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A Wellbeing Approach to Mobility and its Application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

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Abstract This paper demonstrates that key models of human mobility across several disciplines can be considered as specific cases of a broader conceptualisation of mobility in terms of its contribution to wellbeing. It is argued that this wellbeing perspective offers important advantages for the formulation of policy in areas that must respond to mobility in cross-cultural contexts, and particularly in regard to policy relating to highly mobile, indigenous peoples. An applied example is provided through a discussion of how this conceptualisation of mobility offers a different understanding of the mobility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, one that may have led to superior policy outcomes.

Keywords Mobility · Wellbeing · First Nations · Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander · Indigenous · Australia

1 Introduction

The mobility of people, and their resultant dispersion across time and space, has important consequences for a wide range of public policy areas, such as town and regional planning, infrastructure spending, labour market functioning and the provision of services, as well as for decision-making by non-governmental agents. This relationship between mobility and government policy and practice operates in both directions. While policy formulation must take into account mobility, the decisions that governments make impact heavily upon people's decisions on where to be, when and how to get there. At one extreme of this continuum from the role of facilitating mobility to the role of shaping mobility, governments can enact policies to rigidly curtail and control people's movements to suit the objectives of the State (see, for example, Scott 1998).

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Effective formulation of policy dealing with mobility requires an understanding of the drivers of mobility and how people will respond to different policy settings, and this is often informed by academic studies. Underlying these views of mobility are models of some form: be they theoretical or data-driven; explicitly adopted or shaping the policy discourse less formally. Adoption of a specific model generates a lens through which governments quantitatively and qualitatively assess mobility. For groups within society whose mobility patterns do not fit the model, this inevitably shrouds their movements in a veil of randomness and lack of purpose.

In what follows it is argued that a broad range of such models of mobility can be usefully subsumed under a more generalised conceptualisation of mobility in terms of its contribution to wellbeing, and that this may lead to better policy outcomes. This applies equally to micro or temporary mobility, and to more permanent migration. The significance of this reconceptualisation of mobility is highlighted through a discussion of the misunderstandings and policy failures that have characterised the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians following European colonisation from the late 1700s. The models considered include the neo-classical economics approach, the gravity model and models relating to mobility in arid environments and specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2 Theoretical Models of Mobility

To lay the foundations to the argument for a reconceptualisation of mobility, this section briefly summarises selected models from various disciplines designed to explain and quantify mobility. Following Dockery and Colquhoun (2012, pp. 3–4), these are seminal models from neo-classical economics, gravity models and the resource scarcity model. Section 2.4 reviews models applied specifically to explain the mobility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, since these will be less familiar to most readers but integral to the later discussion.

2.1 Neo-Classical Economics

Early models of migration drawing upon the neo-classical paradigm of rational, utility maximising individuals included Lewis' (1954) seminal 'dual sector' model of rural to urban migration during a country's economic development, and Harris and Todaro's (1970) model that sought to explain the continuation of such a rural to urban drift despite high rates of urban unemployment. Harris and Todaro (1970) model the decision on whether or not to migrate by assuming individuals act to maximise their expected income. In urban areas expected income is the product of the urban wage rate and the probability of being employed. Hence the expected wage in urban areas is a decreasing function of the local unemployment rate. Workers would move from rural to urban areas so long as the expected income in cities exceeded their marginal productivity (income) in the agricultural sector (plus costs of migration). Thus the differential between the urban wage rate and marginal productivity in the agricultural sector could account for continued rural–urban migration, despite significant pools of urban unemployment. A broader theory of 'compensating differentials' has since emerged in labour economics to account for differences in equilibrium wages across regions through differences in other attributes affecting utility (see Rosen 1986). For example, firms may be able to pay lower wages in cities with lower

housing costs or a better climate, with worker migration equating expected utility across regions.

2.2 Gravity Models

Like stars and planets in space, gravity models suggest that the strength of attraction (probability of movement) between locations is dependent on the mass (population) of those locations and inversely related to the 'distance' between them. Distance, however, need not be interpreted spatially, but refers to anything that bears upon the cost of migration, be that a financial or psychological cost. For migration decisions, these distances may be measured as differences in languages or culture between the source and destination regions. Gravity models have been used extensively in explaining trade flows, with the general finding that the volume of trade is greater between countries that have larger economies, are in closer proximity, and are similar in culture and per capita income (see, for example, Porojan 2001).

