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Rensel/Home in the Islands

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1 Introduction

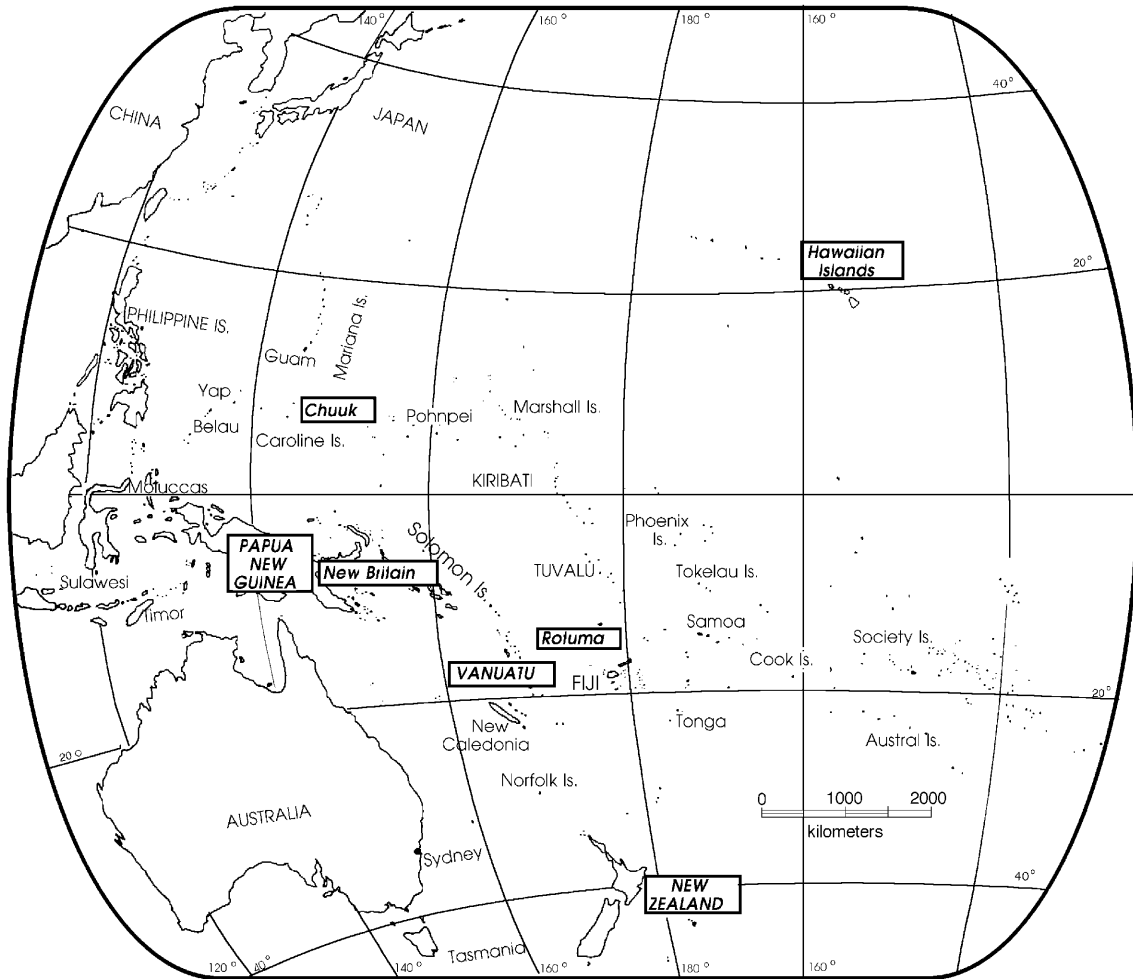


JAN RENSEL

ORDINARY HOUSES have extraordinary stories to tell. Grand, monumental, and ceremonial structures frequently inspire awe and analysis, but mundane, domestic arenas we most often take for granted. It is true that unusual events—such as having to move, coping with damage or loss, or embarking on fieldwork in a strange place—will focus our attention on housing for a time. But as the crisis passes, housing generally recedes to the background of our consciousness. As a result, much of what we could learn from it “goes without saying” (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, 3–4; see also Bloch 1992).

Yet anthropological studies have been providing insights into humanity’s relationships with housing for more than a century. Some of the earliest ethnographers (e.g., Morgan 1965 [1881], Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903]) explored a reciprocal dynamic that is fundamental to the interaction of people and housing: People shape their living spaces, which in turn influence how they live their lives and help to perpetuate the cultural structures that produced them.¹ This is not a homeostatic process, however; people not only house themselves but modify their houses, and even redefine their purposes and meanings. Housing may function as shelter, container, status symbol, home; it may provide a basis of belonging, represent membership in or dominance by an encompassing macro-society, or assert cultural uniqueness or resurgence.

