few decades (for example, Khan, 1982; Arizpe, 1971; Bryceson, 1996; Rozelle, et al., 1999). While the prevailing conditions in rural origins and urban destinations have differed in jurisdictions where rural-to-urban migration has been studied, there have been some consistent patterns observed in the research. Notably, rural-to-urban migration has been described as the domain of the young, and

particularly of young males (for example, Agesa and Agesa, 199). Young males have traditionally been seen as representing the more valuable units of labour for both rural and urban areas. Young females have been seen as likely to accompany young men who move, rather than being the instigators themselves, although this gender divide has been less pronounced and some of the recent literature (Taylor, 2009; Hamilton and Otterstad, 1998). Rural-to-urban migration has been shown as occurring for highly skilled/ educated and poorly skilled/ educated people. The migration of skilled people is explained by expected higher returns for their labour in urban centres that have more competitive economies and more opportunities for advancement. These conditions may also attract unskilled people, with the view that urban unskilled labour is remunerated more highly than rural unskilled labour. The literature remains relatively quiet on the issue of who **does not** move, but it can be inferred that these are the old and the very young, and people with limited levels of skills and education (however that might be defined in the context of the origin community).

The literature is in broad agreement that rural-to-urban migration tends to occur firstly between locations that are relatively close to one another (Conway, 1980. The most common move is from a rural enclave or hinterland to the nearest urban centre, although there is little agreement on what constitutes the tipping point between a place considered rural and one considered urban in this sense. As migration becomes more widely practiced, people who have moved to small urban centres tend to move to larger ones, and the dispersal of the rural population increases. However, the relationships between rural and urban locations intensify over time as they become socially coupled through migration processes (Ross and Wiesner, 1977). The explanations for short distance moves include reducing the cost of travel in the initial instance, but also the need to maintain links back to the rural location, particularly in cases where the move to the city is seasonal (Li, 2006).

Cities become increasingly attractive to rural populations over time for reasons beyond employment of the migrating individuals (Ma, 2001). Institutional economics argues that moving to the city at a particular life stage (be it for education, entertainment, employment or some other reason) can become a rite of passage for people from rural communities (for example, Horvth, 2008; Monsutti, 2007). This has been observed where migration over time has resulted in positive feedback either through remittances from urban workers to their rural families, or through the esteem attached to families whose young people have ‘achieved something’ in the urban environments. In this way, rural-to-urban migration is supported by rural communities. There have been some studies of how migrants returning to rural communities are received. The evidence suggests that they are well supported, even if they have made minimal remittance and failed to achieve as expected (Cassarino, 1980). In this way, the risk of departure from the rural community is minimised. There is also some

suggestion in the literature on return migration that those likely to return are either those who have failed to achieve (and so need the support networks 'back home') or those who have achieved very highly and return to invest in the rural community (King, 1978).

Generational effects of rural-to-urban migration also play out in the urban destination centres. Studies of the formation of 'ghettos' or 'cultural enclaves' or 'clan corridors' highlight the support structures that emerge in urban destinations when they become linked to particular rural origins (for example, Laurence, 1998). Family members, friends and other known people can reduce the costs of the next wave of migration by providing information, housing, access to food and other resources, introductions to potential employment, and even direct employment in the formal or informal sectors. Thus develops chain migration which is undertaken at reduced cost (real or opportunity) to successive migrants (Caldwell, 1966; Andersson, 2001).

What has been observed as fundamentally distinguishing urban destinations from rural origins is the extent to which urban areas provide choice and easier access to resources (O'Stark, 1985). There is the potential for more jobs in urban areas (even when rates of unemployment are similar to or greater than those in the rural areas) and a wider diversity of jobs. Urban areas have more shops, more entertainment facilities, more education and training opportunities, and a greater selection of potential marriage partners. Interestingly, attempts to make rural areas more attractive by increasing facilities, employment and education opportunities have been shown to lead to increased out-migration (Bilsborrow, 1987; Corbett, 2005). This apparent paradox is explained by the improving conditions in the rural area reducing the risks associated with urban migration. As people become more aware of what opportunities might lay elsewhere, they develop a broader set of skills for accessing those opportunities, and they become less fearful of the unknown and the risk of change.