2.3 Resource Variability

McAllister et al. (2009) develop a model specifically related to arid environments. Given the distribution of resources in such environments is typically highly variable, they consider how the resources necessary for survival are accessed. Just as portfolio theory demonstrates that financial risk can be managed through diversification, variability in resources in arid environments may also be managed by diversifying resource access across time and space. Of the different responses animal and plant species have developed to survive in the desert, McAllister et al. (2009) identify two strategies relevant to humans. These are nomadism, moving across space in search of resources, and 'exploiters', moving into regions only in resource-rich times; and such strategies may be embedded in culture and social organisation. Nomadism involves costs in the form of time, energy and information gathering, however, there is a trade-off between these and the cost of storing resources.

2.4 Mobility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

A distinction can be made between the traditional drivers and patterns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility that existed prior to or unaffected by colonisation, and mobility patterns as they have since been shaped through engagement with colonising forces. Beyond Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians themselves, there is limited understanding of either of these categories of mobility. In seeking to generate or to account for population estimates, earlier anthropological perspectives emphasised the importance of the availability of resources—notably water and food and changes in these with climatic variations—as shaping population density, social structures, Aboriginal law, spirituality and mobility (Meehan and White 1990; Young and Doohan 1989).[1] This is consistent with the model by McAllister et al. (2009) of resource variability and availability as a driver of mobility in desert environments and Prout's (2008a, p. vi) observation that people in the more resource abundant, tropical areas of northern Australia appeared to

[1] There is even great uncertainty over the size of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population at the time of European settlement, with estimates varying from a few hundred thousand to over one million persons (Davidson 1990).

have lower mobility than most nomadic peoples. Toyne and Vachon also imply a role of resource scarcity in shaping cultural practices of mobility: 'a map of the Dreaming provides a kind of ecological map for the efficient and secure exploitation of resources' (1985, cited in Young and Doohan 1989, p. 27).

Despite the ongoing integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into the mainstream economy, traditional drivers of mobility have proven to be extremely resilient. Case study-based research conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Young and Doohan 1989) and as recently as the 2000s (Habibis et al. 2011; Memmott et al. 2006) emphasised the maintenance of kinship networks as one of the key factors shaping mobility. Biddle and Hunter (2006) draw on both the neo-classical approach and the gravity model in discussing how the costs of moving might differ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Based on studies of the social networks of the Yolngu people of Northern Australia, Morphy (2010) proposes a three-layered model capturing sacred geography and associated settlements, nodal individuals and kin networks to explain mobility patterns. Sacred geography and nodal individuals are interrelated, and in turn kinship networks are built around these individuals. Such a model, argues Morphy, is far more appropriate to capturing the essence of Yolngu patterns of mobility than the 'bounded container' models underpinning standard demographic categories (2010, p. 366).

3 Reconceptualising Mobility—A Wellbeing Approach

It can be seen that mobility is a phenomenon that can be interpreted from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. Each has been developed and applied with regard to specific contexts, and accordingly attach different weights to the many possible drivers and measures of mobility. Depending upon the motivation of the analyst, for example, mobility may be defined as movement involving a change of usual residence, while others may be interested only in interstate or international migration or moves between strata of neighbourhood socio-economic status. Both the theoretical model adopted and what gets measured shape the way policy-makers view mobility, inevitably elevating attention afforded to some drivers and characteristics of mobility while downplaying others.

Such priorities will not be appropriate for all groups within a society, risking a distorted view of mobility and sub-optimal policy decisions, most notably for minority groups. To mitigate these risks, a much more general but simple conceptualisation of human mobility is proposed:

> Mobility is a simply a means to accessing those things that contribute to wellbeing and avoiding things that contribute to illbeing.

