Received: 30 November 2022 | Accepted: 29 October 2022

DOI: 10.1111/bjso.12598

ARTICLE

A Kaupapa Māori conceptualization and efforts to address the needs of the growing precariat in Aotearoa New Zealand: A situated focus on Māori

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Abstract

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the precariat is populated by at least one in six New Zealanders, with Māori (Indigenous peoples) being over-represented within this emerging social class. For Māori, this socio-economic positioning reflects a colonial legacy spanning 150 years of economic and cultural subjugation, and intergenerational experiences of material, cultural and psychological insecurities. Relating our Kaupapa Māori approach (Māori cultural values and principles underlining research initiatives) to the precariat, this article also draws insights from existing scholarship on social class in psychology and Assemblage Theory in the social sciences to extend present conceptualizations of the Māori precariat. In keeping with the praxis orientation central to our approach, we consider three exemplars of how our research into Māori precarity is mobilized in efforts to inform public deliberations and government policies regarding poverty reduction, humanizing the welfare system and promoting decent work. Note: Aotearoa New Zealand has been popularized within the everyday lexicon of New Zealanders as a political statement of Indigenous rights for Māori.

KEYWORDS

action research, assemblage, indigenous, Kaupapa Māori, precariat

INTRODUCTION

As a means of contributing to praxis in social psychology, this article offers a Kaupapa Māori approach to theorizing, documenting and addressing the needs of the precariat in general and Māori in particular. We also draw insights from social class and Assemblage Theorizing, which aid us in extending our understanding of, and efforts to meet the needs of the precariat as an emergent social class, within which Māori are overrepresented. We offer examples of our efforts to advocate a Māori cultural shift within the contemporary welfare system in Aotearoa New Zealand towards a more humane and effective delivery of support for people experiencing precarity. This article also foregrounds the importance of disciplinary pluralism and the inclusion of Indigenous psychologies for decolonising social psychology by fostering cross-cultural dialogue. We showcase our Kaupapa Māori approach to social psychology that responds to the lived actualities of many Māori facing daily hardships, whilst also seeking to speak to other Indigenous scholars and applied, community-orientated social psychologists from different contexts. In keeping with our Kaupapa Māori approach, this article contributes to reconceptualising the precariat and how social psychologists can engage in public deliberations and efforts to enhance supports for people living lives populated by various socio-economic-cultural insecurities.

KAUPAPA MĀORI SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN ACTION

As noted above, the work our group does as psychologists is informed by a Kaupapa Māori approach to knowledge production and application. This distinctly Indigenous approach features the importance of Māori cultural knowledge, relational ethics and the lived experiences of Māori (Bishop, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Pihama, 2010; Smith, 1997, 2000b, 2012; Te Awekotuku, 1991). Kaupapa Māori research has synergies with Participative Action Research (PAR) in the emphasis on transformational partnerships and praxis, but like other Indigenous traditions retains its own scholarly whakapapa (complex genealogical layering) and distinctive cosmology (Akom, 2011; Caxaj, 2015; Elder & Odoyo, 2018; Smith, 1999). Central to both Kaupapa Māori and PAR are processes of collective learning that entwine researchers and participants in shared efforts to design research that documents social issues impacting their lives and develops effective responses. These are authentic collaborations that involve breaking with the hegemonic tendency in psychology to conduct research *on* rather than *with* communities (Akom, 2011; Caxaj, 2015; Elder & Odoyo, 2018; Hakim et al., 2022; Hodgetts et al., 2020; Mama, 1995; Reddy et al., in review). Similarly, Reddy et al., in review contend that such engagements require an exploration of the role of power and coloniality when understanding that identities are relational and intersecting and that also change and transform. It requires us to emplace ourselves with others to address the needs of the precariat. In this regard, two of our co-authors are employed in advocacy roles to assist and support the precariat, whilst they themselves are part of the precariat. Their insights and experiences are central to generating knowledge, methodological innovation as well as documenting and addressing the precariat. This article is one of several academic publications and public presentations with our co-authors that continues to inform our principled practice and relational ethics whilst engaging with the precariat (Hodgetts et al., 2021; Rua et al., 2019, 2021).

We are not external evaluators who objectively document human misery. Rather, we relate to the precariat through personal experience, and we have members of the precariat living in our households. Our whānau (extended family), friends and academic colleagues are part of the precariat as well as the students we supervise, which is now commonplace in universities. We also work with this lived experience shared through research encounters and operate as community partners in the co-construction and application of our shared knowledge in ways that enact key Māori cultural values and practices. Differing from many forms of PAR, Kaupapa Māori research does not distinguish between theory and application as the focus is on understanding social issues and addressing these practically to meet the aspirations of our peoples.

Kaupapa Māori research centralizes Māori ways of thinking about and engaging with the world, whilst incorporating concepts, insights and strategies of resistance to ongoing processes of colonialism

such as liberation social psychologies out of Latin America and the Philippines (King et al., 2021; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Silva Guimarães, 2020; Watson & Huntington, 2008). The ultimate goal of Kaupapa Māori research is to promote the re-powering of Māori towards achieving tino rangatiratanga (Māori self-determination) and leading efforts to care for all New Zealanders who reside with us on our lands. Research produced by our team, other Māori scholars and allied colleagues is overtly political and exemplifies early traditions of scholar activism in social psychology that have confronted issues of precarity (e.g. Dewey, 1969/1991; Jahoda et al., 1933/1971). Such scholarship involves working in partnership with various stakeholders, whilst embracing Māori cultural ways of being with others. Through our Kaupapa Māori approach we seek to increase socio-economic justice and emancipation by employing participative research strategies that centralize the experiences of precariat Māori but do not ignore their neighbours from other ethnic groups experiencing similar socio-economic hardships. This is important because Māori communities expect scholars and practitioners to involve themselves within community settings and embrace all in our collective efforts to understand and respond to socio-economic precarity (Rua et al., 2021).

