

# PACIFIC PEOPLES, NEW ZEALAND HOUSING-RELATED POLITICAL RHETORIC AND EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

---

*Georgia Brown\**  
*Adele Norris†*

## **Abstract**

In the nearly 50 years since the Dawn Raids, Pacific peoples have continuously faced a housing crisis defined by precarious dwellings. This article employs content analysis to examine the political framing of Pacific peoples in housing-related political rhetoric from 2007 to 2021. The analysis reveals that Pacific peoples almost exclusively featured only in discussions led by Pacific and Māori politicians who sought to add their communities' perspectives into debates where most politicians either ignored them or made uninformed comments. The findings reveal levels of epistemic violence, meaning Pacific peoples are placed in positions where they have to prove their experiences are real within power structures that render institutional constraints invisible. Limited attention towards the specificity of what this article refers to as the "Pacific housing crisis" illustrates an active ignorance employed to uphold the dominant epistemic order. Just like the Dawn Raids, which fell into national amnesia and were erased from public memory for decades, the Pacific housing crisis follows the same trend.

## **Keywords**

Aotearoa New Zealand, Dawn Raids, epistemic violence,  
housing crisis, Pacific peoples, state-sanctioned violence

## **Introduction**

On 1 August 2021, then New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern issued a formal apology for the historical violent policing of Pacific people during the 1970s Dawn Raids. The Dawn Raids were state-sanctioned police raids and random street checks targeting solely Pacific Island overstayers primarily in the Auckland area (Ongley & Pearson, 1995). Within the last decade, a nationwide housing crisis has emerged in Aotearoa New Zealand

reflecting the impacts of a combination of factors: a sharp decline in homeownership, a shortage of affordable quality homes and an increasing demand for emergency housing (Bourassa & Shi, 2017; White & Nandedkar, 2019). Al Jazeera's recent investigative documentary *New Zealand: A Place to Call Home* (2020) explores the housing crisis with a specific focus on the rental market. The documentary opens by exploring the efforts of the advocacy group Auckland Action Against

\* Master's Student, Sociology and Social Policy, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.  
Email: gjb24@students.waikato.ac.nz

† Senior Lecturer, Sociology and Social Policy, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Poverty (AAAP) to house Aucklanders. Those served are predominantly families composed of minimum-wage earners who spend upwards of 70% of their income on housing. Most of this group consists of Pacific populations, which AAAP refers to as the “invisible population”. The term also denotes the growing phenomenon of overcrowding in Auckland. Families and individuals who are otherwise homeless but may have found temporary shelter living with friends or relatives are part of this group.

Auckland remains a key site for Pacific peoples as a place marked by racial inequality and segregation (Anae, 2020; Chisholm, 2022; Gorrell, 2018; Shilliam, 2012). A convergence of public unrest around policing, housing and land rights occurred during the 1970s. Across the country as a whole during this time, protest groups formed to support tenants who paid high rents relative to their incomes and endured poor-quality and insecure housing. These protests were the most intense in Auckland. Particularly visible during this time were the Polynesian Panthers, who worked closely with tenants running various community initiatives (Anae, 2020; Shilliam, 2012). Inspiring young Brown populations to address poor housing and working conditions and to engage in acts of resistance, the Polynesian Panthers were considered a national threat that needed to be neutralised. The Polynesian Panthers incited a special kind of fear in the New Zealand Government, given the global influence of the Black Panthers in the United States at the time. The narrative of threat fashioned around the Panthers and by extension Pacific peoples was a major impetus behind the Dawn Raids. Nearly 50 years after the 1974–1976 Dawn Raids, Auckland remains starkly segregated by race and class, with the same populations now in the grip of a housing crisis (Chisholm et al., 2017). While it is important to note that the issue of housing affordability now also affects white middle-class groups, hence its recognition in government agendas (Madden & Marcuse, 2016), it has been a persistent feature for oppressed and dispossessed groups over the last half century (Chisholm, 2022; Gorrell, 2018; Kake, 2019; Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Norris & Nandedkar, 2020).

Living in precarious dwellings has engendered severe housing-related illnesses for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa (Gorrell, 2018). For example, Norris and Nandedkar’s (2020) discourse analysis explores ways race and ethnicity emerged and were articulated in housing-related academic discourse between 2013 and 2019. Their study

revealed that racial disparities (e.g., between white, Pacific and Indigenous populations) in the housing market are often acknowledged. However, such recognition is not accompanied by analyses of institutional racism. Racism is rarely mentioned as a contributing factor. Rather, a few sentences devoted to various racial and ethnic groups represented in low-wage work are given as the sole driver of racial disparities in access to housing. Pacific people and issues related to overcrowding and housing-related illnesses emerged as a secondary theme in the study. Because overcrowding was often primarily associated with Indigenous and Pacific peoples, the phenomenon was racialised without connecting such outcomes to historical patterns of racial formation linked to processes of urbanisation and immigration policies. As noted above, increased attention has been given to Aotearoa’s housing crisis over the past decade. White and Nandedkar (2019) found that the term “housing crisis” was mentioned only twice in parliamentary housing-policy debates in 2012 but no less than 38 times in 2013. Yet, studies documenting Pacific peoples’ increasingly precarious housing arrangements began emerging during the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Butler et al., 2003; Cheer et al., 2002; Howden-Chapman et al., 2005; Kearns & Smith, 1994; Milne & Kearns, 1999). However, advocacy and grassroots organisations remain the leading voices detailing the plight of Pacific peoples’ housing crisis. In this regard, national attention towards a housing crisis in New Zealand in many ways parallels that of the United States with respect to which groups are able to garner mainstream attention.