The term 'conceptualisation' is used deliberately to avoid suggesting this as a formal model of mobility. Contributors to wellbeing include physical resources, social capital, relationships and other forms of human interaction, knowledge, experiences and networks. A full model would, ideally, specify these constituents by appealing to a specific wellbeing theory or framework. Potential frameworks include, for example, Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, Sen's (1999) capabilities approach, or Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci 2000). It would need to situate the individual within social, cultural and technological environments and acknowledge the scope and role of substitutes to physical mobility as means for accessing things that contribute to wellbeing. Information technology and telecommunications are, of course, important among these substitutes. In this day of telecommunications, people barely need to leave home. They can telecommute

(work or study from home); order goods and services online to be delivered; access entertainment through radio, television and downloading music and movies; stay in touch with other people by phone and any multitude of internet forums. However, people may also derive wellbeing from the experience of mobility, from the journey itself.

Rather than specify a full and sophisticated model, the intention in this paper is to argue that seeing mobility in terms of its contribution to wellbeing is a valuable approach. Note that the wellbeing approach potentially encompasses all of the theories and approaches reviewed above. The general anthropological analyses of resource availability and variability as determining population movement emphasise the basic necessities of food, water and shelter for survival and, hence, for wellbeing. While this was appropriate for agrarian-based civilisations and tribal and nomadic peoples for whom these models were formulated, the requirement for consumers' physical movement to satisfy basic needs has been superseded by advancements in production and transportation. Morphy's model of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility can also be considered a formulation of the underlying conceptualisation of mobility as a means to achieve wellbeing, one that specifically recognises the role of sacred geography, nodal individuals and kinship in the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Gravity models are based on identifying and quantifying forces of attraction (or repulsion) between locations and the cost of movements between those locations. When applied to the movement of people (at least of free people), these attractors and costs can be interpreted simply as contributors to and detractors from wellbeing. In deciding to remain at one location or move to another, people choose the option offering them the highest expected wellbeing, all things considered, and the gravity model becomes one of an empirical modelling of the key factors that determine those expectations (i.e. preferences). In gravity models the weight put on the different factors can be determined empirically, such as in statistical estimation of trade, investment or population flows. However, theory must still guide what factors are measured and tested in the models, and often data availability is determined by external priorities. The mobility of minority groups who represent only a small proportion of the population may not be well captured by 'mainstream' models, either because their different preferences will have little statistical weight in population-based estimates, or because data collections may not adequately capture the unique factors relevant to them.

The wellbeing approach is closest to that of neo-classical economics, which is built around the underlying notion of a utility function. However, traditional welfare economics eschewed the direct measurement of utility, relying instead upon 'revealed preference' combined with the assumption of rational, utility-maximising individuals to infer the rank order of different choice sets: if an individual chooses A over B, then that individual must be happier with A. Further, if a strict set of perfect market assumptions holds, these choices will also generate social optima. The neo-classical models of mobility focus upon maximisation of expected income because, in this framework, higher income expands the choice set available to individuals and, by construction, increases their utility (wellbeing).

A growing body of literature in 'happiness economics' has since embraced direct measurement of subjective wellbeing and presented a number of challenges to the neo-classical approach, perhaps most importantly in casting doubt on the direct link between income and wellbeing (see Frey and Stutzer 2002; Frey 2008). The important departure of the more general wellbeing approach from the neo-classical analysis of mobility lies in the acceptance that income may not be a good proxy for wellbeing. This will be important for minority groups whose culture varies substantially from the mainstream. First, cultural differences imply differences in preferences that may be hidden in utility functions inferred

for the population at large. Second, where such groups are not fully integrated into the mainstream economy, as is often the case with First Nations peoples, there is no efficient market to determine prices for many of the things they value. This further severs the link between income and wellbeing and the assumption that market forces will generate optimal outcomes.

The wellbeing approach is also consistent with the medical and gerontological literature, which has tended to focus on the impact of physical limitations to mobility on wellbeing, which operate through effects upon functional health, independence, reciprocity, self-esteem and self-identity (Bourret et al. 2002; Schwanen and Ziegler 2011). Bourret et al. (2002, p. 339) note that mobility has been identified as the most significant factor shaping elderly people's perceptions of their health and wellbeing.

So it has been demonstrated, I hope, that a wellbeing approach to mobility has broad generalisability, able to subsume the key existing models, and that this generality is highly desirable when mobility needs to be considered across different cultural contexts and for minorities. Moreover, if one accepts that the objectives of policies and programs should ultimately relate to the maximisation of wellbeing, then seeing mobility as a means to wellbeing aligns the conceptualisation of mobility with those objectives. This is important because for policies relating to First Nations peoples, the objectives relating to their wellbeing—even when explicitly stated—are too often overlooked for the convenience of using mainstream indictors of outcomes (see Dockery and Milsom 2007; Pickering 2000). To highlight these points with a concrete example, the following section discusses how such an approach can be drawn upon to challenge the prism through which the temporary mobility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians has been viewed.