While increasing the attractiveness of the rural origin does not serve to decrease the attractiveness of the urban destination, the value attached to rural amenity can serve to attract urban-to-rural migration. This phenomenon is beyond the scope of this paper, but the literature suggests that urban-to-rural migration is most commonly associated with different populations than those who left. A prime example is the phenomenon of 'sea change' and 'tree change' undertaken primarily by resource rich urban residents (Walmsley et al., 1998; Burnley and Murphy, 2004; Costello, 2007). Or, where return (urban to rural) migration occurs, there may be substantial time lag (people moving back to their rural origins many years after leaving to raise a family or to retire). The issue of seasonal or circular rural-to-urban migration has received attention in the literature again largely as a function of labour. The most common explanation is of rural farmers moving to urban areas to supplement their farm

income, and the returning to their rural origins to continue to farm and attend to family commitments (Zhao, 2001).

Non-labour based explanations for rural-to-urban migration are less well developed in the literature than the Harris-Todaro approaches. Such approaches are often considered simply as ameliorating conditions within HT frameworks. Several descriptive frameworks have emerged following the work of Lee (1966). The fundamental observations in these frameworks are that there is a set of push factors encouraging people to leave their existing residence, and a set of pull factors encouraging people to move to particular places. Finally, there is a set of intervening obstacles which raise the costs of migration and temper the push and pull factors. Unlike the HT approaches, these 'social' migration models do not assume that the same factors come into play for all populations. Rather, the significance of individual factors changes from person to person and the complexity of the interactions between these varies over time.

Non-labour considerations tend to be identified in the literature only at the broadest level. There are cases cited of migration arising from family responsibilities, military service, and the desire for improved health and education. Irrespective of the motives, the dominant pattern observed remains as rural-to-urban migration. Btu what these non-labour approaches (whether they be descriptive in the tradition of Lee, or explanatory in the tradition of Harris and Todaro) suggest, however, is that conditions in the origin and destination affect the experience of migration. This includes the impacts felt by individuals (whether they find work, their social status and so on), the destinations (whether they experience labour surplus, for example) and the origins (whether they experience a diminishing of social, political and cultural capital, for example). Similar patterns of migration may be predicted under a range of different conditions, but the outcomes for migrants and for origin and destination communities depend on knowledge of the local conditions. Attempting to manage outcomes likewise requires sensitivity to local conditions.

RURAL-TO-URBAN MIGRATION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

The most commonly used data to describe patterns of migration in Australia is from the quinquennial Census of Population and Housing administered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australia's National Statistical Agency) and most recently conducted in 2006. The Census requests information about the current (usual) address of respondents, and their address one year before the Census and five years before the Census (but not about movements in between those times). It is widely recognised that this provides one fairly limited view of

migration, but the data have been used extensively to model spatial and demographic dimensions population change as well as to inform estimates of population growth and population projections.

Census data may be particularly poor when examining migration of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. There are conceptual issues – movement from place to place may not always be associated with a 'change of residence' by Indigenous people for whom such patterns of movement are cultural norms and do not reflect changing address in the way that they might for other populations (Prout, 2009). There are also practical issues derived from a special Indigenous enumeration strategy for remote areas which involves key informants and a shortened version of the Census form (ABS, 2006). The procedures aim to account for low literacy and poor English language skills that could affect response rates, but it has also been shown to result in under-enumeration because of poor knowledge by Census collectors and their local informants about the intent of Census questions (Martin et al., 2002). Finally there are issues of scale – measuring movements within the Northern Territory and attaching these to specific rural and urban places is difficult due to small population sizes. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is prevented legislatively from releasing information that could potentially identify respondents, so getting sufficiently detailed data about age and sex and Indigenous status (never mind further characteristics such as labour force status) is problematic at small geographic scales.

