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A State Roof Over My Head: Policies, Perspectives and Experiences of State
Housing in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

Through the experiences of those who lived in state housing, this work examines how changing housing policies determined what state housing tenants' experiences would be. Historical accounts of state housing are often centred around the egalitarian intentions of the First Labour Government's 'welfare state', and then the subsequent attempts to reduce the state's role in the provision of housing. This research builds upon existing literature mapping major developments in state housing policy over the twentieth century, from the creation of a state rental sector in the 1930s that was widely approved of, through to the upheaval of the welfare state in the 1990s. Taking Ben Schrader's lead, this research is based on an oral history from state tenants, adding an insider perspective from New Zealanders who lived in state housing. Incorporating personal accounts of life in state housing, this thesis revealed how perceptions of community and what home means to different people has been inextricably linked with the housing decisions made by government. Despite changing government policies and the various pressures that resulted, irrespective of the period, state housing allowed its tenants to see themselves as part of a community.

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Abbreviations

ANZ	Archives New Zealand Te Rua Maharao te Kāwanatanga
DMA	Department of Māori Affairs
HCNZ	Housing Corporation New Zealand
HNZ	Housing New Zealand
MWWL	Māori Women's Welfare League
SAC	State Advances Corporation
SHAC	State Housing Action Coalition
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force

Introduction

The origin of the First Labour Government's state housing scheme was part of a wider set of social policies implemented in the 1930s and 1940s. When the First Labour Government came to power in 1935, they were faced with major social issues caused, in part, by the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that reached New Zealand in 1930. There were significant developments to welfare provision in Aotearoa New Zealand, through the introduction of social security, full employment and state housing policies to end poverty and ensure everybody a reasonable standard of living.¹ Developing universal entitlement to social security involved providing state housing, subsidising access to medical care and providing income security for people who were sick, unemployed or old. Popularity for these policies is exemplified by the nostalgia for this welfare system implemented in the 1930s and 1940s— 'often enough the benevolently smiling Michael Joseph Savage also appears as the personification of Labour's Welfare State.'²

As well as the struggling economy, this government inherited a housing shortage that had reached a crisis level. The previous government's lack of spending on housing, which, up until the 1930s, had been financing half of the houses built in Aotearoa New Zealand aggravated this shortage.³ With many defaulting on loans and subsequently being forced into overcrowded housing, in overpriced rentals, the appearance of slum-like conditions in urban centres gained political prominence.⁴ The First Labour Government wasted no time after their election, building 3,445 state houses in the first three years, with thousands more planned.⁵ The early inception of state housing gained widespread and favourable attention from the public and government alike, most likely because of how dire the housing situation had become, but also because of the houses that were built. Supplying well-built homes that met a modern standard of comfort made state housing a viable alternative to the rental market and was supposed to provide the security of homeownership without the cost. The promotion of community,

¹ Melanie Nolan, "The Reality and Myth of New Zealand Egalitarianism: Explaining the pattern of a labour historiography at the edge of empires," *Labour History Review* 72, no. 2 (2007): 117.

² Margaret Tennant, "History and Social Policy: Perspectives from the Past," in *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, ed. Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant (University of Otago Press, 2004), 9.

³ Ben Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand* (Reed Pub., 2005), 31.

⁴ Erik Olssen, "Towards a New Society," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Geoffrey Rice, W. H. Oliver, and B. R. Williams (Oxford University Press, 1992), 283.

⁵ Olssen, "Towards a New Society," 283.

personal wellbeing, family and stability clearly resonated with a nation experiencing social upheaval earning state housing widespread approval in the first two decades.

From the 1950s, as the price of this welfare state grew, expanding the state's role in the rental housing market was no longer the government's priority. New Zealanders were to be provided for on the basis of need, with housing policies noticeably targeted toward low-income earners from the 1960s, increasingly concentrating the poor into state house areas.⁶ A greater emphasis was put on financing the private purchases of homes instead of the building of rental houses. Negative public perceptions of these areas being ghettoised took hold in the 1970s, alongside a growing intolerance for welfare beneficiaries.⁷ The nuclear family continued to reflect the majority of tenants in the 1970s, but because of the changing shape of society, other household structures began to gain access to state housing. The proportion of single-parent households, Māori and Pacific Islanders and welfare beneficiaries that had once been minority groups in early state housing, were the visible majority by the 1980s.⁸ As the direction of social policy increasingly focused on self-reliance, the government's responsibility as a landlord, defined by the state in the 1930s and 1940s, had considerably changed. While the state continued to provide state housing for New Zealander's who could not afford to house themselves, there was no longer interest in providing housing to create communities.

Intentions of this thesis

The purpose of this work is to examine the changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing and how these changes reflect how society views community and what home means to different people. The origins of state housing in Aotearoa New Zealand pre-date the First Labour Government, but for the purpose of this study, the scope of research has been limited to the housing policies between 1935 and 1999.

An oral history was undertaken to gain insiders' perspectives of life in a state house between the 1950s and the 1990s. The author interviewed nine people, documenting their stories and

⁶ Bronwyn Dalley, *Living in the 20th Century: New Zealand history in photographs, 1900-1980* (Bridget Williams Books and Craig Potton Publishing, 2000), 147.

⁷ Margaret McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998* (Auckland University Press in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1998), 207.

⁸ D.N. Ryan, J. E. Brannigan. M. O. Cleland, E. T. Fitzgerald, Report to the director-general, Housing Corporation of New Zealand on the review of state rental allocation, 1985.

memories of everyday life and events in and around their homes. Grouping people's experiences of living in state housing during different periods into themes, this work displays correlations with changing housing policies, as well as broader themes relating to ideas of what community and home mean. By doing so, this thesis investigates how policies and society determined what state housing tenants' experiences would be in their houses and the area they lived in.

This oral history is placed in the context of changing policies towards state housing from the 1930s up until the 1990s. The body of the thesis is looking from an outsider's perspective, studying policy changes in detail by analysing government reviews, reports, and other documents, alongside newspaper articles and academic literature. Collating primary and secondary sources, this research maps the policies that changed the purpose of state housing over half a century. Investigating how the government went from focusing New Zealanders' priorities on family and domesticity, to meeting only the needs of those in serious housing need, illustrates the government's social policy aims. Policies that shifted from actively promoting state housing as a viable alternative form of tenure, to limiting supply to low-income households, all the while encouraging high rates of homeownership was reflected in the experiences of state house tenants from different periods.

This thesis contributes to an already existing literature on state housing, the most prominent being Ben Schrader's *We Call it Home*, and Gael Ferguson's *Building the New Zealand Dream*, which both track state house history over the twentieth century. Placing state housing within a wider social context, this work also contributes to a body of literature analysing policy changes and their influence on shaping Aotearoa New Zealand society, including, but not limited to the historians Margaret McClure, Erik Olssen and Michael Belgrave. Building upon these works, this thesis researches half a century of experiences of state housing in Aotearoa New Zealand alongside current perspectives on the topic.

The research for this thesis is divided into four parts:

Chapter four examines the development of the First Labour Government's state housing scheme from 1935 to 1949. This chapter studies academic literature alongside archival sources to analyse how a large-scale building programme came into existence, considering the contributing social, economic and political factors that lead up to the development of state

housing. The intentions of early state housing will also be addressed in this chapter, examining how the state used housing to simultaneously encourage housing stability, the nuclear family and a suburban lifestyle. The subsequent positive reception to state housing that these policies received will guide an analysis on how attitudes and perspectives toward state housing, reflect how society views community and what home means from a mainstream perspective.

Chapter five continues mapping the policy changes that noticeably shifted from 1949 with the election of the First National Government, continuing up until 1990 when the Fourth Labour Government lost power. The state's refocused attention on homeownership is examined in this chapter with the sale of state housing stock and access to cheap mortgages, in conjunction with policies that became increasingly targeted towards limiting who had access to state housing. Utilising government reviews and reports this chapter documents the progression of policy changes that shifted support to low-income New Zealanders and the subsequent change in the household structures of state housing are documented as well as the physical difference in how the state approached building state housing. How these changes in a wider economic and social context reflected increasingly negative attitudes and perspectives toward state housing is analysed in this chapter.

Chapter six is focused on state housing policies implemented in the 1990s by the Fourth National Government, that most visibly contrast with the policies in the 1930s and 1940s. Informed by academic literature, wider social policy changes that occurred in 1991 are documented in this chapter to give context to the state housing policy changes that were to follow. Policy changes including commercialising the supply of state houses and supporting social housing indirectly with an accommodation supplement are documented in detail. These changes alongside the sale of a large amount of state housing in the private market are analysed to demonstrate the changing government intentions in the 1990s that emphasised economic policy over social responsibility. The consequences of these policy changes that increased the cost of state housing and reduced the emphasis are analysed including specific instances of state house tenant protests and wider social implications including the increase of poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter seven analyses the oral histories that were undertaken of past state house tenants, grouping various recollections of experiences from different periods into themes that form a detailed account of life in a state house. Recollections of how the interviewees came to live in

state housing, the day-to-day activities in the home, celebrating occasion and time spent in the backyard are all grouped into themes and analysed to build a picture of how tenants experienced their homes in different eras of state housing. The experiences interviewees had out in their community are also grouped into themes, including interacting with neighbours, and feelings of safety, and how these housing areas were socially stratified, analysing the cohesiveness of these communities. How the interviewees reflected on state housing are documented in this chapter to understand from the perspective of state house tenants what home and community means and how this changed over time.

1. Historiographical Review

From Aotearoa New Zealand, Ben Schrader's *We Call it Home* is one of the few books to utilise oral accounts from tenants within the field of history of state housing. Rather than focusing primarily on the changing political context of state housing, Schrader's government commissioned work documented the social history of state housing including the perspective of state house residents. In late 2002, the Ministry of Culture and Heritage developed a web exhibition and put out a media release which asked past and present state housing tenants to send in their 'state house stories'.⁹ Weaving in the stories of past tenants, he analysed the increasing levels of state involvement in housing, their intentions, the physical style of these houses over the decades and changing perceptions of New Zealanders toward state housing. Utilising tenant accounts and representations of state housing that were perpetuated in the media and popular culture, he offered conclusions about the perceived differences between those living in state housing and those who were not were more imagined than real. By taking this approach, he was able to question popular narratives of moral collapse, exposing these as stereotypes of state house tenants, instead, highlighting the many commonalities between state house families and non-state house families—a discovery he had not initially anticipated.¹⁰

Changing housing policies with changing governments

While there is not an abundance of oral history-based research on state housing in Aotearoa New Zealand, research that has been undertaken on the topic is generally focused on changing housing policies, concentrated on both the philosophical intentions and the actions of alternating governments. Gael Ferguson's detailed study of the changing landscape of housing and the government's role in how it was delivered was one of the first comprehensive historical accounts of the history of housing in Aotearoa New Zealand. With high building costs that were expected to be recouped, early state housing was not a relief for the poor, rather it was aimed to provide housing for working New Zealanders and their families.¹¹ She wrote about how the First Labour Government, in their view, attempted to indirectly improve housing for the poor, and improve the efficiency of a then failing building industry by ensuring the long-

⁹ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 10.

¹⁰ Schrader, *We Call It Home*, 146.

¹¹ Gael Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream* (Dunmore Press with the assistance of the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1994), 150.

term improvement of the housing stock. Within a political context, Ferguson examined key periods in which government promotion and delivery of both social housing and homeownership changed between 1840 and 1992. She suggested that the National and Labour governments took different approaches to promote the ‘quarter-acre section’ ideal up until the 1980s. National governments emphasised the importance of homeownership as the ‘only desirable option for true New Zealanders’ whereas Labour governments promoted alternative mainstream public housing tenure.¹² However, since the 1980s, Ferguson argued that both sides of the political divide withdrew direct support in the promotion of housing, be it private or state owned. In part, she argued that this was because the ideal of homeownership needed no more state encouragement, being firmly entrenched in Aotearoa New Zealand’s culture.¹³ Although Ferguson’s book does not provide an in-depth analysis into how lives were lived in state housing, it has provided a very helpful overview of the ideology underpinning state housing and how it transformed throughout the twentieth century.

A history of the early period of state housing is documented by Cedric Firth in *State Housing in New Zealand*, written in 1949 and R.T. Metge’s Master of Arts thesis *The House that Jack Built*. Firth’s account was published by the Ministry of Works under the First Labour Government, and so is arguably not an objective housing history, but nevertheless, it provides an account of housing from an earlier period, offering insight into why the state actively engaged in the provision of housing and how it went about doing so. Firth described how severe housing issues were raised in the National Housing Survey in 1936, resulting in housing policies becoming a central issue for the expansive social security policies the government was offering.¹⁴ Because of the findings of the survey, the government changed legislation so that housing was considered a public utility, where the ‘right to live in a decent dwelling being regarded as on the same level as the right to education, sanitation, to good and abundant water, to an adequate road system, and to a certain amount of medical care.’¹⁵ Firth stated that although housing problems were acute in 1935, it was more so in 1949 when he wrote this account, emphasising the demand for this form of housing.¹⁶ It is evident that although a limited number of New Zealanders gained the opportunity to live in a state house by the mid-

¹² Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 298.

¹³ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 8.

¹⁴ Cedric Harold Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand* (Ministry of Works, 1949), 7.

¹⁵ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 7.

¹⁶ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 5.

century, their creation went beyond supplying affordable housing—they functioned to raise the standard for what housing should look like in New Zealand.

Metge's account of state housing, from its inception in the 1930s through to National's election in 1949, was focused on the extent of individual contributions of government officials, private business people and unionists in shaping state housing. He described how James Fletcher's involvement in housing had been underplayed in historical accounts of the origins of state housing.¹⁷ Metge described the importance of the relationship between Nash and Fletcher that was crucial to the success of this large housing scheme taking shape. John A. Lee, the Parliamentary Under-secretary, is often credited with having designed the socialist housing scheme, thanks to his enthusiasm for the project and his organisational abilities.¹⁸ Metge argued that, on the contrary, Lee had a smaller role in bringing about state housing than common historical narratives recount: 'Lee's role was essentially one of public relations' with a lot of the details of the housing programme having been hashed out before he became involved.¹⁹

State housing in a broader context of social welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand

The progression of state housing across the twentieth century has been tracked through the lens of broader social histories that documented changing sentiments toward government intervention in social welfare. Bronwyn Dalley utilised hundreds of photographs from Archives New Zealand Te Rua Maharao te Kāwanatanga [ANZ], visually demonstrating the changing landscape of New Zealand with images of everyday New Zealanders in *Living in the 20th Century*. With a chapter dedicated to accommodation, she utilised photographs of early state houses contrasted with inner city slums, identifying how well received government intervention in housing was in their effort to 'provide access to housing of good minimum standards for all citizens'.²⁰ McClure's *A Civilised Community*, commissioned by the Department of Social Welfare, covered a history of social security in New Zealand, discussing, in a chronological order, the popular beliefs and opinions of both politicians and 'regular'

¹⁷ Roland Toler Metge, "The House That Jack Built : The Origins of Labour State Housing, 1935-8, With Particular Reference to the Role of J.A. Lee" (Master of Arts University of Auckland, 1972), 61.

¹⁸ Erik Olssen. "Lee, John Alfred Alexander", Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, first published in 1998, updated June, 2014, accessed 24-03-2021, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/418/lee-john-alfred-alexander>.

¹⁹ Metge, "The House That Jack Built", 63.

²⁰ Dalley, *Living in the 20th Century: New Zealand history in photographs, 1900-1980*, 162.

people, during periods of change in New Zealand's welfare history. With increasing targeted welfare, she described how disunity grew between beneficiaries and paid workers when those working and experiencing hardship observed those on welfare benefits could more easily access state housing.²¹ Unlike in the early days of state housing, generosity dissipated by the end of the 1970s, with the term 'welfare' taking on a negative connotation.²² Although, Dalley and McClure's accounts of welfare are sourced from archives mediated by the government, rather than being direct accounts from recipients of welfare, they offer an insight into changing perceptions of welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Most historical accounts identify the racist policies that made it difficult for Māori to accessing early mainstream state housing. Claudia Orange's thesis on the extent of equality between Māori and the government during the Labour administration from 1935 to 1949, mapped housing policies during this period. A large-scale survey of Māori housing conditions was undertaken, revealing appalling conditions for many households.²³ She identified that Labour MPs had vocalised allegations in 1939 that Māori were being discriminated in state housing allocation, leading to an admission of government neglect, however, Māori still did not gain widespread access for another 10 years.²⁴ Orange also compared the state houses that were built in urban areas in contrast to the 'sub-standard' housing that was constructed under the Native Department. Although these houses built by the Native Department were an improvement on existing conditions, the differing standards were so significant that the Health Department had to get involved and legislate against it.²⁵ She concluded that the government had set a low priority on re-housing the Māori population.

The housing policies from the late 1950s, that then saw a disproportionate amount of Māori in state housing communities, have also been widely discussed. Richard Hill mapped the history of Māori and their relationship with the state/crown from 1950 through to 2000. He identified how Māori gained access to state housing as soon as the state began to welcome assimilation objectives that encouraged urban migration and an erosion of Māoridom.²⁶ Assimilation was

²¹ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 188.

²² McClure, *A Civilised Community*, 166.

²³ Claudia Orange, "A Kind of Equality: Labour and the Maori people, 1935-1949" (Master of Arts University of Auckland, 1977), 87.

²⁴ Orange, "A Kind of Equality", 91.

²⁵ Orange, "A Kind of Equality", 92.

²⁶ Richard S. Hill, *Māori and the State: Crown-Māori Relations in New Zealand/Aotearoa, 1950-2000* (Victoria University Press, 2009), 64.

the state's intention, where it was believed 'calculated paternalism' in housing meant 'greater dispersal of homes throughout suburban streets would ultimately prove to be one of the most effective ways of both countering racism and integrating Māori into the Pākehā world.'²⁷ However, in reality, Hill described how the expression of 'Māoriness' was redefined in an urban context and strengthened as communities solidified. However, Hill also described how these communities that concentrated Māori and Pacific Island populations were, by definition, poor, because of state house allocation criteria and inadequate facilities, compounding negative issues and social disorder.²⁸

It is evident in historical accounts of state welfare that particular generations of New Zealanders benefited from more generous and widespread government provisions. In David Thomson's *Selfish Generations?* he tracked the shift in social security policies illustrating how each generation of New Zealanders benefited to varying degrees from State assistance. He concluded that those born in the 1920s through to the early 1940s benefited the most through policies that focused on children and young families during this period (including wider access to state housing and cheap government subsidised home loans). And as this generation grew older, policies shifted with them to better assist aged citizens, including more generous retirement provisions, as assistance for younger generations assessing housing resources was scaled back to help only the very low-income young, and the aged.²⁹ Bassett described the scaling back of welfare, but from a different perspective, as a member of the Labour government during the 1980s, in full support of the neo-liberal economic reforms. Employing an economic examination of the role of the state in Aotearoa New Zealand he highlighted the level of state intervention from the 1930s that continued through to the early 1980s was not sustainable. He concluded that the idealistic collectivism that Aotearoa New Zealand had been governing under was failing and radical change was required in the 1980s.³⁰ These histories elucidate how state involvement in housing transitioned from one of more widespread entitlement in the 1930s and 1940s, to something increasingly targeted toward the poor. By interviewing tenants from both earlier and later periods of state housing, this research intends to analyse the extent to which this change was reflected in tenants' experiences of state housing.

²⁷ Hill, *Māori and the State*, 177

²⁸ Hill, *Māori and the State*, 262.

²⁹ David Thomson, *Selfish Generations?: The Ageing of New Zealand's Welfare State* (Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 60.

³⁰ Michael Bassett, *The State in New Zealand, 1840-1984: Socialism without doctrines?* (Auckland University Press, 1998), 374.

The repercussions of these reforms in the 1990s and the changes experienced by state house tenants during this period were discussed in numerous articles and books demonstrating the hardships experienced. McClure pointed out that the accommodation supplement that was introduced for those who could not afford market rents: ‘did not always meet the difference between a person’s income and the higher rent that landlords and Housing New Zealand were charging.’³¹ Carlyson also described how state housing that was once fixed at 25 percent of the tenant’s income, in the 1990s negatively shifted upwards, sighting how in some areas, ‘the number of empty state houses increased, as tenants vacated them, unable to afford the rent.’³² Waldegrave, offered a different, but equally negative opinion that the housing reforms of the 1990s merely left both public and private renters struggling equally: ‘reformed housing policy simply equalised everybody downwards to the insecure level of those in private sector rentals.’³³ One of the intentions of this research is to see the extent of which the interviewees who lived in state housing during this period felt these rapid social policy changes—or whether these changes had little bearing on their day to day lives.

State housing in relation to homeownership

Although this research is not centrally focused on the homeowner experience, it is evident in housing literature that there is an intrinsic relationship between the acceptance and promotion of state housing and that of homeownership in the second half of the twentieth century. Alexander Davidson wrote a comparative history of housing policies in Aotearoa New Zealand and Sweden. He delved into why the ideology of homeownership has been so strong in Aotearoa New Zealand, and why the state housing programme arguably failed. The corresponding parliamentary terms of National and Labour are central to his argument, where widespread discontent for paying for another person’s home was spread by successive National governments, set against the Labour governments’ control of rents to meet social policy goals.³⁴ Davidson concluded that because the state housing programme was prematurely dismantled and the ideal of homeownership was thrust forward, the housing market was ‘little

³¹ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 243.

³² Jenny Carlyson and Diana Morrow, *Changing Times: New Zealand since 1945* (Auckland University Press, 2013), 334.

³³ Robert Stephens Charles Waldegrave, Peter King, "Assessing the Progress on Poverty Reduction," *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, no. 20 (2003): 209.

³⁴ Alex Davidson, *A Home of One's Own: Housing Policy in Sweden and New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1990s* (Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), 182.

less than catastrophic' by the early 1990s.³⁵ Laurence Murphy, whose studies were focused more specifically on the housing policy changes that occurred in the 1990s, wrote about how, in contrast to state tenancy, the measures of state support for homeownership were far greater, depriving state house tenants of a right to a secure home. He described how overwhelming support for homeownership resulted in state housing stock accounting for five percent of dwellings, compared with 74 percent that were owner occupied by the mid-1980s.³⁶ He concluded 'the state has been an active and willing participant in the creation of a 'home owning' democracy,' while state housing assumed the role 'as tenure of last resort for those who are unable to access housing from the private market.'³⁷ It is evident that government housing policies encouraged a high level of homeownership from the mid twentieth century, at the cost of a strong state operated alternative, socially disadvantaging those who could not afford the privilege and security of owning a house.

Elizabeth McLeay used historical homeownership policies to highlight how changes to state housing delivery in the 1990s disproportionately affected particular groups of New Zealanders. Like Davidson and Murphy, she identified that previous decades of policies were characterised by state support for homeownership. She argued that Māori, Pacific Islanders and women, along with disabled persons have been 'discriminated in the private housing market,' and it is these groups that form a high proportion of state housing tenants.³⁸ Therefore, she described how the punitive measures enacted in the 1990s, including market-driven rents and tighter targeting eligibility for state housing, were felt the strongest by members of society who have been continually marginalised by past homeownership policies. The extent to which the interviewees in this oral history felt and experienced the differences between living in a state housing and owning a house will be addressed in this research, a perspective that is important to better understand the progression of our housing history.

³⁵ Davidson, *A Home of One's Own*, 182.

³⁶ Laurence Murphy, "To the Market and Back: Housing Policy and State Housing in New Zealand," *GeoJournal: An International Journal on Human Geography and Environmental Sciences* 59, no. 2 (2004): 119.

³⁷ Laurence Murphy, "'Houston, we've got a problem': The Political Construction of a Housing Affordability Metric in New Zealand," *Housing Studies* 29, no. 7 (2014): 898.

³⁸ Jonathan Boston and Paul Dalziel, eds., *The Decent Society?: Essays in response to National's economic and social policies* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), 176.

Conclusions

Although there are few oral history accounts of state housing in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a rich amount of literature on state housing to build on, including in-depth research into the intentions behind different housing policies and how these changes were experienced by state house tenants. Gael Ferguson's and Ben Schrader's histories of state housing provided detailed overviews of the policy changes that occurred from the 1930s illustrating the social landscape in which these changes occurred. More specific histories of state housing from various periods, both from government and academic perspectives, offered insights and opposing lines of thought into both the intentions of state housing and how the policies played out in reality. It was also necessary to widen the scope of this research by studying more general histories of social welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand to gain a better understanding of the changing perceptions of welfare and how this related to state house tenants.

It is evident in the literature that government intentions for early state housing were considerably different from what was provided in the 1990s. Early housing policies were designed to provide well-built idealised suburban homes for working families. Contrasting this, more than half a century on in the 1980s and 1990s, state housing became little more than a safety-net for those most in need of housing assistance in a society that privileged homeownership. With a form of tenure that was once considered an alternative to homeownership, by the end of the twentieth century state housing had transitioned into something with far less permanency. This thesis will contribute to existing literature examining changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing from the standpoint of government and wider society, as well as state house tenants.

2. Methodology

A variety of primary and secondary sources were collected and analysed to map changing housing policies in conjunction with changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing from the 1930s up until the 1990s. Complemented by existing academic literature, government information sourced from ANZ contributed to the research in this thesis. These archival sources, providing both qualitative and quantitative data, were analysed to track the changes in state housing policy over sixty-five years.