4 Reconceptualising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility

From the arrival of the First Fleet at what is now known as Sydney in January 1788, cultural misunderstandings have pervaded the history of engagement between the European settlers and Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and much of the subsequent government policy relating to them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility is one of the key areas of such miscomprehension. Perhaps the most profound example of this was the colonists' failure to recognise the laws and customs that connected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to their country, instead assuming the land to be uninhabited. This assumption of *terra nullius* persisted until it was overthrown by the High Court decision in *Mabo v Queensland No. 2* (*1992*), which established the existence of Native Title in Australia, consistent with the principle already long held within English law that inhabitants of a territory prior to colonisation retained possession of that territory (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000; Gammage 2011; Kildea 1998; Ranzijn et al. 2009).

Early colonists saw the patterns of movement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as random and purposeless, a reflection of idleness. Their 'wandering lifestyle' was seen as one of the key traits that set the 'natives' apart from civilised society, and an obstacle to participation in a social and economic system predicated upon a permanent settlement (Young 1990; Young and Doohan 1989). Many of the policies to follow had the express intent to sedentarise these populations, including the removal of people from their traditional lands to be placed on reserves and missions, permit systems limiting movements, and the removal of children from their natural families (Ranzijn et al. 2009). Young and Doohan (1989, p. 1) cite as an example Governor Macquarie's proclamation of 1816:

> The natives (are exhorted) to relinquish their wandering, idle and predatory habits of life and to become industrious and useful members of a community where they will find protection and encouragement.

To this day the policy discourse in Australia reflects a view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as highly mobile and of that mobility as unstructured and unproductive, reflected in the commonly used term 'walkabout' (Prout 2011, p. 409). This mobility is perceived as creating challenges for the delivery of services and the provision of infrastructure and as barriers to participation in education and the labour market (see, for example, Biddle and Markham 2013; Habibis et al. 2010, 2011; Morphy 2010; Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Services 2012; Prout 2008a, b, 2011, Taylor and Dunn 2010).

Australian census data do show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were more likely to be away from their place of 'usual residence' on the night of the Census, and the most recent (2011) data also indicate that they were more likely to have changed their place of usual residence over the past 1 and 5 years. However, it is important to note that mobility is generally considered to be a good thing. Migration in line with regional differences in price signals is seen in the positive light of 'flexibility' and 'structural adjustment', such as movement of workers to areas of higher employment opportunity and higher wages. The growing use of fly-in/fly-out workforces in regional Australia offers another example of mobility in response to labour market needs. The terms of reference for the Productivity Commission's recent enquiry into labour mobility asked the Commission to 'identify the major impediments to geographic mobility to support economic adjustment, employment and productivity outcomes' (Productivity Commission 2013).

In these contexts, mobility itself is not problematic; it is a *lack* of mobility that is seen as the problem. Biddle and Hunter (2006) present evidence that the relatively lower responsiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility to labour market incentives is seen as a problem. Yet they note that this appears perfectly rational given that discrimination and other barriers mean they can expect far lower gains from moving to areas of higher employment opportunity when compared to other Australians, a finding confirmed in Biddle (2010). Rather it is a certain form of mobility that is seen as problematic-temporary mobility. Also referred to as 'beats' and as line, chain and circular mobility, temporary mobility can be thought of as trips of varying duration that do not involve a change in the place or places one usually has access to for accommodation, only absences from those places (Dockery and Colquhoun 2012; Habibis et al. 2010; Memmott et al. 2004; Prout 2008a).