In the United States during the early 1990s, when a new generation of young, middle-class Americans could not afford to purchase similar homes to those in which they were raised, the term “affordable housing crisis” emerged (Hartnett, 1993). At the periphery of these conversations, if considered at all, were low-income and Black people from most suburban communities and the plethora of ills afflicting urban areas. Mainstream media’s failure to cover patterns of racial and class segregation as elements of the housing crises—engendering homeless and persistent poverty—exacerbated the problem. As a result, housing-related hardships for those having experienced generations of social housing were framed as a failure of that population rather than a failure of public policy (Hartnett, 1993). The fact that the term “housing crisis” is introduced in mainstream national discourses only when more affluent and white segments of the population feel

the effects speaks to the nebulous nature of housing crises. Therefore, as this discussion of the Pacific housing crisis advances, it is imperative to examine the relationship between the state, Pacific peoples and housing/property. This article contributes to this discourse by addressing contemporary specificities of Pacific people and precarious housing, an issue that has generally been ignored in academic housing scholarship. This exploratory case study examines how Pacific peoples' experiences are captured in housing-related political rhetoric.

This article is structured as follows. First, a brief sketch of the population politically referred to as "Pacific peoples" is provided. While it is understood Pacific peoples are dispersed throughout the country, particular attention is devoted to the primary site of the Dawn Raids, Auckland. Auckland is also an area that illustrates the specificity of embedded patterns of state-sanctioned violence undergirding present-day conditions. The article then engages in an examination of how Pacific peoples' precarious housing and related health issues are captured and addressed in housing-related political discourse.

### **Pacific peoples' post-war migration**

Pacific peoples account for over 380,000 people in Aotearoa (Stats NZ, 2019). They are very diverse, collectively making up over 7% of the total population. It is essential to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Pacific peoples, given this population is often grouped despite having very distinct histories, stereotypes and phenotype differences. Pacific peoples in Aotearoa are comprised of Samoans (49%), Cook Islander Māori (21%), Tongans (20%), Niueans (8%), Fijians (3%) and Tokelauans (3%). In the late 1940s and 1950s, New Zealand immigration recruitment targeted Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands (Ongley & Pearson, 1995). These groups today comprise 90% of the populations politically designated as Pacific populations. This article refers primarily to people from these countries of origin. It is worth acknowledging that within these groups lie varying degrees of power, which is not explored here.

Pacific peoples migrated to New Zealand when manual labour was needed for post-war industrial expansion. Since 1945, immigration policies in New Zealand have tended to respond to fluctuations in labour demands (Ongley & Pearson, 1995). During this time, migration from the Pacific was the only significant non-European migration, and it provided a valuable source of "unskilled" labour for New Zealand's expanding secondary

industries (Awatere, 1984; Ongley & Pearson, 1995).

With an expanding economy, places like Auckland experienced a growing upper-middle-class population. Hospitality services were in high demand to accommodate the rising upper-middle-class suburbs of Auckland. Pacific populations predominantly filled these low-wage/skill occupations in hospitality and manufacturing, which resulted in their marginalised status in the labour market (Milne & Kearns, 1999; Ongley & Pearson, 1995). Combined with the fact that people from the Pacific Islands are easily identified as ethnically "Other", this has meant that many Pacific groups have been targets of racism and prone to poverty and marginalisation in the housing market (Milne & Kearns, 1999).

According to Tukuitonga (2013), roughly a quarter of all births in the Auckland region are of Pacific peoples, and two-thirds of the entire Pacific Island population is born in New Zealand. Two-thirds of New Zealand's Pacific population live in the Auckland region, mostly in South Auckland and Central Auckland (Tukuitonga, 2013). Donna Awatere (1984) identified housing and employment as the principal gatekeeping systems, referencing areas in greater Auckland as prime locations for this process in the 1970s. Presently, Auckland is characterised by a housing crisis consisting of undersupply of affordable quality homes for buyers and renters. However, Pacific peoples have consistently experienced the highest levels of overcrowding, low levels of homeownership and higher rates of child poverty (Bullen et al., 2008; Norris & Nandedkar, 2020; Paterson et al., 2018; Schluter et al., 2007; Teariki, 2017) for half a century. For example, Paterson et al. (2018) found that in 2018, 15% of the general population reported their houses were too cold or difficult to heat, and Pacific mothers reported cold homes at more than double the rate of the general population (33%). This trend holds across other major housing problems. Reports of small houses stood at 11% for the general population and 27% for Pacific mothers.

### **Precarious housing and employment**

Over the last two decades, Auckland has received attention for being home to the world's largest Polynesian population—a population associated with the city's poorest and least healthy dwellings (Cheer et al., 2002; Schluter et al., 2007). A growing body of scholarship linking housing affordability, overcrowding and poor health outcomes is emerging in New Zealand. Ade

and Rehm's (2020) article "Home Is Where the Health Is: New Zealand Responses to a 'Health' Housing Crisis" established that two-thirds of New Zealand's housing stock is uninsulated and inadequately heated. This study comes decades after scholarship in the 1990s linking housing affordability, poor insulation and overcrowding to poor health outcomes in Auckland, specifically South Auckland. For example, Howden-Chapman et al. (2012) explored the relationship between poor housing conditions and higher rates of respiratory-illness hospital admission in winter and excess winter mortality. It is estimated that 16% (approximately 1,600 deaths annually) of excess winter mortality is related to fuel poverty, which is defined as a household needing to spend more than 10% of its income on all household fuels to achieve satisfactory indoor warmth (Howden-Chapman et al., 2012). The effects of winter-related illnesses are more severe among older populations. Pacific people are more likely than the general population to be renters well into old age, specifically public renters as opposed to private renters, which older Asian and white populations occupy (Pledger et al., 2019). The experiences of older renters reveal a key feature of racial stratification, which is associated with the racial wealth gap and homeownership (Shapiro, 2006).