Architects, along with anthropologists, geographers, folklorists, and historians continue to be fascinated with describing the multiple factors that help to explain variability in, and distribution of, built forms (especially those identified as vernacular or traditional; see below). In their review article, Lawrence and Low (1990) canvass the



1.1 Location of case studies

broad array of perspectives on built environments that have developed over the past several decades. These include, among others, relatively straightforward accounts of ecological and social structural functions of housing in different societies; psychological approaches emphasizing spatial perception and proxemics and exploring issues of privacy and territoriality; and complex symbolic analyses that examine the ways built environments nonverbally express culturally shared meanings, reaffirming conceptions of social, political, and cosmological order.

While many of these issues are incorporated in the case studies in this volume, here the focus is on *change*. Just as in the prologue the houses that moved were the ones that caught Margaret Rodman's eye, in the remaining chapters the stories of the houses that changed are highlighted. The changes in these stories are social, political, and economic as well as physical, personal, and regional—histories writ small and large. Here are stories of colonized peoples incorporating introduced materials and responding to imposed ideas about order, “good houses,” and proper living. Here migrant families seek opportunities and solutions to the physical limits of their housing in a range of new settings. Here families carve out their livelihoods in remote homesteads over generations, where their houses reflect the evolving circumstances they faced, the personal choices they made. These are tales of imperialism and resistance, identity and resilience, transformation and persistence. And all these dramas are played out and recorded in changes in housing over time.

Housing change is inextricably tied to changes in the social relationships that housing embodies and represents and from which it emerges. Further, housing, in its physical forms, uses, and meanings, is impacted by and responds to changes in global political economy. Houses can be seen as a nexus where sociocultural, economic, and political forces interact, transcending disciplinary boundaries. Ordinary housing provides a focal point for discovery and exploration of the stories embodied therein.

Housing as Product and Process

In this volume we use the term housing to connote the dynamic nature of human interaction with domestic space. Housing is both noun—an object, something people have, make, live in—and verb—an activity, something people do. Other scholars have noted a similar noun/verb duality in the term “dwelling”: In his pioneering global survey of vernacular domestic habitation, Oliver (1987, 7) discusses

dwelling as both process—the activity of residing—and artifact—the place or structure that is the physical expression and focus of residence. In the North American context, Saegert (1985) also prefers the active, relational connotations of the term “dwelling.” But in contrast, she limits “housing” to its noun-sense as object, identifying “units of housing” as “commodities . . . we search for rather than produce” (Saegert 1985, 287; in the same vein, see Lawrence 1987, 3–5).

The buildings considered in this volume span a range from kin-group-built thatched houses in remote Pacific Islands villages to government-subsidized cement-and-steel high rises in densely populated capital cities. Given this scope, we have chosen to use the term “housing” reinvested with the fuller range of its meanings. Foregrounded here are the processes through which people create and recreate their living spaces, as well as the values and meanings those constructions represent and perpetuate. But also appropriate here is the added connotation of the noun “housing”—as living spaces provided by the state. A number of authors explore the varying social impacts of and responses to such environments (see chapters by Macpherson, Modell, and Franco and Aga).

Vernacular, Traditional, and Changing Architecture

Most studies of housing in other than metropolitan settings focus on either “vernacular” or “traditional” housing. Although these and other descriptors are sometimes used interchangeably, their connotations and emphases differ to some extent.² In his ground-breaking study, Rapoport (1969, 4–5) suggested that a satisfactory definition of vernacular was difficult, but elected to focus on the process of its design and construction. Expanding on this, scholars today emphasize a number of characteristics in explaining their uses of the term. According to Brunskill (1981, 24), for instance, vernacular architecture is built with an intention of permanence; is traditionally rather than academically inspired; provides support for the daily activities of ordinary people; reflects an attachment to place, especially through the use of local building materials; and serves not only utilitarian but affective functions.³ In a more general sense, Oliver (1987, 9) reminds us of the linguistic contrast from which the term is drawn: Vernacular speech is the language of the common people, as opposed to the language of the court or college; vernacular architecture is built by people themselves without professional help.

In the introduction to their edited collection, *Common Places*, Up-

ton and Vlach (1986, xv) note that people tend to define vernacular by what it is *not*—not high style, sophisticated, monumental, or designed by professionals—and that people frequently use the term as though it referred solely to old, rural, domestic buildings. (In keeping with this emphasis, their 1986 volume *does* concern mostly old, rural, domestic architecture, in the eastern United States.) But in fact vernacular architecture has become much more amorphous in its object, now encompassing not only dwellings but commercial buildings and churches, public spaces and landscapes—even whole settlements—in settings throughout the world. Rather than a specific type of building (process or product), vernacular architecture has grown to represent a range of scholarly approaches and key questions. While some studies trace the expression of ethnic identities in the diffusion of particular features of architecture and space, others document and bring to life construction procedures and materials from different times and places, or seek to interpret the models vernacular builders drew on, how they passed them on, and what they intended to accomplish. Functional approaches examine how spaces are provided, defined, and transformed into “places” by their use, as well as how space and furnishings shape perceptions and frame social relationships (similarly, in this volume, see especially the chapters by Dominy, Flinn, and Macpherson). And despite connotations of pristine timelessness, “vernacular buildings and vernacular landscapes are always changing” (Upton and Vlach 1986, xx). Most pertinent to the focus of the present volume, some students of vernacular architecture identify in built form and uses of space the impacts of changes in populations, their socially defined needs, and the importation of new ideas, resources, and styles, as well as reflections of larger political and social movements.

