

LAND AND THE CONCEPT OF HOME:

AN ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS OF HOME IN THE FACE OF SEA-LEVEL RISE



PAYTON BONANG
DR. DEBORAH COWEN



ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role land has in the concept of home by...:

- Examining how rising sea levels affects the relationships between humans, land, and home
- Focusing on two neighboring Pacific island nations, Fiji and Tuvalu, which have similar climates but are experiencing different degrees of sea level rise and are pursuing different responses.

BACKGROUND

In the face of rising sea levels, Fiji and Tuvalu have different options to pursue:

- Fiji's larger, mountainous landmass provides the opportunity for people to relocate inland, but, this can disrupt connections to ancestral land and community.
- Tuvalu is focused on international connections and unions that support international the relocation of Tuvaluans, as well as protecting their state sovereignty and identity beyond physical territory.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The purpose of this research was to discover what role land plays in the concept of home, and its relevance when faced with rising sea levels and the possibility of land disappearance.

Participants

Eligible participants were 18 years old or older and live in Fiji and/or Tuvalu. Participants were recruited through canvassing as well as referral. Participation was voluntary and I received approval from the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board.

Procedure

Interviews were structured around the following key questions I formulated:

1. What does home mean to you?
2. What do you think is needed for a home?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the land?
4. How do you think your home is being impacted by rising sea levels?
5. What do you think is the land's role in the concept of home?

RESULTS

THEME 1: SECURITY

"Land is like our heart because we depend on the resources... Resources from [the] land [are] necessary for humans to live on earth."

THEME 2: BELONGING

"Home comes from a feeling of belonging...[it] is not just about the land, it's about the people you are with. It's not just about the physical place."

THEME 3: COMFORT

"Home is defined as a comfort, a peace. [It is] a place full of memories with our families and siblings, as well as friends."

Land is important in the concept of home because it provides a sense of security and comfort. However, the role of family and friends in making participants feel at home demonstrates that a sense of belonging is another important aspect of home that extends beyond the physical connection to land.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following, without whom this research could not have come to fruition:

- The Laidlaw Scholars Foundation
- The University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars Programme
- Dr. Deborah Cowen
- This study's participants and those who referred me to possible participants