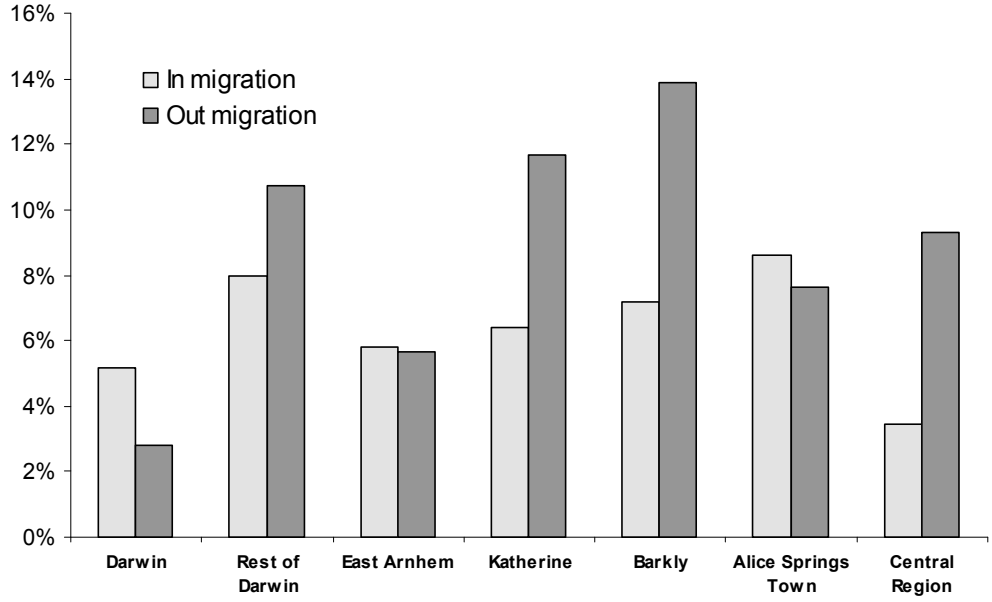
Nonetheless, the Census does provide some insights into broad patterns of intra-Territory movement to inform this paper. Data was extracted from the 2006 Census to compare the place of residence on Census night to the place of residence five years prior for people who had been in the Northern Territory at both those points in time. The data were dissagreagated by age (5 year age groups), sex and Indigenous status. Those who did not state their Indigenous status or their place of residence one or five years ago were excluded from the analysis, resulting in a study group of 11 727.

The geographic basis for analysis separated out the capital city of Darwin and the large Central Australian town of Alice Springs as representative of the urban areas of the NT. The rest of the NT was divided into the horizontal regions of (running north to south) – East Arnhem and Darwin rural, Katherine region, Barkly region, and Central region. Each zone apart from Darwin contains a mix of remote and very remote localities according to the current version of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility Remoteness Index of Australia (ABS, 2008a). Darwin is considered 'outer regional' and even Alice Springs is considered 'remote' on the ARIA+ index. The analysis simply identified the number of people in age, sex and Indigenous status classes who moved between regions, and particularly who moved from the more remote regions (East Arnhem, Katherine, Barkly and Central) to the urban centres of Alice

Springs, Darwin and Darwin rural. It is recognised that this provides an indication of rural-to-urban migration only, but the results were still informative, particularly when comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Less than six percent of the total population had moved from one region to another between 2001 and 2006. The greatest number of migrants moved into Darwin from the other regions (3194 movers) and Alice Springs town (1237). The next largest cohort was migrants out of Darwin to other regions (1694 movers). However, as shown in Figure 2, Darwin received the second lowest proportion of its 2006 population from movers from other regions (5.2%) next to Central (3.4%), and lost the lowest proportion of its 2001 population to other regions (2.9%). The largest proportional in-migrations were to Alice Springs town (8.6%) and Darwin rural (8.0%). The greatest proportional out-migrations were from Barkly (13.9%) and Katherine (11.7%). All regions lost the most population to Darwin, but they also gained the most population from Darwin.