Change can also have a place in the studies of those whose focus is labeled “traditional” architecture. Defining and locating “traditional” is a central concern of a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary volume entitled *Dwellings, Settlements and Tradition* (Bourdier and AlSayyad 1989). In determining whether something is traditional, Bourdier and AlSayyad emphasize cultural origins with common people and the process of transmission. These criteria do not preclude change, and indeed a number of the studies in their collection specifically address the impact of forces such as colonialism, migration, and government-supported housing schemes.

Although vernacular and traditional architectural studies do not necessarily ignore changing forms, both specialties focus on common

elements, those that clearly represent group-accepted norms. As Upton and Vlach (1986, xvi) note with regard to vernacular architecture, “The more self-sufficient and socially secure a community is, the more definite is its sense of identity and the more fixed are its architectural conventions. . . . Scholars are usually most confident about their definitions of the vernacular when they study structures with a more pronounced ethnic character.” This may help to explain why vernacular studies have tended to focus on traditional architecture.

Tradition and Change in the Pacific

Studies that deal with housing in Pacific Islands also have focused on traditional or vernacular forms that were common prior to Western contact; that is, buildings and spaces constructed by the people themselves, drawing on local technologies, concepts, and materials. In his study of traditional architecture in Vanuatu, Coiffier’s definition resonates with Bourdier and AlSayyad’s above: “A building is said to be ‘traditional’ when its design reflects knowledge exclusive to a local culture and when the economic relationships formed by the need for materials remain within one area” (Coiffier 1988, ix).

This focus is often a logical result of the nature of the researchers’ questions. For instance, the few examples of Pacific Islands architecture included in surveys of vernacular architecture worldwide (such as Oliver 1987, Duly 1979) are understandably those most easily identifiable as indigenous, most clearly demonstrating local responses to natural environmental conditions, and incorporating design features supportive of cultural values and practices. A recent volume on housing (Fox 1993) developed by the Comparative Austronesian Project at the Research School of the Pacific, The Australian National University, seeks to document commonalities underlying the range of physical manifestations in domestic space in a number of Pacific Islands and island Southeast Asian settings. But while several of the contributors acknowledge significant recent shifts in housing form and practice, they leave unexplored commonalities traceable to government regulation and economic development (see Rensel 1995).

Pacific Islands societies, along with colonized peoples throughout the world, have faced a range of similar external forces—governmental, religious, economic, social—with far-reaching impacts on their lives, not least on the form and arrangement of their living spaces. Some authors of housing studies in the Pacific choose to limit their consideration to the period before contact or colonization, specifi-

cally to avoid the project of untangling the diversity of outside influences and complexity of impacts (see, e.g., Hockings 1989, xii). Some, especially architecture and anthropology students in the region, conceive their task as salvaging information and compiling as complete an ethnographic record as possible before traditional knowledge and house forms disappear entirely. In the preface to his *Traditional Architecture in the Gilbert Islands* (1989), Hockings notes that his project was prompted in part because “the traditional forms themselves, and the knowledge of their creation and use in the minds of the Gilbertese, [are] in a state of decay” (1989, 15). Similarly, Coiffier (1988) includes among his purposes the education of young ni-Vanuatu in the quality of their own history of technological achievements, aimed at helping them understand the choices made by their ancestors in creating built and social environments appropriate to local situations (Coiffier 1988, ix; see also Riwas 1985, 1).

Yet a number of researchers document housing changes prior to Western contact in response to influences within the region. A history of Enga housing by seven coauthors (six of them Enga) emphasizes that “traditions must not be thought of as static: they change continually. They are enriched by new events and by additions from the stories of neighbouring peoples” (Kembol et al. 1976). The authors cite examples of some Enga groups borrowing features of men’s house forms, such as a circular floor plan and horizontal rather than oblique ridgepole, from nearby Melpa territory. In his examination of types of traditional buildings in Vanuatu, Coiffier (1988) specifies that the Southern Islands type was influenced by Polynesian technology. Ve’a’s 1985 study, *Changing Shape of Traditional House Forms in Tonga*, ties different Tongan house forms to changing social and hierarchical relations within Tonga from prehistory onward, including Samoan influences in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.

Invading clans from Samoa (with ancestral ties to the Gilbert Islands) dramatically affected architecture and settlement patterns in the central and southern Gilberts (Hockings 1989). Legends recount that the first act of the invaders in each island was to erect a meeting house in their own style. Whereas before this there were no villages per se, each meeting house (*maneaba*) and space around it (*te marae*) became focal points for districts and the first “public” spaces for meetings and hosting visitors. At the same time, the invaders reorganized the districts into clan estates, embodied in villages and physically symbolized by seating places within the meeting house. Thus architecture and spatial arrangement were important tools used by

invaders to impose their social system on those they conquered (Hockings 1989, 35–44, 244–245).