Foundational to our Kaupapa Māori approach is a non-individualistic and fundamentally relational understanding of human beings as woven into a world occupied by both human and non-human entities that also possess their own wairua (spirit, sense or soul) and agency (Rua et al., 2017). The importance of this Indigenous social psychological understanding of the interconnected self to our understanding of the precariat will become apparent when discussing Assemblage Theory below. Also central to Assemblage Theory (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) is a comparable understanding of people as emergent beings entangled within larger dynamic social structures that transcend the Western mind/world dualism that remains hegemonic within many areas of psychology (Hodgetts et al., 2020). Rather, people are understood as interdependent emergent creations of biological inheritance, geographical/material and relational situatedness, and processes of socialization, enculturation and in the case of Māori and many other Indigenous groups, processes of colonization that continue to precariatize us (Kaya & Kale, 2016; King et al., 2017; Rua et al., 2017). As such, contemporary efforts, such as ours are realigning social psychological thinking towards decolonial self-determining perspectives (Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021; Smith, 2017).

Communities beset by various forms of oppression, whose members have suffered from a diminished sense of themselves through processes of colonialism, racism and classism, use the research Kaupapa Māori scholars produce to gain recognition and to lobby for resources (Hodgetts et al., 2020). They do so to nurture their own systemic understandings of precarity and oppression and to collaborate and do something useful about it. These efforts extend to preserving and applying our cultural traditions and humane relational practices, and as pathways towards our collective tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) (cf., Henry & Pene, 2001; Pihama, 2010; Watkins et al., 2008).

A Kaupapa Māori approach involves emphasizing the situated and entangled nature of academic knowledge, theory, research and practice in our Indigenous cosmology. This is important for not only Kaupapa Māori scholars but also many other Indigenous scholars because our shared task is not to simply produce social psychological knowledge of the world as it is in the Archimedean sense (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). We seek to produce accounts of particular situations, which anchor processual understandings of issues of precarity and societal responses to these concerns. It also requires us to acknowledge that theory and research are in and of themselves contingent and entwined processes of knowledge assemblage that are subject to power relations in contemporary psychology between the Global North and South (Baker & McGuirk, 2017; Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021). Accordingly, Kaupapa Māori scholarship does not position researchers as distal observers of social psychological phenomena. We are also embroiled within the very issues of precariaty and associated life worlds with which we are engaged theoretically, methodologically and practice wise.

Embracing the logic of both/and rather than either/or, the Kaupapa Māori approach we adopt is brought into conversation with various Indigenous and non-Indigenous psychologies globally, whilst remaining distinctly Māori. For example, like many Indigenous knowledge systems that are being rearticulated within our discipline and beyond, we are open to non-Indigenous ideas that can be used to inform

and serve our purposes. However, this openness is generally not reciprocated by Eurocentric traditions that dominate psychology today and often seek to silence rather than converse with us (cf., Ranchoda & Guimarães, 2021; Reddy et al., in review). This is because psychology has denied Indigenous peoples the status of informed research leaders and producers of legitimate psychological knowledge (Hodgetts et al., 2020). Shifts in these colonial practices of displacement require the recognition of cultural knowledge systems and practices of Māori and other Indigenous groups as legitimate in their own right. These psychologies comprise much more than primitive, unevolved or exotic superstitions to be documented at a distance by groups with histories of colonizing others (cf., Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021; Guimarães, 2020; Liu, 2017; Smith, 2000a, 2015).

In terms of further contextualizing this article, psychological research and practice has come to be known in many Māori communities as an extension of the European colonial civilizing project. This is because psychological research has been used to displace and deny the validity of Māori ways of being, knowing, relating to the world and solving our own problems. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p.1) asserts more generally, 'When mentioned in many Indigenous contexts, [research] stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful'. This mistrust stems from research practices that promote the self-interests of academics and policymakers and often does not consider or simply minimizes the actual needs and aspirations of research participants (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Pihama, 2006; Pihama et al., 2002; Reddy et al., in review). Hakim et al., 2022 refers to a hegemonic social psychology that reproduces practices of settlement and occupation through their treatment of Indigenous peoples whereby we are ignored and dismissed as an unremarkable research subject/object, essentially naturalizing our subjugation and legitimizing their domination. Our questioning of such practices and extractive research relationships should not be taken to constitute a rejection of Western science or the discipline of psychology as such. It is a rejection of the colonialism and racism within such 'science' that has been imposed on our communities with little benefit to inhabitants. This article comprises a conceptually reflexive instalment of a programme of Kaupapa Māori research with the precariat that can be understood as a more participative and non-parasitic approach to social psychology.

THE PRECARIAT AS A DIVERSE EMERGENT SOCIAL CLASS

It is important to understand the genesis of contemporary thinking in psychology regarding issues of social class and precarity, from which we are drawing insights. From the beginning, Marx and those who adopted his historical materialist/economic theory sought to challenge socio-economic inequities and contribute to the development of more just societies[1] (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978). However, since its inception in the Global North, social class has been a contested concept that continues to be refined in response to the complexities that accompany the differential positioning of population groups within socio-economic and cultural hierarchies (cf., Argyle, 1994; Bourdieu, 1987; Marx & Engels, 1848/1998; Standing, 2011; Walkerdine, 1996; Weber, 1922/1978). Correspondingly, class theory and research has become more pluralistic and dynamic in response to the changing nature of work, politics and distinctions in the habitus and relations between various groups, including those in the Global South (Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015). Of particular importance for the present contribution to psychology are cumulative orientations that have developed for over 150 years towards documenting the dynamics of intersectional class positionings, the impacts of these and what can be done about them.