For example, a report by the Southern Initiative et al. (2018) indicates Auckland's Pacific populations' net worth is on average \$12,000 compared with \$87,000 for the non-Pacific population in Auckland (p. 5). When comparing white/Pākehā net worth with Pacific populations, there is a \$102,000 difference between the two groups (Stats NZ, 2016). Considering net worth alone within housing discussions suggests Pacific peoples will have bad experiences accessing quality housing. Because homeownership is an essential aspect of economic, educational and generational stability, it is an important initial site to examine the social implications linked to the precarity of housing and employment (Norris & Nandedkar, 2020).

### **Poor housing conditions, social inequities and stigmatising narratives**

Much of the Pacific population live in areas of significant economic disadvantage. Tukuitonga (2013) establishes that nine out of 10 Pacific people live in low-decile regions. Areas with high rates of deprivation are associated with inadequate access to healthcare services and poor health outcomes. In relation to this, Pacific populations have some of the worst health outcomes in all of New Zealand, where the needs of people

within these highly deprived communities are often unmet. Poor housing exposes occupants to damp, cold and mouldy conditions that increase the risk of respiratory conditions such as the common cold and asthma, while also increasing feelings of fatigue and poor concentration (Butler et al., 2003). Butler et al. (2003) mention that Pacific peoples are more likely to express such symptoms than any other group in society. Nearly half of the Pacific population live in housing conditions that are damp and mouldy, compared with whites/Pākehā, of whom one in five live in these conditions (Cann, 2021). The rate of rheumatic fever among Pacific children is more than 50 times that of whites/Pākehā in New Zealand, and this rate is rising (Naea et al., 2016). Overcrowded homes are the reality for many Pacific families. The 2018 census uncovered that roughly two in five Pacific people were living in overcrowded spaces.

It is important to note that Pacific peoples experience severe housing deprivation at four times the rate of whites/Pākehā (Cann, 2021). Such deprivation contributes to the outcomes of Pacific populations in all aspects of their life (Cann, 2021), but these outcomes are left out of mainstream narratives, which explain the prevalence of overcrowding as a phenomenon among Pacific peoples. For example, racially discriminatory housing-market practices function as a barrier to healthy and adequate homes. Even when one has the income, other negative stigmas associated with Pacific peoples come into play in housing-screening practices that rarely receive attention in academic scholarship exploring institutional barriers (Houkamau & Sibley, 2015; Norris & Nandedkar, 2020). Moreover, stigmatising racial narratives of desirable and undesirable tenants arise and play out in the housing market, exacerbating existing struggles (Lewis et al., 2020).

This discussion has thus far provided a brief account of the long-standing nature of Pacific peoples' precarious housing, which predates mainstream national coverage of the housing crisis. The article now turns to how Pacific peoples' housing struggles are reflected in political debates seeking solutions. The primary goal of this examination is to capture how policy actors have understood and articulated housing-related social problems afflicting Pacific peoples. Two statutory amendments were selected to explore political rhetoric prior to and after their passing: the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2010 and the Residential Tenancies (Prohibiting Letting Fees) Amendment Act 2018. These amendments were selected because the former was enacted prior

to mainstream political talk of a “housing crisis” and the latter after its recognition.

### Methodology

This article is interested in the trends that have emerged before and after the notion of a nationwide housing crisis filtered into mainstream political discourses. This exploratory case study examines this phenomenon in parliamentary housing-related political rhetoric from 2007 to 2021. Hansard parliamentary debates relating to the Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2010 and the Residential Tenancies (Prohibiting Letting Fees) Amendment Act 2018 were chosen as focal points. Hansard is an artefact of communication at the highest level of policymaking, making a content analysis ideal. This examination prioritised analysing text relating only to substantive arguments/debates involving Pacific peoples and housing, rather than simply counting the times the term “Pacific peoples” was said. This decision was made in response to the frequency with which “Māori and Pacific people” are grouped together as marginalised people even though they have distinct histories and experiences. Particular attention was devoted to identifying the contexts that prompt the introduction of Pacific peoples into the debate, and the frequency of, and the amount of emphasis or time given to, issues related to Pacific peoples.

Codes were analytically developed, inductively identified, and transformed into themes and sub-themes (Lune & Berg, 2017). To establish initial codes, the first phase of the analysis consisted of a review of housing-related literature—academic journal articles and newspaper articles published during 2000–2021—to identify key themes associated with Pacific peoples. A theme’s importance related to how many times the words/themes were raised in relation to Pacific peoples and the amount of attention devoted to issues raised. Words or concepts that emerged sporadically without supplementary details substantiating relevance were not included. Six main themes emerged in the first phase: “Auckland”, “health disparities”, “social housing”, “overcrowding”, “homelessness” and “low-wage work”. In addition, three secondary themes emerged: “youth housing-related illness”, “Dawn Raids” and “institutional racism”. With the exception of a few articles specifying a particular country in relation to housing (e.g., Tonga or Niue), most discussions referenced Pacific peoples in general. The second phase of the analysis followed the same process used in the examination of Hansard debates, using the initial code from

the first phase along with the keywords “Pacific peoples”, “Pasifika”, “Pacific Islands”, “Samoans” and “Tongans” as starting points.