Similarly, postcontact sociopolitical history can be read in housing, its forms, arrangements, and uses. Colonial administrators, missionaries, planters, and others often required islanders to reorganize their lives both temporally and spatially. As Thomas (1994, 140) has observed for Fiji, the missionary enterprise “created an entire social geography of stations and circuits, which in some cases reflected indigenous political divisions or trade routes but gave even these new functions; it sought to impose a new temporal regime of work, leisure, celebration and worship; through education it offered a new global and local history [focused on mission activity].” As well, government legislation reflected “a paradigm of order that privileged openness, visibility, ventilation, boundaries and a particular spatial differentiation of activities. A house was perceived as being ‘crowded’ if occupied by any sort of larger extended family; ‘crowding’ itself seemed to be necessarily unhealthy” (Thomas 1994, 119).

In his history of the colonization of Australia, Carter (1987) emphasizes that the first task of the colonial project was to produce empty space. Once space was considered devoid of indigenous inhabitants and even of indigenously named features, then “places” could be created, through naming, mapping, and, eventually, settlement. The places that colonial governments and missionaries tried to create in the process of converting and “civilizing” islanders involved extensive changes to settlement patterns, houses, and households. Such changes are explored by Shaw, Chowning, and Rensel in this volume.

The transformations of domestic space that occurred in the parts of the Pacific addressed by our contributors resonate with the changes to the shape, furnishings, and occupancy of Tswana housing in southern Africa analyzed by Jean and John Comaroff (1992). In much of the Pacific, British colonial hegemony was as “homemade” as it was in Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 265–294). While Pacific Islands (with the possible exception of New Caledonia) did not attract the attention of larger-scale urban planners from Europe attempting to find in the more densely settled colonies experimental solutions to problems plaguing cities back home (Wright 1991, 53–84; see also Rabinow 1989 and King 1976), the islanders shared colonial housing experiences with indigenous peoples elsewhere in the world.

Yet few studies of Pacific Islands housing⁴ give more than passing attention to such relatively recent and powerful socioeconomic, reli-

gious, and political influences. Because our primary concern in this volume is not so much whether housing is traditional or vernacular, but how it affects and reflects people's lives, we focus especially on housing *change*, its causes, and implications.

Rather than conceptual, our boundaries are geographic and temporal: people and housing in the Pacific Islands from Hawai'i to New Zealand, Papua New Guinea to the Federated States of Micronesia, over the past two centuries, but especially in recent decades. Our overall intent has been to address the following questions: What has changed over time in Pacific Islands housing, broadly defined? What political, economic, demographic, social, religious, and natural forces have contributed to transformations—and continuities? How have changes in housing in Pacific Islands impacted social interaction and relationships?

The issues that emerge from consideration of these questions are of relevance to studies of socioeconomic change and development, particularly those having to do with the impacts of demographic shifts, changing household composition and size, gender roles and relations, reliance on imports and remittances, and migration. In addition, the contributors to this volume address many issues of interest to students of housing generally. These include consideration of boundaries between public and private, inside and outside; implications of changes in gendered spaces; and alteration in status relations and their expressions. Also of concern here are social and moral agendas over time and under different political and religious regimes; and issues of identity and attachment to place, notions of community, and meanings of "home" (see Rodman's conclusion). Exploring these issues within the framework of change, the authors highlight their dynamic nature.

The contributors trace not only decades of change in physical structures and arrangements, but the tangled roots of those changes, whether sociopolitical, religious, environmental, or economic. Local populations' experiences of housing change are documented through changes in social practices, attitudes, and meanings.

The first few case studies concern small Pacific Islands communities where, despite their remoteness, a variety of local and externally based factors have affected built environments. Colonial governments and Christian missionaries promoted housing styles and materials, settlement locations, and household compositions that differed from indigenous patterns. Economic involvement with outsiders, as well as migration and remittances, increasingly allow access to new

construction materials and styles. Innovations in housing are both cause and consequence of changes in social organization and relations. Yet cases of resistance to external pressures, a resurgence of interest in traditional house forms, and even a community's response to homelessness among Hawaiians, demonstrate the persistence of distinctive cultural values.

The remaining chapters deal with housing and social change in more urban Pacific Islands settings. Migration to urban centers, even small ones like Weno in Chuuk, involves dramatic changes in housing and creates new tensions for social relationships.⁵ In some cases people have options to create buildings to support and perpetuate cultural values and practices; in others they are faced with having to develop novel solutions to cope with structures that exacerbate adjustments to new environments.

Forces for change vary from place to place in their combinations, intensity, and timing; indigenous responses also differ, according to people's cultural and personal agendas and priorities. So although there are similarities, a close examination reveals that no two trajectories in housing and social change are alike. Whatever the circumstances, the evidence reveals that histories are encoded in housing change—not only personal and family histories, but those of wider social, cultural, economic, religious, and political processes as well.