To understand how changing policies determined what state housing tenants' experiences would be an oral history method was used to inform this thesis. Unlike the usual interviews that complement traditional historical sources recording the voice of important social and political figures, this method of interviewing is a way of giving voice to people whose experiences are often neglected. Oral history is defined as, 'the interviewing of eye-witness participants in the events of the past for the purposes of historical reconstruction.'³⁹ It provides a different perspective from other histories that study state housing in broader economic and political terms.

Oral History Method

Various historians have argued the weaknesses and strengths of oral history, and its ability to record history from a reliable perspective. Critics of oral history have argued that because we construct our own memories, they should not be used by historians.⁴⁰ For instance, in 1985 Eric Hobsbawm described how oral history was 'slippery' when it came to preserving facts because of the unreliability of people's memories.⁴¹ While other historians have offered persuasive arguments in favour of the merits of oral history as a means of understanding how we relate to our past. Alistair Thomson, Paul Thompson and Michael Frisch analysed the importance of memory and its relation to the present where Thompson stated, 'oral testimony is essential evidence for analysis of the interactions between past and present, and between

³⁹ R. J. Grele, "Directions for Oral History in the United States," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. D. K. Dunaway and W. K. Baum (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1996), 63.

⁴⁰ Alistair Thomson, "Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia," *Oral History* 18, no. 1 (1990): 25.

⁴¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 206-07.

memory and mythology.⁴² Paul Thompson in ‘The Voice of the Past’, described how the insurgence of cultural history subsequently silenced many criticisms surrounding oral history. Rather he stated, the subjective nature of oral history was considered a positive attribute, ‘through oral testimonies it was possible to explore the many ways in which individuals construct frameworks of meaning.’⁴³ Frisch connected an individual’s experiences with their social context, where the past affects interpretations in the present. He described how memory in its different forms should be the object, not merely the method where connections between history and memory are explored.⁴⁴ It is evident oral histories have become increasingly accepted as a method to understanding how historical memory was constructed—how our memories of the past resonate with our current lives when these memories are recollected.

Within a local context, relating to this work’s field of research, historians have used oral history to analyse memories and reflections to elucidate the construct of communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. For instance, a common thread of stories and memories emerged from a railway community, when oral historian Anna Green undertook a collective project with a group of students from the University of Waikato. Intending to not only preserve memories of the Frankton Junction community, this oral history built on a wider academic commentary about how a sense of community is constructed and remembered.⁴⁵ Green identified contextual aspects to the stories told that were important because they framed these narratives. For instance, Frankton Junction was a remembered place: ‘the much-altered present day suburb has much less significance for them than the landscape of memory.’⁴⁶ Exploring three particular stories about an elderly woman named ‘Coffee and Bun’, a police officer and a tornado, Green analysed how these stories evoked judgements about good and appropriate behaviour. Green also highlighted the importance of when these interviews took place, and how this affected their recounted memories of their community. The 1980s-1990s was a period of rapid neo-liberal change, fundamentally different from the 1930s-1950s, when state intervention helped maintain high rates of employment, and affordable housing for the working class. Therefore, these stories expressed an element of ‘sadness at the loss of this world...’, of the sense of

⁴² Thomson, "Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia," 25.

⁴³ Anna Green and Megan Hutching, eds., *Remembering: Writing oral history* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2004), 2.

⁴⁴ Frisch Michael, "Oral History and "Hard Times," a Review Essay," (Oral History Association, 1979), 76.

⁴⁵ Anna Green, "Coffee and Bun, Sergeant Bonnington and the Tornado: Myth and Place in Frankton Junction," *Oral History* 28, no. 2 (2000): 26.

⁴⁶ Green, "Coffee and Bun, Sergeant Bonnington and the Tornado," 28.

community, as they knew it.⁴⁷ Through oral history, Green was able to find meaning in the commonalities of the stories told, whilst placing the community of Frankton Junction within a historical context. Green's account exemplifies how rich insight can be gained from the study of personal stories, exploring the constructs of communities, as well as Aotearoa New Zealand society more broadly.

Internationally, oral history research into the social housing experience from the perspective of tenants has been undertaken for various reasons. Sean Purdy undertook an oral history of a public housing project in Toronto in the early 2000s. His objective was to shed light on the voices often marginalised, dismissed or neglected, to capture the memories of those who did not figure in political debates but 'occupied important social and political spaces in their own right.'⁴⁸ Interested in the formation of the welfare state, and frustrated with the lack of analysis that went beyond the exploration of ideology and policy, he sought to understand how tenants experienced the welfare state 'on the ground'.⁴⁹ Addressing the 'lacuna' present in the history of social housing in Glasgow, Sean Damer combined archival and oral history data to analyse the experiences of working-class tenants in their council housing scheme. From the perspective of class struggle, he wrote about council estate schemes and their demonization amongst the general public. His intentions were to correct offensive labelling such as 'schemie', by providing an analysis of various council housing schemes that identified the importance of social housing to the people who lived in them.⁵⁰

Undertaking oral histories of people that tenanted state houses from different periods enabled the researcher to gain insight into the distinction between the changing experiences of living in state housing and how people who didn't live in state housing perceived the experiences. These oral testimonies have been used to gain an insider perspective of life in a state house and in the wider neighbourhood. Having this insight into an interior world of the interviewees has enabled this research to better understand the changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing.

⁴⁷ Green, "Coffee and Bun, Sergeant Bonnington and the Tornado," 34.

⁴⁸ Sean Purdy, "Bertold Brecht, Public Housing, and Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 29, no. 2 (2002): 83.

⁴⁹ Purdy, "Bertold Brecht, Public Housing, and Oral History," 85.

⁵⁰ Seán Damer, *Scheming: A social history of Glasgow council housing, 1919-1956* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), xiv.

Recruiting the interviewees was an informal process, where the researcher identified those who lived in state housing through personal connections, asking friends and family. The interviewees were then selected on the basis of having come from different walks of life spanning many decades. There are limitations to this recruitment method because this group of interviewees is not fully representational of state housing tenants. Because the state houses built by the First Labour Government are now 85 years old the researcher was unable to find interviewees from this period, and so the earliest oral history is based on recollections from the early 1950s. Notably, there were no single occupants recruited in this research, and there is also an absence of people who were elderly when they lived in state housing. The interviewees selected also reflect the circumstances of the researcher who currently lives in Wellington, where the majority of the research was conducted, resulting in interviewees who lived in state housing in Wellington being overrepresented. It should also be taken into account that reflecting the gender of the researcher and because of the method of recruitment, eight out of nine of the interviewees are women.

A total of nine participants were interviewed ranging in age from 27 to 98 who each lived in state houses from a variety of areas between the 1950s and the 1990s. These interviews did not follow a tightly structured questionnaire, instead the researcher opted to take an informal approach, limiting premeditated lines of questioning and prompting relevant topics as necessary. Because of this approach, the interviewee had greater control over the line of questioning, discussing only what they were comfortable with sharing. All but two of these interviews took place in person, with two being conducted via video calling because of Covid-19 restrictions. All nine of these interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. A low-risk ethics application was approved to carry out the interviews that were conducted between April 2020 and January 2021.

Biographies of Interviewees

Belle was raised in central Auckland and moved to Wellington when she married in 1947. She and her partner lived in an apartment in central Wellington and then a transit camp in Miramar before they were allocated a state house in Titahi Bay in 1951. This is where she lived for the next twelve years until her and her partner bought their house a few blocks away. Belle

divorced her partner and retired to a smaller unit in the same area on the coast until she passed away in 2020 aged 98.⁵¹

Jillian, Belle's daughter, was raised in a three-bedroom detached state house in Titahi Bay in the late 1950s until 1969, the youngest of three siblings. Jillian has since raised two children between Santa Cruz, California and Paekakariki on the Kapiti Coast, where she currently resides with her partner. Jillian is a retired primary school teacher.⁵²

Colleen believes she moved into a state house in Awapuni, Manawatu when she was seven in 1963 until the mid 1970s. A middle child in a family of six children, her father died when she was ten, and her family continued to live in this house until she left home and moved to Wellington. She and her husband raised their daughter in Khandallah. She has since divorced and lives in Mount Maunganui.⁵³

Erana was raised on an air force base in Blenheim until she was 12, when her family moved to a state house in Hastings in the late 1960s. Erana has since lived in various state houses in Dunedin and Hastings. She currently resides in a state house in Hastings that she has lived in for over 25 years raising three children. Separated from her partner in 2014, Erana is now the sole carer of her eight-year-old grandson. She works as a part-time caretaker at a local primary school.⁵⁴

Foma'i lived in a state house in Porirua in the late 1970s until the age of five when his father accepted a state-owned house in Lower Hutt managed by the New Zealand Railway Corporation in the early 1980s. He spent the rest of his childhood there up until the early 1990s, with his parents and his two siblings in this house. Foma'i has since returned to the Porirua area where he lives with his wife and two children. He currently works as a technology specialist.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Belle, "Interview with Belle talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, audio recording, 18/06/2020.

⁵² Jillian, "Interview with Jillian talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, Audio recording 30/07/2020.

⁵³ Colleen, "Interview with Colleen talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, Audio recording, 11/10/2020.

⁵⁴ Erana, "Interview with Erana talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, Audio recording 09/01/2020.

⁵⁵ Foma'i, "Interview with Foma'i talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, Audio recording 03/07/2020.

Katrina was raised in Lower Hutt, with her parents and her three siblings. She moved into a state house in Wainuiomata in the late 1980s with her three-year-old son when she was twenty years old until the mid 1990s. Currently Katrina resides with her husband in Waikanae and works in Wellington as a Director of a research company.⁵⁶

Noeline lived in Newtown before she and her family moved into a state house with her parents and her two siblings as a young teenager in the mid 1990s. This was where she continued to live until her father passed away two decades later. Her and her partner now live in Lower Hutt and she works as an assistant researcher for a social and market research company.⁵⁷

Moana moved into her state house flat in a housing complex in Mt Cook, Wellington with her two sisters and her parents as a teenager in the early 1990s. Her extended family lived in the same group of flats, where she lived until 2001. Moana's two children were raised in this home, and then they moved to Kilbirnie where she now resides. She currently works in a call centre.⁵⁸

Fale moved into a state house complex in Kilbirnie when she was five years old in 1996, having lived with her mother and her grandparents at her uncle's house in Newtown. She lived in this flat for 12 years before her mother subsequently bought a villa in Kilbirnie, that Fale now part owns. She currently works in a marketing role in a government department and lives in Newtown in a flat with her partner.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Katrina, "Interview with Katrina talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, Audio recording, 03/05/2020.

⁵⁷ Noeline, "Interview with Noeline talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, Audio recording, 19/06/2020.

⁵⁸ Moana, "Interview with Moana talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, Audio recording, 12/11/2020.

⁵⁹ Fale, "Interview with Fale talking about living in a state house," interview by Alice Brimer, audio recording, 22/04/2020.

3. State housing from 1935 to 1949

The importance of suburban communities

Labour came to power with socialist democratic ideas of utilising ‘the state as a means of providing for a more rational, equal and just society.’⁶⁰ A significant housing scheme became a tangible foundation for the First Labour Government’s intentions to improve the livelihoods of New Zealanders.⁶¹ Because of an increasingly urbanised Pākehā population, the government had subsidised mortgages in the 1920s, directly fostering homeownership up until the Depression. The state already had a stake in public housing, but the state housing scheme was the first to offer people who did not have the means to buy a home the chance to live with the security granted to homeowners. This state-centred form of socialism was influenced by nineteenth century British Fabians who followed social Darwinism theory: ‘human biology became a metaphor for human society, and the laws of society were determined by the broader laws governing all of biological evolution.’⁶² While concerns about welfare dependency persisted, the government believed state intervention could be used to encourage positive social behaviour: ‘the central motivation was not humanitarian concern, but social biology.’⁶³ Belgrave described how changing the physical environment of New Zealanders through full employment, improved health care and access to better housing, ‘was the foundation for individual and collective happiness.’⁶⁴

Poor housing was not a new social crisis. Schrader described how, decades earlier, inner-city landlords had been profiting from poorly planned subdivisions that encouraged congestion and overcrowding.⁶⁵ Because a laissez-faire approach to privately rented housing was dominant, very little was done by the government to improve these slum areas. It was believed that, because of the squalid nature, these areas became home to an ‘urban underclass’ tenanted by

⁶⁰ Michael Belgrave, "Social Policy History: Forty years on, forty years back" (Affording our Future, Wellington, 10-11- 2012).

⁶¹ Ben Schrader, "The Origins of Urban Sprawl in New Zealand" (Landscapes and Ecologies of Urban and Planning History: Proceedings of the 12th Australasian Urban History Planning History Conference Australasian Urban History/Planning History Group and Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, 2014).

⁶² William Toomath, *Built in New Zealand: The Houses We Live In* (HarperCollins, 1996), 6.

⁶³ Michael Belgrave, "Needs and the State: Evolving social policy in New Zealand history," in *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, ed. Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2004), 28.

⁶⁴ Belgrave, "Needs and the State", 29.

⁶⁵ Schrader, "The Origins of Urban Sprawl in New Zealand." 753.

transients, prostitutes and the poor, where ‘physical deterioration followed social decline.’⁶⁶ Overcrowding led to these areas being associated with filth and immorality, which, in a newspaper article written in 1864, was described as reminiscent of British Old World’s high density housing: ‘...securing for the poorest habitations proper ventilation, would at once do away with the greatest and first cause of all filth and immorality, and that is overcrowding.’⁶⁷ This article went on to identify the dangers of these slums adversely affecting the interests of the future of the colony as: ‘an increasing evil’.

It is evident that moving the working-class away from higher density housing was on the minds of politicians before the 1930s. City slums were said to have festered with poverty and crime—trappings that the government did not want to repeat in Aotearoa New Zealand. A more positive, enduring perception of housing that was transplanted from Britain was the single-unit cottage on its own section, referencing ‘the suburban villas, in parkland settings, of London and Manchester’s emerging capitalist elite.’⁶⁸ The Liberal Government elected in 1890 attempted to promote suburban housing, where the working class were encouraged to take up a ‘suburban allotment’ – government-owned land on the periphery of cities encouraging self-reliance.⁶⁹ They were encouraged to make a comfortable home away from the city, to transpose into an urban environment ‘the possibilities for independence once assumed to be the exclusive preserve of yeomen farmers.’⁷⁰ Although this idea did not succeed for many reasons, including a lack of public transport, it showed the beginnings of government introducing interventionist housing policies.

Implementing a large-scale state housing scheme

It was not until the First Labour Government came to power that a large state housing scheme was successfully implemented. They wasted no time, and, by 1935, The Housing Survey Act was passed to secure information about the extent of poor housing conditions in Aotearoa New Zealand and once this was confirmed the Department of Housing Construction was created as

⁶⁶ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 17.

⁶⁷ "Narrow Streets," *The New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), 07/04/ 1864, 3, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/new-zealand-herald/1864/04/07/3>, National Library of New Zealand.

⁶⁸ Schrader, "Short The Origins of Urban Sprawl in New Zealand." 754.

⁶⁹ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 20.

⁷⁰ Erik Olssen, Clyde Griffen, and F. Lancaster Jones, *An Accidental Utopia?: Social Mobility and the Foundations of an Egalitarian Society, 1880-1940* (Otago University Press, 2011), 253.

a branch of the State Advances Corporation [SAC]. Shortly after this, the first construction contracts were let to private builders.⁷¹ A booklet published by the government on state housing in 1949—‘State Housing in New Zealand’—outlined that, ‘For the first time in New Zealand’s history a Government recognised the close association between housing and the health and happiness of the people, and, in the face of criticism and difficulty, did something about it.’⁷² In fact, this connection between housing, health and happiness had been made before with the Workers Dwellings Bill in 1905, but failed to realise its objectives. Richard Seddon’s Liberal party had attempted to give working people access to suburban homes, but due to lack of commitment on the government’s part, the high rental costs and difficulties with commuting the scheme was abandoned.⁷³ The Labour Party came at state housing with more devotion and subsequently, thirty thousand state houses were built between 1936 early, 1949.⁷⁴

The urgent development of a state housing programme was also intended to directly boost a flailing economy. Having been hit hard by the economic downturn in the previous decade, the construction and building industries were considered essential to rebuild the economy, with a central focus on decreasing unemployment.⁷⁵ Metge described how the Labour government was less interested in attempting to nationalise these industries than in creating a stimulus that would carry over into the rest of the economy. The housing programme was centred on using local industry—for instance, iron was cheaper than tiles, but tiles were opted for on the grounds that they utilised idle machinery and created greater employment.⁷⁶ Having previously promoted a relatively laissez-faire approach to governance, by the 1930s, industries had become dependent on the state to provide an economic environment that was favourable—Metge described it as a ‘symbiotic relationship.’⁷⁷ The state to become directly involved in the provision of housing to bolster private enterprise, notably with Fletchers construction company, thus strengthening a struggling economy.

⁷¹ Booklet published by the Ministry of Works, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 1949, ABKK W4478 R20455099, ANZ, Wellington.

⁷² Booklet published by the Ministry of Works, *State Housing in New Zealand*.

⁷³ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 29.

⁷⁴ Booklet published by the Ministry of Works, “State Housing in New Zealand”.

⁷⁵ Metge, “The House That Jack Built : The Origins of Labour State Housing, 1935-8, With Particular Reference to the Role of J.A. Lee,” 16.

⁷⁶ Metge, “The House That Jack Built”, 29.

⁷⁷ Metge, “The House That Jack Built”, 37.

Physically planning suburbs to enhance wellbeing

The style of early state houses also reflects what was considered important at the time—a healthy family-orientated lifestyle. Therefore, it was the detached house in the suburbs that became synonymous with state housing during this period, and this remains the best-known example of state housing today. The intention of building houses that allow room to move is evident in the designs: detached houses, and low blocks of flats that could meet the then modern requirements of a family. Although the heart of housing issues laid in the city centres, Aotearoa New Zealand’s housing scheme consisted of the creation of a particular style of suburban housing, rather than building inner city flats. The overall look of the neighbourhood was of paramount concern to the scheme, as it represented a healthier more positive way of life. Because this scheme was a form of social housing, Firth described how it was important that these houses varied slightly in style so as to avoid monotony.⁷⁸ This was a pitfall of British Council flats, that the government was not going to repeat. Architectural Historian Peter Shaw told Schrader how Labour probably didn’t want to design anything too radical and consequently scare their electorate.⁷⁹ Therefore, the British Feudal style cottage design, with its positive associations, was put forward to sell the idea of state housing to the general public. Schrader explained that the official story of how the state house style came to be was that the government invited the members of the New Zealand Institute of Architects to submit 400 different designs. Schrader also discussed an unofficial story, that Fletcher’s architects were behind the designs, after he approached Savage, before the election, with a plan for a state housing programme to tackle rising unemployment and boost the building industry.⁸⁰ Regardless, the prioritising of suburban cottages over other forms of housing exemplifies Labour’s intentions and vision to create communities that were removed from the negatively perceived city lifestyles.

An important aspect of these houses was that they were to be of high-quality, meeting modern standards of living.⁸¹ Housing surveys conducted during the 1930s on the state of individual houses drew a connection between poor housing, living conditions and health, where good

⁷⁸ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 14.

⁷⁹ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 90.

⁸⁰ Schrader *We Call It Home*, 89.

⁸¹ Letter from Secretary of New Zealand Labour Party to the Prime Minister P. Fraser, 12/09/1944, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

housing was considered to be closely related to better health outcomes.⁸² Building well built houses to improve New Zealander's standard of living was a critical aspect of these homes that were to meet 'a modern standard of comfort.'⁸³ A booklet on state housing stated, 'Designs may change but construction standards will not be relaxed; tenants' comfort and environment will remain first consideration'.⁸⁴ By involving itself in the construction of houses, the government had set a high minimum standard for housing that would, in turn, force the private market to raise its own standards of housing delivery.⁸⁵ This government, with its goals to raise welfare standards for all New Zealanders, had set out to provide housing that raised the bar on what ordinary New Zealanders had come to expect. Belgrave noted, 'for those lucky enough to walk through the front door the state house may well have been a stately home.'⁸⁶

Although it was known that Māori were living in unfavourable living conditions, it did not necessarily translate to Māori families being allocated state houses. The Native Department conducted a survey of the living conditions of rural Māori from 1937, reporting on serious housing problems. The report found that over half of the houses were deemed overcrowded, and over one-third were deemed uninhabitable.⁸⁷ However, these housing concerns did not equate to Māori gaining access to state housing in the 1930s and 1940s. The fact that state houses were built in urban areas during a period when 90 percent of Māori lived rurally also showed little consideration for Māori needs in this housing scheme: 'As long as the rural orientation of the Māori people could be maintained, Government was able to defer a solution of urban housing needs for Māori.'⁸⁸

Rather than including Māori in the state housing scheme, access to housing was based on providing access to loans.⁸⁹ The provision of housing for Māori in the 1930s was considered to exist 'outside of the mainstream state housing policy of the Labour government...'⁹⁰ Māori rural land development schemes were established in an attempt to help Māori reconnect with

⁸² Angela Wanhalla, *Housing Un/healthy Bodies: Native Housing Surveys and Maori Health in New Zealand 1930-45*, Australian and New Zealand Society for the History of Medicine (2006), 113.

⁸³ Bassett, *The State in New Zealand, 1840-1984: Socialism without doctrines?*, 189.

⁸⁴ Booklet published by the Ministry of Works, "State Housing in New Zealand".

⁸⁵ Dalley, *Living in the 20th Century: New Zealand history in photographs, 1900-1980*, 162.

⁸⁶ Belgrave, "Needs and the State: Evolving social policy in New Zealand history," 29.

⁸⁷ Orange, "A Kind of Equality: Labour and the Maori people, 1935-1949," 90.

⁸⁸ Orange, "A Kind of Equality", 95.

⁸⁹ Wanhalla, *Housing Un/healthy Bodies: Native Housing Surveys and Maori Health in New Zealand 1930-45*, 103.

⁹⁰ Wanhalla, *Housing Un/healthy Bodies*, 103.

the land within a western framework—such as in an industrious way or working the soil—as well as improve the overall health of Māori.⁹¹ However, the progress in building these houses was slow, and complaints from Māori politicians about the limitations of the scheme, and who could access it, were ignored.⁹² While building houses to exceed expectations of ordinary New Zealanders was the benchmark for the state housing scheme, it appeared the same standards were not comparable to what was built by the Native Department. Orange described how many of the houses built under the Māori housing schemes should not have qualified as houses, and were likened to cowsheds.⁹³ Regardless of the complaints raised, this discrimination against Māori accessing mainstream state housing would not be rectified for another decade.

While Māori were housed through the state on a meagre budget, the design of the early mainstream state housing scheme was clearly more ambitious, promoting modern living conditions that would be replicated for the next twenty years.⁹⁴ The visibly high standard of housing, its subsequent cost and the corresponding rents that were charged drew criticism from the public. The rate of state house rent, from the 1930s up until the mid 1950s, was standardised and simplified; houses of the same size would have the same basic rental charge anywhere in New Zealand.⁹⁵ The rent formula for state housing in the 1930s, up until the mid 1950s, was to have ‘a uniform national, or standard, rent on all the newly constructed houses from 1937, based on ‘accommodation’ criteria.’⁹⁶

In a response to a report on ‘uneconomic rents’, Nash defended the government’s intentions: ‘Is it reasonable to infer from the report and recommendations that there will always be a section of our community whose income is such that they will never be able to pay a rental for a reasonably comfortable house? Must we build something less than the normal for a section of our community, or should we build houses of good standards that will enable all mothers in all sections of the community to make a home and family life like unit that which the government considers to be essential for the foundations of the future?’ A member of the public responded to this in a letter to Nash, disagreeing with Nash’s sentiment, that welfare should be

⁹¹ Wanhalla, *Housing Un/healthy Bodies*, 104.

⁹² Orange, "A Kind of Equality : Labour and the Maori people, 1935-1949," 91.

⁹³ Orange, "A Kind of Equality", 94.

⁹⁴ Paola Leardini, Manfredo Manfredini, and Maria Callau, "Energy Upgrade to Passive House Standard for Historic Public Housing in New Zealand," *Energy & Buildings* 95 (2015): 212.

⁹⁵ S. A. Boyce, *Only the Houses Remain: The demise of the state housing scheme in New Zealand* (Paraparaumu Beach: Wayside Press, 2010), 22.

⁹⁶ Boyce, *Only the Houses Remain*, 22.

for all—‘don’t talk so much sob stuff.’ This correspondent’s issue was that these houses were not built for families—because they are too small. They finish by saying ‘Let those who won’t rear children look after themselves... Just see that all houses, particularly in country districts, have 3 bedrooms.’⁹⁷ Prioritising families over individuals was a popular policy in the first decades of state housing.