Figure 2 – In and out migration by region, 2001 to 2006

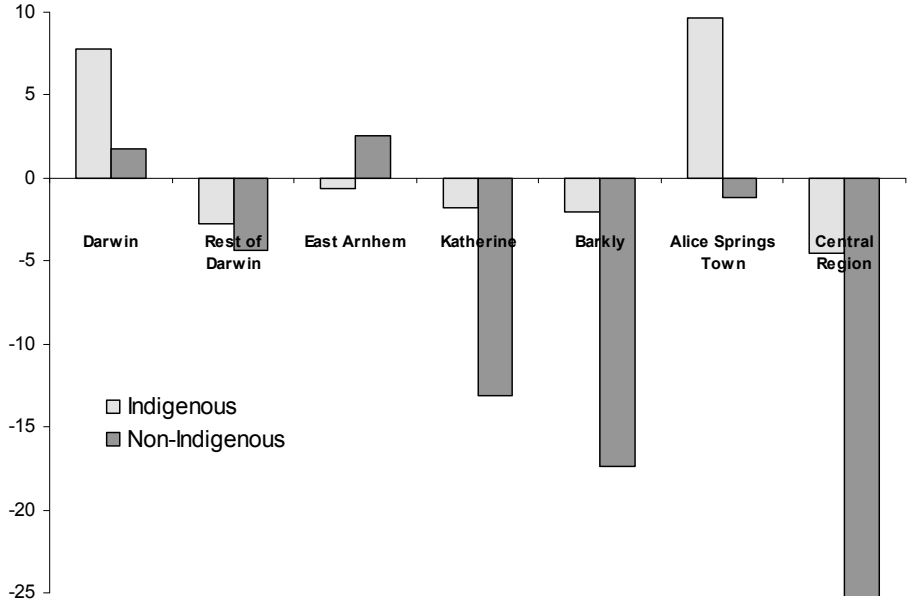


The overall pattern of Darwin receiving roughly twice as many in-migrants as it produced out-migrants was repeated in its relationship with each of the regions. For example, 760 people moved from Alice Springs to Darwin while 368 moved from Darwin to Alice Springs. And while 181 people moved from Barkly to Darwin, 90 moved from Darwin to Barkly. For Alice Springs this broad pattern was similar with the exception of its relationship to Katherine where it lost more than it gained. The only regions other than Darwin and Alice Springs which received more in-migrants than it produced out-migrants was East Arnhem, which received 14 more people than it sent out. At the surface, then, and with the exception of East Arnhem (which experienced substantial growth in mining

activity in the period), a pattern of movement from the rest of the NT to Darwin and Alice Springs and from Alice Springs to Darwin is apparent.

These broad patterns of movement can be summarised by identifying the proportion of migrants who moved from more remote to less remote regions (according to ARIA+ index scores) and vice versa. Some 4155 people (60% of migrants) moved from more remote to less remote regions, with 2748 (40% of migrants) moving in the other direction. The percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people moving from more remote to less remote regions was equivalent at 60%. However, as shown in Figure 3, the patterns of movement between individual regions were quite different for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

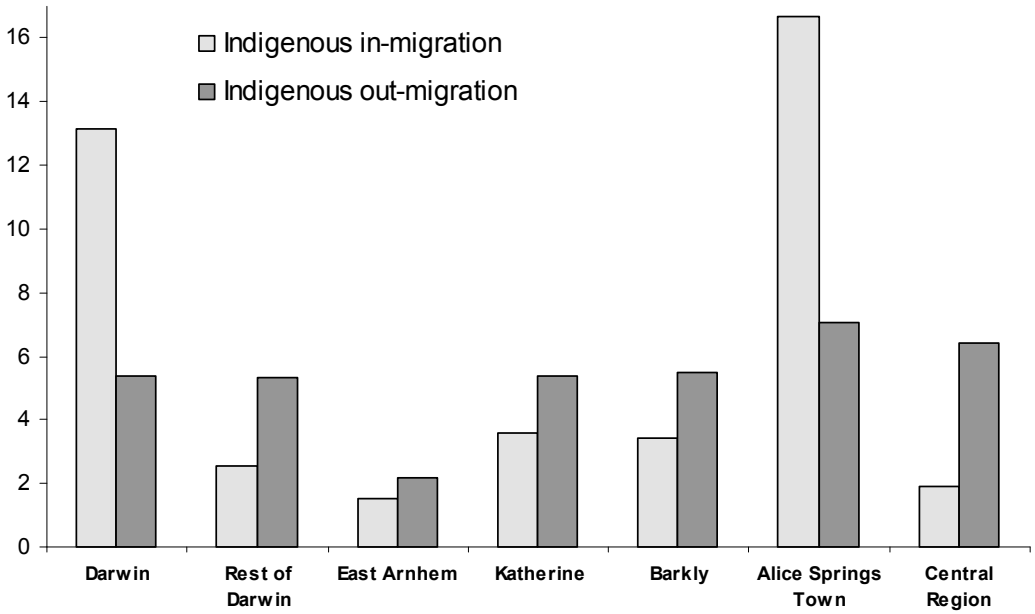
Figure 3 – Difference between in and outmigration by Indigenous status, 2001 to 2006 (%)



The above figure indicates the difference between the percentage (as a proportion of the 2006 population) of in and out-migration by Indigenous status and region. For Indigenous people there were noticeable differences between in and out migration for Darwin and Alice Springs with these centres being the only regions to record a positive net difference (around 8% and 10% respectively). The remaining regions recorded net losses of in the order of one and five percent, although the proportion of Indigenous people moving is lower overall than non-Indigenous. For non-Indigenous net movement, only Darwin and East Arnhem experienced increases in population (1.8% and 2.6% respectively).