Housing Change in Remote Locations

External forces combine with local concerns to produce a particular history of change, not only in house styles and materials, but in the meaning of houses and the social relationships they represent. In the case of Rotuma (Rensel, chapter 2), houses have been central to the social reproduction of Rotuman kin groups for centuries. Rotumans reckon blood ties on the basis of common ancestors' claims to named house sites. They actively affirm their kinship by engaging in reciprocal sharing, for which house building and maintenance provide many opportunities. Rotuman houses thus stand as tangible reminders of the relationships and responsibilities of all who participate in their construction, repair, and use.

Jan Rensel draws on written descriptions of Rotuman houses dating from the early nineteenth century, as well as missionary and colonial records documenting changes in housing materials, styles, and construction techniques. Walls of plaited sago or coconut palm fronds were gradually replaced by lime and stone around the turn of the century, then by wood or cement in the mid-1900s. Thatched roofs similarly have given way to corrugated iron over time. Various

factors contributed to the shift in materials. Through early trade and sailing on European ships, Rotumans observed different house styles and obtained new types of furnishings. Catholic and Methodist missionaries, who began conversion efforts on Rotuma in the mid-nineteenth century, introduced new construction techniques involving lime and stone, and propagated new attitudes about what constituted “good” housing. Periodic hurricanes that destroyed thatched houses while depleting the supply of sago and coconut palm gave impetus to Rotumans’ interest in alternatives.

The disaster relief program that followed one such hurricane in 1972 led to the near disappearance of thatched houses on Rotuma, replaced by structures of cement and iron. Since that time, money and goods remitted by migrant Rotumans have played a major role in promoting the construction and renovation of houses with imported materials. In the same period, piped water and water-sealed toilets became available through government projects. Individual houses and communities increasingly depend on generators for lights and electricity, and on appliances such as gas stoves and kerosene refrigerators.

Housing changes have far-reaching implications for social relations on Rotuma. Thatch and wooden poles for basic structures are available to Rotumans from their own land and that of relatives. Extended family members, including men, women, and children, can assist in the construction process, and are thanked with feasts and gifts of food. In contrast, access to imported materials requires sufficient earned income, or off-island relatives willing and able to contribute. To the extent that remitted cash and materials are substituted for local materials, ties with migrant supporters gain prominence over local relationships. Opportunities for sustaining reciprocal involvement with on-island kin are also eroded by the emerging practice of arranging for skilled (primarily adult male) laborers to build houses, and compensating them with cash.

Changes in housing also have implications for authority and status relations on the island. Houses of Rotuman chiefs formerly were distinguished by their size, reflecting both chiefly responsibility for hosting visitors and community support in providing materials and labor. Chiefs today who desire cement structures must have access to cash through earnings or remittances, like everyone else. Thus their homes may be neither the largest nor the most elaborate in their districts, nor do they represent as clearly their people’s loyalty and commitment.

Rotuman considerations of social merit may be implicated by

changing house styles. Hard work and generosity are core values by which one is evaluated socially. Recent evidence suggests that the provision of a Western-style house for one's family is superseding garden productivity and community sharing in importance. It appears, however, that the transition from thatch to cement is not totally unidirectional. Some returning migrants have chosen to build Rotuman-style, thatched-roof dwellings, with the help of their kin groups. Although the new houses usually incorporate modern furnishings, plumbing, and electricity, the use of thatch in the traditional style suggests the persistence of powerful cultural symbolism.

The involvement of colonial governments and Christian missionaries spurred significant changes in housing styles throughout the Pacific Islands. In areas where warfare had been endemic, colonial pacification allowed different construction styles and settlement patterns to develop. Colonial governments established housing regulations for public welfare purposes, especially health and sanitation, but promoted other changes, such as clustered settlement, for administrative convenience. In the case of the Samo of Papua New Guinea, R. Daniel Shaw (chapter 3) reports that government administrative procedures initially prompted a shift in the location of longhouses, from dispersed forest sites to aggregated villages. Changes in building form, from group longhouse to smaller family dwellings, developed later as practical responses to changing social and local environmental circumstances.

Precontact Samo lifestyles were dominated by subsistence activities and the need for protection against raids by other groups. These priorities were reflected in the location and form of longhouses, which also served as centers of social and ceremonial activity. Construction, using ironwood poles, sago palm roofs, rattan, and vines, required months of cooperative labor on the part of longhouse members. But as local soils and food resources diminished, a longhouse group would seek another site in the forest and begin the cycle of construction and gardening anew. Thus they ranged through the region over time, eventually returning to a longhouse/garden site when the forest had replenished the soil naturally.

Australian colonial administration led to cessation of intergroup warfare, thus eliminating the need for defensive structures. At the same time, the government designated village sites for administrative purposes. People were drawn in from outlying sites when rebuilding their longhouses, but the concentration of residents in one location put increased pressure on the surrounding land and resources. People

found they had to spend more and more time away from the village, sometimes building small bush houses at distant garden sites as temporary shelters. In addition, they had to work one day a week for the government as a form of taxation, and young people began attending school. When longhouses in the village required replacement, competing demands on materials and time eventually resulted in construction of smaller houses as residences for nuclear family groups.