There were also other factors, beyond building houses with longevity, that related to promoting a particular lifestyle when living in state housing. With increasing prosperity labour saving consumer items in these houses freed up time for children, particularly in urban areas, to partake in leisure activities with their peers. The importance of providing safe areas within communities to play needed to be considered.⁹⁸ Savage Crescent in Palmerston North was built with the ‘garden city’ concept in mind. These houses were built around a long oval reserve where the community could come together in a safe setting away from the road. Naenae in Lower Hutt was another example, where plenty of space was left for reserves, and front fences were banned ‘to create the effect of a sweeping community garden.’⁹⁹

In the Ministry of Works publication, produced in an election year in 1949, Firth describes the many positive attributes of state housing. ‘New Zealander’s want elbow room’ is how Firth described the reason for the creation of state house suburbs. The quarter acre section was the popular choice with semi-detached housing making up one fifth of all state houses designs built by the late 1940s.¹⁰⁰ It is evident that the planning and building of state housing suburbs were about encouraging physical and social wellbeing. Firth explained that housing went beyond designing and building houses and that to carry out ‘civilised life’ demanded more than this.¹⁰¹ Taking into account housing density, the provision of open space and recreational facilities were made available through reserves, and it was said to be 10 percent of every gross area. Planning considered such details as children crossing as few streets as possible when walking to school, so that they could walk across a reserve.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Letter from J. Grant to W. Nash, 17/11/1944, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

⁹⁸ "The Post-war Family," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2017, accessed 10-12-20, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/children-and-adolescents-1940-60/post-war-family>.

⁹⁹ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 8.

¹⁰² Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 10.

Houses were designed to encourage a healthy lifestyle. In a government published booklet in state housing from 1949, it highlighted the various positive attributes of this form of housing. Four-fifths of the houses were fully detached. They came complete with essential services (laundry, clothes lines etc.). The importance of a safe outdoor living space for the whole family was highlighted: 'the rear part of the section gives room for a vegetable garden; is safe, secluded play-area for children.'¹⁰³ Walls of glass were used on the north side to capture all-day winter sun. Their windows were large, for sunlight and fresh air, which was deemed very important for avoiding the recently experienced outbreak of tuberculosis and diphtheria.¹⁰⁴ The living-room was designed as a hub, 'a practical illustration of the aim to keep the family together as a unit. Social and recreational centre for at least half of the year, the state house lounge is warm, roomy, and comfortable, fills all requirements as a family gathering place.'¹⁰⁵

How the houses were situated to transport and work, as well as recreational and community facilities, were also factored in when deciding on where to build state housing. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Housing Division had been more concerned about building housing amongst existing sub-divisions. For instance, the planning of land for state housing worked into the existing housing framework. However, with larger pieces of land earmarked for state housing, a different form of planning was required, including the inclusion of reserves for recreation, children's playgrounds, park strips, schools, shopping centres and cultural and community centres.¹⁰⁶ Firth explained that state housing was as much an exercise in town planning as it was in building desirable houses. The construction of Naenae, in Lower Hutt was an example of the considerations that were undertaken to create a cohesive community. A community centre was to be the focal point of this state housing area, 'incorporating commercial, social and cultural activities, its design was based on Venice's social nexus, the San Marco Square.'¹⁰⁷

In a report on the development of the Porirua Basin area in 1942, it is evident that a great deal of consideration was given to where to develop state housing communities in Wellington. The history of the land, topography, sewage, commercial spaces, recreational areas, to name a few, were all taken into account. Even milk supply was considered in regard to planning for winter

¹⁰³ Booklet published by the Ministry of Works, *State Housing in New Zealand*.

¹⁰⁴ Leardini, Manfredini, and Callau, "Energy Upgrade to Passive House Standard for Historic Public Housing in New Zealand," 212.

¹⁰⁵ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 171.

months and delivery: 'Consumption of milk in the City of Wellington has now reached 3,110,000 gallons (excluding cream).'¹⁰⁸

Although weary of the social ills of inner city living, there are a few examples of larger blocks of flats in Wellington and Auckland built by the Housing Corporation in the early stages of the scheme. Flats were built in the late 1940s for the 'urbanists' – one to three-bedroom units. There were pros of multi-unit living to be considered; for instance, they were closer to the city, so transport costs and time were minimised. A family with only one child might consider the multi-unit more ideal, being closer to the city, and the amenities that go with it, in favour of a garden and having more children. However, it is evident in the designs of these multi-unit dwellings, that, while not providing as much space as the stand-alone houses, the designs incorporated aspects of the outdoor areas in the form of communal spaces.

The public perception of state housing

The state house suburbs received favourable attention both locally and internationally. The creation of these state-built houses brought about such widespread attention that, in the late 1930s, people came to visit new state housing communities as a leisure activity.¹⁰⁹ The first locations—Miramar, Hutt Valley and Orakei—were consciously and successfully built as show sights: 'An unprecedented number of Wellingtonians visited Miramar and from all accounts went away impressed. Orakei even became a popular Sunday afternoon outing and picnic spot for thousands of Aucklanders—the waterfront road along which they drove, a legacy of pick and shovel relief works.'¹¹⁰ As a physical product of the social policies implemented by the government, Murphy argued that state housing had taken on an iconic status 'within the New Zealand imagination, being a material manifestation of the country's early and innovative welfare state.'¹¹¹ The early state housing programme also gained international attention. The Director of Urban Development in the National Housing Agency in the United States of America expressed an interest in sending someone to New Zealand to discuss the developments in large scale housing – 'an American Administrator could discover

¹⁰⁸ Report by the City Engineer, *Development of Porirua Basin Area*, August 1942, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁰⁹ Schrader, *We Call It Home*, 211.

¹¹⁰ Metge, "The House That Jack Built : The Origins of Labour State Housing, 1935-8, With Particular Reference to the Role of J.A. Lee," 42.

¹¹¹ Murphy, "To the Market and Back: Housing Policy and State Housing in New Zealand," 119.

a great deal of value from seeing the organisation of housing in NZ, particularly on the financial and Governmental levels.’¹¹²

While the high standard of construction in state housing appeared to be favoured, there was also criticism of state housing being too well-built. In a newspaper article from 1944 on the Associated Chambers of Commerce conference, which criticised the perceived excesses of Labour’s state housing policies, Bob Semple, Minister of Works, stated:

The conference in its report makes one suggestion which shows the old conservative mind of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, this is the contention that there is room for a ‘more modest type of house’ than the Housing Department’s present standard. What does this mean? It is simply an oblique way of saying that the standard of State houses is too good for the working class of this country. The time has long passed for perpetuating the standard of housing which soon degenerates to the frowsy level of slums.’¹¹³

Criticism to the perceived excesses of the early state housing programme was becoming increasingly visible.

Promoting a family-orientated vision of Aotearoa New Zealand

Regardless of the intended universality of state housing, there is general agreement amongst historians that, in practice, state housing during its early inception favoured families. With the make-up of Pākehā families changing, family sizes were trending downwards from the late nineteenth century, with couples having and fewer children.¹¹⁴ In response to the declining birth rates, young New Zealanders needed to be encouraged to begin families to bolster the population. The number of one-bedroom units being built by the state in the late 1940s went from 4.8 percent of all state units to less than one percent in favour of houses with more bedrooms that could accommodate larger families.¹¹⁵ A woman’s place in state housing was connected to their role as a mother within the family unit. Unmarried, single mothers did not fare well when it came to being allocated a state house: ‘...the vision of family was a highly specific one, with lone parent families not considered legitimate clients... In sum, despite the

¹¹² Letter from the office of the New Zealand Legation in Washington to W. Nash, 25/10/1944, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹¹³ Newspaper article, “State housing: Reply to criticism of Labour’s Policy: Wartime shortages of materials”, 1944, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹¹⁴ Olssen, "Towards a New Society," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 280.

¹¹⁵ Carlyon and Morrow, *Changing Times: New Zealand since 1945*, 20.

otherwise liberal and welfare-orientated views of the government of the day, there were well established and highly gendered views as to what family formations should be assisted and encouraged by the state.¹¹⁶

Solo women who succeeded in securing state house tenancy attracted criticism and condemnation. In a newspaper article in 1944, the wife of a prisoner of war was allocated one of the Dixon Street flats, which she shared with two girlfriends who were members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force [WAAF]. This woman was carrying on her brother's dental practice whilst he had been serving overseas. Somebody, clearly perturbed by the article, wrote to the Prime Minister a day after this story was published to point out that these women shouldn't be allowed to live in this house: 'I understand on applying at the State Advances that a woman is told that she cannot get a flat unless her husband is here in New Zealand with her? How is it that this lady is able to get one and share it with two Waafs, who could be quartered at Camp Anderson? I would also like to draw your attention to clause 5 of the tenancy agreement of these flats which forbids sub-letting, this practice is getting very prevalent.' The letter was signed "Interested and curious".¹¹⁷ These are examples of how sought-after state housing was, as well as the very specific ideas on who should be allocated state housing.

It is also evident that state housing, in its early inception, was not intended for the poor. Ferguson argued that the Labour government had created a favoured group of tenants that did not reflect those who were most in need of state housing.¹¹⁸ Schrader argued that one reason for not building in the city was that the government knew the inner-city poor were not likely to be allocated a state house anyway.¹¹⁹ A newspaper article in 1949 relayed an article from an Australian newspaper that criticised the New Zealand government for providing state houses for middle-class families at a comparatively cheaper price than other tenancies:

It's easy living for them—at the taxpayer's expense. The State has skimmed the cream from the pool of tenants or potential home-owners, has helped a lot that don't need helping because they're well able to look after themselves but are losing sturdy

¹¹⁶ R. A. Kearns, C. M. A. G. Van Wiechen, and C. J. Smith, "The Status of Lone and Partnered Women Seeking State Housing Assistance in Two New Zealand Cities," *Urban Policy and Research* 13, no. 4 (1995): 224.

¹¹⁷ Letter to the Prime Minister, 10/12/1944, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹¹⁸ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 158.

¹¹⁹ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 37.

independence, and is pushing ahead with another of its socialistic schemes to convert Maorilanders into State dependents.¹²⁰

Preference was given to families with children rather than being based on an individual's level of need. In a newspaper article from 1944, Nash explained, 'houses would be consistently allocated in accord with the particular need of each applicant and would not be allocated on a pauper or poverty basis. They would be provided at rentals within the means of all sections of the community.'¹²¹ A document from the Manager of the SAC to MP J Thorn, in response to questions asked by Nash, described the allocation process of state housing, outlining: 'If there is a large family suffering undue hardship on account of difficult living conditions the case will be treated more sympathetically than say the case of a married couple without children in a good financial position with both husband and wife working...'¹²² State housing was for working-class families, not to house the poor.

As mentioned earlier, Māori, in particular, gained few benefits from early state housing compared to Pākehā and those living in urban areas. Schrader argued that, in the 1940s and 1950s, the SAC delayed allocation of Māori tenants because of the concentration of Māori areas in would create.¹²³ Perceptions of Māori as being bad tenants and as lacking the ability to care for housing was not uncommon. In a letter to Savage, a Labour Party member claimed that, until Māori had been taught how to live, 'it would be a waste to substitute good homes for the hovels they dwell in now.'¹²⁴

Providing stability through state housing

By undertaking this housing scheme, the Labour government was also endeavouring to offer an alternative form of tenure to homeownership, with more stability than the private rental market. The aspiration of homeownership was already well entrenched in Aotearoa New Zealand culture. Schrader described living in a stand-alone house with one's own plot of land

¹²⁰ Newspaper article, "State Housing in N.Z. Australian Paper's Criticism", Christchurch Press, 28/02/1949, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹²¹ Newspaper article, "Finance Minister's Reply to Criticism", 1944, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹²² Letter from the Manager of the State Advances Corporation to Parliamentary Under-Secretary Mr J. Thorn, 10/12/1943, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹²³ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 221.

¹²⁴ Orange, "A Kind of Equality : Labour and the Maori people, 1935-1949," 97.

as having ‘long been central to New Zealanders’ sense of place and wellbeing.’¹²⁵ The nineteenth century’s positive associations with homeownership persisted; in Victorian society ‘homeownership was equated with a greater level of independence and respectability than renting.’¹²⁶ The Labour government had set out to provide New Zealanders with a viable alternative to an overpriced rental housing market while retaining the positive aspects of homeownership. The most positive aspect was stability—in the sense that the houses were solid and well-built in coveted suburbia, and in that tenants had the security of long-term tenancies. Schrader described how state housing was intending to ‘bridge the gap between the uncertainty of tenure in the private rental market and the (perceived) certainty of home-ownership by offering a form of tenure unknown in the market: a rental home for life.’¹²⁷ Outlined in the 1943 Finance Act (#3), Section 14 (2) gave the occupier of a state house tenancy for life, as well as providing protection for the wife, and an extension of occupation to the children, as long as the contract was not broken.¹²⁸

The long-term nature of state house tenancies is exemplified by the investment of time and effort into gardening and landscaping that was expected as part of the upkeep of these properties. The need to work the land and grow gardens was a big undertaking without immediate rewards, especially when many of these properties were situated on barren land. The Landscape Section of the Housing Division gave advice on gardening. For instance, advice was given on how to prepare land for gardening, how to prepare and sow a lawn, the application of fertilizers to the soil, the planting of trees. Up until the 1970s, home grown vegetables were an important part of a family’s economy—the convenience of purchasing fresh produce from the supermarket was not so readily available before this period. As outlined in the 1949 booklet on state housing, ‘Pride of possession is shown in gardens, lawns, shrubs, which soon often soften outlines and cover up early rawness of construction. Tenants are responsible for the upkeep of grass verges fronting sections. Twelve-year-old housing blocks are already attractive residential suburbs.’¹²⁹

The front gardens were to be seen on a broader scale, as part of a community whole, rather than solely as an expression of the individual tenant. Determined to create a successful street scene,

¹²⁵ Schrader, "Short The Origins of Urban Sprawl in New Zealand." 756.

¹²⁶ Schrader, "Short The Origins of Urban Sprawl in New Zealand." 754.

¹²⁷ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 44.

¹²⁸ Boyce, *Only the Houses Remain: The demise of the state housing scheme in New Zealand*, 24.

¹²⁹ Booklet published by the Ministry of Works, *State Housing in New Zealand*.

details such as the front fence and palings were considered. A wide grassed verge on the street side was to facilitate tree planting. Trees and shrubs were planted, in the sections and in the reserves and street verges, in accordance with a set-out planting scheme that would, in later years, add attractiveness to these neighbourhoods.¹³⁰ Landscaping was also an essential aspect of the larger city blocks of flats, where blocks were often grouped around a park or some sort of community area.¹³¹ With these larger developments where individual gardens were impractical, community gardens were utilised and centrally positioned. For instance, the Berhampore Block was designed to make room for a large open space in the centre of the space for lawns, trees and gardens. Although multi-storey flats were not part of the suburban vision of state housing, efforts were made to incorporate many of the positive aspects of the quarter acre section, including beautifying the urban landscape through gardening.

Whilst it was every tenant's responsibility to keep the house clean and tidy, the SAC dealt with repairs and maintenance, a responsibility that was often neglected. Rebates on rent for 'correct care of home' were implemented to encourage tenants to take care of the properties.¹³² However, the upkeep and the presentation of state housing was ultimately the responsibility of the government. A series of letters to and from Nash in 1949 outlined that the repainting and upkeep of state houses was supposed to occur every 10 years, but that was not necessarily happening—general renovations were not always reported as having been carried out.¹³³ It is evident that the SAC was allowing these houses to become run-down and tired, and this would become a prominent issue later on when the problem compounded.

Conclusions

Examining the academic literature on state housing alongside government reports and newspaper articles, the government's early state housing policies in the 1930s and 1940s encouraged an enduring definition of what home and community means. While the state already had a stake in public housing, having helped finance the mortgages of many households in the 1920s, this was the first large-scale endeavour to create a form of tenure that could rival homeownership. Poor housing provision had continued to result in slum-like urban areas and

¹³⁰ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 14.

¹³¹ Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand*, 31.

¹³² Booklet published by the Ministry of Works, *State Housing in New Zealand*.

¹³³ Letter from F. Hackett to Walter Nash, 04/04/1949, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

overcrowded housing conditions up until the 1930s. Labour's welfare state came into power with the intention of addressing these issues by delivering, 'stable employment, material security for all and to recreate community.'¹³⁴

While intentions behind state housing appear socialist in nature, there were other factors that encouraged the large state housing programme in the 1930s and 1940s. Promoting a state-approved lifestyle was a leading factor behind the design and build of sturdy, idealised suburban homes that exceeded the expectations of average New Zealanders. The government's desire to improve the livelihoods of New Zealanders by providing good housing for working-class New Zealanders was believed to be the recipe for fostering a better society. Providing an ideal long-term rental housing environment for young Pākehā families in community-minded suburbs, tenants were encouraged to be house proud and invest their time into creating family homes. Although the welfare provisions were intended to benefit all New Zealanders, there was a very specific ideas on who should live in state houses, generally allocated to Pākehā families with young children. With relatively high rents and housing built in urban suburbs, poorer New Zealanders were unable to access state housing. State houses built in safe, family orientated communities had society's approval making state housing a viable alternative to the rental market that provided the security of homeownership.

¹³⁴ Erik Olssen, *Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham, 1880s-1920s* (Auckland University Press, 1995), 261.

4. State housing from 1949 to 1990

Change in policy with a change in government

Enthusiasm to expand the welfare state began to wane by the late 1940s. In a series of letters sent to members of parliament, including Nash, the MP for Hastings, H. Keating was seeking urgent action to publicly promote the welfare system. He referenced a newspaper article written in the Press in 1949, promoting the National Party, whilst questioning the wisdom of maintaining 'The Welfare State'.¹³⁵ In a paper titled *Social Welfare Publicity* it was acknowledged that, 'It is true that the term "welfare state" has come into a certain popular disrepute in recent years, but there is little opposition to the general system of social security.'¹³⁶ The necessity to promote the benefits of a modern welfare system indicates how welfare had come to mean something different from what was understood just a decade before.

There was an increasing undercurrent of the perceived unfairness of state housing during the 1949 election year, with National's policy to sell state housing to tenants gaining political traction. A drafted pamphlet from the Labour Party, intended for every house, was to outline the repercussions for the people who were waiting for state houses if the National Party was to gain power: 'These thousands of people will be left to the tender mercies of the private builders who will mainly build for sale at high prices. They may build a few houses for letting but the rents will be high, for builders have said, time and time again, that they cannot build houses of the same standard as state houses to let at similar rents.'¹³⁷ This Labour government argued that intervention in the housing market was both necessary to keep the standard of housing high and prices low. However, the opposition's argument that Labour's expanding state housing programme was impeding on the freedoms of New Zealanders ultimately succeeded.

State housing, as the Labour government had envisaged it, shifted when the National Party won the election in 1949, although these changes were not immediately felt. The National Party

¹³⁵ Letter from H. J. Keating to Mr Boord, 28/09/1959, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹³⁶ Report, *Social Welfare Publicity*, 1959, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

¹³⁷ Letter from E. J. Keating to W. Nash 17/09/1959, AEFZ 22618 W5727 1200/0629-0849 R25483515, ANZ, Wellington.

won, in part, on a promise to continue the state housing programme, but to also provide the opportunity for state house tenants to buy their homes.¹³⁸ The desire for homeownership was gaining momentum during this period, which is evident in the policy introduced in 1952 that allowed state house tenants to purchase the state house they were renting.¹³⁹ The new government introduced legislation that not only allowed state house tenants to buy their homes, but induced them to by offering generous purchasing terms: five percent deposit, a three percent mortgage rate, with a maximum purchase period of 40 years.¹⁴⁰ Ferguson described the justification to sell housing stock was because: ‘the solution to an unsatisfactory private rental sector was to encourage its disappearance. This was to be done by making every New Zealander a home-owner, not by making the state a landlord.’¹⁴¹

Some areas that were considered Labour strongholds, where state housing dominated, suffered a decrease in popularity, instead favouring National’s housing policies. Metge stated, ‘Labour foundered on the rock of human self-interest.’¹⁴² State house tenants had enjoyed their homes throughout the 1930s and 1940s and turned their sights to owning them. However, by 1957, only 13,300 state houses sold—30 percent of the saleable stock.¹⁴³ Even with all the inducement, state houses did not sell at a particularly high rate during the 1950s. Nevertheless, the intentions of this government to distance itself from its responsibility to provide state housing was clear.

The negative sentiment towards state housing and Labour’s apparent socialist intentions were evident during the election in 1957 when Labour gained power from 1957 to 1960, albeit briefly, with Nash at the helm. A complaint printed in a pamphlet for Social Credit Political League criticised the SAC’s cruelty to its tenants, and compared the ills of state housing, in contrast to the freedom of homeownership:

This corporation is not only trying to dispossess our returned boys from their farms, but when it comes to State Rental houses they certainly use the whip freely. A widow in

¹³⁸ Boyce, *Only the Houses Remain: The demise of the state housing scheme in New Zealand*, 43.

¹³⁹ Katy Bergstrom, A. Grimes, and Steven Stillman, *Does Selling State Silver Generate Private Gold?: Determinants and impacts of state house sales and acquisitions in New Zealand* (Motu Economic and Public Policy Research, 2011), 1259.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Chapman, "From Labour to National," in *The Oxford history of New Zealand*, ed. Geoffrey Rice, W. H. Oliver, and B. R. Williams (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), 379.

¹⁴¹ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 177.

¹⁴² Metge, "The House That Jack Built : The Origins of Labour State Housing, 1935-8, With Particular Reference to the Role of J.A. Lee," 80.

¹⁴³ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 44.

New Plymouth, had her daughter living with her for company to look after the old women in poor health... (husband brought along) and then their rent was doubled—the amount close to the whole pension of the old women, could anything be more inhumane or unchristian? Also, may we point out to readers, that there is a lesson to be learnt, and that is do not go for rental homes, but own your own home. You see here what miserable treatment and what dictation can be expected from a State department, and when homes are scarce, you have very little choice but to accept terms, that no decent person would impose. Imagine what it would be like if all homes were owned by the State and we could only rent them and not own them and not own our own. Yet we find Labour intensifying rental homes and departing from individual ownership. It is their policy to bring about State ownership of all things.¹⁴⁴

The government response to this allegation was that this was ‘couched in extravagant and probably libelous terms,’ and that an apology from the author was due.¹⁴⁵ However, this newsletter clearly gave voice to a feeling that the welfare state was over-reaching into the lives of New Zealanders.

The rise in demand for work available to young Māori encouraged migration into urban areas after the War.¹⁴⁶ As the urban Māori population grew, it was necessary for the government to admit Māori into mainstream state housing because most Māori could not afford to live outside areas of cheap housing.¹⁴⁷ Holland’s National government in the 1950s asserted assimilationist policies more vigorously than previous governments, believing ‘that the prevalent feeling in state circles that the time when Māoridom would begin to dissipate was nigh.’¹⁴⁸ Examples of Māori households being ‘pepper-potted’ amongst general state houses has been documented; Māori families were allocated housing in predominantly Pākehā neighbourhoods, encouraging assimilation into mainstream society.¹⁴⁹ R. Ngatata Love described how Nash’s 1957 Labour government aimed to provide the necessities of life equally to all citizens, including state housing, however, ‘promises of equality and settlement of grievances were never carried out.’¹⁵⁰ Racial tensions grew in these neighbourhoods, where Pākehā neighbours were said to

¹⁴⁴ Monthly pamphlet printed by Social Credit Political League, February 1957, AELE 19203 SAC1 R20054323, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from O. Solr to the General Manager of the Housing Corporation of New Zealand, 14/03/1957, AELE 19203 SAC1 R20054323, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁴⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Nga aho o te kaka matauranga: The multiple layers of struggle by Maori in education" (Unpublished PhD thesis The University of Auckland, 1996), 347.

¹⁴⁷ Graeme Dunstall, "The Social Pattern," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Geoffrey Rice, W. H. Oliver, and B. R. Williams (Oxford University Press, 1992), 459.

¹⁴⁸ Hill, *Māori and the State : Crown-Māori Relations in New Zealand/Aotearoa, 1950-2000*, 64.

¹⁴⁹ Dr Te Kani Kingi, "Indigeneity and Māori Mental Health" (International Symposium: Indigenous Inspiration in Health, Waitangi, 2005); Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Penguin Books, 2012), 483.

¹⁵⁰ R. Ngatata Love, "Policies of Frustration: The growth of Maori politics, the Ratana/Labour Era" (PhD Victoria University of Wellington, 1977), 490.

have frequently complained about noise and drinking habits, driving some Māori to seek out other Māori for socialising.¹⁵¹ However it was not until the 1970s, Schrader described how Māori assimilation was no longer ‘desirable nor practical’.¹⁵²

State surveillance in tenants’ lives

The importance of the outward presentation of state houses is evident in how Māori tenants were treated in regard to this matter. Efforts to improve Māori relationships through a western standard of housing invited novel approaches by the government, and the public, from the 1950s. As discussed, Māori were not readily allocated state houses during the early period of state housing, and it appears that they were closely monitored in the 1950s. Garden competitions were a way in which members of the public, alongside Māori organisations, including the Māori Women’s Welfare League [MWWL], and with the support of the Department of Māori Affairs [DMA], could foster the presentation of homes. A cultivated garden reflected middle-class values reflecting mainstream society in Aotearoa New Zealand. There seemed to be a perception that housing occupied by Māori lowered the tone of a neighbourhood, so an inducement was provided, in the form of a competition, to present their homes more in line with western ideals of what a house should look like.