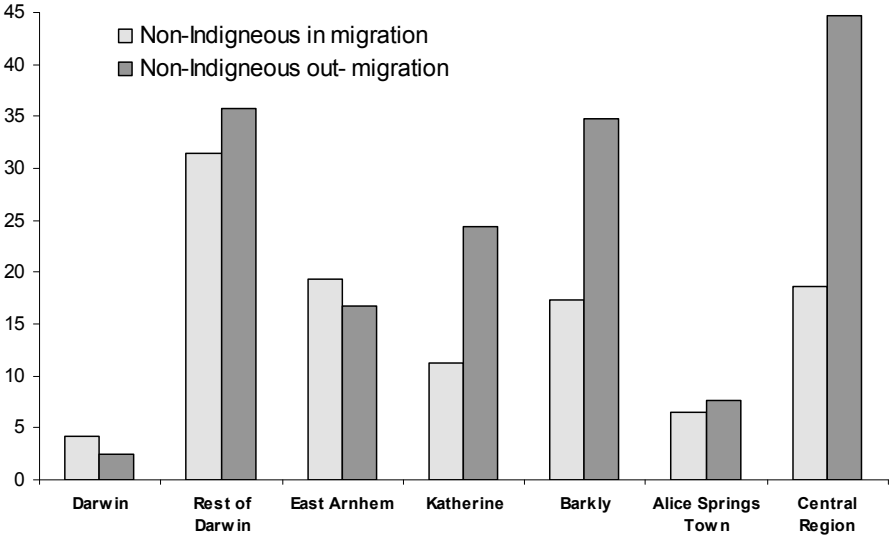
The patterns of in and out-migration for Indigenous persons are shown below to highlight the net contributions of intra-Territory migration.

Figure 4 – Indigenous persons: In and out-migration, 2001 to 2006 (%)



As shown in Figure 4, Alice Springs and Greater Darwin gained the largest percentage of its Indigenous population from other regions (16.7% and 13.1% respectively) during the period and lost only 7.1% and 5.4%. More than half of the loss from Alice Springs (54%) was to Darwin. Meanwhile for non-Indigenous persons Darwin and East Arnhem gained population, outer Darwin and Alice Springs lost some, while the remaining regions (Katherine, Barkly and Central) experienced large net losses (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Non-Indigenous persons: In and out migration, 2001 to 2006 (%)



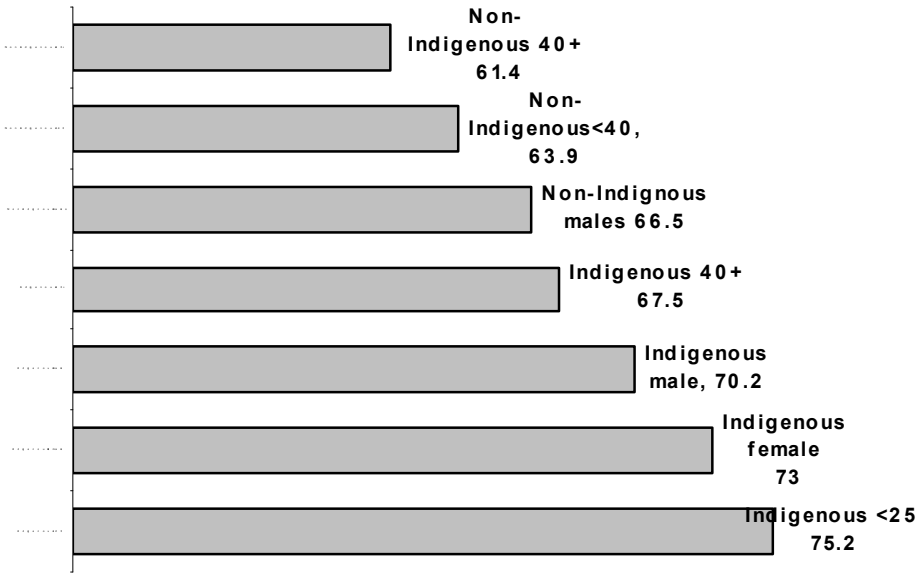
For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons the results for Katherine, Barkly, and Central are particularly interesting, reflecting a substantial out-migration of Northern Territorians from those regions. The overall impression

provided by these statistics is of relatively small movements of Indigenous people, but with a definite concentration of movement from throughout the NT to Darwin and Alice Springs. In contrast, non-Indigenous people were more mobile, with the general trend of moving to Darwin concealed in a more volatile overall migration system.

AGE AND GENDER ANALYSIS OF THOSE WHO MOVED FROM MORE REMOTE TO LESS REMOTE REGIONS

An analysis of age and gender in relation to those who moved from more remote to less remote areas are provided in the following figures. The proportions represent the percentages of persons in each group who moved from a more remote to less remote region as denoted by the ARIA scale.

Figure 6 - Percentage of persons moving from more remote to less remote areas by Indigenous status, gender and age



Overall 68% of moves were from more to less remote areas. The ratio was highest for Indigenous females (73%) and lowest for non-Indigenous males (66.5%). As shown in Figure 5 the greatest proportion of movers to less remote areas were Indigenous people aged less than 25 years (75.2%) followed by Indigenous females (73%). Non-Indigenous persons were less likely to have moved than Indigenous persons, with those 60 years or older least likely to have moved (61.2%).