Besides effecting changes in Samo kinship terms and social structure, which Shaw details in his chapter, living in aggregated villages has led to a redefinition of the Samo house, now primarily a sleeping space rather than a social, ceremonial, or defensive site. As Shaw points out, however, when the members of one Samo village decided to build a community meeting house in 1990, they did so in the form of a traditional longhouse. Although it serves as a ceremonial center and guest house rather than as a primary dwelling for village members, this building reflects community identity and pride much as former longhouses did.

In the Cape Hoskins region of West New Britain, the colonial government, reinforced by Methodist missionaries, also affected residence patterns and housing styles. Ann Chowning (chapter 4) traces such changes over more than seventy years in the Lakalai village of Galilo, where, until the end of World War I, people lived in small hamlets. Each hamlet included a men's house and gathering place, and several houses for women and children. Houses were ground based, constructed of wood, bark, and sometimes palm-leaf thatch. Interaction between men and women was limited by a number of taboos, important for success in battle. Hamlet residents considered one another kin and shared food and numerous daily activities. Hamlets typically were grouped into larger villages. Members of a village gardened together and cooperated in large-scale enterprises such as major ceremonies and warfare with neighboring groups, but trust was tenuous. Quarrels and rivalries often led to splits and the establishment of new hamlets.

The arrival of Methodist missionaries in 1918 and Australian rule the following year combined to initiate far-reaching changes. The colonial government forbade segments of villages to split or move. By establishing a single school and church for each village, the missionaries reinforced the government's administrative emphasis. The church also preached against the taboos that kept men and women apart, and because the abolition of warfare removed a reason for avoidance, men began to spend much more time with their wives.

Gradually men's houses were abandoned. As a result of these changes and growing individualism, hamlet unity has all but disappeared.

Government regulations concerning health and sanitation also affected house construction, although practices changed less quickly than structures. For instance, in Galilo the government required that houses be built on piles, but older people often chose surreptitiously to sleep in ground-based cook houses. Attempts to introduce privies were similarly resisted; although a few were constructed, men rarely used them, and some women not at all.⁶

Such incidents illustrate the point that changes in housing in the Pacific have not been merely a matter of passive acceptance of externally imposed conditions. Although power differentials were great, local people adapted to colonial demands and missionary teachings while persisting with their own preferences when they could. They also exercised choice in selecting among new building techniques and materials as they became available, striving to meet their own needs and goals.

Where people are able to make choices in shaping their built environments, particularly where structures are modified and added to over time, it is possible to undertake a kind of "archaeology" of housing change. Physical evidence accompanied by photographs, written diaries, and oral histories, as provided by Michèle Dominy (chapter 5) in her study of homesteads in the high country of New Zealand's South Island, demonstrate how houses record the interaction of changing personal, cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic circumstances.

Dominy's study describes changes in the built environment in the New Zealand high country over three generations, during which time a shift has occurred from the sheep station homestead of the past, with a large hired staff, to the contemporary station as a family farm unit. Her analysis of transformations in the use and design of domestic physical space reveals generational transformations in conceptual and social systems, including attitudes toward the natural environment and changing definitions of gender roles.

Evolving attitudes to the environment are apparent in the placement and design of contemporary homesteads and the opening up of older homesteads. For example, expanded verandahs, bigger windows, natural colors, gardens, and windbreaks with curvaceous rather than straight lines have replaced the cold, dark, sheltered homesteads and formal gardens of the past. Changing patterns of location and

design suggest growing control over the landscape and reflect a perceptual shift in which high country people have integrated the vastness and ruggedness of the high country into their lives.

Changes in women's roles interweave with changes in the structures of the houses, and reflect broader economic developments. Altered cooking spaces and eating arrangements reflect a downturn in the farming economy with consequent changes in social relationships. Shrinking staff and the elimination of station cooks shifted the job of meal preparation to the women in the family. Social distance also lessened between owners and workers, as the latter, fewer in number, came to take their meals with the family rather than eat in separate areas.

The continuing evolution of high country homesteads through accretion and reconfiguration also reflects the stages of the family's developmental cycle. As Dominy phrases it, "walls stretch and contract" (page 129) with the birth and departure of children, rooms are transformed continually through use, aging parents move aside as their married children take over the farm. Finally, changes represent personal choices, as members of each generation leave their mark in the buildings and grounds they are passing through, and passing on to their children. Thus the built environment is a "cumulative identity marker denoting continuity of family habitation" (page 130), even as it represents changing historical circumstances.