### Analysis

The analysis of 14 years of Hansard debates revealed Pacific people and housing received a paucity of attention. When Pacific issues emerged apart from general statements of overcrowding, they were introduced primarily by Pacific speakers and speakers from the Māori Party in hearings leading up to and after the 2018 Residential Tenancies (Prohibiting Letting Fees) Amendment Act. The phrase “Māori and Pacific peoples” appeared periodically. This study only examined statements explicitly related to Pacific people that were followed by specific accounts and statements that expounded on specific conditions. Themes and subthemes were derived from statements detailing the scope of the problem.

For example, over the 14-year period covered, politicians’ responses tend to reiterate the same details. On 5 July 2016, Su’a William Sio (Labour—Māngere) responded to the Minister for Pacific Peoples, Peseta Sam Lotu-liga (National—Maungakiekie), in reference to the new housing initiatives that had yet to reach Pacific peoples: “Is the household net worth statistics report incorrect that Pacific peoples’ average net worth is \$12,000, a ninth of the European population’s \$114,000, and that is largely because Pacific homeownership rates have fallen?” Almost 10 years prior, Dr Pita Sharples (then Co-Leader—Māori Party), on 7 August 2007, made similar statements in response to the framing of poverty in relation to housing and debt prevention:

Predominantly, the people who are preyed upon by what John Minto has termed the “parasites of poverty” are Māori and Pacific Island people. The Ministry of Social Development’s living standards survey found that 20.6 percent of Māori families were likely to have fallen behind with hire purchase, credit card, or store payments. It is a big difference from the 8.7 percent of European families in the same position. Debts on cars, furniture, and appliances now comprise the biggest amounts of debts accumulated, accounting for some 38 percent of all arrears owed by clients of the Federation of Family Budgeting Services last year. The debt levels are even higher for Pasifika. In 2000, 24 percent of Pasifika people, 16 percent of Māori people, and a mere 5 percent of Pākehā had fallen into arrears with rent and mortgage payments.

But this Social Assistance (Debt Prevention

and Minimisation) Amendment Bill is not about families who have plunged into debt. This bill is not concerned with financial pain and the widening disparities between the different sectors in our society. This bill is about a Government agency, the Ministry of Social Development, which has an estimated actual forecast for 2006-07 of \$1,124,430,000. The bill is to enable this agency to recover debts by targeting the vulnerable, specifically the prisoner population. It is a population of which the great majority, 60 percent, of all inmates are either Māori or Pasifika.

It is important to note that these two examples are among only five substantive statements that focus specifically on Pacific people during the period under study. These statements did not ignite further debate, which is also significant. Discussion of how Pacific peoples' housing inadequacy intensified under the Fifth National Government (2008–2017) met the criteria for analysis. These testimonies included detailed accounts of declining homeownership, the wealth gap, South Auckland, and the failure of the government to address the issue. On 9 May 2017, Su'a William Sio's (Labour—Māngere) comments echoed the statements above:

Here is the big issue: on Saturday there was a group of 500 people from all of South Auckland who came together, and I asked them: what is the No. 1 issue for you? Housing—for Pacific families, it is housing. Our homeownership at the moment is 16 percent. In 2013 figures it was 18.5 percent. That means 74 percent of our Pacific population does not own a home. How sad is that? Is that not an indictment that this Government's policy does not favour Pacific people? It is even more reflected when you look at the median net worth of Pacific people: it is \$12,000. The median net worth for the rest of New Zealand is \$87,000. That is the gap—\$12,000 median net worth for Pacific and \$87,000 median net worth for the rest of New Zealand. That is the gap.

In addition to these repeated themes, a pattern emerged of Pacific peoples constantly having to prove their struggle is real. Table 1 details the themes and subthemes identified from the content analysis. As noted above, the themes included words and phrases that were only mentioned in relation to Pacific peoples. Embedded systemic barriers producing and reproducing inadequate housing conditions for Pacific peoples were not discussed. As reflected in Table 1, overcrowding

was the foremost theme identified in discussions of Pacific people and housing. This issue was mainly associated with Pacific peoples and Māori.

Institutional racism was not identified explicitly in the content analysis. Houkamau and Sibley's (2015) empirical study examined differences in homeownership among Māori and found systemic factors that influenced homeownership. The study found that self-reported appearance as Māori significantly predicted decreased rates of homeownership, leading to the conclusion that New Zealand's home lending industry was institutionally racist. Individual cases of racial discrimination in housing and policing in general, such as the extra-legal photographing of Pacific youth by law enforcement, illustrate race and ethnicity is a factor influencing early engagement with law enforcement (Dempster & Norris, 2022; Lewis et al., 2020; Norris & Tauri, 2021). Thus, ethnicity should be considered in housing screening practices as well.

Employment and education were not extracted as themes in relation to Pacific peoples' housing. Yet, a wealth gap between racial groups was reiterated as a primary contributor to the financial position and housing opportunities for Pacific households. Lastly, with the exception of mentioning Tongans and Samoans in relation to South Auckland, "Pacific peoples" was the most common phrase used to discuss housing-related issues.

## Discussion

Overall, this examination of housing-related political rhetoric revealed that very little attention is devoted to Pacific peoples in parliamentary debates. This finding parallels that of Lola Gorrell's 2018 study "Not Sold on the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Act 2013: How Housing Legislation in New Zealand Ignores Our Pacific People on the Peripheries". It is evident that housing outcomes for Pacific peoples are not prioritised within parliamentary debates to the extent that reflects their sustained lived experiences in precarious housing. Additionally, the government's recent charge to address the idea of a nationwide housing crisis implies that Pacific peoples' plight alone did not signal a "crisis". Thus, this examination reveals an active silencing of Pacific peoples' struggles that carries serious social implications. This article situates this active silence as part of the broader structure of epistemic violence, specifically practices of silencing with respect to testimony, which is discussed by (Dotson, 2011).