Within psychology scholarship on these issues has primarily been conducted within community, feminist, liberation and some orientations towards critical social psychologies (e.g., Argyle, 1994; Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Centers, 1949; Fryer & Stambe, 2014; Parker & Spears, 1996; Skeggs, 2004; Walkerdine, 1996, 2015). Researchers have paid particular attention to the various income, employment, food, housing and relational insecurities that populate the lives of increasing numbers of people under

[1]For a more detailed discussion of different theories of class and the implications for psychology please see Centers (1949) and Hodgetts & Griffin (2015).

advanced neoliberal capitalism (Barnes & Milovanovic, 2015; Fryer & Stambe, 2014; Hodgetts et al., 2014; Thomas, 2014). As we will illustrate through our own efforts to theorize, document and address issues of socio-economic and cultural insecurities, contemporary scholarship often involves participative efforts to help people who live through the negative consequences of class positionings (Hodgetts et al., 2021).

It is important to emphasize that contemporary thinking on class features increased recognition of issues of diversity within classes and the intersectional nature of socio-economic [dis]advantages across groups (Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015). Intersectional scholarship investigates how people are often multiply burdened through the articulation of various insecurities that reach out beyond but also exacerbate their positionings within socio-economic hierarchies. Such intersectional positionings have been foregrounded by generations of Black feminists and other minoritized peoples (Anthias, 2013; Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989; Moolman, 2013; Rollock, 2014). Scholarship in this area responds to experiences of gendered and emplaced hardships, exploitative relations, systemic violence and practices of oppression, which often play out within everyday institutional arrangements that reproduce racist and inequitable socio-economic hierarchies. Central are exclusions and insecurities that stem from inequitable power relations between ethnicities, genders, [dis]abilities, sexualities, places and so forth which we address below as part of our review of a popular book (Groot et al., 2017; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). As such, it is increasingly recognized that the precariat is shaped by economic and material conditions of living as well as being negotiated through everyday socio-cultural interactions and power relations, discrimination and exploitation (Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015).

Over the last decade, much has been made of the malleable concept of the 'precariat' as an emergent social class formation that occupies diverse socio-material spaces of adversity, and whose lives are characterized by various inequities in employment, human rights, housing, [dis]abilities, food, health and so forth (Standing, 2011; Walkerdine, 2015). The precariat is considered heterogeneous in terms of culture and socio-material circumstances, fragmented and intersectional (Campbell & Price, 2016). The precariat is thought to encapsulate discrete clusters or groupings of people whose lives are burdened due to the pernicious effects of having to survive on low incomes or welfare supports and to navigate various socio-political exclusions, insecurities and discriminatory practices (Groot et al., 2017). These groups must navigate tenuous lifeworlds that feature considerable uncertainty and require constant negotiation. The initial conceptualization of the precariat reflects Standing's background in economics and the associated focus on the rise of the precariat with processes of neoliberalized globalization and the promotion of 'flexible' (read insecure) labour practices. Standing (2011) has theorized the precariat as a social class in the making that is comprised of people experiencing unliveable wages, insecure work and periods of unemployment. This orientation has been elaborated upon in Aotearoa New Zealand in terms of issues of culture and the dynamics of the psycho-social, material and spatial relations that are reproduced through everyday personal and institutional practices (cf., Groot et al., 2017; Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

Addressing issues of difference within the precariat is particularly important in colonial contexts such as Aotearoa New Zealand. Here, Māori and descendants of the settler society (Pākehā), for example may occupy similar socio-economic profiles, whilst differing in terms of how they ended up in the precariat, their experiences of adversity and stigma and how they respond to adversity. We can see the impacts of intersectional concerns that accompany processes of colonization in the proportion of population groups that feature in the precariat. For example, it has been estimated that approximately one in six people overall reside in our precariat (Cochrane et al., 2017; Stubbs et al, 2017). The largest ethnic population group in the country are Pākehā (European New Zealanders) (70%) who are under-represented at 63% of the precariat. Conversely, Māori represent a smaller population group (15%), whilst being drastically overrepresented in the precariat at 28.8%. Culturally, we cannot and have not ignored the needs of the largest group of precariatized persons (Pākehā), whilst also needing to prioritize the over representation of Māori.

In terms of further thinking through the complex, dynamic and intersectional aspects of precarity for these groups, we approach the precariat as an assemblage (cf., Anderson et al., 2012; DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). Deleuze and Guattari formulated this theory to conceptualize the similar

processes via which entities from molecules and natural organisms to species and ecosystems, people and institutions take shape. As such both biological and socio-cultural entities are presented as interdependent within our shared world (DeLanda, 2006). These entities interact and combine in complex ways to influence each other like instruments in an orchestra. As Anderson et al. (2012, p. 177) propose, assemblages are constituted through '…the provisional holding together of a group of entities across differences and a continuous process of movement and transformation as relations and terms change'. Relatedly, from this perspective the world is conceptualized as a contingent and always emerging ecosystem that is comprised of a nexus of interacting assemblages that are reproduced through ongoing social relations, human and non-human interactions and institutional practices (Anderson et al., 2012). This line of reasoning resonates with Standing's (2011) conceptualization of the precariat as an emergent and dynamic social class formation that interacts with institutional systems, such as welfare systems. On offer is a worldview from the Global North that is compatible with Indigenous notions of the interconnected self and world within which people are immersed together in dynamic relations that are not always equitable.