4.1 Taking a Wellbeing Perspective

How might these perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander temporary mobility have differed if, as policy-makers, program administrators or evaluators, we commenced from the view that mobility is undertaken to access things that contribute to wellbeing? One would first look for differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in what contributes to their wellbeing and in preferences for how these things are accessed that might generate differences in levels and patterns of mobility. It would readily become apparent that such differences are rooted in culture. Characteristics identified as distinguishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture from Western cultures include:

- The importance of connections to the land in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' sense of identity and of their past. Terms such as country, homelands, sacred sites, songlines and the Dreamtime all reflect how this important relationship is deeply embedded within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. There is evidence that connection to country and maintenance of traditional 'caring for country' activities has positive effects on health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Campbell et al. 2011).
- The emphasis placed on relationships within families, extended kin and other members of the community, in contrast to the emphasis placed on the nuclear family within Western culture (see, for example, Berry et al. 2001; Christie 1985; Greer and Patel 2000; Long et al. 2007; Thompson et al. 2000).
- Less verbal and less direct communication styles, with greater emphasis on 'yarning', body language and other non-verbal cues (Ranzijn et al. 2009).

Each of these, most obviously the importance of connection to the land, could be expected to generate stronger preferences for physical mobility and for person-to-person contact. A close, spiritual connection to country and high quality relationships with an extended kinship network featuring reciprocity and non-verbal communication cannot be obtained online. Two quotes serve to attest to the remarkable persistence of kinship, culture and country as key drivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility:

> Even after 200 years of colonisation … involving radical dispossession of Aboriginal groups and … severe curtailment of their freedom to move around their country, nearly 70 % … recognised a homeland or traditional country. (Morphy 2010, p. 376).

> Attachment to place and community prevail, irrespective of a history of changing government policies. There appears no reason to expect that these attachments will change in the foreseeable future. (Memmott et al. 2006, p. 5).

These and other studies provide strong evidence that such relationships are extremely important to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Explicit recognition of the link between these factors as drivers of mobility because of their contribution to wellbeing could be expected to result in policy and planning that affords a greater weight to accommodating such mobility rather than viewing it as a problem, even if only at the margins.

If one accepts that mobility is undertaken as a means to achieving wellbeing, or avoiding illbeing, it becomes difficult to comprehend the sense in which mobility can be seen as 'problematic'. As noted, however, focussing on existing models of mobility can lead to data collections that do not adequately capture the unique factors driving mobility for culturally diverse minorities. Indeed, this has been the case in Australia. Many of the constructs used to measure and understand mobility serve to misrepresent or obscure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander temporary mobility and its motivation. Most commonly this is acknowledged with respect to the methods used in the Census, the data source for the bulk of empirical analyses of population movements in Australia. Examples of culturally inappropriate classifications used in the Census include:[2]

[2] Taylor (2006); Morphy (2006, 2007); Foster et al. (2005) and others have expanded on the limitations of the Census and other data collections for the purposes of analysing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility, and temporary mobility in particular.

- Place of usual residence—the Census identifies individuals' usual place of residence and classifies them as being either in their place of usual residence or their place of enumeration (where they were on Census night). These data, and data on place of usual residence 1 and 5 years earlier, are the key indicators of mobility used in much empirical research. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, however, have a number of places where they would regularly stay overnight.
- Nuclear families—the Census household form is largely predicated around the idea of a nuclear family and hence the relationship grid uses terms (e.g. husband, wife, de facto, son, daughter, granddaughter, etc.) which do not translate to kinship relationships recognised by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Morphy 2006).
- Visitor—persons within a household that is not their usual place of residence are classified as visitors. Just as the 'usual resident' construct is less clear cut for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, so too is the concept of visitor.
- Geographical boundaries—people are mapped to geographical areas based on both their place of residence and place of enumeration. State and Local Government Areas are used extensively as many government programs and funding allocations are made at these levels. Such boundaries are often of very limited relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[3]

Taking a wellbeing perspective, data collection to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility would encompass kinship connections and associated networks of places of accommodation, where people are in relation to their homelands and geographical boundaries based on language groups, akin to Morphy's three-layered model. That policy-makers do not have such data can contribute to the mobility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples appearing mysterious and irrational:

> For people who cannot think outside their own meta-metaphorical square, the bounded container appears as the only possible model for coherent sociality. The apparent capturing of Aboriginal sociality within the bounded container model of census data provides a basis for believing that Aboriginal people are just not very good at being contained: their households are too big and they move around too much; and it is government's job to formulate policies that help them to become better contained citizens. (Morphy 2007, pp. 178–179).