Kristie Dotson (2011) draws on Gayatri Spivak's (1988) application of the concept of

**TABLE 1** Primary and secondary themes related to Pacific populations in housing policy-related political rhetoric, 2007–2021

Primary themes	Secondary themes
Poor housing; social housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severely overcrowded dwellings</li> <li>• Dwelling in cars, garages, boarding housing</li> <li>• Damp, mouldy, poorly insulated</li> </ul>	Emergency housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing reliance</li> <li>• Does not fix the problem</li> <li>• Evidence of government failure</li> </ul>
Accessing housing in Auckland specifically <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South Auckland</li> <li>• Children most at risk for overcrowding</li> <li>• Lack of response from government</li> <li>• Tongans and Samoans</li> <li>• Highest rates of rheumatic fever</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Low-wage families</li> </ul>	Political Inactivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous governments' refusal to acknowledge the persistence of Pacific housing struggles</li> <li>• Solutions vague/unclear</li> <li>• Dawn Raids</li> <li>• Institutional racism</li> </ul>
Decline in Ownership; Low-Wage Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing income and wealth gap</li> <li>• Highest decline in homeownership</li> </ul>	Renters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expensive upfront cost/deposits</li> <li>• Locked out of homeownership</li> </ul>
Housing-related illness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventable</li> <li>• Added financial burden to Pacific households</li> <li>• Increase in cases of rheumatic fever</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Housing-related illnesses (respiratory diseases, infectious disease and psychological stress)</li> <li>• Services not available to meet demand</li> </ul>	Social housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pacific Social Housing Network (2015)</li> </ul>

epistemic violence as a way of marking practices of silencing marginalised groups. Epistemic violence in testimony, Dotson (2011) posits, “is a refusal, intentional or unintentional, of an audience to communicatively reciprocate a linguistic exchange owing to pernicious ignorance. Pernicious ignorance should be understood to refer to any reliable ignorance that, in a given context, harms another person (or set of persons)” (p. 238). This article argues that the testimonies given by Pacific speakers that were met with little recognition or further discussion over the 14-year period examined reflect a type of epistemic violence and exploitation that has been largely ignored in academic scholarship. Furthermore, this article argues that this type of violence is chronic and linked to a deeper systemic problem, especially when considered with other historical events such as the Dawn Raids. The Dawn Raids offer important insight into what this

article calls the “Pacific housing crisis”, illuminating the trajectory of state violence inflicted upon Pacific peoples that has largely been ignored by successive governments.

### Dawn Raids

As noted above, on 1 August 2021, nearly 50 years after the Dawn Raids of 1974–1976, the New Zealand Government issued an official apology. Prior to the apology, the Dawn Raids had succumbed to national amnesia and had been erased from public memory. The Dawn Raids refer to the era when police armed with dogs and batons invaded the homes of Pacific Island (particularly Samoans and Tongans) immigrants who were suspected of illegal overstaying. Analyses have since revealed many intersecting factors that fuelled the targeted state-sanctioned operation. Despite comprising only 30% of overstayers, Pacific

families comprised 86% of the prosecutions and deportations—the majority of the migrants who overstayed their visas were white Europeans and North Americans who were seldom targeted by the government and law enforcement nor included in national media coverage of overstayers (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Anae, 2020, 2021; Shilliam, 2015). The national political rhetoric racialised overstayers not only by excluding white overstayers from the intervention but also by sensationalising racist rhetoric espousing a “brown problem” (Shilliam, 2012). The potential threat and invasion of Pacific Brown bodies in New Zealand were framed as a public concern in need of immediate attention, thereby rationalising the need for racial targeting and thus fashioning an easy scapegoat narrative (Shilliam, 2012).

Authorities targeted areas/suburbs largely populated by Pacific people and Māori (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Anae, 2021; Shilliam, 2015). Thousands were deported—many of whom were legal residents—from areas such as Ponsonby (an inner-city suburb in Auckland) with large Pacific Island and Māori populations prior to the gentrification. The New Zealand Government empowered the police to execute home search warrants with authority to stop and question any Pacific-looking person on the streets concerning permits, visas and passports (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021). Specifically, racist remarks from Pākehā/whites towards Pacific people were shaped by the growing narrative of the “Polynesian problem”, whereby Pacific migrants incited a moral panic of Brown people in white areas (Shilliam, 2012). It is important to highlight that the areas targeted during the Dawn Raids were also marked for gentrification. Ponsonby represents one of New Zealand’s most prominent instances of gentrification (Friesen, 2009). House prices, demographics and socioeconomic characteristics shifted drastically from 1986 to 2014. The Pacific population in Ponsonby and adjacent suburbs peaked in 1976, when the area was a centre of Pacific, especially Samoan, culture (Hiyama, 1991). Now the occupants of these suburbs are over 70% white/European (Friesen, 2009). If the aim of such targeted policing was to confirm a person’s right to be in the country, then individuals from European nations and North America would have been included in the raids, thus signalling that the Dawn Raids were indeed racially fuelled (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021).