Various Indigenous scholars do not always overtly employ the language and concepts of Assemblage Theory. However, many are engaged in what appears to be assemblage thinking when exploring the unfolding of various dimensions of precarity and associated complexities, multiplicities of influence and the interconnection of various human and non-human elements within lifeworlds (e.g. Joks et al., 2020; Povinelli, 2019; Watson & Huntington, 2008). Reflecting the utility of this way of thinking, links between precarity or instabilities in life and processes of assemblage are also evident in research with non-Indigenous precariat groups, including elderly people and their care workers (van Eeuwijk, 2020) and the Roma (Lancione, 2019).

Those engaged with Assemblage Theory from within literary studies, occupational science, geography and archaeology often refer to 'assemblage thinking' to signal the malleable use of ideas associated with processes of assemblage, dis-assemblage and re-assemblage and in applying these to a wide range of phenomena (Baker & McGuirk, 2017; McGurik et al., 2016; Sellar, 2009). Correspondingly, assemblage thinking resonates with a Māori worldview that encompasses natural and material as well as socio-cultural elements in seeking to understand and address the needs of the precariat. From our Kaupapa Māori perspective, assemblage thinking is useful in informing our orientation conceptually to the complexities and empirical messiness of precariatized lives (cf., Baker & McGuirk, 2017; Jacobs, 2006). Along with other theoretical constructs such as those relating to Indigeneity, class, intersectionality and precarity, the very construct of assemblage is subsumed in this article as a key heuristic tool to aid our culturally informed reflections on the situations of precarity that many of our fellow citizens find themselves. In the process, we can better understand, speak and respond to the geometries of generative power imbalances that manifest at multiple levels of policy, institutional practices, community situations and personal relations (Farias, 2011).

Assemblage thinking is also useful in articulating associated power dynamics in recognizing that people, groups and institutional formations are often hierarchically structured in inequitable ways (McGurik et al., 2016). Relatedly, our use of assemblage thinking is strategically situated within emancipatory Indigenous politics and aids us in not only communicating our understanding of a Kaupapa Māori worldview but also our approach to the precariat. It moves in the opposite direction of the hegemonic colonizing tendencies of psychology to reify Western worldviews onto Indigenous populations and psychologies. Instead, we are appropriating Assemblage Theory for our own purposes to articulate further our thinking regarding the precariat and our contribution to decolonizing social psychology.

As a heterogeneous cultural group in our own right, Māori people can be both part of the precariat and share some common needs with Pākehā as discussed previously, for example, often working in the same industries and organizations and occupying the same households together. However, Māori also remain unique and are not fully consumed within the precariat assemblage. Akin to our Kaupapa Māori worldview, this line of reasoning is reflective of the logic of both/and, rather than either/all, which is foundational to Assemblage Theory (DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). Further key elements of what it means to be Māori can be brought in and out of the precariat assemblage across various situations. These aspects, such as cultural values and relational practices can also remain independent of the

precariat assemblage (cf., DeLanda, 2006). In other words, Māori can experience insecure employment alongside Pākehā and members of diverse ethnic groups, whilst remaining distinctly Māori in terms of how we understand and respond to precarity. Similarly, how precarity is experienced within the Māori population also differs between persons of different ages, genders, [dis]abilities, sexualities and so forth. Occupationally, street sex workers, hotel cleaners or taxi drivers who are all Māori, will experience aspects of their precarity in differing ways, but how they respond *as Māori* can feature similarities. This includes efforts to enact core Māori cultural practices regarding manaakitanga (care for others) as evident in the sharing and pooling together of limited resources. In other words, a complex array of elements is central to the dynamic intersectional positioning of different groups and persons within the precariat, and how they conduct their everyday lives of restraint. Persons from different groups within the precariat can live through experiences and material circumstances that resonate with one another, whilst also having unique worldviews related to various elements that shape their lives, including aspects of ethnic cultures.

To recap, we approach the precariat as an emergent, processual and diverse social class in the making that is shaped by multiple relationships across time and space (DeLanda, 2006). These relationships often extend to related assemblages, such as the welfare system, which is also shaped by often contradictory combinations of elements, including various groups of precariatized persons (Clarke, 2004). Conceptualizing the systems, including welfare as an assemblage helps orientate us towards the potential for contributing to the re-assemblage of various structurally violent institutional policies and practices that have often served to deny members of the precariat the supports that they need (Hodgetts et al., 2014). Below, we offer practical exemplars of our Kaupapa Māori efforts towards such re-assembling from the perspective of the precariat in general, and the Māori precariat in particular. By doing so, we attune ourselves to the heterogeneity of the precariat and embrace issues of diversity that also open-up options for responses that extend beyond one size fits all welfarist strategies and into policies and initiatives that are tailored to the needs of different groups.

As we will demonstrate in the following sections, our Kaupapa Māori efforts are not limited to abstract theorizing. These extend to promoting more equitable distributions of resources through enactments of what Māori call whakawhanaungatanga (constructive and mutually beneficial engagements with others) *with* key stakeholders, which can make a real difference in precariatized lives. These involve efforts to inform the public directly through media advocacy work, including the publication of a popular book designed to raise public awareness of the diversity and needs of the precariat. Our work also featured efforts to inform central and local government policy development to assist the re-assemblage of a more humane and culturally appropriate welfare system from the bottom up. This then leads to a discussion of a current project that is exploring links between precarity and recent government interventions to address growing concerns regarding in-work precarity and well-being.

CONTRIBUTING TO PUBLIC DELIBERATIONS VIA A BOOK SHOWCASING DIVERSITY IN THE PRECARIAT

Our Kaupapa Māori approach recognizes the need to engage at all levels of society and to share the precariatized voices of those who are predominantly excluded from the design of systems that are used to 'manage' them. This section provides the exemplar of a popular book that was written for a public audience to showcase the complexities of intersectional concerns within the precariat in Aotearoa. This work draws on Māori cultural principles of whanaungatanga (engaging relationships) and manaakitanga (caring for others). This involved us bringing together leading researchers from across the country who are engaging with a range of precariat communities into conversation. The book showcases diversity within the precariat and the issues people face in conducting their lives of restraint and navigating a structurally violent welfare system.