Public involvement is evident in the promotion of these competitions. Mrs Whyte, for example, spearheaded a competition in Hastings in 1952, having drawn up the rules, conditions and even provided a trophy for the winner. After a letter from Mrs Whyte to the DMA, a Māori Welfare Officer, Emate T. Otene, was brought in to liaise with Māori communities to encourage interest in the project.¹⁵³ Homes were to be judged on repair and repainting, lawns and hedges, flowerbeds and vegetables gardens and fences. A category for maraes was also included: grounds were to be tidy, marae were to be painted, and ‘the general appearance and beautification of Maraes’ and the roads to marae were to be kept tidy.¹⁵⁴ The DMA commended Mrs Whyte’s efforts, acknowledging that she had shown ‘a genuine and sympathetic interest in the welfare of the Māori people...’, and that her idea would ‘engender greater self-respect

¹⁵¹ Hill, *Māori and the State*, 76

¹⁵² Schrader <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/state-housing/> Schrader, "State Housing."

¹⁵³ Report on State Houses by Welfare Officers and assistance by Women’s Welfare League, *Garden Competitions*, 1949-1966, AAMK 869 W3074 R11840079, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁵⁴ Report on State Houses by Welfare Officers and assistance by Women’s Welfare League, *Garden Competitions*.

amongst the Māori people of your district, and better understanding between the two races'. The Pākehā way of life being set as the benchmark of good living in society is exemplified by these garden competitions for Māori.

A collection of reports on sub-letting and unauthorised occupants, with correspondence regarding individual cases from 1954 to 1957, provides insight into how tenants experienced their homes, and the level of state intervention in their lives. The condition of the house and the grounds were taken into consideration, as were the tenant's financial arrangement and the rent they paid and who was living in these houses.¹⁵⁵ Complaints directed at state house tenants were also documented, illustrating the moral judgements imposed on tenants by society and housing officers. One unauthorised tenant was living with his brother and nephew in 1957, but was planning to move to the United States: 'The trip is probably a flight of his imagination – previous reports and correspondence on the file indicate that tenant is more than somewhat eccentric.'¹⁵⁶ 'Drinking parties' was a popular grievance. A report from 1956 referred to a tenant as being an undesirable tenant – a drinker and regarded as of 'poor moral calibre'.¹⁵⁷

Changing housing policies from the late 1950s

The growing cost of housing curtailed the ambitions of the First Labour Government, which had used state housing as a tool to promote the ideal, family-orientated society. While the First National Government still honoured the objectives, it made clear distinctions between those who could access support and those who should be self-reliant. According to the Housing Act 1955, 'Corporation houses are intended to provide accommodation at a reasonable rental for those families and other citizens who are living in unsatisfactory conditions and are unable, by their own means, to obtain a suitable standard of housing.'¹⁵⁸ Those in a better situation to obtain suitable housing 'will not normally be regarded as qualifying for Corporation rental

¹⁵⁵ Report to the Wellington Branch Officer Manager, *Unauthorised Occupancy of State House*, 14/03/1957, AELE 19203 SAC1 R20054323, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁵⁶ Report to the Wellington Branch Officer Manager, *Unauthorised Occupancy of State House*, 13/02/1957, AELE 19203 SAC1 R20054323, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁵⁷ Report to the Wellington Branch Officer Manager, *Unauthorised Occupancy of State House*, 15/10/1956, AELE 19203 SAC1 R20054323, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁵⁸ D. N. Ryan, J. E. Brannigan, M. O. Cleland, E. T. Fitzgerald, Report to the director-general, *Housing Corporation of New Zealand on the Review of State Rental Allocation*, March 1985, ABVF 7482 W4925 R6818990, ANZ, Wellington.

tenancies.’¹⁵⁹ Whereas, before state housing was for lower and medium income families, policies were adapted to limit who could live in state housing, redirecting increasingly targeted support to those in a financially weaker position, struggling to access housing in the private market.¹⁶⁰ Income limits were placed on applicants for state housing as a method of cutting down the number of people applying for these houses, which would subsequently reduce the pressure on the government to build more state houses.¹⁶¹

This increasingly targeted approach to housing was part of a wider shift in the socio-economic landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1960s, redefining what was required from the welfare system. Nolan described how the governments that aspired to delivering egalitarianism had succeeded with the working class having adopted middle-class values and lifestyles in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁶² Because of thirty years of full employment and steady economic growth, the social welfare system implemented in the 1930s had not needed to change. However, the public’s expectation of generous government spending for health, education and social security was becoming expensive, increasing ‘from 13 percent of GDP in the 1950s to 23 percent of GDP in the late 1970s’.¹⁶³ Concurrent with increasing costs to deliver wide-reaching social services, from the 1960s, family structures and aspirations were changing; two-parent households with multiple children, and the father going to work and the mother keeping house, were becoming less common. Instead, there were increasing levels of single-parent households emerging, as well as women entering the workforce in larger numbers.¹⁶⁴ Consumer products, television and the contraceptive pill, alongside tertiary education transformed family and personal relationships, needs and wants.¹⁶⁵ Michael King described how, in the late 1930s, the social security measures that were put in place were valued extremely highly because of the memory of hardship experienced after the economic depression. However, as that memory wore off, ‘the effectiveness of ‘big spending’ was questioned and concerns raised about the extensive intrusion of government into the lives of its citizens, along with the fear that welfare

¹⁵⁹ Ryan et al., Report to the director-general, Housing Corporation of New Zealand on the review of state rental allocation.

¹⁶⁰ Philip S. Morrison, "The Geography of Rental Housing and the Restructuring of Housing Assistance in New Zealand," *Housing Studies* 10, no. 1 (1995): 42.

¹⁶¹ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 180.

¹⁶² Nolan, "The Reality and Myth of New Zealand Egalitarianism: Explaining the pattern of a labour historiography at the edge of empires," 118.

¹⁶³ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 211.

¹⁶⁴ Belgrave, "Short Social Policy History: Forty years on, forty years back." 15.

¹⁶⁵ Chapman, "From Labour to National," 382.

states sapped individual responsibility and initiative.¹⁶⁶ The state's responsibility to prioritise social security for the nuclear family on a single-wage was no longer fit-for-purpose.

The universal entitlement for all New Zealanders to have the ability to participate meaningfully in society had defined the welfare state up until this point. Since the early 1970s, participation in society was unproblematic because of high employment and a stable economy. Providing a good standard of living for all was codified in the 1972 Royal Commission on Social Security. This large-scale review stemmed from the slower growth of the economy after 1966, and the evident rise in labour market stresses and concerns surrounding the affordability of the current welfare state.¹⁶⁷ The principles set out in this commission involved the social system being based on eliminating absolute and relative poverty.¹⁶⁸ It focused on the importance of social security benefits being generous enough to facilitate a sense of belonging and participation in the community.¹⁶⁹ The review found that the government had an obligation to all New Zealanders to provide for their wellbeing, allowing a standard of living that was similar to other New Zealanders. Gender and race were distinctions that should not hinder participation, but, as Belgrave pointed out, identifying what participation looked like in an increasingly diverse society was difficult.¹⁷⁰

In practice, this fundamental shift in who was entitled to state housing was illustrated by the demographic profile of its tenants from the 1960s, and particularly in the 1970s.¹⁷¹ Social policy changed to become more inclusive of diverse family dynamics, reflecting trends in wider societies. In 1977, the Housing Green Paper was published, which outlined that two-parent families came first, but an allowance was to be made for those 'outside the implied norm.'¹⁷² Nevertheless, there was clearly a reluctance to treat lone women parents in the same manner as dual parent households.¹⁷³ In an article on the status of lone and partnered women seeking state housing, it is reported that 'lone parent households were considered to be a threat to the

¹⁶⁶ King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 425.

¹⁶⁷ Brian Easton, "Assessing a Poverty Line," *Globalization and a Welfare State* (Unpublished: Brian Easton, 1997), https://www.eastonbh.ac.nz/1997/12/globalization_and_a_welfare_state/.

¹⁶⁸ Jonathan Boston, "Reshaping Social Policy in New Zealand," *Fiscal Studies* 14, no. 3 (1993): 65.

¹⁶⁹ Royal Commission of Inquiry on Social Security in New Zealand, *Social Security in New Zealand*, Government Printer (Wellington, 1972), 65.

¹⁷⁰ Belgrave, "Short Social Policy History: Forty years on, forty years back." 13.

¹⁷¹ "The State Steps In and Out," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2014, accessed 21-11-20, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/we-call-it-home/the-state-steps-in-and-out>.

¹⁷² Gillian Pascall, *Social Policy: A Feminist Analysis* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1986), 133.

¹⁷³ Kearns, Van Wiechen, and Smith, "The Status of Lone and Partnered Women Seeking State Housing Assistance in Two New Zealand Cities," 224.

(at least symbolic) stability of the dual-parent-dominated suburbs of New Zealand larger cities.’¹⁷⁴ Therefore, these single parent families were ‘pepper-potted’ amongst ‘normal’ families – to ‘diffuse any potential for concentrations of people with social problems.’¹⁷⁵ The needs of the individual and how they chose to participate in society, distinct from the earlier emphasis on the nuclear family, took on a central role in housing reforms, undermining ‘the idea of the suburb as the bastion of stable, two-parent families and a place to assimilate other groups to mainstream New Zealand life.’¹⁷⁶ Although there continued to be an emphasis, albeit reduced, on promoting the nuclear family, the cultural shift toward acceptance of other household structures became more visible in state housing.

While most state houses were still being allocated to married couples in the 20-40-year age group, and who had one or two children, from February to June 1974, variances in income levels and marriage status reflected the shifting profile of people allocated state houses.¹⁷⁷ By the mid-1970s, over 25 percent of tenants were social welfare beneficiaries, and the majority had low incomes. In a report on state house preferences for size, the targeted groups of New Zealanders that were allocated housing was identified: ‘It can be seen that in line with stated policy of the Corporation it is generally people in the lower socio-economic bracket who are being housed and these are recognised as young married couples with children; solo parents (usually women) and elderly people who are in the lower income brackets.’¹⁷⁸

A government research report into state housing allocation in 1973 explained that state housing was intended to help those members of the community who could not otherwise obtain housing of a reasonable standard and at a price bearing a reasonable relationship to their income. The report identified that the demographics of state housing applicants in the Wellington area were in line with common trends:

In general, single men without dependants are not considered eligible for housing. The bulk of applications are expected to come from married couples (or solo parents), with a moderate number of retired persons, usually age beneficiaries (with or without

¹⁷⁴ Kearns, Van Wiechen, and Smith, "The Status of Lone and Partnered Women Seeking State Housing Assistance in Two New Zealand Cities," 224.

¹⁷⁵ Kearns, Van Wiechen, and Smith, "The Status of Lone and Partnered Women Seeking State Housing Assistance in Two New Zealand Cities," 225.

¹⁷⁶ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 179.

¹⁷⁷ Research report by Housing Corporation of New Zealand, *Preference for Section Sizes and Shapes – State Tenants in the Wellington Region*, 1975, ABVF 7477 W4925 R6819307, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁷⁸ Report by Housing Corporation of New Zealand, *Preference for Section Sizes and Shapes – State Tenants in the Wellington Region*.

dependants). Priority is given to those in the greatest need, and this in practice tends to exclude childless married couples.¹⁷⁹

A new state house environment

While it is clear that a considerable amount of time and thought went into the first wave of state housing designs, the cost of building grew from the 1950s, causing cost cutting methods that reduced the building standard of state housing.¹⁸⁰ Methods of mass production, alongside a lack of amenities, came to define various state housing areas, including in South Auckland and Porirua.¹⁸¹ Early state housing was put in enclaves amongst wealthy suburbs, with no two homes designed to look the same, but, to cut costs and meet demands, policies were introduced to build big concentrated areas of state housing with rows of uniform housing and little town planning. King described how: ‘City suburbs mushroomed, initially without vegetation or parks, which gave them a raw, impermanent feel and led to the detection of such social problems as ‘juvenile delinquency’... and to ‘suburban’ neurosis’, a term coined to describe the depression of some young wives experienced as a result of isolation from adult company and purposeful activity.’¹⁸²

The lack of consideration for the social needs of people living in newly built state housing areas was identified in the Mazengarb Report, charged with investigating the perceived rise in juvenile delinquency in 1954. The lack of community amenities in state housing areas was linked to a rise of delinquency: ‘many cases have occurred in new settlements where the building of State houses has gone far ahead of the ability of the community to arrange for the provision of playing fields, halls, and clubs.’¹⁸³ It was also reported that there was an absence of community spirit in these neighbourhoods because they have not been normally developed, and that there is no pride of ownership because of the lack of choice that state housing affords. Although this report is widely disregarded by historians as a moral over-reaction, Schrader

¹⁷⁹ Jane A. McMurray, SAC, *Survey of Applicants for State Rental Housing – Wellington Area*, July 1973, ABVF 7490 W4925 R6819241, ANZ, Wellington.

¹⁸⁰ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 107.

¹⁸¹ "State House Style," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2014, accessed 03-11-2020, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/we-call-it-home/state-house-style>.

¹⁸² King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 434.

¹⁸³ Oswald Chettle Mazengarb, *Report of the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1954), 32, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14760/14760-h/14760-h.htm#Page_31.

argued that the report had provided recommendations, that if they had been acted upon, ‘might have moderated future social problems in state housing areas.’¹⁸⁴

From the 1960s, the large-scale state housing suburbs that were built on the periphery of urban centres came with growing social issues surrounding the perceived fostering of ‘ghetto’ communities.¹⁸⁵ Because of targeted policies relating to tenant income, state housing became relegated to providing for those who increasingly found themselves on the periphery of society. Because state housing was being targeted to low-income households, Māori, Pacific Peoples and single parent households were especially concentrated in these areas.¹⁸⁶ These large state house suburbs with their targeted approach to eligibility were seen as ‘class based’ measures, which ‘forced low-income households into particular areas, in direct contravention of the wider policy of assimilation.’¹⁸⁷ By 1973, prospective tenants were indicating their preference for Lower Hutt in Wellington, compared with other areas where state housing was concentrated and available—demonstrating the bad reputation areas such as Porirua were garnering.¹⁸⁸

Māori and large-scale state housing developments

With the redevelopment of inner-city suburbs, Māori were allocated large numbers of housing in new housing areas in Otara, South Auckland and Porirua, Wellington.¹⁸⁹ Dunstall described how urban migration improved Māori housing overall, but as mentioned earlier, because most Māori could not afford to live outside of cheap housing, large state housing areas became ‘symbols of the disadvantages of race and class.’¹⁹⁰ Dalley reiterated that Māori made up a disproportionately large percentage of state house tenants ‘as state housing had become the refuge of low-income and socially disadvantaged groups.’¹⁹¹ This resulted in, ‘a pattern of identification of suburbs by ethnicity, a pattern that was reinforced by the international migration of low-income migrants from the rural Pacific Peoples during the labour shortage of the 1970s.’¹⁹² Smith described how Māori urban migration into poorly resourced housing areas,

¹⁸⁴ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 214.

¹⁸⁵ Schrader, "State House Style."

¹⁸⁶ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 204.

¹⁸⁷ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 204.

¹⁸⁸ McMurray, SAC, *Survey of Applicants for State Rental Housing*.

¹⁸⁹ Carlyon and Morrow, *Changing Times: New Zealand since 1945*, 37.

¹⁹⁰ Dunstall, "The Social Pattern," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 459

¹⁹¹ Dalley, *Living in the 20th Century: New Zealand history in photographs, 1900-1980*, 147.

¹⁹² Morrison, "The Geography of Rental Housing and the Restructuring of Housing Assistance in New Zealand," 41.

away from their tribal centres, ‘created the conditions for a series of social problems.’¹⁹³ For instance, one such issue that arose for Māori families was that the size of the houses did not often accommodate larger Māori families that included extended whānau. The design and planning of state housing was rooted in western notions of the family structure. The shortage of larger houses was strongly felt by Māori families that were often bigger in size, and concerns relating to overcrowding were reported in the 1970s.¹⁹⁴

Nonetheless, overemphasis on the negative consequences of Māori urbanisation contributed to undermining the significance of how tribal identities evolved and strengthened in these urban areas for Māori from the 1960s. Hill described how the concept of home was not constrained because of Māori urbanisation:

Migrants did not stop ‘being tribal’ in the new environment, whatever the temptations to full assimilate... Few completely abandoned all vestiges of Māori culture or identification, despite the myth peddled by many pākehā (including officials and scholars) that ‘detrribalisation’ was rampant. More broadly, Māori did not cease to ‘be Māori’. They sought out fellow Māori in social and other circumstances, such as at playcentres, in church congregations and sports clubs, and outside school gates. Established households became centres of Māori life, whether or not people were of the same tribe. Such environments were microcosms of Māoridom in a pākehā landscape to a degree that most non-Māori never realised.¹⁹⁵

Lifestyles and interactions exemplify the strong sense of cultural identification that was anchored in these suburbs, but this was downplayed in favour of narratives that led to many in Aotearoa New Zealand ‘to believe that the state had created slums in communities, in places like Porirua, Aranui and Otara.’¹⁹⁶ The Society for Research on Women highlighted examples, such as the MWWL’s successful establishment of community facilities in Porirua and Otara: ‘Whereas the planners, architects and urban designers of the day concerned themselves with aesthetics, the concerns of these women’s groups were with places to meet, exchange information and develop community-based serves (function).’¹⁹⁷ Smith described how social issues that arose from newly migrated Māori into urban suburbs, removed from their tribal identities, led to the creation of new forms of social organisations, including ‘urban Māori,

¹⁹³ Smith, "Nga aho o te kaka matauranga: The multiple layers of struggle by Maori in education " 354.

¹⁹⁴ "Homelessness in New Zealand," Parliamentary Library, 2014, https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/research-papers/document/00PLEcoRP14021/homelessness-in-new-zealand#footnote_13.

¹⁹⁵ Hill, *Māori and the State : Crown-Māori Relations in New Zealand/Aotearoa, 1950-2000*, 83.

¹⁹⁶ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 215.

¹⁹⁷ Kearns, Van Wiechen, and Smith, "The Status of Lone and Partnered Women Seeking State Housing Assistance in Two New Zealand Cities," 225.

sports clubs and Māori organisations, which had a pan-Māori emphasis, such as the RSA, church missions and the Māori Women's Welfare League.¹⁹⁸ The concentration of Māori in state house neighbourhoods, alongside the development of urban maraes and cultural groups, fostered Māori urban communities.¹⁹⁹

The appearance of new styles of state housing

The concentration of state housing in particular areas, and the subsequent communities that were formed, were not the only factors that changed the landscape of housing. Physically, the style of many state houses was adapted to conform with wider social and economic factors. There was a distinct move away from the stand-alone state house on a quarter acre section to the construction of medium- and high-density flats. This was, in part, a response to increasing concerns about the impact of suburban sprawl, and the perceived creation of large ghetto communities.²⁰⁰ Promoting large section sizes was becoming unsustainable, which meant state houses were being built further and further away from amenities and workplaces.²⁰¹ From 1957, a policy was introduced which required that 25 percent, and later 50 percent, of new state houses be constructed as multi-unit accommodation.²⁰² This policy was continued when the Labour government took power between 1957 and 1960. Medium density housing increased with designs including 'atrium flats', which were made up of four single-storey units that circled an open space that was fenced to give each unit a small private garden. The 'duplex flats' were two-storey and had either single-storey units or two-storey houses with a central staircase in the middle. 'Star flats', which continue to be widely admired, were three-storey blocks, comprising 10 units that were two-bedroom units and two single-bedroom units—'star' refers to the cruciform plan and their butterfly roof style.²⁰³

After an enquiry into state housing, the Housing Corporation of New Zealand [HCNZ] was formed in 1974, charged with increasing building in inner-city areas and further developing different housing types, such as cluster housing amongst private developments.²⁰⁴ Regardless

¹⁹⁸ Smith, "Nga aho o te kaka matauranga: The multiple layers of struggle by Maori in education " 355.

¹⁹⁹ Schrader <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/state-housing/> Schrader, "State Housing."

²⁰⁰ Julia Gatley, "The Heritage Identification of Modern Public Housing: The New Zealand Example," *Journal of Architecture* 15, no. 5 (2010): 687.

²⁰¹ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 192.

²⁰² Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 195.

²⁰³ Gatley, "The Heritage Identification of Modern Public Housing: The New Zealand Example," 687.

²⁰⁴ "History of State Housing," Kāinga Ora, 2019, accessed 05-01-21, <https://kaingaora.govt.nz/about-us/history-of-state-housing/>.

of the changes to the style of housing and the effects these changes had on the communities, there was still a clear preference amongst tenants for houses that most closely resembled the early English cottage-style house prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1975, a HCNZ Report was conducted to see whether a preference for smaller sections had taken hold with the changing lifestyles of New Zealanders.²⁰⁵ Home-related activities, such as spending time in the garden, may have become a less popular way to spend leisure-time. Therefore, a smaller, less demanding section may have been more preferable. This was reflected in the importance of proximity to open public spaces; if park-like spaces were nearby, small detached sections or ‘town house’ type sections would be considered.²⁰⁶ Joint units were favoured by older people and the ‘town house’ style was favoured by those in professional jobs. However, overall there was a clear preference for detached, rectangular sections that were closely associated with the quarter acre section.

Although more flats and units were being built, they were not only less desirable than single unit houses—and were therefore not seen as permanent situations—but they were also less likely to be well-cared for. A report in 1973 found that, if people were not happy with their immediate environment, they were less likely to take pride in, and care for, the house.²⁰⁷ When different sections were compared, the results showed that ‘non-committal attitudes were most prevalent among people in the blocks of flats, duplex units and multi units with stairs.’ The results from the report reinforced the hypothesis that tenants’ attitudes towards their environment correlated with how well the environment was cared for and, subsequently, the areas that were less popular tended to receive less care. The report went on to state that there was also a cumulative process at work—as properties become more run down, people were more likely to dislike or feel indifferent to their state house. The 1975 report identified that ‘the small number of complaints were mainly about the condition of the house when they moved in...’²⁰⁸ A combination of deteriorating state house stock that, through age and apathy, fell into disrepair, and tenants increasingly being allocated housing that did not suit their lifestyle or preference, created housing that no longer exceeded the expectations of the average New Zealander.

²⁰⁵ Robert L. Page, HCNZ research report, *Housing in the Future, A Comment*, 1975, ABVF 7477 W4925 R6819307, ANZ, Wellington.

²⁰⁶ Research report by Housing Corporation of New Zealand, *Preference for Section Sizes and Shapes – State Tenants in the Wellington Region*.

²⁰⁷ McMurray, SAC, *Survey of Applicants for State Rental Housing*.

²⁰⁸ Page, HCNZ research report, *Housing in the Future, A Comment*.

Attitudes toward state house tenants

From the 1960s, the general attitude toward state housing began to shift from positive to negative. With access to state housing being targeted toward low-income households, a stigma—that had not existed before—was attached to these tenants. Ferguson wrote about how state housing was ‘to be reserved for society’s ‘misfits’ and ‘losers’.’²⁰⁹ McClure connected the struggling economy as a contributing factor to the negative shift in attitude towards the social security: ‘In tougher economic times and in the midst of social change, the public mood of tolerance that had marked the early 1970s shifted to one of fear and disparagement.’²¹⁰ Subsequently, the term ‘welfare’ took on a negative connotation, as the state began to reassess the extent of their responsibility to provide for every New Zealander.²¹¹

Disparities between state house tenants and those in the private rental market emerged. Those who lived in state housing during its early period were gainfully employed, and, therefore, in the eyes of many, were deserving of help. Whereas, from the 1970s, tenants were more likely to be welfare beneficiaries.²¹² The registered unemployed was near zero during the war and remained low during the post-war boom until after 1966 when the wool price collapsed.²¹³ Those who were employed, but who were experiencing hardship during this later period, observed that individuals on the unemployment benefit could more easily access state housing.²¹⁴ Furthermore, rents were dependent on what the tenant could pay, but did not necessarily align with the cost of the housing or rents in the private market, so state house tenants were often paying considerably less than their counterparts who were privately renting.²¹⁵ Ferguson noted that these differences in rental charges differed so significantly that state house tenants were deemed ‘a privileged class’.²¹⁶

Regardless of the outside perspective that state housing was undesirable, many tenants saw the houses as their permanent homes. Results from the surveys conducted in 1973 indicated that

²⁰⁹ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 181.

²¹⁰ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 207.

²¹¹ McClure, *A Civilised Community*, 209.

²¹² Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 179.

²¹³ Brian Easton, "Economic History - Government and market liberalisation," (2010).
<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/graph/24362/unemployment-1896-2006>.

²¹⁴ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 188.

²¹⁵ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 222.

²¹⁶ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 222.

most people residing in the detached houses saw them as a long-term venture. However, this straightforward attitude was not held by those in the joined units. These tenants hoped that they would not have to stay in the unit for very long. In a report for the SAC on the possible under-utilisation of state rental houses in 1974, particular attention was paid to the requirements of those tenants whose families had grown up and left home or were likely to do so in the future.²¹⁷ Fifty to 60 percent of state house tenants who had lived in their homes for an extended period of time never wanted to move to another house, ‘regardless of whether others see them as under-utilising their homes. Those who, now or in the future, may consider moving, are likely to be very critical of any alternative housing offered them.’ If someone did consider moving to a smaller property, it was often contingent on the relocation being in the same area. Because the report found that families stayed near or within the same neighbourhoods or areas after they left home.²¹⁸

The state-promoted ideal of homeownership

The government’s emphasis on homeownership from the 1950s went a long way in undermining the attractiveness of state housing. As mentioned earlier, the government’s involvement in the promotion of homeownership was not new, having begun in the 1920s, to foster self-reliance and social stability, with workers allowed to borrow up to 95 percent of the total cost of a home.²¹⁹ Ferguson described how homeownership had not always been a priority for a lot of New Zealanders, but that the value and importance of homeownership was promoted by the government. This vision of the detached family home was to become a ‘symbol of material reward and contentment in return for one’s labour.’²²⁰ A 1975 report on housing in the future acknowledged that ‘in New Zealand, certain precepts of our society are accepted almost without question. It is assumed by most policy-makers that every household group wants to own their home eventually; that they must have ownership of the land on which they live; that the unit family and accompanying unit dwelling will persist.’²²¹ The report described how 70 percent of households owned their own homes, and the other 30 percent must want to:

²¹⁷ Research report by State Advances Corporation, *Survey into Possible Under-utilisation of State Rental Houses*, 1974, ABVF 7477 W4925 R6819307, ANZ, Wellington.