This is not to deny that delivering services and infrastructure to a population is more difficult when that population is more dispersed and more mobile. To the extent this is true, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inevitably face trade-offs between mobility and some aspects of what Western society considers as reflecting a higher standard of living or 'progress'. But how are policymakers to know what weight to put on competing desires if mobility is seen only as a problem and not in terms of its contribution to wellbeing? For this, policymakers need much more detailed and current information about the reasons for temporary mobility, how it contributes to wellbeing and how mobility can be accommodated within models of service delivery.[4]

[3] The ABS does map the Census data to an 'Indigenous Geography' in which the country is divided into a number of Indigenous locations, areas and regions, but since the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, these have not been the basis upon which program funding is allocated regionally.

[4] Addressing this information gap is one of the main objectives of the Population Mobility and Labour Markets research project current being undertaken by the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

In the opening chapter of *Seeing like a State*, Scott (1998) discusses how the extraction of revenue from forested land and the development of scientific forestry shaped the way the early modern European State viewed and measured forests. The rich biodiversity of the forest, replete with many varieties of trees, plants, birds, animals, insects, underbrush and fodder was 'resolved through its [the state's] fiscal lens into a single number: the revenue yield of the timber that might be extracted annually' (1998, p. 12). Vocabularies changed to represent this fiscal view of the world. High yielding species of trees became 'timber', while competing species of trees became 'trash' trees or 'underbrush', plants became 'weeds', and insects and birds living off trees or crops became 'pests' (1998, p. 13).

Scott goes on to detail how a range of facets of society—including urban planning, map boundaries, language and even the development of surnames—can be traced to the state's need to monitor, regulate and tax its people. In fact, Scott was motivated to write *Seeing like a State* by his observation that 'people who move around', such as gypsies, nomads, hunter-gatherers and serfs, seemed always to be enemies of the state:

> The more I examined these efforts at sedentarization, the more I came to see them as a state's attempt to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion. (Scott 1998, p. 2).

In this paper I hope to have persuaded the reader that the wellbeing perspective is a powerful and useful way of understanding human mobility. The main existing models can be subsumed under a conceptualisation of mobility as a means to accessing those things that contribute to wellbeing, and avoiding things that contribute to illbeing. The importance of this generality lies in its implications for policy formulation and evaluation in cross-cultural settings, with particular relevance for First Nations peoples. The wellbeing approach calls for the realignment of priorities, definitions and measurement to afford greater weight to those things that matter most in people's lives. It exposes the prism through which governments perceive the mobility of such peoples as problematic—their need to impose simplifying classifications to carry out the functions of statehood, for it is otherwise hard to conceive how the pursuit of wellbeing could be interpreted as problematic.

To move beyond the abstract, the mobility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians was examined as an applied example, and in particular the perception that their temporary mobility patterns retard socio-economic progress. Accepting that the same principle holds for this temporary mobility—as I believe it must—that it is undertaken to access things that promote wellbeing or avoid things that detract from wellbeing forces one to focus on those things that are important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing: culture, kinship and country. To borrow from Sen (1999), these are things that they have cause to value and have the right to value. Viewing such mobility as problematic implies that choices made or differences in preferences held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are somehow illegitimate. In commencing from a wellbeing perspective, I hope to have demonstrated that the extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobility and the air of illegitimacy around it can be attributed to the way mainstream society classifies and measures both mobility and socio-economic outcomes.

The danger that culture-based differences in preferences are seen as illegitimate choices is a more general one:

> The concept of Indigenous temporary mobility has come into prominence as a way of capturing an aspect of indigenous culture critical to the explanation for the disadvantage experienced by Australia's Indigenous peoples, including adverse housing outcomes. (Habibis et al. 2011, p. 3).

Viewing cultures themselves as the source of disadvantage leads to hidden pressures for assimilation pervading policy thinking (Pickering 2000). Large cities create problems such as pollution and congestion, and the use of fly-in/fly-out work forces in the Australian mining industry has given rise to a range of negative social impacts, but these challenges are not described in terms of problems of Western sedentary culture. If policy is to reflect the values and aspirations of peoples across diverse cultures, then I argue that mobility needs to be seen as the pursuit of wellbeing. For many First Nation peoples this will require recognition of the role of mobility in maintaining culture and identity, rather than dismissing mobility as illegitimate because of cultural differences and prejudices.

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