Members of our team led the design and production of that book with the express intention of translating contemporary scholarship on the precariat for public consumption without losing sight of its diversity. This effort was timed for release during the build up to the 2017 national elections in Aotearoa

New Zealand (Groot et al., 2017). By design, this book renders visible diverse situations of precarity that were largely denied, simply ignored or dismissed by more affluent groups as self-inflicted relative deprivation. This was important because at the time a neoliberal trope that there was 'no real poverty in New Zealand' remained hegemonic. Contributing authors across the 24 chapters were asked to address intersecting issues of precarity and how our society might respond to these. These authors worked closely with the editors and former journalists employed by the publisher to ensure chapters were accessible to non-academic audiences. This often required several rounds of redrafting as part of a collective knowledge sharing and translation process. Many of these authors were first-generation scholars and practitioners from precariat backgrounds.

The resulting book highlights the specific plight of Māori, Pacific, migrant and refugee, gendered and differently abled groups, as well as various combinations of these intersectional elements. Topics addressed included the diverse characteristics of the precariat, experiences of life within poverty traps, and classist, cissexist and racist systemic processes central to contemporary experiences of precarity. Also included were analyses of power relations as evident in classist and racist media representations; the trauma of everyday housing and food insecurities; employment discrimination for racialized trans women; disruptions to cultural practices, such as mourning rituals among ethnically minoritized communities; the conservative National party lead government of the time's role in amplifying the familial abuse experienced by precariatized women and children; and strategies for change, including those evident in documentary theatre initiatives. Many of these chapters reflect on how the precariat assemblage features different ethnic and gendered communities who share similar experiences of some elements of precarity such as classism, whilst not all groups experience other elements, such as cissexism, racism and ableism. Several chapters directly addressed how intersectional processes also bring multiple responsibilities and burdens to some people and not others. Despite these differences, the use of intersectional assemblage throughout the book leads to deeper questions about structural violence and systemic inequities.

A key feature of the book was to foreground the intersection of a range of social disadvantages and issues faced by groups that comprise the contemporary precariat. We explained in accessible, jargon-free language how many of these disadvantages are shaped through colonial legacies and practices of subordination that haunt and traumatize the lives of some groups disproportionately when compared to others. This was important to foreground the rise of the precariat in Aotearoa as a relational phenomenon driven by the exploitative actions of more affluent groups and ongoing processes of colonization. For example, when the welfare system was initially developed in the late 1800s, Pākehā received the full entitlement for the first benefit (retirement) and Māori were paid three quarters of the rate in accordance with racist assertions of Māori who would simply waste money on alcohol and tobacco. This paternalistic and moralistic trope remained pervasive during the 2017 national election campaign and in subsequent debates regarding the welfare system and how we (society) might address issues of precarity (Martin et al., 2021).

The book received wide public recognition and circulation and was referred to by the incumbent Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, during her successful election campaign and was placed prominently on her bookshelf (see Figure 1). Reflecting the importance and popularity of the book, it went through two sold out print runs and featured on the Prime Ministers summer reading list for several years.

Other scholars have also drawn on the relational and processual thinking central to Assemblage Thinking to document and identify potentials for change in housing systems and to facilitate home-making practices among the precariat (Easthope et al., 2020). After the production of the book, we realized the importance of this conceptual gaze to understand the relational, spatial, material and affective functioning of the welfare system and how it might be improved. Important here is how we deconstruct the ways in which institutions constitute relationships with members of the precariat that often feature procedural and temporal injustices (Hodgetts et al., 2022). What such research shows is how some relationships between staff in institutions and members of the precariat ('clients') can be resistant to change due to classist, cissexist, ableist, racist and institutional ideologies and policies. These relationships can be singled out as particularly important targets for changes in institutional practices that if realized can have profound knock-on effects in both the welfare and precariat assemblages. If we change the relational practices between staff and clients in the welfare assemblage to be more humane or in keeping with key

FIGURE 1 Prime Minister Jacinda Adern with the precariat on her bookshelf

Māori cultural values (e.g. manaakitanga) we are likely to enhance the provision of more appropriate and effective support to precariatized persons that enhance, rather than undermine their lives.

ENGAGING GOVERNMENT *WITH* COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO CHANGE RELATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE WELFARE SYSTEM: A POLICY THINK-PIECE

The think-piece (Rua et al., 2019) for central government was funded by Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga (Aotearoa New Zealand's Māori Centre of Research Excellence) and brought together lessons learned from the book and other activities, including research and service design activities with various Māori precariat groups and agencies. The cultural processes involved in its production reflects the emphasis placed by Kaupapa Māori researchers on cultivating practices of whanaungatanga (relational engagements) over time. This involves working insights from these relationships to reach consensus in how we might address real problems faced by Māori and related communities. Foregrounded were the lived experiences of members of the precariat and their efforts to navigate and survive as well as engage with the welfare system.

We drew on these experiences to inform concrete recommendations for how the welfare system could be re-assembled to better reflect the diverse needs of precariatized persons, families and communities. This focus is important because hegemonic classist, cissexist and racist tropes at the time associated precarity with personal failures, including the lack of a work ethic, freeloading off the taxpayer, fraud, immorality, substance misuse and classic notions of the 'undeserving poor' (Chauhan & Foster, 2014;

Meese et al., 2020; Reutter et al., 2009; Standing, 2012). Popular rhetoric focused on the supposed evils of State dependency that renders invisible our national history of colonization and illegal resource confiscations that have rendered many Māori. The presentation of lived experiences of precarity that were linked to the structural causes of such phenomena were important in countering conservative rhetoric and for offering alternative perspectives on a nation state that is now the fifth most unequal in the OECD (Bernsten, 2019; Pacheco et al., 2016).