Further analysis of Indigenous persons showed that, of the 714 Indigenous females who moved, 27.7% (n=198) moved to Greater Darwin from Darwin rural and a further 18.2% (n=130) moved from Katherine. The pattern was similar for Indigenous males as two thirds of them also moved to Darwin from Darwin rural or Katherine (27% and 12.9% respectively).

In relation to the 703 Indigenous persons under 40 years of age 40.9% (n=288) moved from Darwin rural to Darwin, 23.7% (n=167) from Katherine to Darwin and a further 19.2% (n=135) from the Central region to Darwin. There were much smaller numbers of persons in the 40 years of age or over group, however they were also likely to have moved from Darwin rural to Darwin (44.2%, n=77) and from Katherine to Darwin (24.1%, n=42).

The migratory patterns of people in the NT are therefore consistent with the literature which indicates that the dominant migration flow is from is rural to urban centres and that this generally tends to occur between locations which are relatively close to each other, and from a rural enclave to the nearest urban

centre, in this case Darwin Rural to Darwin and Katherine to Darwin, and, to a lesser extent, Central to Alice Springs. The following section discusses research which examined the 'push' and 'pull' factors associated with this pattern of migration.

DETERMINANTS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION

During 2008, a qualitative study was undertaken by the authors in four large Indigenous communities in remote parts of the Northern Territory (in fact all of the Northern Territory outside of its capital city Darwin is classified as remote). The study entailed in depth interviews with around 400 residents obtained through purposeful sampling but broadly representative to include a mix by gender, status in the community, labour force status, household types and family types (see Taylor and Carson, 2009). Respondents were asked to relay their stories about their own patterns of mobility, those of their family and friends, as well as observations about push and pull factors for other community residents. Most respondents were heads of families or those recommended for interviews by heads of families.

Respondents were able to identify common reasons for travel to and from the communities to urban areas. These included for shopping, health treatment, recreation, work or study, and for cultural reasons. Often more than one activity was undertaken on a single to compensate for large travel distances and the high costs of transport. This meant some trips were reportedly for extended periods of time of up to several months or more (which would qualify as residential migration under the ABS definition of length of stay for consideration as the place of residence). Older residents away for health related treatment were amongst those who tended to be away for longer periods and combine reasons for travel. Some trips were expressly taken for drinking as a result of the banning or limiting of alcohol in the home community; but in general this group was thought to represent a very small number of people who regularly travelled away for this purpose.

While some respondents recounted moves away from communities which were permanent, primarily for work and education purposes, most migration was reported to result in a return to the community at some time. Movement was hampered by a lack of transport and the costs associated with travel, particularly during the wet season for residents of communities in the north. Meanwhile the widespread and a growth in the use of telecommunications technologies (especially mobile phones) were thought to be helping stimulate mobility. Mobile phones were seen to assist with the communications about

other peoples movements, allow people to make arrangements to visit friends and family, and spread news of events which created moves.

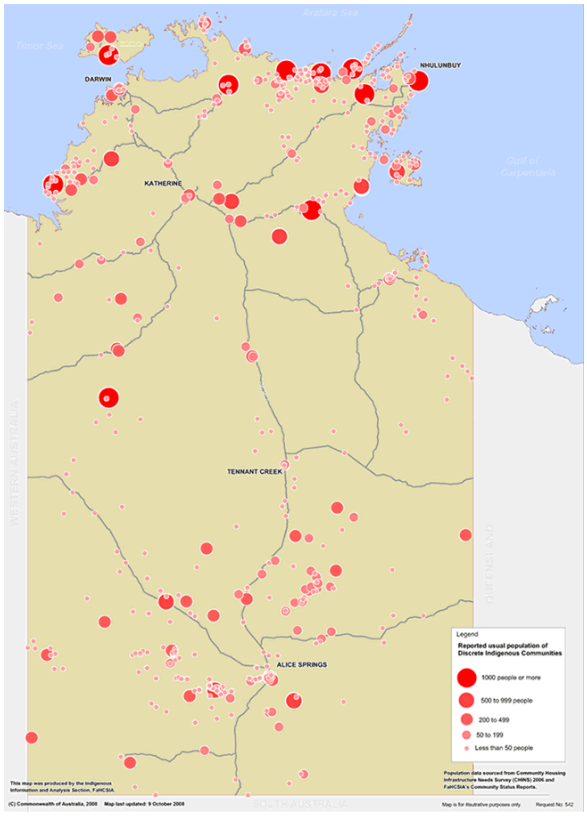
One of the most conspicuous mobility push factors for residents of some communities was the payment of royalty monies from mining ventures which operate on locally owned (Indigenous) lands. These sources of income do not accrue to all communities but where they do respondents reported large sums of money would be distributed by heads of families (known as Traditional Owners) around two to three times a year. Royalty money was reported to fund trips to urban centres (including interstate) for shopping, entertainment, visiting relatives and general 'partying'. Most often these trips lasted until the money was spent. For those that did not use royalty money for trips away expenditure on items whose cost was prohibitive under normal circumstances was common. This commonly included motor vehicles, furniture, toys, and mobile phones.