### **Housing, racialised surveillance and policing Pacific bodies**

Racially charged opinions intimately linked to colonial logic permeate mainstream opinions about ethnic minorities in the past and present. The Dawn Raids were in part a result of a worsening economic climate. The New Zealand Government sensationalised racist rhetoric that deemed Pacific people to be overstayers and granted police powers to target Brown people specifically. The Dawn Raids signify a targeted effort of racial social control by the New Zealand Government fuelled by a confluence of forces: immigration laws, police authority and the power of media to encourage racist actions targeting Pacific bodies (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021). The contemporary housing crisis in which many Pacific peoples are bearing the brunt signals a continuation of these historical processes. Bonds (2019) and Villanueva (2018) argue that housing dynamics are deeply connected to the expansion of law-and-order politics. Spaces where Pacific bodies have been zoned through housing policies and practices coalesced with local racial dynamics and modes of governing property to harden racial and class lines that are extensively policed (Bonds, 2019). Such spaces are actively constituted through discursive and material practices by lawmakers, local officials and enforcement agents for effective policing and surveilling. Bodies occupying spaces designed to contain and regulate behaviours through the constant threat of detention and imprisonment feed into a carceral continuum that facilitates arrest, prosecution, confinement and deportation (Villanueva, 2018). Similarly, the 1970s Dawn Raids illustrate a form of racialised surveillance and targeting of overstayers, which provides insight into broader systemic issues Pacific people continually navigate to secure housing.

### **Housing and epistemic violence**

Within the context of sharpening racial inequalities, race and class segregation, and the Pacific housing crisis, one case deserves special consideration. In 2014, a coroner ruled that poor-quality housing was a contributing factor in the death of two-year-old Emma-Lita Bourne. Her family’s South Auckland state house exposed the child to cold and damp conditions that led to disease, infection and later death (Walters et al., 2015). In response, the New Zealand Government initiated a massive shake-up of all public housing quality standards (Baker, 2015). The government introduced the Healthy Homes initiative that put in place a housing warrant of fitness to



ensure all rental properties were up to a reasonable level of quality in terms of insulation and heating. Ten years prior, Howden-Chapman et al. (2005) had provided clear evidence of the importance of insulated homes, linking it directly to health and wellbeing in an effort to reduce health inequalities in communities. Following the death of Emma-Lita and the coroner's report, Housing New Zealand (now Kāinga Ora) called for urgent checks of their housing stock whereby those occupying public housing had their repair requests fulfilled, with priority given to homes affected by cold and dampness (Radio New Zealand, 2015). The urgent maintenance repairs saw 2,800 public houses receive upgrades to insulation, ventilation, heating, carpets and thermal drapes in 12 months (Radio New Zealand, 2015). This sudden concern for the health and wellbeing of those public-housed individuals following a highly publicised death of a child demonstrates that a housing crisis was already plaguing a significant portion of the population decades before the affordable housing crisis registered in mainstream media and the government's agenda. The Pacific and Māori voices raising concerns about unhealthy dwellings and limited access to homes received little attention.

The ways in which voices are dismissed and silenced deserve special consideration in discussions of a housing crisis. Various forms of dismissiveness towards the voices of those experiencing housing-related struggles can be unpacked and understood as a form of epistemic violence, resulting in "testimonial quietening" of the oppressed (Dotson, 2011). Testimonial quietening occurs when the voices of the oppressed are less likely to be considered competent in their testimony "due to an audience's inability to discern the possession of credibility" (Dotson, 2011, p. 237). Thus, epistemic violence within this context is considered a form of institutional racism as defined by Barnes et al. (2013):

Societal racism is constituted in the cultural ambience produced by the entrenched social orders and includes the values, epistemologies, norms and sensibilities that attach to hegemonic power. Institutional racism is produced in this context through the organisational requirements, conditions, practices, policies and processes that maintain and reproduce avoidable and unfair inequalities across ethnic/racial groups. (p. 64)

## Conclusion

Pacific peoples' relegation to precarious housing and living arrangements is chronic. Apart from explicit references to the wealth gap, other forms of embedded structural barriers in the housing market were not found in this study (e.g., discriminatory lending practices and racial profiling by property managers). Barnes et al.'s (2013) examination of institutional racism in New Zealand explores Māori experiences of structural violence. The authors acknowledge that while understanding the significance of racial discrimination as a determinant of health and wellbeing is widely known, the experiential dimensions of these phenomena are sparse. This study makes a similar argument for Pacific peoples' experiences in precarious housing and associated illnesses. Pacific parliamentarians' time, in this analysis, was seemingly used primarily to push against embedded stereotypical narratives rather than explore viable solutions. This process further illustrates epistemic violence. It shows that the structures and institutions Pacific peoples must navigate to tell their stories are hostile and that their narratives are rendered invisible, exonerating the state from charges of violence perpetrated against Pacific peoples.

As discussed, the Dawn Raids revealed the adverse effects of the pernicious influence of the mass media in concert with state institutions in perpetuating the "Polynesian problem" in New Zealand. Such negative stigmas fashioned criminal and deficit narratives around Brown bodies to incite fears that led to targeted policing. Similarly, negative stigmas play out in the housing market today, which deserves renewed attention. Precarious housing for Pacific peoples was recognised decades prior to a national declaration of a housing crisis. Long-term precarity is a result of many intersecting factors that produce inequalities that were hardly acknowledged in housing-related political rhetoric. Despite growing evidence that the effects of poor housing and related health and wellbeing issues in Pacific communities far exceed the population as a whole, the government has been slow to respond. Drawing on Barnes et al. (2013), this article argues that the slow response and overall silencing around the Pacific housing crisis are by design. This examination provides a glimpse into a type of violence experienced when Pacific housing issues are subsumed within the overall housing crisis discussion. The lack of attention to the Pacific housing crisis in parliamentary political debates is a form of epistemic violence and testimonial quietening, which indicates an insidious form of structural racism. Violence, therefore,

exists within the structures, preventing discussions from arising. The failure to identify ways institutional racism has deepened the Pacific housing crisis further disadvantages the positionality of Pacific people. Just like the Dawn Raids, which fell into national amnesia and were erased from public memory for decades, the Pacific housing crisis follows the same trend.