²¹⁸ Research report by State Advances Corporation, *Survey into Possible Under-utilisation of State Rental Houses*.

²¹⁹ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 30.

²²⁰ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 179.

²²¹ Page, HCNZ research report, *Housing in the Future, A Comment*.

‘This, in fact, may be true but it may also be an instance of a self-fulfilling prophecy in that homeownership continues to be aspired to as it is thought that this is what the majority wants.’

From the 1950s there was a refocus shifting the responsibility of the state to support the family suburban dream from providing the housing directly, to making homeownership increasingly accessible in Aotearoa New Zealand. Generous lending programmes as well as low interest rates that could be accessed by low-income families helped to promote the government’s intentions to increase rates of homeownership.²²² The Home Ownership Savings Act 1974, gave applicants subsidised interest rates and a Purchase Grant (up to 25 percent of total savings) to buy a house, as well as various tax rebate benefits.²²³ The aim of this residential lending was to help families own their homes – virtually any married couple was eligible for a loan to build a house: ‘except in a fairly narrow range of circumstances, a lone person without dependants is not eligible for a loan.’²²⁴ It was believed that these policies would keep the cost of existing housing low, as well as encourage mortgage rates to drop. In turn, this would make homeownership more accessible to New Zealanders who would have struggled to become homeowners.²²⁵

Selling state houses to the tenants was legislated to both reduce state housing stock and dependency on the government, whilst increasing the personal freedoms that come with homeownership. National governments were particularly in favour of homeownership, whereas Labour and Labour-led governments were more willing to invest in state housing construction and generally halting sales. Although, as Gatley pointed out, these approaches were not mutually exclusive.²²⁶ In 1961, to directly encourage state house tenants to buy the houses they tenanted, if the tenant qualified for a three percent loan, their rents were subsequently raised.²²⁷ Rather than continuing to expand the state as a landlord in an effort to shape communities, by financing more than half of the houses built in Aotearoa New Zealand in the early 1960s, the government’s promotion of suburban homeownership reached new

²²² Ian Pool and Rosemary Du Plessis, "Families: A history - Families, wars and economic hardship: 1914-1944," no. 23-01-2021 (2011). <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/graph/30207/rates-of-home-ownership>.

²²³ Housing Corporation of New Zealand, *Homeownership Savings Scheme Handbook*, 1977, ABVF 7481 W4925 R6819362, ANZ, Wellington.

²²⁴ McMurray, SAC, *Survey of Applicants for State Rental Housing*.

²²⁵ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 233.

²²⁶ Gatley, "The Heritage Identification of Modern Public Housing: The New Zealand Example," 686.

²²⁷ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 222.

heights.²²⁸ By 1975, of the 77,231 state houses that had been built to date, 35 percent were sold.²²⁹

From the late 1970s, attitudes toward beneficiaries had digressed; there was ‘growing bad sentiment about welfare in general, and fears that it was creating a lifetime dependency on the state...’²³⁰ In a report for the HCNZ in the mid-1970s, the negative sentiment towards those who did not own their own home is reported: ‘There is quite definitely a stigma attached to non-homeowners or, more correctly, to those who do not appear to aspire to homeownership.’²³¹ The report goes on to warn that this perception contributes to the general attitude towards government administered rental houses: that state house tenants are seen as ‘second-class citizens’.²³² Requiring welfare support had become framed by society as a matter of choice. Therefore, Aotearoa New Zealand society viewed state housing tenants as purposely choosing to not own a home in favour of being housed at the cost of the taxpayer. There was an increasingly observable gap between the wealthy and the poor—or homeowners and renters—was exacerbated.

The government predicted that there would be issues with the delivery of public and private housing, if the benefits of homeownership were not shared with those who were renting. The standard of housing was reportedly decreasing amongst renters, and this would need to be addressed to prevent exasperating social divisions. In this 1975 report on housing in the future, the author posited that the benefits of homeownership could be feasibly applied to the rental system: security of tenure, a feeling of permanence, freedom to adapt one’s surroundings and so forth. There were also more radical solutions provided that included a complete reexamination of homeownership: ‘the pressures of the existing system mean that fewer people can attain a reasonable standard of housing. It is felt that the main shift in emphasis which will be needed is one of attitude. Whether or not this occurs may be the deciding factor in the housing process of the future.’²³³

²²⁸ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 7.

²²⁹ Bergstrom, Grimes, and Stillman, *Does Selling State Silver Generate Private Gold?: Determinants and impacts of state house sales and acquisitions in New Zealand*, 1259.

²³⁰ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 207.

²³¹ Page, HCNZ research report, *Housing in the Future, A Comment*.

²³² Page, HCNZ research report, *Housing in the Future, A Comment*.

²³³ Page, HCNZ research report, *Housing in the Future, A Comment*.

Redefining the government's role in the 1980s

From 1984, due to the struggling economy, the Fourth Labour Government was impeded from big spending on welfare policies, instead making transformative economic reforms. Unemployment was steadily rising alongside net public debt, which led this government in the mid-1980s to initiate a programme of economic liberalisation.²³⁴ This included floating the dollar, removing agriculture and manufacturing subsidies, as well as commercialising and privatising state assets. Easton wrote about the influential sections of the business community, such as the Treasury, recommending significant reductions in welfare expenditure, including housing.²³⁵ A report released by the Treasury in 1987 stated that 'the lion's share of income and other social policies is in fact devoted to schemes that are not focused on those in need... Many of the existing interventions were not well conceived at the time they were introduced or no longer fit the changed economic environment.'²³⁶

Morrison described how, 'most of the Treasury's recommendations regarding privatisation of state housing were resisted in a stance that had the support of the existing Housing Commission and the Royal Commission on Social Policy as well as the grassroots of the Labour Party itself.'²³⁷ Although many of the Treasury's recommendations were declined, the government's role in housing in the 1980s had become increasingly restricted to 'assisting those who had serious housing needs.'²³⁸ The once high standard that was expected of state housing, intended to exceed the expectations of the average New Zealander, was considerably downgraded to a 'decent level' by the 1980s.²³⁹ The government continued to promote homeownership in the 1980s, but direct financial support was considerably reduced compared with the previous three decades. The government's new approach was described by Ferguson as a 'shadow of what it had once been.'²⁴⁰ Evidently, it was no longer necessary for the government to commit too many resources into supporting an already strong homeowner democracy.

²³⁴ Boston, "Reshaping Social Policy in New Zealand," 66.

²³⁵ Boston, "Reshaping Social Policy in New Zealand," 67.

²³⁶ New Zealand Treasury, Government management: Brief to the incoming government 1987, (Wellington New Zealand Treasury, 1987), 7.

²³⁷ Morrison, "The Geography of Rental Housing and the Restructuring of Housing Assistance in New Zealand," 42.

²³⁸ Davidson, *A Home of One's Own: Housing Policy in Sweden and New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1990s*, 10.

²³⁹ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 235.

²⁴⁰ Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, 8.

The language that was used by government regarding homeownership, and it being a choice, had implications for those New Zealanders not in a financial position to do buy. The government printed pamphlets that were publicly circulated, including in high schools, offering a breakdown of the cost of a house, rates, deposit, size of mortgage, insurance and so on.²⁴¹ One booklet titled ‘Do You Want to Own Your Own Home?’ illustrated how buying a home involves planning, financial commitment over a period of years, and it may involve sacrifices – ‘this does not mean buying a home is a very difficult thing to do. It isn’t.’²⁴² The emphasis that a ‘sacrifice’ was required to own a home indicated a possible perception that those who did not own their own house were not willing to make a sacrifice, or not willing to put the money aside. It implied that those who did not own their home, or were not planning to, were actively choosing not to, rather than not being in a position to do so.

Balancing social commitments whilst making the state housing system economically viable was not a straightforward issue for the government. The 1985 review outlined that housing should be available only to selected tenants—those who were on low incomes, living in unsatisfactory conditions or unable to help and house themselves: ‘Yet it was put to us that state rental housing should, as a policy be available to anyone prepared to pay current market rates.’²⁴³ This was because more finance would be available for making improvements to, and extensions on, the houses. There would also be a better socio-economic mix in state housing areas, and the state, as a competitor to the private rental market, would act as a monitor in the private rental market—influencing pricing. However, this policy was not practical, or easily implemented, because there were too many people during this period who were in dire need of housing.²⁴⁴

Pressure on the state to provide housing to low-income New Zealanders continued to grow. A major HCNZ report in 1988 identified 20,000 households had a serious housing need.²⁴⁵ The increasing rates of homelessness in Aotearoa New Zealand in the late 1970s and 1980s indicate how stretched social housing was during this period, but they also indicate the wider failings of the social welfare system, unable to provide the bare minimum of basic necessities. A

²⁴¹ National Housing Commission booklet, *The Price of Homeownership*, AALF 6129 W3371 R3191452, ANZ, Wellington.

²⁴² Housing Corporation of New Zealand booklet, ‘Do You Want to Own Your Own Home?’

²⁴³ Ryan et al. Report to the director-general, HCNZ on the review of state rental allocation.

²⁴⁴ Ryan et al. Report to the director-general, HCNZ on the review of state rental allocation.

²⁴⁵ "Homelessness in New Zealand."

concerning trend became apparent: emergency housing was, in many cases, becoming semi-permanent for some tenants. Voluntary agencies, such as The Salvation Army and other churches, found it necessary to supply emergency housing in addition to what was provided by HCNZ in areas of serious housing need.²⁴⁶ The demand for state housing had clearly reached desperate levels, which is highlighted in the conclusion of the 1985 report: ‘The provision of low-cost rental housing is obviously a very low government priority.’²⁴⁷

By 1985, with the change in the social landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand, the pattern of applicants for state housing had completely shifted. Only a decade before, the majority of applicants were married couples with children, whereas, by September 1984, the total number of lodged applications comprised 3,240 married couples, and 7,090 single people, including those who were widowed, separated or divorced. A further 1,721 were listed as ‘other’.²⁴⁸ In 1973, 37 percent of state houses were single parent households, which increased to 51 percent by 1988.²⁴⁹ There was a proportional increase of Māori and Pacific Island populations, who also represented a high proportion of the unemployed, and were generally in the lower income brackets. There was evidence of racial discrimination in the private rental market, which would have also made state housing a more viable option.²⁵⁰ Socially and politically recognised circumstances, of domestic abuse, matrimonial breakdown, defacto relationships and solo parents all impacted the demographics of who lived in state housing in the 1980s—a vastly different group to that of the nuclear family that had once dominated Aotearoa New Zealand’s state house suburbs.

Conclusions

The extent to which the government felt responsible as a landlord to provide safe, well-conceived environments for their tenants—defined by the state—had depleted over the course of forty years. While providing a welfare state had not lost its impetus, policies implemented between 1949 and 1990 changed the government’s presence in the state housing market. The

²⁴⁶ Dorothy Wakeling, Environmental for Corporate Plan Rotorua Branch, 1988-1989, 30/09/1987, AALF 6126 W3378 R20322531, ANZ, Wellington.

²⁴⁷ Ryan et al. Report to the director-general, Housing Corporation of New Zealand on the review of state rental allocation.

²⁴⁸ Ryan et al. Report to the director-general, Housing Corporation of New Zealand on the review of state rental allocation.

²⁴⁹ Kearns, Van Wiechen, and Smith, "The Status of Lone and Partnered Women Seeking State Housing Assistance in Two New Zealand Cities," 225.

²⁵⁰ King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 474.

state was no longer as interested in creating strong, durable communities, withdrawing the aspects of what made state housing so popular in society—well-built houses in attractive neighbourhoods for upwardly mobile New Zealanders. The social needs of people, that had previously been catered to by building thoughtfully conceived communities, by the 1950s lacked facilities that encouraged neighbourly interactions. Large sprawling state house suburbs grew populated with New Zealanders on the basis of need, concentrating the poor, into state house areas. The variances of income levels and marriage status reflected the shifting profile of those living in state housing. Negative public attention of these areas being perceived as ghettoised took hold in the 1970s, alongside a growing social intolerance for beneficiaries of welfare. Regardless of the negative perceptions of these large state house areas from outside audiences, there are many examples of how cultural identification was anchored in these suburbs that allocated large numbers of housing to Māori and Pacific Peoples.

While the neo-liberal changes that occurred in the 1980s focused more on economic reform, the government's role became increasingly restricted to helping only those most in need. Because of the increased development of flats and units as opposed to stand alone houses in the state house stock, alongside the intermittent selling of state houses, the housing that was available no longer exceeded the expectations of average New Zealanders. Through the housing policies implemented, the government encouraged a homeowner democracy in Aotearoa New Zealand leaving state house tenants increasingly on the outside of mainstream society.

5. 1990s

The upheaval of social welfare delivery

State housing in the 1990s delivered a distinctly different approach to housing from the previous half-century, with new policies actively encouraging tenants to seek alternative private accommodations. This was in stark contrast to the policies in the 1930s and 1940s, that actively promoted a state house lifestyle with security of tenure, an emphasis on the nuclear family and a safe community—not only for its tenants, but as a template for all New Zealanders. The government's responsibility to preserve every New Zealander's right to participation and belonging within their community had considerably eroded by the 1990s, as the state stepped away from its previous social obligations.

Reducing welfare provision during this period was a marked shift from the 'cradle to the grave' social security policies of the 1930s that had characterised Aotearoa New Zealand's modern social welfare system. With the steady increase in spending on the welfare state from 1939 to 1990, alongside the decline in the economy during the late 1970s and 1980s, changes to the delivery of welfare were deemed necessary in the 1990s.²⁵¹ Easton described how the newly elected Fourth National Government, led by Jim Bolger, were confronted with a 'looming fiscal crisis' that was worsening.²⁵² The government's solution to this, influenced by an increasingly neo-liberal social and economic philosophy, and wanting to send a strong signal to the financial markets, was to reduce public expenditure.²⁵³ Moving away from universal social assistance, reforms were based on implementing a system more tightly targeted to those on very low incomes. Reducing dependency on the government for social assistance was considered a priority if National were to make good on their promise to create a 'decent society', containing the demands that the welfare system made on a strained economy. Self-reliance and individual success—popular free-market mantras—came to dominate wider social welfare objectives Bolger's government. An emphasis on the individual taking responsibility for their own lives was at the forefront of policies during the 1990s.²⁵⁴ Aotearoa New Zealand

²⁵¹ Steve Maharey, Social Welfare in New Zealand - Address by the Minister of Social Services and Employment to the RNZAF Command and Staff College, No 41 Staff Course. RNZAF Whenuapai, Auckland, (Beehive.govt.nz: The Official Website of the Government of the New Zealand Government, 2000).

²⁵² Boston, "Reshaping Social Policy in New Zealand," 68.

²⁵³ Boston, "Reshaping Social Policy in New Zealand," 68.

²⁵⁴ Jago Dodson, "The "Roll" of the State: Government, Neoliberalism and Housing Assistance in Four Advanced Economies," *Housing, Theory & Society* 23, no. 4 (2006): 227.

was part of a global sway toward liberalised economies, tightly targeting welfare provision to only those most in need.²⁵⁵

In practice, this involved extreme cuts to public spending, as well as a continuation of the free-market policies that Labour had enacted in the 1980s, but with added momentum. Ruth Richardson, the Minister of Finance, stated in the ‘Mother of all Budgets’, welfare was to be comprehensively targeted to provide only the bare minimum for those most in need: ‘The state will continue to provide a safety net—a modest standard below which people will not be allowed to fall provided they are prepared to help themselves...’²⁵⁶ This directly repudiated the principles laid out in the 1972 Royal Commission, allowing beneficiaries, through welfare payments, to meaningfully participate and belong in society. Some of the changes to the social welfare system included reducing healthcare subsidies; the introduction of part-charges for hospital services; reducing payments and limiting eligibility for accident compensation; slashing the rates for those on the Unemployment Benefit, Domestic Purposes Benefit for Sole Parents, Widows Benefit and the Sickness Benefit; means testing the national superannuation and tertiary student allowances.²⁵⁷ The argument used to justify targeting low-income New Zealanders was that it had been previously poorly targeted, allowing the middle-class to access it unnecessarily.²⁵⁸ There was also the concern that previous measures had created a ‘welfare trap’, encouraging dependency on the government. It was believed that reducing the standard of living for beneficiaries to something closer to subsistence—providing only essential food, clothing, power and housing at a decent level—would encourage them to actively go out and improve their personal situation and that of their families.

Delivering state housing efficiently and rationally

The big changes to state housing policy came relatively late compared with other social services that had been affected by neo-liberal restructuring in the 1980s under the Labour government.²⁵⁹ The introduction of market rents to low-income state house tenants from July

²⁵⁵ Christine Cheyne, Mike O'Brien, and Michael Belgrave, *Social Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand*, 4th ed ed. (Oxford University Press, 2008), 38.

²⁵⁶ Jenny Shipley, *Social Assistance: Welfare that works*, (Wellington: Government Printer, 1991).

²⁵⁷ Boston, "Reshaping Social Policy in New Zealand," 74.

²⁵⁸ Boston, "Reshaping Social Policy in New Zealand," 68.

²⁵⁹ Dodson, "The ‘Roll’ of the State: Government, Neoliberalism and Housing Assistance in Four Advanced Economies," 233.

1993 was described as ‘the most radical experiment in the history of state housing.’²⁶⁰ The HCNZ was said to have been struggling to provide housing assistance efficiently and rationally because of its conflicting commercial and social roles. The formation of Housing New Zealand [HNZ] in the 1990s, and the transfer of 69,500 rental units from the HCNZ to this State-Owned Enterprise, changed the social intentions of state housing. While the Ministry of Housing was charged with creating and regulating housing policy, HNZ now had a commercial focus, which understandably caused an apparent tension between the commercial focus of HNZ and the government’s social responsibilities. As a newly made Crown entity, it was intended to operate as a successful business—efficiently and profitably, all while maintaining social responsibilities. This tension was said to have created issues between the HNZ Board, the CEO and the Minister of Housing about ‘whether or not the ‘social’ responsibility of HNZ was being fulfilled.’²⁶¹ The need to deliver state housing more efficiently appears to have overruled these concerns, as this market model prevailed throughout the 1990s, until a new Labour-led government was elected in 1999.

These housing reforms were based, in part, on the belief that previous policies had created a marginalising effect for those on low incomes. The government’s social responsibility was to be delivered via demand-side assistance in the form of an accommodation supplement for low-income households, rather than physically supplying housing.²⁶² This gave tenants the choice of where they rented, therefore empowering them, and making them less dependent on the state for a direct supply to accommodation. State housing policy had, up until the 1990s, ignored the importance of ‘consumer choice’, with state houses being allocated to the tenant who often had little say in the matter of both the house and the neighbourhood they were to live in. The government, through this policy, was acknowledging that they did not know what individual customers wanted, and the very idea that they should be in a position to direct an individual’s housing decisions was challenged during this period.

The reforms were also designed to encourage efficiencies and fairness in the rental housing market. There was little encouragement to appropriately utilise different housing sizes—no matter the size of the house, the tenant had been charged the same rent based on their income.

²⁶⁰ Schrader, "State Housing."

²⁶¹ David C. Thorns, "Housing Policy and the 1990s: New Zealand a Decade of Change," *Housing Studies* 15, no. 1 (2000): 132.

²⁶² Belgrave, "Needs and the State: Evolving social policy in New Zealand history," 37.

Therefore, with rents frozen at 25 percent of incomes, there was little incentive to downsize when children moved out of home, for instance. In turn, this meant the state could not always appropriately place bigger families in larger houses. The intention of gradually setting rents at market prices over three years from 1991 was to encourage ‘movement from large houses to smaller units when families moved away...’²⁶³ With bigger houses generally using a larger proportion of household incomes to pay rent, the accommodation supplement would then enable tenants to either maintain the situation they were in, or make a change to a different living situation that made better use of their money. There was also a matter of fairness that was being addressed by the introduction of the accommodation supplement to a wider group of low-income earners. State house tenants received subsidised rents when other New Zealanders in similar financial circumstances were forced to pay market rents.²⁶⁴ All low-income earners were entitled to the accommodation supplement, and, subsequently, this provided more people with benefits than under the previous policy that only benefited state house tenants.²⁶⁵ The government insisted housing assistance was to be no longer based on who one's landlord was within the rental market.

As well as a more general move toward privatising state assets, a scheme to sell a large amount of state housing stock was implemented in the second half of this decade. A home-buy scheme was introduced in 1996, through which state house tenants were given the opportunity to buy their homes with a five percent deposit. During the next three years, nearly 1,800 houses were sold in this way.²⁶⁶ While state houses had been sold to state house tenants since the 1950s, this was the first time state houses were also being sold on the private market.²⁶⁷ Between 1992 and 1999, 10,000 houses were sold privately where the number of state housing units dropped from around 70,000 to 59,000.²⁶⁸ The government was criticised for selling these houses, but defended the sales by arguing that they were made in affluent areas and provided money to purchase more state houses in cheaper areas where there was more demand for state housing.²⁶⁹ However, state houses built during this period did not come close to matching what was sold.

²⁶³ Thorns, "Housing Policy and the 1990s: New Zealand a Decade of Change," 131.

²⁶⁴ Alex Olssen et al., "A State Housing Database: 1993-2009," (November 2010: Motu Economic and Public Policy Research, 10-06-20 2010), 4. http://motu-www.motu.org.nz/wpapers/10_13.pdf.

²⁶⁵ Thorns, "Housing Policy and the 1990s: New Zealand a Decade of Change," 133.

²⁶⁶ Schrader, "State Housing."

²⁶⁷ Olssen et al., "A State Housing Database: 1993-2009," 4.

²⁶⁸ Thorns, "Housing Policy and the 1990s: New Zealand a Decade of Change," 131.

²⁶⁹ M. Austin Patricia, Nicole Gurrán, and M. E. Whitehead Christine, "Planning and Affordable Housing in Australia, New Zealand and England: Common culture; Different mechanisms," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 29, no. 3 (2014).

According to a database of state housing stock, as little as 51 houses were built in 1995 and, by 1999, this figure crept to 761, contributing to the overall drop in housing stock of 9,982 units between 1993 and 2000.²⁷⁰ There is also evidence that many of the state houses were sold under their market value and that there were people that made a very profitable turnover in a relatively short time-frame.²⁷¹ The government's commitment to selling state houses reinforced the state's increasingly indirect approach to providing housing, and welfare more generally.

The consequences of the government's indirect approach to housing assistance

The extent of run-down state housing in the 1990s underscored the government's evident lack of concern for maintaining and future-proofing existing state housing stock, in favour of selling it and administering housing assistance that was 'tenure-neutral'. A report in 2004 stated that 60 percent of state houses were constructed before 1970, with little done to modernise them throughout the 1990s, leaving the housing stock with outdated amenities, ill-matched to the needs of the people.²⁷² When searching 'state housing in the 1990s' in the government's NZ History website, one of the primary articles is about the then newly-built Talbot Park, a state housing area that is brightly coloured and tidy, and comprising medium density housing. However, this was a relatively rare example of newly built state housing—between 1992 and 1996 the rate of building had not been so low since World War Two.²⁷³ The brief article on Talbot Park demonstrates the condition of state housing in the 1990s; this reserve in the 1960s, once a popular place for young families, had become unsafe and 'slum-like' in the 1990s, to the extent that the houses were rebuilt.²⁷⁴ The deterioration of an increasingly ageing housing stock presented the question of whether or not the state had a judiciary responsibility to provide better accommodation than private landlords—from the state of some houses in HNZ's portfolio, it appeared that the state did not consider itself responsible.

²⁷⁰ Olssen et al., "A State Housing Database: 1993-2009," 15.

²⁷¹ Thorns, *"Housing Policy and the 1990s: New Zealand a Decade of Change,"* 131.

²⁷² Judith A. Davey et al., *Accommodation Options for Older People in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Centre for Housing Research, 2004), 60.

²⁷³ "Construction and Sale of State Houses, 1938-2002," Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2016, accessed 30-10-20, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/construction-and-sale-of-state-houses-1938-2002>.

²⁷⁴ Margaret McClure, "Auckland Places - Southern-Eastern Suburbs: Industrial heartland," (2016). <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/16211/new-state-houses>.