A firm sense of the embededness of mobility patterns was conveyed by respondents. That is, travel between communities and urban centres (as well as those in the other direction) were seen as part of everyday life AND very resilient to major 'shocks' as a result of policy, legislative, or governance changes within communities. Demonstrative of this a suite of changes to welfare reform, policing, health management, alcohol availability, schooling, and individual income management which were enacted by the Australian and Northern Territory Governments during recent years were reported to have had little impact on changing mobility patterns and purposes.

Most of the focus of stories about exogenous shocks to Northern Territory communities was on around the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). The NTER was an Australian Government initiative which stemmed from a report on child abuse in remote Indigenous communities. Commencing in mid 2007, and with a five year timeframe, part of the program involved subsuming of Indigenous land (Indigenous townships and town camps) as 'prescribed areas' under the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007 (Figure 1. This provided* the Australian Government with five year leases over the land in order to enable it to coordinate and facilitate implementation of NTER measures. Within most communities these measures included:

- An initial military presence to assist with implementation;
- The placing of Government Business Managers within communities to coordinate the response locally;
- Welfare quarantining (50%) to restrict how and where money can be spent;
- Compulsory health checkups for residents;
- Early intervention programs for children at risk;
- A range of housing programs and partnerships;
- The banning of alcohol and pornography possession and consumption;

Figure 6 - NTER communities in the Northern Territory



Source: FAHCSIA, 2008;

As well as fuelling of already trenchant views on the merits of NTER measures for redressing disadvantages for Indigenous people in remote areas, the NTER was reported by its detractors and by the media to have driven an exodus of young males (in particular) from communities into urban centres to escape the limitations imposed under the NTER. In particular, media reporting of drinking camps occupied by itinerants springing up in and on the outskirts of Alice Springs and Darwin were rife (see for example, The Australian). But in the research many respondents indicated that departures from communities were commonplace subsequent to big changes in community life – whether it be the death of an elder, a crackdown on marijuana use, or new regulations. It was proposed that such patterns might become stabilised once the initial shock of the change is absorbed, resulting in at least some movement back to the communities. It was also noted that programs to assist people to 'return to country' may aide in this process.

DISCUSSION

The Census data points to a net loss of Indigenous people from the remote regions of the NT to its urban centres of Darwin (in particular) and Alice Springs. Indigenous females and young Indigenous people were over represented in the cohort moving into urban centres. The female movement is interesting because much of the discussion around 'urban drift' has focused on young males. The Census data, while suffering from coverage issues, is relatively clear cut as a record of formal acknowledgement by respondents of a residential move. Meanwhile, interview respondents described a range of movements driven by a complex mix of purposes, with trips of varying lengths. There was little mention of employment seeking or the perception of better employment opportunities. In fact, employment was barely mentioned as a motivator for trips to 'town' and when it was it was within the context of employment related educational course.