## Glossary

Aotearoa	Māori name for New Zealand; lit. “land of the long white cloud”
Māori	Indigenous peoples of New Zealand
Pākehā	New Zealanders of European descent
Pasifika	The terms “Pasifika” and “Pasifika peoples” are umbrella terms that are unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, and were coined by government agencies (often used in governmental documents) to describe both migrants from the Pacific regions and their descendants.

## References

- Ade, R., & Rehm, M. (2020). Home is where the health is: New Zealand responses to a “healthy” housing crisis. *Pacific Rim Property Research Journal*, 26(1), 69–93. <https://doi.org/kb35>
- Allen, J. M., & Bruce, T. (2017). Constructing the other: News media representations of a predominantly “brown” community in New Zealand. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 23(1), 225–244.
- Anae, M. (2020). *The platform: The radical legacy of the Polynesian Panthers*. Bridget Williams Books. <https://doi.org/kb36>
- Anae, M. (2021, 3 August). Ardern’s apology to Pacific peoples lacks concrete actions. We will continue the fight. *Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2021/aug/04/arderns-apology-to-pacific-peoples-lacks-concrete-actions-we-will-continue-the-fight>
- Awatere, D. (1984). *Maori sovereignty*. Broadsheet.
- Baker, L. (2015, 21 August). “Mould is killing my children”. RNZ. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/regional/281980/mould-is-killing-my-children>
- Barnes, A. M., Taiapa, K., Borell, B., & McCreanor, T. (2013). Māori experiences and responses to racism in Aotearoa New Zealand. *MAI Journal*, 2(2), 63–77.
- Bonds, A. (2019). Race and ethnicity I: Property, race, and the carceral state. *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(3), 574–583. <https://doi.org/gfc948>
- Bourassa, S. C., & Shi, S. (2017). Understanding New Zealand’s decline in homeownership. *Housing Studies*, 32(5), 693–710. <https://doi.org/kb37>
- Bullen, C., Kearns, R. A., Clinton, J., Laing, P., Mahoney, F., & McDuff, I. (2008). Bringing health home: Householder and provider perspectives on the healthy housing programme in Auckland, New Zealand. *Social Science & Medicine*, 66, 1185–1196. <https://doi.org/ckfhmj>
- Butler, S., Williams, M., Tukuitonga, C., & Paterson, J. (2003). Problems with damp and cold housing among Pacific families in New Zealand. *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 116(1177), Article U494.
- Cann, G. (2021, 16 August). Housing affordability: Who actually wins from the housing crisis? *Stuff*. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300382175/housingaffordability-who-actually-wins-from-the-housing-crisis>
- Cheer, T., Kearns, R., & Murphy, L. (2002). Housing policy, poverty, and culture: “Discounting” decisions among Pacific peoples in Auckland, New Zealand. *Environmental and Planning C: Governmental and Policy*, 20, 497–516. <https://doi.org/cp6sb4>
- Chisholm, E. (2022). “The way to end housing problems”: Tenant protest in New Zealand in the 1970s. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 17(4), 445–460. <https://doi.org/kb38>
- Chisholm, E., Howden-Chapman, P., & Fougere, G. (2017). Renting in New Zealand: Perspectives from tenant advocates. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 12(1), 95–110. <https://doi.org/grm6cs>
- Dempster, C., & Norris, A. N. (2022). The 2020 cannabis referendum: Māori voter support, racialized policing, and the criminal justice system. *Decolonization of Criminology and Justice*, 4(1), 57–80. <https://doi.org/kb39>
- Dotson, K. (2011). Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing. *Hypatia*, 26(2), 236–257. <https://doi.org/fcj3wm>
- Friesen, W. (2009). The demographic transformation of inner-city Auckland. *New Zealand Population Review*, 35(1), 55–74.
- Gorrell, L. (2018). Not sold on the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Act 2013: How housing legislation in New Zealand ignores our Pacific people on the peripheries. *Public Interest Law Journal of New Zealand*, 5, 84–96.
- Hartnett, J. J. (1993). Affordable housing, exclusionary zoning, and American apartheid: Using Title VIII to foster statewide racial integration. *New York University Law Review*, 68(1), 89–135.
- Hiyama, K. (1991). *High hopes in hard times: A history of Grey Lynn and Westmere*. Media Studies Trust.
- Houkamau, C. A., & Sibley, C. G. (2015). Looking Māori predicts decreased rates of home ownership: Institutional racism in housing based on perceived appearance. *PLoS ONE*, 10(3), e0118540. <https://doi.org/c6nt>
- Howden-Chapman, P., Viggers, H., Chapman, R., O’Sullivan, K., Barnard, L. T., & Lloyd, B. (2012). Tackling cold housing and fuel poverty in New Zealand: A review of policies, research, and health impacts. *Energy Policy*, 49, 134–142. <https://doi.org/dxn67d>
- Howden-Chapman, P., Crane, J., Matheson, A., Viggers,

