Modern Living: Houses and Change in the Kingdom of Tonga

The desire for Western goods is increasing in Tonga, but key cultural values seem to have lost little of their importance. The extended family network is at the base of a system of exchange where money and goods flow to the islands and traditional wealth is supplied to the Diaspora. This paper explores the ways in which Tongan households negotiate modernity through their appropriation of consumer goods and the impact it has on the way of life. How are values compromised, if at all? What role does religion; family and hierarchy play in a consumer-oriented society? How does a society based on principles of sharing deal with accumulation and display of wealth? By looking through the prism of the house and the household these key issues will be explored.