Beyond dispelling hegemonic myths regarding the character and moral dispositions of members of the precariat, another key task of the think-piece was to offer a more humane alternative to the penal welfare system that had taken shape since the 1980 s (Hodgetts et al., 2014; King et al., 2017). Penal welfare is based on behavioural punishment principles (nudging) and involves a merging of the logic of a correctional facility with the functioning of the welfare system. This is articulated in the posting of security guards and cameras in welfare offices, increased hostility and suspicion and sanctions for non-compliance with dictates. Consequently, people accessing welfare supports are characterized and treated as defective denizens or failed citizens and criminals who are to be nudged, sanctioned and micro-managed. This occurs through applications of technologies of governance (in the Foucauldian tradition) and control, which have been developed by experimental psychologists and imported from countries such as the United States and United Kingdom (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

In response, the think-piece offered a reconceptualization of the precariat and penal welfare, challenging discriminatory tropes regarding beneficiaries and their supposed deficits; offering contextual considerations for the rise of precarity and the everyday dilemmas and hardships faced by growing numbers of New Zealanders. We also pointed to how the problems members of the precariat face in accessing needed supports for survival and participation in society reflect the penal orientation of a welfare system that has lost its coherence and heart (Hodgetts et al., 2014). For one of the precariat households showcased in the think-piece, this meant engaging with 19 separate 'support' agencies over a single fortnight in order to scratch together enough resources to survive. We pointed out that this is a common experience for members of the precariat who often require the services of client advocates to access their statutory entitlements. The welfare system is also inefficient, heartless, and strips people of their self-worth and dignity.

In formulating an alternative culturally humane approach to systemic support for the precariat, we drew on our collaborations with Māori community leaders who co-authored and co-presented the think-piece with us to also make the point that it is time to be less punitive and to actually listen to such client groups. This is an important assertion of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) because as the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, public policy and the functioning of institutions need to be accountable to Māori and their ways of being and caring for and serving others. As noted in the think-piece, mātauranga Māori, or Māori ways of being and engaging in the world, challenges the current paradigm of punitive approaches to one based upon Māori notions of manaakitanga (caring relationships), whanaungatanga (engaging relationships), kotahitanga (unity through consensus), whakaiti (service to others with humility) and hūmarie (acting with gentleness and kindness). Mātauranga Māori constitutes an ever-evolving knowledge and wisdom base that is open to debate and the inclusion of ideas from other knowledge bases (Hoskins & Jones, 2017). Policies and services founded upon these cultural values become important in the development of a more caring and humane system and initiatives to address the diverse needs of the precariat in structurally non-violent ways (cf., Hodgetts et al., 2014).

Central to our thinking is the well-known Māori proverb, 'he aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata'. This proverb can be translated into English in this context as 'what is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people'. Correspondingly, a key message was that the welfare system needs to centralize the needs of precariatized people and to treat them respectfully and with dignity. Such a shift is in keeping with the *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the foundational agreement between Māori and the British Crown that is the legal document for the establishment of our nation state).

The Kaupapa Māori approach that made this work possible and lead to our contributions to the glacial reorientation of the welfare system was the foregrounding of the everyday experiences of precariatized Māori and key leaders who work with them on a daily basis (two of whom are well known within the Māori world for their services to others and are co-authors on this article). By way of further related reflec-

tion, the think-piece relied upon a 30-year collective effort to cultivate a partnership between community groups, including Te Whakaruruhau: Waikato Women's Refuge (Rua et al., 2021). Te Whakaruruhau: Waikato Women's Refuge is a key agency with extensive community and professional networks that are anchored in a primary focus on family violence, but which extend outwards to related issues of precarity. This policy advocacy initiative and the underlying research also drew upon a more recent relationship at the time with another key Māori community group Te Whare o Te Ata: Fairfield Community House who provided daily cultural, material and psychological supports to a precariat community.

These community leaders spoke first when presenting this work to government because of their expertise in terms of frontline work, advocacy and real-life experience. Just as importantly, practical solutions that are informed by Māori cultural values and practices noted above were essential to reflecting the everyday human impact. Their value and expertise as community leaders in responding to Māori precarity extends to having them as authors on peer-reviewed publications, including this one to reflect the importance of their professional work and experiences. It also reflects the importance we place as psychologists on recognizing community relationships. When Te Whakaruruhau: Waikato Women's Refuge hosts representatives from Government agencies, community practitioners and client groups they also invite us to contribute. We do so in recognition of their key role in directly supporting many precariat households (women and children in particular).

This work is particularly important at present as we are in what Lewin (1947) calls 'unfreezing moments' within institutional structures or in this case the welfare system. These moments open possibilities for positive change and the rethinking of the system within which we as scholar activists are never in charge. Māori have been responding to such unfreezing moments within settler society institutions for over 150 years and have taken opportunities to promote cultural inclusion and emancipatory change. The outcomes of such efforts are never certain or complete. Achieving outcomes requires considerable flexibility and creativity to encourage decision makers to consider more human orientations and Māori cultural practices and institutional procedures (Rua et al., 2021). They are reflected in the importance we place on humanizing members of the precariat as part of the reassembling of the welfare system to adopt a more humane and person-centred institutional approach that is informed by Māori cultural values. To work, we have to show the dynamics of precariat lives and interactions with the system as it is reassembled and to try and effect this process with experiences of the precariat.

EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF LOW PAID AND INSECURE WORK FOR MĀORI AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

As academic psychologists we often think about each piece of research or our practice projects as distinct endeavours. It is also important to think about the exemplars we outline above and the one reported below as instalments within an ongoing processes of collective knowledge accumulation, which is central to Kaupapa Māori research. For example, we learned a lot about public communication and deliberations from the precariat book and lessons about the power of talking from the community to policymakers through the think-piece exercise. Insights and relationships from both these efforts have also been folded into the design of a New Zealand Health Research Council (HRC) funded project (2020–2023) in which we are currently engaged.

The HRC funded project is built on the premise that government policy, work, income and well-being are closely intertwined, particularly within precariat households. Of central concern is the impacts recent Government policies and initiatives in refocusing the social safety net are having (as new elements in the precariat assemblage) when addressing interconnected issues of precarity. This project is concerned with why having a job is often not sufficient for precariat whānau (immediate and extended families) to resolve the insecurities and health inequalities they face (Bambra & Eikemo, 2018). Members of the precariat are more likely to get sicker and die quicker than those positioned further up socio-economic and cultural hierarchies. Whilst it is known that income and health are entangled with intersectional burdens (Bambra & Eikemo, 2018; Lenhart, 2017), there is much still to learn about the material, cultural, psychosocial and

spiritual elements that shape the everyday lifeworlds of members of the precariat in general and Māori in particular.

The current project is designed to directly inform the work of the current Labour government who have introduced a raft of socio-economic policies and initiatives as initiatives to alleviate hardship and contribute well-being gains for the precariat (Treasury New Zealand, 2019). However, a key emerging issue is the lack of understanding of how various insecurities and institutional practices combine in concert to shape precarious situations. Because many initiatives have been developed by separate ministries and have not been formally tracked in terms of actual impacts, little is known in government circles about the real-time consequences these have for reducing precarity. What we do know is that recent initiatives have been introduced in a sub-optimal strategic sense, and typically with little integration in terms of existing policies, services and relationships between the precariat and parasitic groups, such as for-profit private landlords. This funded project is designed to learn more by spending time in open dialogue with precariat households and sharing these experiences with those in government tasked with developing policy responses. As a result, we are gaining insights into how precariat workers get caught in 'poverty traps' where increases in income backfire and leave them worse off due to the loss of public housing places, for example or exorbitant rent inflation (Bambra & Eikemo, 2018).

Reflecting assemblage thinking and the importance of recognizing diversity in the precariat, this Māori led project includes investigators from different gender, ethnic and class backgrounds and has three interrelated components. (1) Spending considerable time over several months talking *with* 40 precariat households (20 Māori, 10 Pacific [Cook Island, Samoan, Tongan], 5 Pākehā [European descent] and 5 Asian [Indonesian, Korean and Chinese] recent migrant). This combination reflects the dynamic complexities of precarity whereby many Māori, for example live and work alongside persons from these precariatized groups. As such, their well-being and experiences of living through hardship are shaped relationally, at least in part, through their everyday interactions with those around them. Manaakitanga (caring for others) is again central to our project's engagements with these households in that we take and share food, have developed worksheets that contain information on where households can go to address particular issues they might raise, such as insulation for cold damp windows. (2) Drawing insights from the household engagements to develop a nationally representative survey of key issues, relationships and processes. We are producing a general statistical picture of precarity that links issues of employment, income, various insecurities and well-being in order to contextualize and generalize from the household engagements. (3) Information from the first two components is being used to engage policy decisions makers, not only through the co-production of further policy documents. This component also involves the use of documentary theatre productions that draw on the expertise of members of the precariat involved with social justice-oriented community theatre groups and colleagues from the humanities who work in this space (Hazou, 2009). Scripted performances for government ministries and related groups utilize research materials we produce, including interviews, maps and photography of everyday life as a means for grounding arguments for systemic change.

As with our other projects, central to making this project work is the activation of whanaungatanga (relational networks) to bridge precariat households, relevant expertise in producing theatrical performances and to access policymakers and processes. As such, we have centralized a diverse advisory group that includes representatives from the Ministry of Social Development (oversees the welfare system), the Productivity Commission (currently reviewing policy options for addressing precarity) and E Tū (a leading private sector low-income workers' union). These groups offer independent expertise, cyclical feedback on the project as it unfolds, avenues for ethical recruitment of participants through the trade union, and access to key staff in various government agencies whose job it is to render assistance to members of the precariat. It also offers opportunities for reciprocity as a key feature of Kaupapa Māori research. For example, two of us were involved in presenting insights from this project in the form of a documentary theatre performance at the 2022 National Decent Work Summit hosted by E Tū and attended by two government ministers. Afterwards, we were recruited by the Ministry of Social Development to engage in the review process for the Social Security Act 2018, that underpins government responses to precarity.

Our participation has also led to the inclusion of one of us on the standing committee that sets the living wage level for Aotearoa.

CONCLUSION

This article is intended to inform the efforts of other scholar activists who are willing and able to work in partnership *with* communities and supportive policymakers in culturally informed and relationally ethical ways (Hodgetts et al., 2021; Rua et al., 2021). We have focused on Māori, not to exclude others, but rather because of the over-representation of Māori in the precariat. Further, Māori die 10–13 years earlier than non-Māori groups and experience one of the highest rates of suicide in the world. This is because Māori are disproportionately affected by insecure (read 'flexible' for neoliberals) and often alienating employment that does not pay a living wage, and which places whanau at heightened risk of increased precarity (redundancy and reduced work hours) in times of economic crises (King et al., 2017; McAllister et al., 2021; Pomare et al., 1995).