The negative social consequences of these tightly targeted, less generous welfare policies quickly became evident with the increase in visible poverty. With the reduction in welfare benefits across the board, those who were unemployed, widowed or on the Domestic Purpose Benefit would have felt the negative effects of a reduced income and the financial pressures that resulted. In 2000, when recapping the previous decade, Labour's Minister of Social Services and Employment, Steve Maharey, identified the consequences of these policies that resulted in increased unemployment, and people remaining on benefits for longer periods. He described how those with few qualifications or marketable skills 'bore the brunt of unemployment, Māori and Pacific people were disproportionately affected along with certain regions of the country.'²⁷⁵ It is evident that the voluntary sector was also stretched during this period, with the increased demand for their assistance indicating just how difficult this period was for some New Zealanders. The number of people requiring food bank services escalated, with agencies, including the Salvation Army and other church social service groups, reporting significant increases in demand during this period. This is evident in the fact that there were 16 foodbanks in the Auckland metropolitan area in 1989 and, by 1994, there were more than 130.²⁷⁶ O'Brien described how the level of demand for foodbanks was a 'useful barometer of the adequacy of benefit levels' that was clearly insufficient during the 1990s.²⁷⁷

The consequences of the changes to state house delivery were frequently described as detrimental, particularly to vulnerable New Zealanders, encouraging tenant turnover and rising housing costs. It is apparent that the change in housing policies in the 1990s adversely affected tenants who could no longer afford the subsequent rising housing costs that occurred in both the public and private rental markets.²⁷⁸ This, combined with welfare benefits being reduced by around 10 percent in 1991, financially strained many state house tenants; the accommodation supplement 'did not always meet the difference between a person's income and the higher rent that landlords and Housing New Zealand were charging.'²⁷⁹ From July 1993, the accommodation supplement covered 65 percent of the difference between what the tenant had paid and the market rates, with state house rents increasing by 106 percent from

²⁷⁵ Maharey, Short Social Welfare in New Zealand - Address by the Minister of Social Services and Employment to the RNZAF Command and Staff College, No 41 Staff Course. RNZAF Whenuapai, Auckland.

²⁷⁶ Ross Mackay, "Foodbank Demand and Supplementary Assistance Programmes: A Research and Policy Case Study," *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* (1995): 2.

²⁷⁷ Mike O'Brien, *Welfare Justice For All : Reflections and Recommendations: A Contribution to the Welfare Reform Debate* (Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, 2010), 34.

²⁷⁸ O'Brien, *Welfare Justice for All*, 33.

²⁷⁹ McClure, *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998*, 243.

1990 to 1999. By the end of the decade, sixty percent of state housing tenants were paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent.²⁸⁰ Murphy claimed that these policies ‘effectively removed the social component from the social rented sector and, although challenged and modified over time, have had significant impacts on state tenants and adversely impacted upon housing affordability for low-income groups.’²⁸¹

These reforms seemed almost antithetical to the community-building that was at the forefront of policies fifty years before. In 1999, it was reported that 77 percent of state house tenants had a tenancy duration of less than 10 years. Twenty-five percent of tenants were in these houses for less than 12 months. Murphy noted that these are significant turnover rates, considering the fact that 8,504 tenants had been granted tenure protection or rent protection.²⁸² He goes on to describe how these rates of turnover are more closely aligned to the private sector: ‘characterised by a high degree of tenure insecurity than the traditional social rented housing sector with security of tenure.’²⁸³ He argued that from a community perspective, the transient nature of living for struggling state house tenants ‘seriously undermined processes of community formation and cohesion.’²⁸⁴ Although this was the apparent intention of housing reforms—for tenants to ‘shop around’—it also indicated that community cohesion would have become difficult to obtain with the transient nature of tenancies.

Backlash from state house tenants

As it became increasingly difficult for some tenants to pay substantially larger rents, those critical of the reforms voiced their opposition. There were protests from church, community and welfare groups brought about by the hardships that the housing reforms had created. Grassroot efforts to protest these changes occurred; a 1999 news piece reported the State Housing Action Coalition [SHAC] had been protesting for nine years about unfair evictions for non-payment of rent. They used slogans such as ‘Oppose tenant cleansing’ and ‘National’s market rents a disaster’ to get their message across. Len Parker, an elderly tenant who was interviewed, was supported by the Coalition when he faced eviction for non-payment—he

²⁸⁰ McKenzie, "Social Assistance Chronology - a chronology of social assistance and programmes in New Zealand - 1844 to 2020."

²⁸¹ Murphy, "Reasserting the 'Social' in Social Rented Housing: Politics, Housing Policy and Housing Reforms in New Zealand," 90.

²⁸² Murphy, "Reasserting the 'Social' in Social Rented Housing", 94.

²⁸³ Murphy, "Reasserting the 'Social' in Social Rented Housing", 94.

²⁸⁴ Murphy, "To the Market and Back: Housing Policy and State Housing in New Zealand," 202.

refused to pay more than 25 percent of his income. With the help of SHAC, he barricaded himself into the basement of his state house.²⁸⁵

Rent strikes were also used to protest the rent increases. In a parliamentary debate in 1993, when asked what actions would be taken to resolve the issue of a proposed partial rent strike, the then Minister of Housing—Hon. John Luxton—responded by distancing the government from its social responsibility: ‘It is not for me to intervene in the relationship between any tenant and his or her landlord.’²⁸⁶ He went on to acknowledge that he was aware that the increase in rent for state house tenants reduced their disposable income, but he stated that the amount of government assistance was ‘actually still considerable,’ and that more money was going into housing because it was based on need, not just if one tenanted a state house. Luxton did not believe the strikes would happen, because there was not much interest in the SHAC run strikes: ‘The State Housing Action Coalition has been holding meetings around the country: in Napier nobody attended one meeting and one person attended the other, while in Christchurch the group called off its meetings completely...’²⁸⁷ Regardless of the effectiveness of these strikes, their very existence indicates the extent of hardship and struggle that caused some state tenants to take decisive actions to be heard by the government.

State house tenants on the periphery of mainstream society

In contrast to other forms of tenure in the 1990s, state rental housing made up a small fraction of Aotearoa New Zealand households, making it easy to dismiss the voice of state house tenants. Under five percent of housing made up this form of tenure, compared to the 70 percent that was owner occupied; the preoccupation with homeownership in Aotearoa New Zealand culture was very much present in the 1990s.²⁸⁸ Davidson explained that the ‘two main features of the New Zealand housing scene are the dominance of single, detached houses in the housing stock and the preponderance of owner-occupied tenure.’²⁸⁹ With tenure choices being market driven, and the government becoming increasingly withdrawn from the housing market, both

²⁸⁵ Ben Schrader, "Housing and government - a property-owning democracy," (2012). <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/video/32435/market-rents-protest>.

²⁸⁶ New Zealand Parliamentary Debate, *Questions for oral answer: Housing New Zealand - rent strike: 1 September*, 19/08/1993, (1993).

²⁸⁷ *Questions for oral answer: Housing New Zealand - rent strike: 1 September*.

²⁸⁸ Thorns, "Housing Policy and the 1990s: New Zealand a Decade of Change," 129.

²⁸⁹ Davidson, *A Home of One's Own: Housing Policy in Sweden and New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1990s*, 4.

publicly and privately, it was easy to disregard the struggles of this small group of New Zealanders.²⁹⁰

The rhetoric employed when describing beneficiaries and their lifestyles became increasingly derisive and lacking in empathy. In Maharey's political speech on social welfare, he described the 1990s as a period when new language entered the welfare debate: 'commentators began to discuss the "corrosive" effects of benefit receipt. It was suggested that benefit receipt robbed people of their motivation to find work. Politicians spoke of "welfare dependency", benefit fraud, loss of the work ethic, and encouragement for single mothers to have more and more children.'²⁹¹ O'Brien described how, 'the persistent critical use of the word 'dependent' has been an important part of the process of treating benefit recipients as 'outsiders', 'others', people who, it is implied, do not belong in our society. In many respects it has become an acceptable alternative to the more directly critical term, 'bludgers'.²⁹² The general sentiment towards recipients of welfare benefits, and, therefore, state house tenants, grew increasingly negative, with ideas around the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor becoming more prominent.

Popular culture, media and politicians perpetuated derogatory stereotypes of state house tenants, speaking to 'middle-class fears'.²⁹³ Schrader cited Alan Duff's successful film, *Once Were Warriors*, a film set in a state house, depicting an incredibly violent life: 'it would be hard to find a more damning indictment of state house life.'²⁹⁴ These perceptions of state house life, in turn, affected the way the public treated state house tenants, according to Schrader.²⁹⁵ Schrader quotes National MP John Carter in 1992, arguing that state house applicants should take a 'good living test' before they were given tenancy: 'Animals take better care of their bodies than some of these people.'²⁹⁶ Carter argued this interview had been reported inaccurately by TV1's *One Network News* who said he described some state housing tenants 'as lazy and filthy' and treated their homes like 'pigsties'. TVNZ went on to clarify in a later broadcast 'that Mr Carter had not been referring to state house tenants when he talked about

²⁹⁰ Davidson, *A Home of One's Own*, 10.

²⁹¹ Maharey, Short Social Welfare in New Zealand - Address by the Minister of Social Services and Employment to the RNZAF Command and Staff College, No 41 Staff Course. RNZAF Whenuapai, Auckland.

²⁹² Davidson, *A Home of One's Own: Housing Policy in Sweden and New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1990s*, 36.

²⁹³ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 219.

²⁹⁴ Ben Schrader, "The Other Story: Changing Perceptions of State Housing," *New Zealand Journal of History* 40, no. 2 (2006): 156.

²⁹⁵ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 291.

²⁹⁶ Schrader, *We Call It Home*, 217.

people who stank and wore filthy clothes.²⁹⁷ Whether or not Carter's insulting outburst was directed at state house tenants, he had given voice to what many already thought.

Correcting imbalances

From 1996, it was evident that the imbalance between HNZ's economic and social objectives had led to unjustifiably negative social outcomes. Contending with significant political pressure, a rent freeze was imposed in 1997, and HNZ was forced to include specific references to their social responsibilities in their statement of corporate intent.²⁹⁸ The company was also required to take into account tenant payment histories and set rents accordingly. The accommodation supplement was increased from 65 percent to 70 percent, and state house tenants over the age of 55 were given secure and subsidised tenure. HNZ was refocused to meet social objectives 'in a business-like manner.'²⁹⁹ However, a return to income-related rents was not over-turned and the overall intention to promote individuals taking personal responsibility for their lives endured throughout the 1990s.

The repercussions of these reforms, aimed to reduce welfare expenditure and discourage reliance on the state, ultimately entrenched many New Zealanders in poverty. Vowles stated that: 'Notions of egalitarianism in New Zealand were not about the absence of class but the absence of extreme class distinction, class oppression and conflict, and elite rule. While much has changed since the late 1940s, it is still argued that the related theme of fairness remains part of the values many people associate with being a New Zealander.'³⁰⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that there was an increasing lack of support for these reforms, reflected in the election of the Labour Party in 1999 and their action to remove the market rents policy in favour of the pre-1993 income-related rental charges. This reintroduction of income-related rents for state house tenants, alongside a moratorium on the planned sale of a further 10,000 state houses, had been a major election platform for the Labour Party, and it proved successful.³⁰¹ New

²⁹⁷ 27th August 1992, Broadcasting Standards Authority, Decision No. 55/92

<https://www.bsa.govt.nz/oldsite/assets/PDF-Decisions/1992/55-9227081992John-Carter-MP-for-the-Bay-of-Islands.pdf>

²⁹⁸ Murphy, "Reasserting the 'Social' in Social Rented Housing: Politics, Housing Policy and Housing Reforms in New Zealand," 94.

²⁹⁹ Schrader, "State Housing."

³⁰⁰ Jack Vowles, Hilde Coffé, and Jennifer C. Curtin, *A Bark But No Bite: Inequality and the 2014 New Zealand general election* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2017), 28.

³⁰¹ Vasantha Krishnan, "The Cost of Housing and Housing Support," *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* July (2001): 110.

Zealanders clearly still felt strongly about the state's responsibility to provide state housing as well as a more generous welfare state, particularly for those who required assistance.

Conclusions

The sharp change in housing policies from 1993, including the introduction of market rents offset by an accommodation supplement, was part of a wider shift away from supporting welfare beneficiaries. The government's decision to reduce welfare benefits, both to decrease public expenditure and to emphasise individual responsibility, resulted in the poorest New Zealander's receiving the bare minimum of state support. The conflicting commercial and social roles of HCNZ lead to the creation of HNZ which was mandated with a greater commercial focus taking priority over their social responsibilities. While more low-income New Zealanders were able to access state support in housing, and tenants were given greater choice in where they lived, these housing policies in action encouraged tenant turnover and rising housing costs, making community cohesion increasingly difficult. These arguably punitive state housing policies corresponded with the rhetoric used in popular culture, media as well as by politicians targeting welfare beneficiaries, negatively framing words such as 'dependant.' Although these negative sentiments toward beneficiaries affected the way the public perceived state house tenants, the social outcomes that resulted from the state stepping back from providing social welfare, including increased poverty, made the policy reforms unpopular.

In 2005, Don Brash, leader of the National Party, spoke on the subject of personal responsibility, expressing these sentiments: 'Why should Kiwi families battling to get ahead in life, working hard and coping with the pressures of raising a family and paying off the mortgage, all at their own expense, have to support numerous people who are not making a similar effort, or who have substantially contributed to the unenviable situation they find themselves in?'³⁰² In that same year, under Don Brash's leadership, National also announced that, if elected, there would be a return to market rates for state house tenants.³⁰³ Although the

³⁰² "Orewa 2005 - Welfare Dependency: Whatever happened to personal responsibility?," Don Brash, 2005, accessed 12/01/2021, <https://www.donbrash.com/national-party/orewa-2005-welfare-dependency-whatever-happened-to-personal-responsibility/>.

³⁰³ Simon Collins, "National plans to bring back market rents," *New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), 06/09/2005, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/national-plans-to-bring-back-market-rents/GJ5AQFEAVCDKWTELTOARRUMK7U/>.

National Party was only marginally defeated by Labour, this showed Don Brash was out-of-touch. After witnessing the hardship caused by reforms in the 1990s, policies that were not socially responsible were perceived as unfair and unacceptable by many New Zealanders. Nevertheless, Brash gave voice to widely held beliefs about what defines community and a home, being participation in society by working and paying tax, raising a family and owning a house.

6. Living in state housing from the perspective of state tenants

From the early 1950s through to the late 1990s, a series of government policies have changed both the style and the planning of state housing areas, as well as the structures of these households. The previous three chapters outlined state housing changes from the perspective of government and academics—an outsider’s perspective. The purpose of undertaking an oral history is to gain an insider perspective of state housing from those who lived in these houses and experienced these policy changes first-hand. This chapter examines the stories of nine people who tenanted state housing at some point between the 1950s and the 1990s. While these informants are by no means representative of all state house tenants, their recollections of experiences in state housing from different periods build a detailed picture of what life was like for them, both in their home, and their community.

This chapter is divided into multiple sections broadly covering the interviewees recollections in state housing. The various paths to state housing, as well as day-to-day life, including hosting celebrations, and life in the backyard are grouped and interpreted. The stories told also illustrate the extent to which community played a part in the lives of these informants; the types of interactions they had with neighbours, whether there was a sense of safety and how groups of people were stratified within these communities. Finally, these stories demonstrate how ideas around homeownership and perspectives on state housing reflects society’s views of community and what home means. By examining how changing attitudes toward state housing is reflected in the experiences of those who lived in these houses, one can start to get a clearer picture about whether shifts in attitude were due to changing experiences within state housing, or due to changing narratives as a result of shifting policy.

Path to state housing

There were many different paths that people took to become tenants of state housing. The following section examines who lived in state houses, and how the archetypal young, two-parent, Pākehā family, that populated the majority of early state housing, mirrored societal changes over the next fifty years.

Belle, a Pākehā mother in her mid-twenties, married to a petrol station worker, rented an upstairs apartment in Tinakori Road, Wellington in the 1950s. She described how the early 1950s was a period when there was limited housing options, and moving into state housing was a way out of her housing predicament: ‘We couldn’t buy a house and it was very hard to rent a house. We were very lucky to get a state house. It wasn’t easy to get one—the only reason we did was because we were living in an apartment with no area for my child to go out and play. If I had been living in a more comfortable house with a garden or a lawn we wouldn’t have got one.’ While she was a preferred candidate for state housing during this period—raising a young family, Pākehā, from a working/middle class background—her choice to live in a transit camp for over a year while she awaited a house demonstrated the strong demand for state housing in the 1950s: ‘We stayed there for a year, I think. We got into the transfer camp because we had two children at the time. And so, we were eventually allocated a state house in Titahi Bay...’ Belle came from a middle-class background, her grandmother had been the head mistress of a school in South Africa, as well as teaching music, and she married a farmer in New Zealand: ‘It all worked out well.’ Her mother went overseas as a nurse during the war, where she met Belle’s father who lost his leg in the war, and then they married.

Colleen’s family’s circumstances a decade later, in Manawatū, differed considerably from Belle’s; living in state housing as a child was tied up with the death of her father in the 1960s. Struggling to decipher the timeline of when in her childhood she moved into a state house, she described how, ‘My father died when I was 10. Could have possibly had a state house when I was 7. I’m not sure if they owned it or not. It looked like a state house.’ She described how the family had a bakery that they ran until her father got sick and was sent to Auckland for heart surgery: ‘While this was happening, we moved to a state house, when my father died, and my mother started paying rent. I can’t really remember the details. You were seen and not heard as a child. You were not considered.’ Colleen’s mother being allocated a state house as a solo, working Pākehā mother illustrated how housing policies were being refocused toward non-nuclear households. Although, it could be argued that, in the eyes of the state, she would have been considered more deserving of assistance due to being a widow. This house in Awapuni became the family home for six children, from when Colleen thinks she was around 9 until she was 15.

Erana, who was raised on an air force base in Blenheim, moved into her first state house in the early 1970s, as a 12-year-old Māori girl. She described moving into the three-bedroom brick

house in Hastings as very different to her earlier childhood: ‘It was quite scary. It was open duck season. I rode my bike to Heretaunga, and the boys would get off the bus and wait for me and pull me off my bike. Take my lunch box out.’ For the past fifty years, she has subsequently lived in a variety of different state houses between Hastings and Dunedin, currently residing in a house she has lived in for 27 years. For Erana, having not lived outside of the state house system in her adult life, with income coming from either welfare benefits or low paying jobs, her housing options have always been considerably limited. She said she could not afford to pay the level of rent charged in the private market; she acknowledged she wouldn’t know what that was like and that she knows some that struggle to do so. She described a tumultuous family dynamic that strengthened her resilient character: ‘My family is weird, because I am weird. I tend to do what I want to do when I want to do it. Doesn’t tend to go down well with my siblings. I am the oldest. My father used to treat me like crap. I used to get a hiding because it was my fault being the oldest. When he got cancer, I still had to stand up to him. He would try and put me under his thumb. I stand up for myself and that gets me in trouble. I don’t always engage the brain first; it is usually the mouth. That gets me into a bit of trouble now and then.’

Foma’i could not recall much of his first state house in Porirua on the outskirts of Cannon’s Creek, as a young Samoan boy, in the late 1970s—only that it was two storied with wooden floorboards, and wooden stairs on the outside of the building. He remembers that, around the time he turned five, his parents got the news that they were moving to Lower Hutt: ‘I remember when dad got the letter from the railways. It was an exciting time. They were happy, because I think from what I learnt later on, living in a railway house was cheaper than state housing because they were subsidised.’ When referring to this house in the Hutt, Foma’i stated, ‘It was definitely home.’

Katrina moved into a state house in Wainuiomata in the late 1980s, until the early 1990s as a twenty-year-old Rarotongan/Māori single mother looking for a safer, happier environment. Initially, she was staying in her sister’s duplex unit in a cul-de-sac in Wainuiomata, then—when her sister got a larger, stand-alone house a few blocks over—Katrina remembers having a little macabre luck in securing her own state house. She was over at her sister’s when she saw the ambulance pull up and cart away an elderly neighbour who had evidently died. She called the Housing Corporation immediately, asking about her position on the waiting list for a house. They said nothing was currently available in the area; Katrina laughed as she recalled responding, ‘I think something just popped up.’ She remembers moving her and her son into

that house quite soon after. Katrina described a happy childhood, growing up in Lower Hutt with her parents and her three siblings. In her late teens, she had fallen into a bad social scene, living with her partner in Raumati with gang affiliations. After one particular incident when ‘he was given a couple of fenders by some Black Power guys to look after which were in the garage for a year. He thought they had forgotten about them and so sold them—someone told these guys and they were not happy about that.’ Things turned aggressive between him and the gang, and Katrina decided to leave with her young son. She described how getting that state house, along with an office job in the city, was an active choice to change the direction of her life: ‘it was getting pretty crazy, I took the safe option.’

In 1994, 14-year-old Noeline, who is Samoan, moved into what would become her family home in Newtown with her parents and her brother and sister, after living in a one-bedroom flat in the same neighbourhood. Before this house, she described how she had slept in the lounge with her siblings in a privately rented, one-bedroom flat. Regardless of how overcrowded this place was, she fondly remembers this part of her childhood, reminiscing about a time when life was carefree, and safe, ‘That house was the bomb-dot-com, playing on the street. We walked to school by ourselves, can’t do that now days. Sent to go buy smokes, can’t do that now.’ Although, on one particular occasion, she remembered getting herself into trouble when she was playing around in the Newtown Community centre: ‘got this scar from the attic falling down onto a light. I was knocked unconscious in the community centre. Almost lost my eye. My mum was not impressed, she wanted to give me a hiding, but my sister stopped her cause we were in the ambulance.’ Her mum had been a mid-wife for 30 years, and her father was a carpenter. She divulged how her father pursued her mother persistently after spotting her at a Samoan community function and eventually she gave up and they married. He had children to other women during their relationship, which her mum ‘just got on and dealt with’.

From these experiences, it is clear that household structures in state housing changed, mirroring the housing policies that were set out by the government. After two decades of prioritising the ‘nuclear family’, by the 1960s, other family groups were able to access state housing. These correspond with increasing urbanisation of Māori and Pacific Islanders, alongside, recognition and acceptance of different family structures, including single-parent households. Regardless of the period, state housing has offered opportunities for improved living, not always afforded in the private housing market.

Life at home in a state house

How state tenants lived in their homes, navigating family dynamics, and negotiating the balance between work and maintaining a household, are examined in this next section. The extent of state involvement in determining how tenants interacted with their homes, and whether this changed over time, mirroring changing housing policies, will be explored in these first-hand accounts of living in state housing.

Jillian's recollections of her parents were in keeping with societal expectations in the 1950s and 1960s. While her father worked in town, Jillian could remember her mother, Belle, would be at home, 'slaving away. Big chore to do washing. Mondays were always wash the floor days. Every day had a different chore.' She talked about the usual jobs that she had to do around the house, 'We had to make our bed, dishes, setting tables. We got a certain amount of pocket money. We had bank accounts, through the schools. A post office savings account. I didn't grow up thinking my brothers were treated differently. There was something about my brothers that made them special, I grew up wanting to be like them, so I wouldn't play with dolls. If I had a doll it would just be the head of a doll. I didn't want to look like a sissy. It was really a feeling of boys are better.'

Jillian described her mother as 'an old-fashioned mum', She recalled when she bought a bikini, and her mother 'went nuts. Thought I was trying to expose myself, which I probably was. Parading myself in front of dirty old men, I hadn't even thought of that until she suggested it. I didn't like my mother that much growing up, she was always judgmental, sanctimonious, I think that was mostly because of the church. She was scared I was going to get pregnant at five. Dad was more a beer, rugby, racing guy. For mum you had to be behaved. Not so affectionate—which was quite typical.' When discussing her father, Jillian said, 'Dad was at work. I adored my father. He was a traveller, always on the road. Worked in a shoe shop on Friday nights. I thought he was beautiful—he would come home in a tie. Nah, he wasn't around a lot. But he would come home every night. Same time. Same stuff. We would have meat.'

For Colleen, her early memories of her parents centred around the running of their family business. She described how they would travel from their house to the shop across town. Her parents would leave at 4.30 in the morning, returning a few hours later to pick her and her

siblings up to do jobs at the bakery, and then they would go to school from there. She explained, ‘We did deliveries. But dad would give a lot away to families. Families would come at the end of the day as I remember. He also would cater. He made pies. There was a dairy at the front, the bakery and then accommodation out the back. I don’t know how they did it with all the kids. But they did. I’ve never tasted such great food. Tasty pies and lamingtons and cream horns. There was one staff member, one guy, otherwise it was family. Dunking the lamingtons. We had all these jobs to do.’ Despite there being little time for life outside running the business and rearing children, Colleen talked of how her mother and father were a good match despite their differences: ‘I was so curious to go to a Catholic church. Father was Presbyterian and mum was Catholic. Father wouldn’t allow us to be baptized because he was of the belief that we have to choose our own religion. That is what he believed. I guess it was a relief for my mother.’ Her mother’s lifestyle had to be drastically changed after her father died: ‘She absolutely adored him. Very shocking when he died. Life changed completely. She didn’t have a particular career. You didn’t grow up with a career in mind unless you were an affluent family. It seemed to me that if you were from an affluent family there was more responsibility for you to achieve, even if you were a girl. I wanted to be a Karitane nurse until I found out that babies died. I couldn’t be dealing with that.’ Colleen described the change to life without her father: ‘When he died mum couldn’t keep the business. Mum worked vacuuming the offices at Massey. She would leave at 4.30 in the afternoon and come back at 10.’ Colleen remembered life at home being full of chores: ‘Mum wasn’t a gardener. I have been cooking roasts since I was 10 and half. Mowing lawns, cooking, gardening, looking after younger siblings. My older sister married, but the rest of the kids lived at home. Mum was pregnant when dad died. Five girls and one brother—he might not have enjoyed being ganged up on.’