- H., Cunningham, M., Blakely, T., O'Dea, D., Cunningham, C., Woodward, A., Saville-Smith, K. Baker, M., & Waipara, N. (2005). Retrofitting houses with insulation to reduce health inequalities: Aims and methods of a clustered, randomised community-based trial. *Social Science & Medicine*, 61(12), 2600–2610. <https://doi.org/cdjqr2>
- Take, J. (2019). *Rebuilding the kāinga: Lessons from Te Ao Hurihuri*. Bridget Williams Books. <https://doi.org/kb4c>
- Kearns, R. A., & Smith, C. J. (1994). Housing, homelessness, and mental health: Mapping an agenda for geographical inquiry. *The Professional Geographer*, 46(4), 418–424. <https://doi.org/bjbxnn>
- Lewis, C., Norris, A. N., Heta-Cooper, W., & Tauri, J. (2020). Stigmatising gang narratives, housing, and the social policing of Māori women. In L. George, A. N., Norris, A. Deckert, & J. Tauri (Eds.), *Neocolonial injustice and the mass imprisonment of Indigenous women* (pp. 13–33). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/kb4d>
- Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson.
- Madden, D., & Marcuse, P. (2016). *In defense of housing*. Verso.
- Miline, K., & Kearns, R. (1999). Housing status and health implications for Pacific peoples in New Zealand. *Pacific Health Dialogue*, 6(1), 80–86.
- Ministry for Culture and Heritage. (2021). The Dawn Raids: Causes, impacts and legacy. *New Zealand History*. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/dawn-raids>
- Naea, N., Dobson, A., Leversha, A., Williams, S., Knott, K., Clayton-Bray, L., & Dickinson, A. (2016). Awareness and understanding of rheumatic fever among Pacific people in Auckland. *Neonatal, Paediatric & Child Health Nursing*, 19(1), 7–12.
- New Zealand: A place to call home. (2020, 4 June). *Al Jazeera*. [https://www.aljazeera.com/program/101-east/2020/6/4/new-zealand-a-place-to-call-home?fbclid=IwAR1\\_UFMnnPUg9t0y8v\\_Rx07Nxdogr8BWUB61RwfIT75N7sN3-DsVqbR2LIQ](https://www.aljazeera.com/program/101-east/2020/6/4/new-zealand-a-place-to-call-home?fbclid=IwAR1_UFMnnPUg9t0y8v_Rx07Nxdogr8BWUB61RwfIT75N7sN3-DsVqbR2LIQ)
- Norris, A. N., & Nandedkar, G. (2020). Ethnicity, racism and housing: Discourse analysis of New Zealand housing research. *Housing Studies*, 37(8), 1331–1349. <https://doi.org/kb4f>
- Norris, A. N., & Tauri, J. (2021). Racialized surveillance in New Zealand: From the Tūhoe raids to the extralegal photographing of Indigenous youth. *Race and Justice*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/kb4g>
- Ongley, P., & Pearson, D. (1995). Post-1995 international migration: New Zealand, Australia and Canada compared. *International Migration Review*, 29(3), 765–793. <https://doi.org/kb4h>
- Paterson, J., Lusitini, L., Tautolo, E., Taylor, S., & Clougherty, J. (2018). Pacific Island Families (PIF) study: Housing and psychological distress among Pacific mothers. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 42(2), 140–144. <https://doi.org/gdfd8v>
- Pledger, M., McDonald, J., Dunn, P., Cumming, J., & Saville-Smith, K. (2019). The health of other New Zealanders in relation to housing tenure: Analysis of pooled data from three consecutive, annual New Zealand health surveys. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 43(2), 182–189. <https://doi.org/kb4j>
- Schluter, P., Carter, S., & Kokaua, J. (2007). Indices and perception of crowding in Pacific households domiciled within Auckland, New Zealand: Finding from the Pacific Islands families study. *New Zealand Medical Journal*, 120(1248), Article U2393.
- Shapiro, T. M. (2006). Race, homeownership, and wealth. *Washington Journal of Law and Policy*, 20, 53–74.
- Shilliam, R. (2012). The Polynesian Panthers and the Black Power gang: Surviving racism and colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand. In N. Slate (Ed.), *Black Power beyond borders* (pp. 107–126). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/kb4k>
- Shilliam, R. (2015). *The black Pacific: Anti-colonial struggles and oceanic connections*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Southern Initiative, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, & Auckland Co-Design Lab. (2018). *Pacific Peoples' workforce challenge: Accelerating the advancement of Pacific people in the workforce*. <https://www.aucklandco-lab.nz/reports-summary/pacific-peoples-workforce-challenge>
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In N. Carry & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- Statistics New Zealand. (2016). Wealth patterns across ethnic groups in New Zealand. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/wealth-patterns-across-ethnic-groups-in-new-zealand>
- Stats NZ. (2019, 4 November). *New Zealand's population reflects growing diversity*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/new-zealands-population-reflects-growing-diversity>
- Teariki, M. A. (2017). Housing and health of Kiribati migrants living in New Zealand. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(10), Article 1237. <https://doi.org/gckdzz>
- Tukuitoranga, C. (2013). Pacific people in New Zealand. In I. St George (Ed.), *Cole's medical practice in New Zealand, 12th edition* (pp. 66–73). Medical Council of New Zealand.
- Villanueva, J. (2018). Pathways of confinement: The legal constitution of carceral spaces in France's social housing estates. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 19(8), 963–983.
- Walters, L., Fagan, J., & Small, V. (2015, 4 June). Damp state housing played part in toddler's death. *Stuff*. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/69095130/damp-state-house-played-part-in-toddlers-death>
- White, L., & Nandedkar, G. (2019). The housing crisis as an ideological artefact: Analysing how political discourse defines, diagnoses, and responds. *Housing Studies*, 36(2), 213–234. <https://doi.org/kknk>