Therefore, it is up to engaged scholars to re-imagine our disciplinary theories, approaches and responses in ways that enable us to offer increased utility to our communities. Having a special issue on the precariat, such as this one, is crucial for opening spaces in which diversity in approaches and understanding can be showcased. Relatedly, we are cognizant that what we have written is not a typical journal article in psychology. This is not simply an exercise in academic theory building or debate. We do not present empirical findings from a particular study. Although we do retheorize the concept of the precariat and draw insights from an extensive body of empirical research. This is in keeping with the Kaupapa Māori approach outlined above, which does not maintain an artificial split between theory, research and practice. Our use of assemblage thinking further helps us to share our Kaupapa Māori efforts to theorize, research and promote possibilities for change in the welfare system into conversation with the Global North academic cannon that still dominates the discipline of psychology.

Assemblage thinking is particularly important for exploring overlaps between the everyday positioning of persons, including Māori within the precariat and as key elements within the national welfare assemblage. Within a Kaupapa Māori worldview, it helps us translate an Indigenous and fundamentally relational approach to understanding human beings and social psychology. In developing our Kaupapa Māori approach to the precariat, we draw in such theoretical and methodological ideas from other contexts and adapt these to aid us in conceptualizing events in Aotearoa without losing the primacy of a Māori worldview. This also enables us to communicate the position that theory, method and practice are entwined and central to the further development of a social psychology by Māori that is more fitting for the complexities we face in Aotearoa. We do this by upholding key Māori relational values and ethics (Smith, 1999; Te Awekotuku, 1991), which include manaakitanga or our obligation to care for and help others.

Relatedly, Kaupapa Māori scholars emphasize the culturally situated and entangled nature of knowledge, theory, research and practice. This is important for not only our Kaupapa Māori approach but also many other Indigenous approaches because our task is not to simply produce theory and research (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). We seek to produce knowledge of particular situations to develop processual understandings of issues of precarity and how we might enhance societal responses to these issues. It also requires us to acknowledge that theory and research is in and of itself also a contingent process of knowledge assemblage (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). Accordingly, Kaupapa Māori researchers situate themselves within community relations through which we conduct research *with*, rather than *on* members of the precariat. All three exemplars of action offered above speak to distinct and overlapping elements of the precariat assemblage and how we can respond as Kaupapa Māori scholar activists. Exemplar one showcases a book designed to communicate the complexities that come with the intersectionalities that populate the precariat. Exemplar two showcases the promotion of an alternative welfare system based on human relational practice evident in Māori cultural values. Exemplar three reflects the realization that

precarity extends beyond the welfare system and into issues of employment and the need for decent work that pays liveable wages for whānau to thrive.

This article is an exercise in communicating community-informed praxis whereby we offer an account of some of our theoretically informed, research based and applied efforts to address the needs of the precariat. We do not naively expect instantaneous structural results from these works. Our scholar activism emphasizes the need for vigilance by drawing on our knowledge and skills as social psychologists to render assistance to some of the most marginalized citizens in our society as opportunities arise (Hodgetts et al., 2021). We would also emphasize that as a sub-discipline social psychology has more to offer than abstract theorizing regarding the intricacies of the precariat. Such conceptual work is important, but also benefits from time spent *with* the groups we are theorizing about and in efforts to work *with* them to address various insecurities that populate their lives. We can provide much more than exercises in poverty tourism and knowledge extraction that offer little by way of material and psychological supports for the very people being written about. To be effective, we need to better understand the complexities members of the precariat face every day by engaging *with* them whilst strategizing efforts that might help. In other words, a desire to theorize and know more should not hamper us from doing more, particularly if we work in partnership *with* communities, their expert leaders and people in government who have the power and will to make a difference.

Our collaborative efforts to address precarity are anchored in a Māori worldview and set of humane relational values and practices that also require us to challenge and de-centre dominant approaches to theorizing and practising research in psychology (Rua et al., 2021). We strive to inform the work of like-minded scholarly activists who share our sense of urgency in addressing the needs of our communities and society at large. This often involves breaking with dominant methodological practices and to centralize the need to develop relationships and even friendships *with* our participants. Such ways of working reflect a culturally Māori informed orientation towards relational ethics (Hodgetts et al., 2021), which requires us to build meaningful relationships of mutual support and accountability. This involves taking time to reside in community, listen and work to address the needs of the precariat *with* the locals, including challenging ongoing processes of colonization, discrimination, intergenerational poverty and dispossession that are reproduced through present systems. This is important because the complexities of issues faced by the precariat cannot be adequately resolved by our working alone. Connecting and 'residing' within community groups like Te Whakaruruhau: Waikato Women's Refuge, who work with some of our most 'hard to reach' sectors of society, facilitates the sharing of resources for action and the development of responses that are grounded in community experiences, whilst targeting systemic changes. These relationships are informed by Māori cultural norms, expectations, understandings and reciprocal practices as we work towards achieving a culturally patterned system of support for the precariat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga (Centre for Māori Research Excellence) and the New Zealand Health Research Council for the research funding that made this article possible. Open access publishing facilitated by The University of Auckland, as part of the Wiley – The University of Auckland agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Mohi Rua, Darrin Hodgetts and Shiloh Groot: Involved in conceptualization, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, supervision, validation, visualization, writing the original draft, review and editing. **Denise Blake:** Involved in visualization, writing the original draft, review and editing). **Rolinda Karapu:** Involved in conceptualization, funding acquisition, methodology, supervision, visualization, writing the original draft, review and editing. **Eddie Neha:** Involved in investigation, methodology, project administration, supervision, visualization, writing the original draft, review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable—no new data generated, or the article describes entirely theoretical research.

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How to cite this article: Rua, M., Hodgetts, D., Groot, S., Blake, D., Karapu, R., & Neha, E. (2022). A Kaupapa Māori conceptualization and efforts to address the needs of the growing precariat in Aotearoa New Zealand: A situated focus on Māori. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *00*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12598