Erana was not working when she moved into her three-bedroom weatherboard house with an orange tiled roof in the early 1990s. She described this period as a difficult time, overshadowed by her struggle with alcoholism and domestic abuse: ‘My ex-husband was quite violent so there was always police here which didn’t always go down too well with the Housing Corp, the police ring them I suppose, because they have to be notified. The neighbours would get involved—for the safety of the kids. It was a bit like *Once Were Warriors* when I was drinking. That is quite close to my experience. I have been sober 14 years.’ She described how her alcoholism made life challenging during this period for her children: ‘I am a recovering alcoholic, so it was a wee bit full on during that stage when they grew up.’ She observed that it was ‘more free’ in the 1990s, with less state control: ‘it wasn’t so restricted. You have all

these restrictions now. Not just with the house, but what you can do with your kids—disciplining children. I have seen some parents lose the plot, and I do, but I have been on the receiving end of someone lashing out. It relates to feeling like crap. It is not so bad now, but I have felt like shit in this state housing area. People look down on you if you live in a state house and are on the benefit'. While Erana was not always attached to her place, it still held important memories. All of their Christmas celebrations over the last twenty-seven years were held in this house, apart from when she took her children up to Lake Tutira one year. In saying this, her bags were packed, and she was ready to move to her new HNZ house with her grandson: 'When we were told we were moving she [the tenancy manager] put a letter in my letterbox. Three months later, she came around and said make sure you have your bags packed, so I have had my stuff packed since May last year. Waiting, waiting, waiting.'

Fale who is Samoan/Chinese, was five when she moved into the bottom flat in a state housing complex in Kilbirnie with her mother and grandparents. Before the move in 1996, her mother had divorced her father, and they were living with extended family in the area. She remembered her grandmother usually cooked if her mother was at work, or they both shared cooking responsibilities: 'Once grandma passed away, mum cooked. She usually made one huge meal on a Sunday which I'd eat till Wednesday or Tuesday. It wasn't all the time, but it saved her from standing in the kitchen after work.' She described how, 'Everybody in the complex had their own outdoor area where you can hang washing, there was a shed. It looped around the whole house which I thought was fine. There was enough room to have a garden and run around.' Fale remembered her grandmother growing a few plants: 'There is this plant that is used in massage. I think it is still there when I drive past, lau ti. I'm not sure about the medicinal properties, but it is used a lot for burns and muscle pain. No veges, more just plants.'

Fale recalled her house not being the location for family get togethers. Christmas couldn't be hosted there, as it was not big enough: 'We usually celebrated Christmas at my Uncle's house in Newtown because it was the biggest and he had the capacity to host that amount of people.' Although she enjoyed her homelife, Fale's interactions with her house were surrounded by a sense of impermanence; she always felt like she wouldn't be in that house for long: 'I don't know where that idea came from, it was just like this idea it should always be a temporary thing. But at the same time, I know families that have been in state housing forever... I would say my mum wanted to get out of it. I don't think anyone in state housing wants to stay in state

housing forever. I think she was also probably grateful that she had a house as well. And we had my grandparents staying with me and they always looked after me when she was at work.’

Noeline shared a room with her sister, her parents were in another room, in separate beds, and her brother had his own room— ‘because he was the favourite—nah, because he was a boy... My brother is chill, but he was spoilt. We had to work while he was meant to be the next All Black. He just blew out. Was very fit, an amazing rugby player. Dad didn’t want him to do weights. Sure enough, he did weights then got lazy and big.’ Noeline recalled at one point having to move into one of the neighbouring flats for three months while theirs got renovated: ‘We moved back in and it was amazing.’ Noeline distinctly remembers how her mum would look out the window at passersby and her friends would joke that she was watching them. Noeline would run up the stairs to yell at her, and her mum’s unapologetic response would be ‘mind your business, it is my bloody house.’ A vision that still amuses Noeline is it being pitch black outside and watching her mum hide behind a lace curtain.

Living in state housing came with freedoms and restrictions that were negotiated, and sometimes imposed, usually from within these households but also by the state. Often the stories are typical of any household in Aotearoa New Zealand, navigating an old-fashioned mother, in Jillian’s case, or a prying one in Noeline’s. However, some similarities and differences between each person’s experiences, also reflect the state and society’s attitudes toward state housing. The lack of permanence, encouraged by the state, was felt by Fale and Erana in their homes in the 1990s, but in different ways. Although Fale lived in her flat for over ten years, because of societal expectations, she felt this was always a temporary home for her family. Fale’s experience was that of feeling a degree of transience, and still she used the word ‘grateful’ to describe how her mother felt about living there. She might be indicating that alternative housing options were considerably worse, but it should be kept in mind that this interview took place amidst a widely discussed housing crisis, so it can be assumed this has played a part in how she reflected on her experience. Erana, having spent most of her life in state housing, does not expect to rent outside of HNZ, but does require her landlord, the state, to provide a less rundown house in a safer community to raise her grandson.

Celebrating special occasions in the home

The focus of state housing shifted away from encouraging the ‘nuclear family’ lifestyle orientated around the home, to providing housing of a ‘decent’ standard for individuals most in need, this did not necessarily change the way in which people interacted with their homes. The celebration of special occasions in state houses is one way in which these spaces held significance to those who lived in them.

Jillian remembered how happy the holiday period was during her childhood in the 1950s. It revolved around both her family and the wider community. She recollected the excitement of going from one house to the next to celebrate Christmas with the neighbours: ‘Christmas was so good. Started in our house, have drinks, go to other houses to have drinks. Celebrating in each other’s houses. Go back to ours for lunch around 2 o’clock, where aunties would come around. Dad would take time off work. Buy special food. The two weeks before Christmas were so magical for me.’

Moana described her colourful, three-bedroom, two storied flat in Mt Cook, Wellington as being a social hub for Samoan friends and family. Moana recalled her place being nicknamed ‘the halfway house’ where all her cousins would come over: ‘It was a party house. Birthdays, cousins’ 18th, mum and dad’s anniversaries. Practically everyone’s birthdays were at ours. Mum and dad preferred we drank around them so there wasn’t any trouble. Everyone got along with mum and dad.’ While early state housing attempted to keep the adults out in the suburbs with their families, away from the pubs, Moana described how her parents actively encouraged her to stay home, by allowing her to drink with them. This reflected the changing drinking patterns in more recent history. Christmas was a big deal in her household and her extended family put on a massive lunch: ‘Had to be in one of the big flats. Had fold out tables lined up. Party hats. Best memories – it was a family home. Christmas was Secret Santa with everybody. Luma—her mum was my dad’s sister, lived up top. My dad had another brother in another flat. I miss it. Now the family is not as tight as it was back then.’

The importance Noeline’s parents placed on hosting events from their Newtown flat made their house, much like Moana’s, the social centre for their family. She described how her parents continued to host special occasions at their house, even when more suitable locations were available: ‘That was our family home. When my older siblings moved out. All holidays would

be celebrated at our house. Even if their houses were bigger. Everything was catered around our parents.’ For Noeline, her home was particularly special because both her mum and dad passed away there. It is an important part of Samoan culture, to die at home. Some of the funeral rituals took place inside the house where the family put up a huge tarpaulin in their backyard. She explained how visitors would come through the front door, where greetings and condolences were made, and head out to the back of the house where the food was: ‘Everything in the sitting room went upstairs into the bedrooms. Crammed everything in the rooms during that time. A few hundred came through over a week. So mum was in the sitting room and everyone sat on the floor to make room.’ Visitors could spread out around the house, or congregate at the basketball court at the centre of all the flats. Noeline remembered all her neighbours coming together for this moment and contributing their own household items to help host such a large amount of people: ‘They gave mats to lay out for people to sit on’. Noeline’s family was able to modify their small space to accommodate a very important, deeply personal moment that had great cultural significance.

Earlier state houses, with spacious lounges and big backyards, were built for hosting, but on account of the changing attitudes of both the government and society, these homes became less generously provided for regarding space and amenities. Nevertheless, tenants continued to host sentimental experiences in their homes, not often seen by those living outside state housing. Navigating spatial restrictions, particularly in multi-unit flats, with limited space, illustrated how households were able to adapt their state houses to their traditions and cultural values.

In the backyard

In this next section, the interactions people had with the immediate space around their homes is examined. Examining these backyard memories is a way to understand the intimate experiences that might not have been evident to people who weren’t living in state houses. These backyard memories contribute to the argument about how changing attitudes and perceptions of state housing, and what home means, was reflected in the experiences of these households. As the necessity for spacious outdoor areas for state house tenants was reexamined, communal spaces became notably more important.

When talking about the house, Jillian remembered loving her room, and with added emphasis, the time she spent outside in the backyard, where she recalled, ‘I loved my back yard. I had a

tree I would climb up all the time. Dad would always be working in the garden. Composting heaps and we grew fruit trees. That was huge in their lives. Being involved in the garden—we were really lucky compared to now. Big vegetable gardens. We had chickens. Ate off the land. It was so simple and so good. I think, as I remember it...’ Jillian contrasted this wholesome image of being dedicated to the garden, which provided both sustenance and entertainment, with what she perceived to be a lack of care in the same neighbourhood sixty years on: ‘That is what I notice now. We were so proud about our yards. Everybody had really well manicured yards. Now you go up there and no one cares less. Everyone cared. Everyone’s house was very well looked after.’

Colleen wasn’t so reminiscent about her experience gardening in the 1960s. With her mother out working to afford rent, and no father around to do the labour, property maintenance became one of Colleen’s many responsibilities. Living in the four-bedroom house that was on a big section with a garden shed, she remembered both the plentiful harvest of all the fruit trees but also the labour that was needed to maintain such a large property. There were plenty of fruit trees in the back yard: plums—black doris and a lighter plum—a peach tree on the boundary, an apricot tree next door, and a huge passionfruit vine along the back boundary. Colleen explains that there was ‘An abundance of them. I had to grow silverbeet in the garden and carrots. It wasn’t a big vege garden. Parsley. After father died it was quite hard to keep the section going. There was a cat in the shed that had six kittens and my sister was always out there with them in their boxes. The kittens didn’t leave the shed that often.’

Fomai’s house in Lower Hutt had three-bedrooms, with a big lounge, but a small kitchen and dining area, and—as was the case with Jillian and Colleen—Foma’i identified the back yard as being a big part of his day-to-day living. He described how the property had, ‘A nice big plot of land. A big back yard... There was a vege garden. All four of us, my mum and dad and my sister were involved.’ He recalled there being a ‘nice sized’ front lawn and a big backyard where they would have family occasions and people would come over. He remembered going out the back door and the pathway going to the clothesline: ‘in the middle of everything. It was weird.’ This feature that Foma’i found “weird” was a reminder of the first state house designs that were centred around domesticity—the path to the clothesline was once a big feature of these houses. This fact would be lost on a young child, whose life was clearly not centred around washing, as was often the case pre-1960s. Foma’i detailed how the back yard was split into two: ‘Vege and fruit in one half and the taro leaves on the other—that is what Islanders

did when they moved to New Zealand, grow taro leaves.’ Foma’i remembers having running races around the back yard, making use of the lane in the middle of the taro. He said his parents loved it for the growing and the taro leaves: ‘Mum would make raspberry jam. It was a food-focused garden. There was a prickly green plant. When you snap it apart there is a juice—aloe vera—my parents used that. Roses out the front. But they would have already been there when we moved in, but mum would have just maintained them.’ While Fomai’s mother appeared to have tended to the roses out of obligation, keeping an outwardly presentable house in a tidy neighbourhood, in the backyard, the garden reflected their cultural identity. Adapting the backyard to grow the edible taro leaves was one way in which his family maintained strong links to their Samoan culture.

Moana also remembered how her father utilised the outdoor area to grow taro. This was a feat, considering she was in a flat on a small sized section. She remembered the lengths her father went to grow a successful crop: ‘Dad grew taro leaves that he had fenced off, but it didn’t help because with parties and people stumbling...’. She said the neighbours had cats that were also a threat to the taro: ‘At the back there is a little ditch and the cats would have their babies down there. There were kittens everywhere. We would get the neighbours to come get the kittens because they were eating the taro leaves.’

At Noeline’s, the private outdoor area was small. She described how the original carpark had been converted into a basketball court and each flat had a path that lead on to the court. She described how all the kids would congregate there, and could ‘hang out until whenever, because all our families knew everyone.’ Her friends outside of the flats did not socialise there; it was their own specific community who would hang out on the basketball courts where everyone knew everyone. Noeline believed the importance of having this communal space to bring together all the residents, was a key aspect of the cohesiveness of her community.

Although Fale said the outdoor area at her flat was large enough to have a run around, she said it lacked ‘indoor/outdoor flow’ and so she spent limited time out there. With no siblings and an unappealing private outdoor, she would spend time outside behind the units at the carpark, where ‘during summer other kids would be playing. We would play games like ‘octopus’—which was like tag, so you needed quite a few kids involved.’ She talked about one of her younger cousins who grew up in a house his parents owned, but he spent most of his time with his friends in a state housing area in Newtown: ‘that place was more like a meeting point. With

so many families living in a space, it becomes a focal point, especially for kids. My cousin had his own backyard but would always be over at this housing area by the Newtown Community Centre.’

It is evident the backyard was prominent in the lives of those who grew up with big private spaces. Cultivating the garden and other recreational activities in the backyard involving the whole family, was orchestrated by early state house policies focused on promoting middle-class values; being houseproud in the suburbs with your family. Growing taro crops in Foma’i and Moana’s backyards illustrated how these spaces were adapted independently by tenants over time, expressing their own cultural identities—a social fabric that made a state house a home. These were different cultural norms, but still an investment in caring for the home, demonstrating this sense of being houseproud. Although the single-unit house has been a prevailing societal ideal of what home looks like, for those who grew up in multi-unit housing, communal spaces often took on the role of the backyard. These communal spaces then became an extension of tenants’ homes, cultivating a sense of belonging within these communities.

Out in the community

Early state housing areas were carefully designed with great importance placed on the concept of community, but as the demand for, and cost of, state housing increased, these considerations were not always prioritised. The extent to which housing policies facilitated the creation of integrated communities over fifty years will be examined in this next section. Memories of interactions with neighbours in areas with state housing across different periods illustrate how perceptions and attitudes toward state housing was changing, and these changes reflect what community means to society.

Jillian’s memories in the neighbourhood were happy ones: going with friends from one backyard to the next, or onto the streets. Jillian remembers her days spent socialising with everyone congregated on the beach or playing tag on the streets. She told one story of a small act of deviance when she and her friends ‘stole 20 cents from a friend’s uncle and went to the dairy to buy chocolate. And the dairy owner called all our parents to see how we got the 20 cents. Everyone was all up in everyone’s business. We didn’t get away with that. You couldn’t do stuff like that because you would get told on—they were all snitches.’ Jillian believed this was a neighbourhood where everyone was looking out for each other, in a neighbourly way, keeping

each other's children out of mischief. She remembered building forts in the forest: 'It was a minute away—the pine forests. I was able to roam anywhere from the beach to the harbour. Just had to be back before dinner. We could have been doing anything, and I did.'

Colleen described how her social life centred closely around her street where there were five houses in a row. Colleen described herself as a bit of a recluse, socialising close to home: 'I wasn't one to go out a lot. My brother was very social. Playing soccer. Always at the Lido swimming pool. I was more of a home body.' This did not stop Colleen from hanging out with the kids on her street. She remembered playing an assortment of games with her neighbours: 'bull rush, with balls and water fights and Elastic games. We played with tennis balls between properties with rackets. Drawing with chalk and marbles.' Colleen's memories illustrated a time before high fences partitioning houses, and she recalled playing on the boundaries of these neighbouring houses: 'We would go out after school and on the weekends and we would run and jump hedges for hours. Until teatime. All Sunday afternoon.'

Foma'i did not recall having friends in his first state house in a Porirua neighbourhood, explaining that he spent a lot of time with family. He said that, although he had no family on the street they lived on, they did have family in wider Porirua. Because they didn't have a car, he had distinct memories of frequently taking the bus to go visiting. One memory he did have involved an incident on his turtle bike – 'my go to out on the street'. When recalling the memory, he felt like it had happened at night, but reasoned that it must have been during the day—'although who knows back then—but I remember some older kids came up to me when I was riding it and took my bike and left me there. I got it back, but I am not sure how that happened. You know, you block out those bad memories but then you are happy again because your turtle bike has been returned. I know it got returned to me because there is a picture with me in the Lower Hutt house. All I remember is the street was on a slope, so I would hike up and ride down. People were around, but I remember being alone. That was me, just going up and down. I don't remember if they were Māori or Pacific Islander boys who came up to me. There were a lot of PIs in the area at that time.'

Moving from Porirua to Lower Hutt was a big social change for Foma'i. He found out in later years that he couldn't speak English as a young child, having spent his formative years in a community with a strong Pacific Islander population: 'When I started school. When you are surrounded by English speaking people, I had no option but to change... Lower Hutt was

predominantly white people.’ Although he does remember a little diversity in the neighbourhood: ‘We did have a Māori family who lived across from me. Richard, he was in the same class as me with an older brother Stephen, I remember that. We had a long relationship as friends. I remember a friend Te Aro who lived down the way, who became a traffic cop.’

Noeline described how racially diverse her neighbourhood was: ‘there were Cook Islanders next to us and a Māori family next door, next door. There were Iraqis behind us and a Tongan family. There were no Pākehā families. There were Somalians, and another PI family.’ She remembers that, although her neighbours were from a wide range of cultural and racial backgrounds, as a community it was very cohesive: ‘Us kids would play hide and seek, spotlight, basketball, tag, dodge ball, touch, all hanging out on the basketball court in the middle of the flats.’ Noeline described this neighbourly environment that came together around the basketball court does not exist in her current place: ‘I’m definitely closer to my neighbours in Newtown. We haven’t spoken to our neighbours, or met them, since we moved here four years ago.’

Moana said a lot of her neighbours were a part of the same tight-knit Samoan community: ‘I grew up with my neighbours, we went to school together, to church. We still keep in touch, although the majority have moved to Australia—better money.’ She described how there was a communal area outside the flats, but Moana remembers this not being used as frequently because there was a public park one flat over. She described how the kids would all play hide and seek by a tower block near the flats, ‘but they busted it down. It was sad because that is where everyone met.’

Fale remembered there being at least twenty families in the complex, and a handful within her block of flats that she was in close contact with. She explained: ‘there were four families within the complex. I knew all my neighbours. They were all there for the same time. The woman across from us was a single mother with her daughter. She was a bit nutty but still really cool. We never had any trouble with any of our neighbours, everyone got along quite well. And then above us were three Indian siblings. They had moved from India and their parents were still over there, so they lived upstairs. And then on the other side upstairs was another family with mum, dad and three kids, I think. The dad passed away sometime.’ Fale did not go to school with the other kids in the wider complex. She was not sure where they went to school: ‘I was familiar with them from seeing them around.’ Fale thought some state housing areas had

stronger communities than others because they all went to school and church together. She talked about her friends in other state housing areas that lived in very tight-knit communities, in contrast to her own experience: ‘in primary school most of my friends lived in their own homes, from what I remember, once I went to college some of my friends lived in state housing. I think what they enjoyed was the community aspect of it. A lot of kids that grew up in similar complexes up in Strathmore they all grew up together, they all went to school together, they went to church together and so I think it is more about the suburb or the neighbourhood rather than the state house. I’ve never heard them say any bad things about it. I think they were all grateful, but at the same time they might want to move on from it, I am not sure.’

These are examples of how state housing and living together, in close proximity, was the basis of connections that were formed within these communities, rather than having to extend out to organisations such as the church and sport teams to create connections. Despite society’s perception of state housing communities as concentrated areas of anti-social behaviour by the late 1970s, in conjunction with government policies that did not encourage long-term tenancies, the connections formed in these communities were strong.

A sense of safety in the community

There was a perception that state house communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand were becoming increasingly unsafe, particularly for children.³⁰⁴ However, it is unclear to what extent this is based on actual incidents occurring more frequently from the late 1970s, if this is more closely related to state housing areas or society in general, or whether there is an element of nostalgia for a bygone era when life felt safer. Were these areas becoming increasingly dangerous because of changing policies that concentrated poorer New Zealanders into state house areas or was it a perception that because these communities did not reflect societal norms of what a home and a community looked like, they must be dangerous. In any case, there were a couple of stories from different periods that did illustrate a persistent concern of predatory behaviour.

Jillian felt her parents did not concern themselves with how she spent her days around the neighbourhood in the 1950s and 1960s, because of a general sense that this was a safe

³⁰⁴ Schrader, *We Call It Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, 214.

neighbourhood. Jillian recalled, ‘not too many bad things went on’. She remembered the day when Marilyn Munroe died, being a shocking moment in an otherwise sheltered existence: ‘Things were good, it was an easy life. No one had money, and no one had much stuff. It was simple. It was really good, as I remember.’ Jillian reiterated that she had a sense that in Titahi Bay nothing bad happened because there were no bars and other negative influences, ‘just a dairy and the surf club.’ It is difficult to know how much of what Jillian remembered has been romanticised, but what is clear is that she believed the community she was raised in was safer, affording her freedoms that her own children in the 1990s would not have: ‘We would be out there. Mothers would be calling out the windows for the kids to come in for dinner. I would never, as a mum, let my kids do what we did—going into the forests for the day. Mum wouldn’t care.’

Colleen remembered, for all of the freedom she had running around with the neighbourhood kids on her street, there was a strong awareness of being weary of strangers in the wider community distilled in her by her parents in the 1960s:

My father was careful after my sister went missing one afternoon. I came home and we were supposed to go together. She was always doing things like this; she would do her own thing. She got a beating when she got back. She did. It wasn’t nice, it was quite scary. My father was so fearful, she got a smack for that. She went down to Memorial Park with her friends. My father was extremely strict. I was always told he broke the coat hanger on her, but I didn’t see it, just heard about it—she might have exaggerated. We buried the strap when he died. I never got it—I never pushed the boundaries. My older sisters did. My mother was hopeless. She wasn’t a disciplinary at all. I remember being 15 and she told me ‘you make your bed you lie in it’. My mother was a catholic. She had a hard time with her father. She wasn’t going to continue that with her family. She was very tolerant of choices. This is probably where I get it from with Jenna [Colleen’s daughter]. She would have never hurt anyone. I don’t really think my dad would have either, but I do know that because of the fear mum and dad felt, that was at the base of it.

Katrina remembered one disturbing incident in the late 1980s when her then three-year-old son was playing on the foot path on a tricycle outside their house, going back and forth down the road, when a car came up to him and a man offered him a lift home: ‘Quint said no, pointing to our house, but the man said it was no trouble and would have said something like, “your mum is wondering where you are”. Then I saw my sister who was coming home from work and she had seen Quinton talking to the guy in the car and screamed, running towards them. The car sped off.’ Katrina did not seem too fazed when retelling this story thirty years on, but

this could be because so much time as passed since the incident occurred. While concerns surrounding prowling strangers are certainly evident, so too is a sense that neighbours were watching—although, in this instance, it was Katrina’s sister.

Foma’i and Jillian believed the freedoms they enjoyed as children were the product of an era, when communities were perceived to be safer, irregardless of the form of tenure. Foma’i described hanging out in his neighbourhood: ‘Those were the days when you could roam the streets. Hang out on the streets and play.’ Foma’i and Jillian’s experiences, a generation apart, illustrate the comfort and security found in belonging to a community, where neighbours looked out for one another, that in Colleen’s experience, did not extend beyond her street. Despite changing societal perceptions about the people who live in state houses that became increasingly critical from the 1970s, making these neighbourhoods increasingly dangerous, here are examples, regardless of the period, when the safety of the household often extended to the immediate neighbourhood where people knew each other well enough to broaden their safety net.

The stratification of society

There are many examples of how state housing areas were cohesive, functioning communities, but there were also various ways in which these smaller societies were obstructively stratified. This section will examine the extent to which these divisions were a product of housing policies, or whether these were divisions that existed in wider society.

The location of Belle’s state house would come to influence where she lived the rest of her life, frequently comparing what could have been her life in a neighbouring suburb that she perceived as inferior. She described how where one lived was a matter of chance, out of one’s control: ‘You couldn’t say where you wanted to go. You had to just go. When we got Titahi Bay people said, ‘you’re not going there are you?’ But it was the best thing that happened. Could have been Porirua East.’ She reiterated a few times how fortunate she felt to have moved to Titahi Bay as opposed to Porirua: ‘And we were very lucky that it was Titahi Bay. Could have been Porirua, could have been Taita. No one had heard of Titahi Bay. It wasn’t a well-known place. It made me think we were going to a very unwelcome place, but it was the best thing that could have happened to us.’ Belle described: ‘First, we lived on Kura Street which was a double unit, that was alright. We were there and then we were given a bigger house in Dimock Street

because we had more children. It was a very lovely comfortable house. I liked it very much. Three bedrooms, nice lawns and gardens around it. Was in a good part of the Bay.'