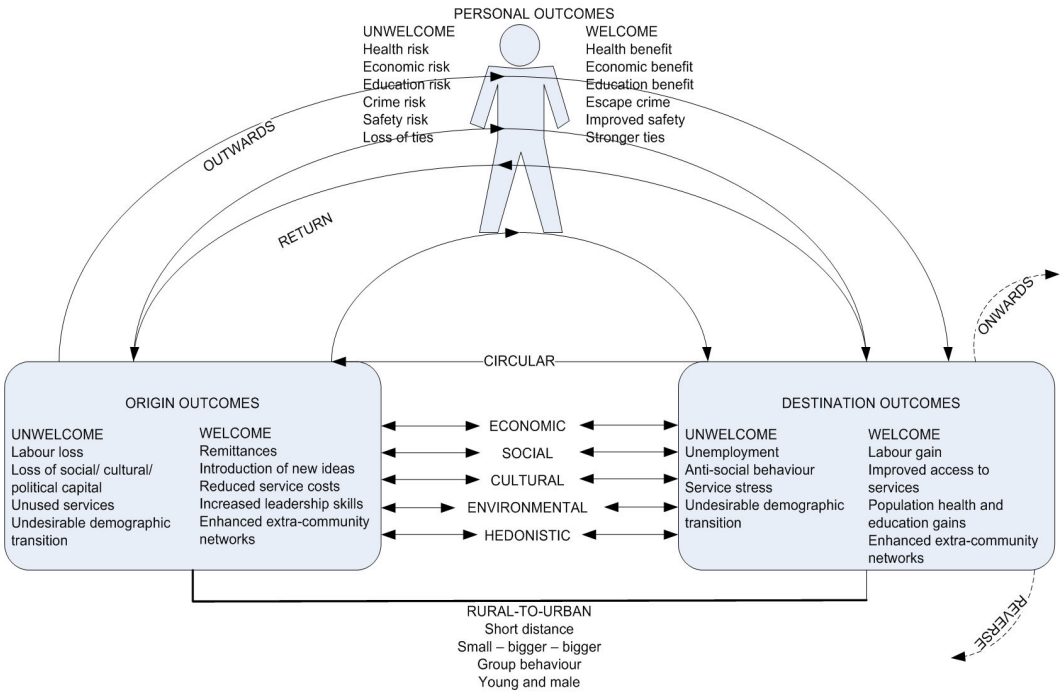
Public discourse to date has clearly reflected a lack of understanding about the reasons Indigenous people visit urban centres, who does so, how often, and what they do when they are there. The generic label of 'urban drift' engenders a perception of mobility which is both unplanned and non-purposeful. This is clearly not the case even though some trips involve activities which are perceived as having negative consequences (drinking and gambling). Despite being most prominent in policy and public debate about urban drift, these negative motivations were reported to be a regular driver for only a small number of people in each community. In contrast to the general perception, patterns of mobility are embedded to the extent that they are not impacted in the long term by major shocks in the community like those which accompanied the NTER. This paper questions the extent to which the purported increase in Indigenous people undertaking anti social activities in towns and their fringes can be attributed to the NTER. Given the findings here it is difficult to argue that reversing the provisions of the NTER would reverse the patterns of mobility reported as attributable to the program. The NTER, it must be acknowledged, may have driven a spike in mobility but fundamentally it is unlikely to have enacted a long term change to established patterns.

Commentary focusing on the negative outcomes associate with rural to urban migration by Indigenous people is not new. Most existing academic and grey literature has taken a dispersive view of Indigenous mobility. In particular the impacts on the delivery of services and on program outcomes have received much attention. In practice this might well be a reflection of the difficulties service providers face in servicing remote and sparsely settled populations. Prout (2009), for example, has highlighted this perception as a derivative of a lack knowledge and understanding about Indigenous temporary mobility practices which in itself stems from a lack of reliable data for depicting and understanding the phenomenon. Consequently, Indigenous people are perceived as opting out of the systems, institutions, and infrastructure put in

place to educate them, keep them healthy, and provide them with an equivalent lifestyle to those in less remote parts of the Territory.

For policy makers it may be more productive and appropriate to consider these findings as indicative of a system of migration and mobility which includes residential (permanent) moves from more to less remote places, temporary and short-term moves, welcome and unwelcome moves, all of which may result from a spectrum of drivers. Within this marginal benefits from employment and education are two of many factors. Transitive to this perspective it is possible to conceive and discuss a range of both positive and negative outcomes. In Figure 7 a framework for describing our understanding of rural to urban migration in the NT is presented. It depicts a suite of possible outcomes for both the person moving, their community of origin and the destination. Amongst these is the reduced costs and enhanced access for service provision to Indigenous people located (temporarily or otherwise) in urban centres and the flow on effects for personal health and wellbeing which may result.

Figure 7 - A Framework for Understanding Rural-to-Urban Migration in the Northern Territory



The complexity of the framework and the diversity of possible outcomes make it clear that changing the fundamental patterns would be very difficult. Evidence from overseas, and especially in the literature on Chinese migration to the

cities, demonstrates the resilience of urban migration even in the presence of imposing policy which at times has created institutional barriers for reducing, and in some cases, discouraging altogether such movements (Zhao, 2003). In the NT more attention and energy might be paid to maximising the potentially beneficial outcomes and minimising the potential negative outcomes outlined in the framework and evident in the experiences overseas. Transitioning new urban residents to employment and education is obviously a key but, unlike the tenant of HT models and their more contemporary derivatives, not necessarily the most significant driving force.

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