Housing Change in Urban Centers

Some of the same issues of housing and social change, along with new tensions, face Pacific Islanders in more densely populated and urban settings.⁷ For the Micronesians of Pollap atoll who migrate to the Chuuk state capital on Weno, adjustment problems may be mitigated because the Pollapese have been able to purchase several contiguous land plots that have come to form the basis of their community. But, as Juliana Flinn (chapter 6) reports, there are strong contrasts with the home island. On Pollap some houses are constructed of imported, purchased materials, but many are still made of thatch in the traditional style. These thatched houses represent self-sufficiency, close connections with the land, and cooperative kin relations. On Weno, all Pollapese houses use imported materials, but they range from tiny, rough shacks to much larger, well-appointed houses. The social differentiation represented by this range is related to employment rather than traditional principles of kinship, gender,

and age. It is the younger, formally educated islanders who are finding jobs and, with direct access to money, enjoying the prestige of more elaborate homes.

Flinn notes that increasing differentiation in housing is raising conflicts with Pollapese values of reciprocity and generosity. The newer buildings, built with purchased materials and paid labor, and requiring less regular maintenance and repair, reduce opportunities for mutual aid among kin. In addition, the new house types provide more privacy, allowing people to hoard food and hide goods from public view. People regularly lock their houses in Weno, and sometimes lock interior rooms as well. Struggling both to take advantage of new economic opportunities and to retain important values and traditions, Pollapese migrants have developed a practice of public sharing through group preparation and distribution of food on a weekly basis.

Migrants to other areas, particularly those with limited incomes, often have to cope with available housing rather than have the option of building their own homes and communities. This causes difficulties when buildings are designed for households with different characteristics and social priorities than those of the immigrant families. Samoan households, for instance, are frequently larger and typically more fluid than European nuclear families. Cluny Macpherson (chapter 7) describes the case of Samoan migrants to New Zealand in the 1960s. The migrants were often persuaded by financial incentives to buy new homes in low-cost subdivisions. These homes, however, were not well suited to their needs, since household compositions were constantly changing as new migrants arrived and then moved on. Built for two adults and two children, the living space and facilities were not only inadequate for Samoan families, but were further stressed when households needed to host guests and entertain large numbers of people for important cultural gatherings.

The solution in this case has been to add garages, and use them in novel ways. Less expensive and not subject to the stringent regulations regarding house extensions, garages have been adapted by Samoan migrants in New Zealand as temporary living quarters for unmarried men, meeting places for migrant village councils of chiefs, homes for newly formed church congregations, venues for fund-raising activities, sites for language retention classes, and recording studios for a new genre of Samoan migrant music. The convenience of such flexible space made garages an ideal solution, allowing the perpetuation of cultural traditions in a new setting.

Samoan migrants in Honolulu face other problems, exacerbated by inappropriate housing, according to Robert Franco and Simeamativa Mageo Aga (chapter 8). While many Samoan migrants live in rural areas of O'ahu (the Wai'anae coast or Lā'ie-Hau'ula on the north shore), approximately 28 percent of those on the island live in the Kalihi valley area of metropolitan Honolulu, and many of those in public housing. Like the Samoans in New Zealand, Kalihi residents have problems hosting large groups of visiting kin. But they have more serious problems. In their chapter, Franco and Aga describe the stark contrast between houses and village layouts in Samoa, and the "vertical villages" of Kūhiō Park Terrace (KPT), two sixteen-story high-rise towers. Whereas the openness of the village arrangement and the wall-less Samoan *fale* 'houses' allow for continual community observation of behavior, and support shared responsibility for socialization through collaborative work and service, the small, closed units of KPT's high rises limit supervision of children to parents, often single mothers, who are poorly prepared for child rearing without the support of other adults.

Samoans link the closed, private character of housing at KPT to social problems such as child abuse and neglect, drug use, and gang violence. Recently a community policing effort has contributed to a greater sense of security and safety at KPT. At another Kalihi public housing site, Samoan residents built a traditional *fale* that temporarily provided a gathering space for group conversation, play, and work. But until more permanent solutions are found, the challenge for Samoans in Honolulu is to develop parenting education focusing on socialization and disciplinary practices that both draw on Samoan cultural values, and work in the confines of American public housing.

Perhaps the most dramatic case of housing change is considered in the contribution by Judith Modell (chapter 9), who writes about Hawaiians facing the bitter irony of being homeless in their own land. Focusing on the work of a task force in Waimānalo, who in 1991 proposed their own solutions to the housing crisis, Modell argues that such local responses to homelessness reflect Hawaiian cultural values, demonstrate the links between the concept of "home" and notions of family, kinship, and the person, and become part of the negotiation crucial to housing policy anywhere.

Rejecting temporary shelters on land set apart from the rest of the community ("cluster villages"), the Waimānalo Task Force plan stressed incorporation: providing people with respectable bases from

which to resume their social place in the community. The solutions ranged from moving people in with families who already had homes in the area, into spare rooms, tents, or garages, or building houses on selected sites within, not separated from, the rest of Waimānalo. Moreover, they recommended that houses in each site be few in number and sturdy in construction, thereby having the potential to blend into the community rather than remain separate and stigmatized.

