

Jan Rensel and Margaret Rodman, eds., *Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997. Pp. 264, maps, figs., bib., index. US\$39 cloth; \$24.95 paperback.

*Reviewed by Rebecca A. Stephenson, University of Guam*

*Home in the Islands* is concerned not only with housing arrangements in the contemporary Pacific, but also and more importantly with the structure and content of people's daily lives. The reader encounters housing and social change in Rotuma (by Jan Rensel), among the Samo in Papua New Guinea (by R. Daniel Shaw), in Galilo, New Britain (by Ann Chowning), among long-time resident *pakehas* in the highlands of New Zealand (by Michele D. Dominy), and among Pollapese in Weno, Chuuk (by Juliana Flinn). Additional chapters in the text discuss the urban housing situation of Samoans in New Zealand (by Cluny Macpherson), the experiences of urbanization for

Samoans in Hawai'i (by Robert Franco and Simeamativa Mageo Aga), and homelessness in Hawai'i (by Judith Modell).

Co-editors Rensel and Rodman bring to their task considerable depth and breadth of field research in the Pacific. Rodman leads off in a well-written prologue, illustrated with maps of the "moving walls" of houses she and Bill Rodman encountered in Ambae, Vanuatu. Rensel, in a lengthy introduction, sets forth the theoretical points with verve. We are reminded that housing involves both product and process; that architecture styles in the Pacific include the vernacular as well as traditional and changing forms; that the modification of housing is occurring even in remote locations in the region; and that the urbanization process for some Pacific Islanders can present entirely new challenges to be met and overcome.

The case-study chapters then follow, as mentioned above, eight in number. Rodman contributes the conclusion, a fine synthesis. She reminds us once again that, like the social relations that produce them, houses are constantly in flux, being "containers not only of people but of changing cultural meanings" (p. 223). Housing is likewise linked to the collective experience of being human, in that "home is a place in a community" (ibid.). Accordingly, the experience of being homeless (e.g., in Hawai'i, chapter 9 by Modell) means a lack of both structure as well as connectedness for contemporary Pacific Islanders, a circumstance that can be fraught with new tensions and trauma.

I used *Home in the Islands* for the first time in my undergraduate course Anthropology 320: Peoples of the Pacific, at the University of Guam in spring 1998. Each student in the class selected a case study in the text to present. In May, the students were asked if they would be willing to help me evaluate *Home in the Islands* for this review. Their names and comments are included here with their express permission.

Jerleen Rokop of Chuuk stated in writing, "I like this book very much. I have many friends who see the cover of the book and wish they had taken our class because they would like to learn about different types of housing in the Pacific today. They ask if they can look through the book to see if their island is included! . . . One thing I find very common, and it applies to every culture, is that houses are built to show success. . . . When I went to high school on Weno [Chuuk], I had some Pollapese classmates. I never thought about their culture and how they had to change some of their ways of living because they moved to a different place [until I read this book]."

Charles Acosta of Guam offered: "This is a very appealing book. I enjoyed studying the relationships between modern day challenges of living and housing structures. It never crossed my mind before reading the text. I especially like the use of local language terms within many of the chapters

because it provides the reader with a sense of the cultural awareness that the authors command. . . . I feel that the book is an important tool for Pacific Islanders to read and understand because it provides important insights into social and housing changes that occur hand in hand in our precious islands. . . . I am a visual learner. More maps and photos would enhance this book.”

According to Lindsay Quichocho of Guam, the book's greatest value is that it highlights ways in which Pacific Islanders come together as a community. “It [the book] is not about how people live together, but about how they share their common unity with each other regardless if they are weak or strong.” He reflected on the fact that the physical labor of constructing homes in the Pacific emphasizes and enhances close bonds between people. But modern housing construction undermines this, and leaves some members of the community (e.g., women) with fewer opportunities to contribute (see chapter 2 concerning Rotuma). Lindsay feels that the book needs to be revised: “In Chapter 6 [concerning Chuuk], the information [refers to] 1980, but it is now 1998. A lot of changes have happened since 1980 in housing and in people's lives.” Finally, Lindsay concludes: “This book is great in showing Westerners how close the relationships are among Pacific Islanders. No matter how many obstacles Pacific Islanders encounter and how they change their homes or lifestyles, they will always share their close kinship.”

For Magdalena Mesngon of Rota, the book *Home in the Islands* is interesting because it sets forth problems and solutions for living in many different Pacific Islands settings. She was impressed by the great variety of housing styles that are found throughout the Pacific. “My favorite chapter is Chapter 9 [on homelessness in Hawai'i]. But when this book is rewritten, I wish someone would write about my island of Rota! . . . Also, additional maps, illustrations, and photographs are needed in this book to elaborate the points being made more fully.”

Joseph N. San Nicolas of Guam wrote: “This book is very informative for someone like myself who is an islander from Guam but knows little about the rest of the Pacific, except for Rota and Saipan, Hawaii and the Philippines. . . . Many islands are still in the developing stages in housing; eventually technology will be brought to these places but hopefully not destroy the beauty of these islands that are still somewhat native and pure [*sic*]. . . . It's very creative that Samoan people who live in New Zealand [in chapter 7] use their garages to live in, play in, for storage, and basically to do whatever they want to within. . . . The most significant thing I learned was that the people are all becoming Westernized and that the daily ways of farming and fishing may soon be on the way out. . . . When the book is re-written, all the chapters should be kept in! But the book does need additional maps, illustrations and photographs. It is true that a picture can say a thousand words!”

According to Sheila Santiago of Guam, *Home in the Islands* is very informative and exhaustive in its presentations in the various chapters. The book offers detailed explanations of the many Pacific Islands cultures portrayed. “But please, more photos and maps! And where is the chapter about Guam?”

Katarina Rocky of Chuuk shared with the class her understanding of the complex situation of Pollapese migrants to Weno (see chapter 6). Pollapese habits, ideas, and values are quite different from those more commonly found on Weno. However, according to Kathy, some Pollapese migrants to Weno rather quickly accommodate, and this is reflected in their housing. The photo on page 142 depicts a certain style of Pollapese house on Weno. But now there are Pollapese people on Weno who have constructed very modern homes, says Kathy. She thinks it would be helpful if the chapter made further mention of this. Also, Pollapese people now reside in other geographic locations around the island of Weno. A rewriting of the chapter could add this new information.

For Ted Nededog of Guam, “*Home in the Islands* has given me new insights about life on the different islands. Customs and practices in other islands do bear some resemblances to the ways we live on Guam. . . . This book has given me a reason to look forward to visiting other islands in the Pacific!”

In addition to the comments of my students cited above, I’d also like to mention that we considered the colonial experience and its impact upon the lives of the Pacific Islanders that we encountered in this book. Alterations over time in the ways that islanders build their homes and formulate their sense of identity and community are inextricably linked to their lives in the colonial period.

Finally, my students and I have a question for R. Daniel Shaw concerning chapter 3, “Samo House Styles and Social Change,” especially with reference to the diagram of the floor plan of a village house (p. 69). Our question is, Where do children sleep?