Belle declared that she always had good neighbours since the 1950s. She didn't think she had ever had problems, that they were 'nice people' and that she had been 'very fortunate'. In saying this, Belle did describe how her Catholic neighbour in the unit on Kura St 'never gave them a good start'. She sympathetically remembered, 'they were so biased, you know? She was a difficult lady. I felt very sorry for her, I think she had a problem with one of her daughters. Things never seemed to go very well for her, so I felt quite sorry for her.' Belle recalled one particular incident when this neighbour upset her:

Rodney caused a lot of trouble. He was a little boy who wanted to be near everything. The children used to love coming over to play with Rodney. If the kids didn't get their own way and went home howling it was always Rodney's fault. And you know I remember one day, the children were all playing in the backyard, they would always come over to our place to play, because they wanted to play with Rodney, I don't know what happened, but one of the little girls went home crying and about an hour later—by that time they had all gone home to lunch including Rodney. This little girl came back and said, 'can I speak to Rodney please?' and I said 'yes'. I got Rodney to come out and say hello. She hit him across the face with a little wooden spade. I've never forgotten that. What a mean thing for a mum to do to send her child around to hit another child across the face with a spade. I couldn't have done that. Rodney hadn't done anything to her daughter. She just didn't get her way about something. There was a difference between Catholics and Protestants in those days. There was quite a big difference. They were a Catholic family and we were Protestant and if anything ever went wrong it was always Rodney's fault. Well, he was mischievous in a way, but I had a lovely neighbour who said, 'if I had a son he would be just like Rodney' and that made me feel good. She observed what was going on at my place. Every morning this little girl would be over at ours the minute her father went to work to come play with Rodney, and I use to tell her mother if she is not happy here, Rodney can play with others. I look back on these things [Belle laughs], you can see you are living totally different lives. Your little ones will be totally free but disciplined.

Her daughter Jillian also recalled religious lines being drawn during this period: 'Catholics. We absolutely had a thing with Catholics. We thought we were a little bit better than the Catholics for some reason. You didn't play with Catholic kids... I'm not sure if they were better than us or worse but they were not the same as us. You didn't talk to kids who went to Catholic schools.'

Erana described how her neighbourhood has always been defined by an element of gang rivalry. However, this has become more defined in recent years. Having been in her current

house since 1993, in a concentrated state housing area in Hastings, Erana described how increasingly dysfunctional her neighbourhood was becoming. She remembered when she moved in that it was all low-income couples with young families. Her and her partner didn't know anyone and it took a while to settle down, 'to work out who was who.' Erana thinks her kids enjoyed the neighbourhood, hanging out with other kids who were all in the same social environment—where there were constant parties. She said, 'It wasn't too bad. Around here it used to be quite noisy. Fights. Black Power on one side and Mongrel Mob on the other side.' Although her description suggests there was a large degree of anti-social behaviour, she is comparing it to her current situation where a recent stabbing took place a few houses down: 'It is bloody shocking. Domestic violence over there, Mongrel Mob members over there—shit, I can't wait to move. I am moving to another Housing Corp house. Three bedrooms nearby, it is not in this sort of environment. It is not in a Housing Corp environment.'

Irrespective of the period, these state housing areas, like any other community, were not egalitarian. The sense of stratification within these communities defined peoples place and in Erana's experience informed who to be weary of. Although, historically, religion has always been schismatic, the experiences of prejudice toward different state house locations, and the concentration of gang houses in some of these areas, reflect the state and society's attitudes toward state housing. Although Belle herself lived in state housing, she was critical of areas that she perceived as having developed negative reputations. As housing policies changed, concentrating poorer households into particular neighbourhoods, this changed the tenants' experiences, and when the tenants' experiences changed, society's critical attitude toward these tenants reflected this change.

The divisiveness of homeownership

Homeownership was one of the more divisive ways state housing was stratified, both within communities that mixed homeowners with state tenants, and in Aotearoa New Zealand's society as a whole. Although no one in these interviews was overtly negative toward state housing, there was general consensus that homeownership gave both security and more respect in society.

Although Belle looked back fondly on both of the state houses she raised her children in, through the 1950s and early 1960s, the house she was able to buy was by far her favourite place

to live. Throughout the interview, Belle's attention would continuously be brought back to the house she bought on Richard Street. She smiled as she described the moment she found this house: 'For some reason I had seen a house advertised in Richard Street for \$20,000 and I went to have a look at it, and I came back to see my husband, "I want to bid on that house. We can afford \$20k for a house". He agreed and had a look, so we ended up on Richard Street. It goes halfway up the hill, a two-level house with a garage beneath. You look out over the sea. It was a lovely place to live. And it was built by a builder. Nothing to complain about it. I was there for many years.' Belle frequently mentioned how it felt better owning a home and how this made her fortunate. She described how it was better for her financially: 'You didn't have to have a mortgage. We were very lucky that we didn't have to worry about paying rent or mortgage. From that point of view, it has been very good. Once I knew that we had bought our house there was no pressure by that time. It was mine you see, it all worked out.'

Belle reiterated multiple times how lucky she felt to be a property owner in her neighbourhood, where most people were in state housing or renting privately. She described how, possibly because of this distinction, her husband treated people differently when they owned their own home; although this was entwined with tensions relating to differences in religion: 'with some of my neighbours there was a little bit of snobbery from my husband, because of my husband. He was a little bit snobbish; it was because of his mother. Because it turned out these neighbours were great people. The father watched all his children's rugby games. Whereas Rodney's father wouldn't watch him play rugby. In those days' mums stayed at home. Religion always seemed to make a difference. I don't care who is Catholic but in those days it mattered.'

It is clear Belle's daughter, Jillian, also enjoyed her family having bought their own house, and the social prestige this came with, intermingled with her pride in coming from Titahi Bay. Jillian spoke about how, growing up in the fifties, she felt equal with her peers until college: 'People in Plimmerton were better, they were richer. You felt the hierarchy. But growing up in Titahi Bay was great. No one had any money; you were just wild on the streets. We were allowed to go all day without going home. Parents didn't care less.' She recalled one half of Titahi Bay was not state housing, and that they knew they were "better" than the kids who lived in the state houses. She mentioned that, when her parents eventually bought their house: 'I felt more special—down by the beach was where the money was.' She concluded that life there was really good: 'I was really happy in a state house. I was happy out as well. Just because of status. You walked past people's houses and wondered who lived there and I was one of those

girls who lived there. It wasn't a fancy house either. It was just by the beach and not a state house—I'm a real snob.'

Colleen, whose state house was in an enclave of privately-owned houses in a middle-class neighbourhood, was in favour of this mixed approach to state housing: 'You were still included. Some of the houses were owned, others were state houses. But you were all in the neighbourhood. We would meet after school. Play after school. I remember in the mornings going to school and the frost leaving footprints in the grass. We walked everywhere. There were commonalities. Fleur was in love with another neighbour. A range of people but we were all just people.' When considering state housing now, she is not sure if communities in these areas 'hold'. She discussed how building large groups of state houses together was ill-conceived, preferring the experience she had when the state houses were mixed in with privately owned houses. She believes the mandate has changed and this has exacerbated current housing issues: 'it used to be a rental for families that the government helped with. They were covered by the rent for the houses but there were chances to buy those properties. And then the government could plan to build more at the same time. Then we wouldn't have this shortage. I think they should have done that. The rent was really cheap. I don't know what they were thinking!'

In the early 1970s, Erana recalled moving into a flat in Dunedin and immediately expressing her distaste for all of the hills there. She described how the neighbourhood was full of older people and solo mothers. She described how it wasn't a very social community: 'We kept to ourselves. There wasn't a lot of mingling going on... It all depends what area you were in. But this first place, they were stuck up.' She described how there were a lot of privately-owned houses next door to state housing. She said it was the type of neighbourhood where, 'You wouldn't dare ask them for a cup of sugar. You could pick the state houses—stuck out like a bloody sore thumb.' Erana explained state house tenants were clearly identified in this neighbourhood, regardless of the houses looking the same, implying a perceived societal bias that differentiated them from homeowners: 'You could look around, and you wouldn't have bloody known. We all used to do our gardens, lawns were done, everything was cut back—I did this because of pressure. I used to tell the kids I don't give a shit what the house looks like on the inside, just make sure the mailman knows where we live. I still get someone to clean up the front even though we are about to move.' Although Erana did not mention this, her sense

of being an outsider in this community could have involved, in part, her being Māori, in what sounded like a predominantly Pākehā neighbourhood.

Noeline mentioned that she does want to own her own home and that her siblings bought houses and enjoyed the freedom that entails: ‘They chose where they wanted to live—what was right for them’. However, Noeline reiterated that she had a great upbringing and was weary of how homeownership was not a grounding experience for her sister: ‘it didn’t matter that mum and dad didn’t own it. It didn’t matter that it was small because it was the family home. My sister literally changed. Moved to Aus and got married. Had it all. Got the house and everything at her disposal. But we didn’t have that growing up. I stayed longer with my parents. She didn’t—left in her early twenties. When we have family get togethers now, she won’t do the dishes because it might break her nails. I’m like are you kidding me? It did change my sister.’ Noeline explained that they moved out of her family home in 2012 when her father passed away. Both her and her partner were working part time during this time and could not afford to take on the lease: ‘We got it at the rate the beneficiaries are charged, but we still could not afford it.’

When Fale’s mum bought a house when she was 15, two blocks away from the flats—a house that Fale has part ownership of—she watched her mum invest in the house: ‘I notice the difference with my mum, like she grows veges now. She spends way more time in the garden. You are investing your time into what you own, rather than what you might not always live in—renting versus buying. Should I invest time in growing veges or a tree? Her garden now has a mixture of plants, herbs, and veges, there is lavender, mint, rosemary. Lilies, roses, hydrangeas and other stuff.’ Although Fale doesn’t remember a time when her mum was ‘completely negative’ about living in a state house, Fale believes, ‘Now that she owns her own house, she is very grateful for the house she lives in.’

The continual prevalence of homeownership as the mainstream form of tenure in Aotearoa New Zealand is reflected in society and government’s attitudes toward state housing and its tenants from the 1950s. The creation of status due to homeownership impacted the way in which Erana experienced her community in Dunedin. It did not matter that the houses on her street were indistinguishable from one another, the prejudice she experienced because she did not own her home made her feel unwelcome and out of place in this neighbourhood.

Reflecting on state housing

Increasingly critical outsider perspectives of state housing, particularly from the late 1960s, reveal a distinction between the experiences of living in state housing, and those outside state housing perceived these experiences. This next section examines the extent to which society's perceptions of state housing influenced state tenant experiences.

Colleen recalled that living in state housing in the 1960s had a slight stigma attached to it: 'I guess we were kids. I don't remember thinking it was a good or a bad thing or thinking about it at all. It was only after at 14, 15, I began to realise.' This is when she discerned what she described as her home not being her own house: 'I'm not sure if someone told me this or whether I just knew. I guess, I don't know. Around that time, I became aware that my father wasn't around. It was a completely different time after he died. I went back to school and I was teased terribly because I cried a lot. I don't know if the other kids knew, perhaps the teachers told them. You weren't told things as a kid back then.'

Erana had drawn a link between her husband's aggressive behaviour and the negative perception of state housing: 'My husband who I separated from 14 years ago, he was a control freak, and I always wondered whether that was because we were in state housing and people looked down on us. Yeah, just a little bit. By other parents at school. It was not so bad at Frimley, a little at Mahora and lot at St Matthews, you would think at a Christian school they would have their shit together.' This did not mean Erana had negative feelings toward state housing, despite the challenging circumstances in her neighbourhood, explaining, 'I just wish they did more planning. What areas you stick people in. Across the road, this used to be all pensioner flats. And now with the mental health system we've got all the goons over there, the loonies. Three houses on the other side you have three mob members. I get a wee bit annoyed because I have grandchildren here and you have the loonies and the Mob. You have to be very careful. While there are homeless families with children sleeping in cars. I feel for some people. This weird bitch here set her flat up on fire—she is a weirdo—she was smoking P on the stove and it caught fire and went up the wall. I was coming back from the bakery and she leaned over the fence to ask if I could help, she said she needed some water and I asked what for? And she said to put out a fire. I looked up and it was a towering inferno. I told my niece to call the fire brigade. The fire engine was here, the ambulance and the police. They came over and asked what was she smoking? I said I don't know, I wasn't in the house. Bloody weirdos.'

Fale reflected on how she felt socially different from her peers because of where she lived in the 1990s and 2000s. She guesses this occurred when she was a teenager: ‘you know when you are a teenager you are so self-conscious about everything, comparing yourself to everybody else. I probably had friends in exactly the same situation as me. I was probably embarrassed about the house. Living in this complex, whereas they were living in a house in Newtown, I lived in this complex when my friends lived in these houses on their own section. And then it wasn’t until I was older that I realised that some of these houses were also state houses and they were in state housing anyway. I didn’t associate the two. I thought state housing was a flat type situation.’ Fale, when asked to reflect on the social implications of living in state house, stated ‘I would like to say I wasn’t embarrassed by it when I was younger, but I think when you are that age you begin to notice differences. The fact that maybe you notice wealth. At the time I probably would have said yes to a house on its own. When I think back now as an adult, I think it was fine. That is how I feel about it now which is probably different to how I would have felt about it then, you know?’

Moana looks back happily on her life in her family home in the 1990s. She had her son in 2001, and her daughter there too, ‘I actually miss it back then. It was good, besides mum and dad with the rent increases—Every year rent was going up. Mum and dad were getting extra jobs—stressful for them because we went to a catholic school and it was expensive.’ She described how they left in the mid-2000s: ‘we moved out and the lease changed over to my cousin. Not sure if Mum and Dad did that legally. Dad got a promotion. Packed everything into a container, that was a mission. Mum and Dad were like hoarders.’ She did not feel any stigma attached to living in state housing. She didn’t elaborate on this; it didn’t seem like something she had given much thought. She described how although not all her memories were happy there: ‘some sad stories, we had family pass away, and mates, committing suicide.’ Her strong sense of attachment to her family home is evident: ‘I don’t remember other places we stayed at. Like I remember, but I don’t remember them like I do this one.’

For Moana, although aware of the financial pressures of punitive rent increases in the 1990s, living in a tight-knit community insulated her from detecting any social stigma associated with state housing, however, this was generally not the case for state tenants. Fale was objective about living in state housing on reflection, but in hindsight, she acknowledged feeling embarrassed when she was old enough to discern a difference between her living situation and

that of her peers. Erana's experience exemplified how changing housing policies encouraged society's increasingly critical perception of state house experiences, and this stigma changed how the people living in state housing viewed their own experience. She also described what she perceived to be a sense of unfairness in the allocation process, mentioning families forced to sleep in cars, while people she thought were less deserving had a state roof over their head. Erana's acknowledgment of the current housing crisis, has affected, at least to some degree, how she perceives state housing and its shortcomings.

Conclusions

These oral histories demonstrate how the perceptions of community and what home is are inextricably linked with the housing decisions that the government was making. The day-to-day experiences of state house tenants from different periods reflected similarities both cross generationally and with wider society, raising children, household chores, cooking, gardening, celebrating with family, socialising with neighbours, going to school, playing rugby and kittens. However, because of changing government policies, the existence of a distinction between the experiences of living in state housing and how people who didn't live in state housing perceived these experiences became increasingly defined, from as early as the 1950s. Belle described how lucky she felt to have been allocated a state house in the early 1950s, when private renting was difficult to come by, and homeownership was out of reach. State housing offered her family a good house with security, in a safe community, at an affordable price, that was not available privately.

Policies began to visibly change over the second half of the twentieth century reflecting different intentions for state housing. Policies transitioned away from prioritising the nuclear family, and the lifestyle that went with this, as was the case with Belle and her daughter Jillian. Instead, state housing supported increasingly low-income earners, at a 'decent' level, that often included single-parent households, and Māori and Pacific Island families. The consequences of society being able to identify state house tenants based on their socio-economic status was acknowledged by Jillian and Colleen, and, to a greater extent Erana and Fale, who each experienced feeling a social stigma. By the 1990s, the government increasingly promoted self-reliance, punitively targeting those deemed too dependent on the state. Transitioning state house rents from income related to market driven, was one way of drawing negative attention to state house tenants. Moana described how this period was a noticeably stressful time for her

parents, who had to find additional work to cover rising costs. These changes demonstrated how housing policies over fifty years influenced society's perceptions of state housing, and that, both the government and society changed the experiences of those living in state housing.

It is evident the government's overarching emphasis on the societal merits of homeownership from the 1950s, distinguishing state house tenants from New Zealander's who owned their home contributed to this stigma. Prevalent throughout the interviews from different periods was the strong sense that homeownership was better than living in a state house, that it signaled social superiority. Erana's experience in the 1970s of feeling like an unwelcome neighbour because she did not own her home in an enclave of privately owned houses illustrated this. Although this was not always the case, where Colleen described growing up in a state house amongst privately owned houses, with memories of feeling she belonged to a very cohesive neighbourhood. Whether this had more to do with Colleen's background, coming from a Pākehā family with a widowed working mother is unclear. Nevertheless, Colleen acknowledged feeling a stigma attached to state housing as she grew older, however this did not come from within her own community but at school, in wider society.

State housing policies also physically changed the environment of state houses that in turn affected attitudes and perspectives toward state housing and its occupants. With an increasing focus on providing multi-unit buildings, in contrast to single-unit houses, for Fale, being conscious of a perceived inferiority of the multi-unit building she lived in, illustrated how society's idea of what constitutes a home changed her experience. Erana's experience spotlighted the inadequate spatial and social planning of the street she continues to live on, with a constant gang presence and increasing numbers of people with mental health issues. Policies that concentrated state housing into particular areas, without thought to encourage a functioning community, as was the case in the 1930s and 1940s, changed the attitudes and perspectives of society toward these state house areas. Erana highlighted the stratification of her neighbourhood that contributed to her experience of feeling unsafe in her immediate environment and her perception of being treated with disdain in wider society. Many of the interviewee's experiences, particularly from the 1980s and 1990s, illustrate the distinction between the realities of living in state housing versus the negative perspectives from those who did not live in state housing. Excluding Erana's experience in a socially difficult neighbourhood, there was no mention of rundown or derelict houses, or having to contend with frequent anti-social behaviour in state house communities. Noeline recalled how exciting it

was returning to her newly renovated state house, illustrating a decidedly different picture from a common perspective of state houses being ‘slum-like’.

Policies from the 1950s, through to the 1990s dictated the shape and the inhabitants of state houses, however, there were many examples of how tenants were able challenge mainstream notions of what community and home looked like. These communities were never egalitarian being stratified in various ways, whether it be by religion, ethnicity, gang affiliations and so on, yet still a sense of community was negotiated informed by these social divisions. With a distinct increase in the diversity of cultures in state housing from the 1970s, adapting spaces to assert cultural identities was one way in which Foma’i, Moana and Noeline’s families made their homes expressions of themselves and their wider communities. State housing policies by the 1980s, actively discouraged long-term tenancies, concentrated low-income families together, housing tenants in multi-unit flats, often with communal living spaces—the antithesis of mainstream understandings of what a home is and how community is constructed. And yet, it was in these state houses that important milestones were shared with family and friends, and identities were able to be expressed. These state houses were where a sense of home and community was made, inextricably linked to one another, and not often recaptured in the private housing market.

7. Conclusions

Changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing have been inextricably linked with housing policies reflecting society's idea of what community and home means, as filtered through government policy. The state had created a form of tenure that was considered an alternative to homeownership in the 1930s and 1940s, introducing a state rental sector to gain command over an underperforming private housing market. Policies relating to state housing reflected what home and community meant in the public mind. Those who lived in these early state houses were lucky because houses were well-built and thoughtfully designed, particularly given the poor standards of private rental housing available in the 1930s. There was an emphasis on town planning, providing community facilities and visibly promoting attractive, safe suburban neighborhoods that encouraged family life and domesticity. These houses were built for the nuclear family: Pākehā households with breadwinner fathers, full-time mothers and healthy children.

From 1950, policies changed, targeting state housing toward low-income households, concentrating the poor into distinct areas that lacked community facilities, in lower quality housing. The nuclear family continued to reflect the majority of tenants through the 1970s, but because of the changing social landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand, other household structures began to gain access to state housing. Within a decade the pattern of applicants for state housing had completely shifted, and by the mid-1980s applications from single people outstripped that of married couples. Negative public perceptions of state housing visibly took hold in the mid-1960s, with obstructive stereotypes of tenants lacking in morals and having poor lifestyle choices circulated by media, politicians and popular culture. Prejudice toward the poor contributed to these perceptions of state housing. There was a social intolerance toward those perceived to have chosen to depend on the state instead of aspiring to have independence. Attitudes toward state housing and its inhabitants became increasingly disparaging, filtered through government policies that linked this form of tenure to low-income households. The lack of long-term security of tenure on quarter-acre sections, and a perception that these were run-down houses, in ill-conceived neighbourhoods, filled with unemployed New Zealanders, did not align with general perceptions of what a community and a home is. By the 1990s, after close to a century of encouraging high rates of homeownership, state house tenants were left increasingly on the outside of mainstream society.

The oral histories of previous state tenants gave this thesis an insider perspective on how changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing reflected how society views community and what home means to different people. Policies determined how tenants' experienced state houses, deciding where these neighbourhoods would be, the types of housing that would be provided, who would live in them and for how long. Examples were provided of policies implemented from the 1970s that had negative implications on the lives of those who lived in state housing, where a lack of concern to foster a functioning community went beyond the implications of grouping the poor in state houses, creating single-class neighbourhoods. It is evident from this research that changing policies involving the spatial and social planning of these neighbourhoods changed tenants' experiences, and when the tenants' experiences changed so did society's attitudes. Through the experiences of state house tenants, it is evident that policies created distinctions between the experiences of living in state housing and how people who didn't live in state housing perceived the experiences. Increasingly differentiating low-income households from mainstream society was a driver of this distinction, as was homeownership status, or lack thereof. However, sometimes this distinction was blurred, because the stigma that came to be associated with state housing later on started impacting how the people living in state housing viewed their own experience. Even if they were having a positive experience, the stigma made it negative for some.

Distinctions between the lived experience and society's perceptions did not always align with the realities of life in a state house. State house tenants were generally poorer than those in other forms of tenure, a gap that became increasingly wider from the 1980s. Nevertheless, there were strong similarities between state house tenants and homeowners. Memories of the day-to-day rhythms of life were decidedly normal, doing housework, socialising with family and friends, working out in the garden. Special occasions were celebrated in these spaces, children were born, and parents died. These houses became homes for many of the inhabitants because of these personal experiences.

Despite the lack of facilities provided in these areas from the 1950s, people continued to find ways to forge connections with their neighbours. The oral histories provided examples of how state houses were adapted to suit the lives of the tenants and to build connections within these communities. Low hedges and quiet streets in the 1950s and 1960s encouraged children to go out and play with their neighbours. As the style of state housing changed and section sizes

became smaller and in closer proximity to one another, these state housing areas continued to foster strong communities by utilising communal areas. Irrespective of the period, the space around state housing continued to be an extension of the home. State housing areas were stratified and not egalitarian in nature, differentiated by religion, ethnicity, location, homeownership, gang affiliations and so on, and it was these distinctions that contributed to the strong communities that were forged. With a distinct increase in the diversity of cultures in state housing from the 1970s, particularly Māori and Pacific Islander populations, these spaces were adapted, both in and around the homes, to assert cultural identities. Despite perceptions that state housing lacked a sense of community and were not homes, in the traditional sense that they were not owner-occupied, tenants were able to adapt these spaces to express themselves and build lasting ties with their community, something most likely not seen from an outside perspective.

Regardless of the continual presence of state housing since the 1930s, housing problems have not gone away, and remain a fundamental issue in our current society. Because of the nature of history not being static, this thesis is different from other oral histories because the interviews for this oral history were undertaken in 2020, amidst a housing crisis and therefore provides current perspectives on the topic of state housing in Aotearoa New Zealand. There were no strongly negative sentiments toward state housing from any of the interviewees across fifty years of experiences. It is likely that there are multiple contributing factors for the positive perception of state housing from those who lived in these houses. Lasting memories of positive experiences in these houses, despite the perceptions from people living outside state housing, is inextricably entwined with an awareness of how difficult it is in the current private housing market to access affordable houses. Because of the current housing climate, forcing many New Zealanders into unhealthy living arrangements, this thesis contributes to a wider ongoing discussion about public housing and its role in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The interviews conducted for this research were sourced from the researcher's own acquaintances and this method of data collection highlighted various limitations. Although this research never intended to be representative of all state house tenants, it unintentionally became very heavily weighted toward female perspectives and growing up as a child in state housing. A richer understanding of the different experiences of living in state housing would have been gained from having the voice of more males in this research, as would have interviewing people who lived in state housing in their retirement and tenants who had lived alone. On reflection, a

greater emphasis on recruiting more interviewees from different backgrounds would have been valuable to this thesis. Nevertheless, as a qualitative research project it succeeded in giving the researcher an in depth insight into life in a state house for the people who were interviewed.

This thesis has contributed to existing literature examining changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing from the standpoint of government, wider society, and from state house tenants. By studying a range of primary and secondary sources from the perspectives of both outsiders and insiders, this work has examined how policy changes over 65 years reflected how society views community and what home means to different people. Despite policies including, but not limited to, increasing privatisation of state housing, means testing tenants and supplying medium density buildings that all encouraged a stigmatised experience, those who lived in state houses often found them safe, durable communities. Irrespective of the period and changing attitudes and perspectives toward state housing, these were places where people who lived in them were able to authentically express themselves. The experiences of state house tenants was often positive despite government policies and the various pressures that resulted from these changes. Inseparable from the sense of place that was felt within their homes, state house tenants were able to forge strong lasting communities.

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