Despite community resistance, a “barracks-like” cluster village has been built in Waimānalo. The task force process, however, contributed to a broader discussion of houses as places of social interaction and individual dignity. At another cluster village, Mā‘ili Land, improvements toward this end came in the form of replacing communal kitchens with unit kitchens. The task force helped give clear voice to local conceptions of “home” for Hawaiians; the particular form of housing is not so important as following the guiding principle of incorporation and acceptance in the broader community.

The Stories Houses Tell

In recent years, calls have increased for work that integrates multiple perspectives in the study of housing. Kent (1990, 2–3) urges anthropologists to notice and document uses of space and built environment, while recommending that architects study aspects of culture likely to influence the use of space. Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995, 4) point out that architectural works typically focus “on the more material aspects of dwellings, including environmental conditions, resources, technology, techniques of construction and types of building,” and may deal with “spatial organization, symbolism and aesthetic values of buildings, but they often say relatively little about the social organization of the people who live inside.”⁸ Among anthropologists, they see a tendency to focus on ritual rather than ordinary aspects of life:

But the house has another side. It is an ordinary group of people concerned with their day-to-day affairs, sharing consumption and living in the shared space of a domestic dwelling. It is out of these everyday activities, carried on without ritual, reflection or fuss and significantly, often by women, that the house is built. This house, all too easily taken for granted, is one that anthropologists have tended to ignore. One conclusion we would emphasize is the need for further research on an anthropology of everyday life which might both balance, and eventually be incorporated into, studies of ritual and ideology. (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, 45)

In this volume we present the stories of everyday life embodied in, influencing, and being influenced by housing in the Pacific Islands. While for most cases the luxury of detailed written and photographic documentation is not available, for those who learn to read the evidence, the stories are there. As Rodman discovered in the hills of Ambae, Vanuatu, houses, and parts of houses, move. Buildings may be reoriented or relocated. The current state of social relationships thus can be read from the built form by noting whose walls end up on whose house, which way dwellings face, and who lives in them.

Similarly, the houses in Rotuma and Weno and Lakalai, the abandoned longhouses and new meeting halls in the Samo villages, the garages in New Zealand, and the high rises in Honolulu, even the lack of homes for some Hawaiians—each have stories to tell. These are stories about colonial and missionary agendas, local and global economies, environmental disasters, cultural identities, social connections, family continuity, personal choices. The people who shape these houses both tell these stories, and reading them, know more of and continue to create their own history.

Notes

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1. In his study of the Kabyle house, Bourdieu (1990 [1970]) explores one aspect of this fundamental relationship—house as mnemonic for socialization—prefiguring the development of his notion of *habitus*.

2. Other descriptors include indigenous, folk, popular, primitive, tribal, and anonymous, depending on disciplinary basis (and bias). Aside from the pejorative implications of some of the latter terms, there are limits to their applicability and accuracy; for instance, can housing be considered indigenous if local people build it with imported materials (Bourdier and AlSayyad 1989, 6)? And, furthermore, who is to say?

3. In his discussion of vernacular building, Lawrence (1987, 16–17) cites

Brunskill's list of characteristics. Bourdier and AlSayyad (1989, 6) use Brunskill's criteria to define their focus on the traditional.

4. Notable exceptions include Vea 1985, Kembol et al. 1976, and Rutz 1984.

5. In his review of the study of urbanization in the Pacific Islands, Mayo (1987) notes that absolute size is not an adequate criterion for designating a place as urban; more appropriate is the *relative* concentration of population. People are drawn from outlying areas to more densely settled port towns and government centers in pursuit of education, employment, novelty and excitement, etc. Thus the urban centers in this volume include Weno as well as metropolitan Auckland and Honolulu.

6. In his book, *Longhouse to Village*, Shaw (1996, 27) reports a tale from Samo that has been told, with variations, for other locales: Under government supervision the villagers dutifully built latrines, and used them as instructed. After a year, however, a government inspector found the outhouses maggot infested, and ordered them burned. Happy to comply, the Samo villagers returned to their traditional practice of using the forest. The following year another official arrived and, finding no latrines, demanded that the regulation be followed. By this time the Samo had learned how to please the administration: They built new outhouses, but used the forest. Thereafter they passed the annual government inspection.

7. Self-constructed "squatter" houses in Pacific port towns are an important but understudied form of vernacular architecture. Whereas some unauthorized settlements pose serious problems for safety and sanitation, Plocki (1975, 4) notes that squatter houses in Port Moresby "are usually much larger than the government's standard [low-income houses], usually have bigger verandahs [and] individually lockable rooms, are cooler and generally more comfortable, especially now that the government has accepted these areas, and the Housing Commission is bringing in services and roads." Plocki (1975, 13) also suggests that government housing developments provide less security than squatter areas, "where people are at least protected by being part of the group."

8. An important exception is the work of Waterson, whose 1990 volume, *The Living House*, explores the architecture of Southeast Asia. This book illustrates the range of perspectives for studying houses and what they can tell us about spatial organization, construction, cosmology, ritual, kinship groups, historical power relations, and daily social relations.