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**THE MĀORI  
PRECARIAT  
A SILHOUETTE**

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**R**ecent financial crises and a host of punitive labour and welfare reforms have intensified socio-economic divisions across advanced nations. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the indigenous Māori peoples are subject to systemic labour market disadvantages, and are thus more likely to be affected by increased inequalities in times of economic downturn. Despite the legacies of systematic economic exclusion and discrimination in the economy, the majority of Māori demonstrate a resounding level of social resilience in the face of this hostile context. Even so, there is evidence to suggest that an unacceptable number of Māori still struggle to overcome these challenges. For instance, 13.0 per cent of Māori are in temporary work compared to 8.2 per cent of Pākehā,<sup>1</sup> and 12.4 per cent of Māori are experiencing unemployment against 4.4 per cent of Pākehā.<sup>2</sup> These trends contribute to a range of socio-economic challenges, to which mainstream and Māori service providers are struggling to respond.

In this chapter, we develop a demographic silhouette to seek an understanding of socio-economically marginalised — or ‘precariat’ — Māori. Although we are wary of portraying Māori in an unduly negative light, we also submit that an appreciation of the extent of the issues faced by this group is necessary if our analysis is to be useful in the development of an effective response. We begin by defining the precariat. Using data obtained from Statistics New Zealand’s Te Kupenga survey of Māori wellbeing, we then outline the prevalence and

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composition of the Māori precariat in Aotearoa New Zealand. Overall, we find that the Māori precariat comprises a substantial portion of the Māori population, particularly among females, younger age groups, and those with low or no qualifications. They are predominantly located in regions that have high levels of seasonal employment, and in more deprived areas. We also find the value attached to Māori culture and experiences of stigma for this group are, for the most part, similar to those among the Māori non-precariat.

### DEFINING THE MĀORI PRECARIAT

As in Chapter 1, but using data from Te Kupenga,<sup>3</sup> we measure the Māori precariat on the basis of three categories: temporary employees, the jobless, and beneficiaries. We acknowledge that measuring the precariat in this way represents a compromise. First, due to constraints on the availability of data, we are unable to capture those who are deemed to be permanently employed but have no sureness of job security. This could include an employee who is on a long-term contract but is certain to lose their job within the next year, or an employee who works highly variable hours of permanent employment and may — in practice — experience chronic income insecurity where a minimum of work hours are not assured each week. Second, we do not count full-time students who may still be experiencing income insecurity and habitual unstable living. For instance, those Māori who become students due to the unavailability of suitable employment, or are sent on a course by government agencies as a requirement to obtain future benefits, would still fall within the definition of the precariat. Given these shortcomings, our analysis is likely to underestimate the extent of the Māori precariat.

### FINDINGS

In 2013, of the estimated 529,500 Māori aged 15 years and over, 120,500 were in the precariat. This corresponds to a scenario where almost one in every four Māori were in the precariat (22.8 per cent), compared to almost one in every six non-Māori (15.4 per cent). Table 1 illustrates a gender division within the Māori precariat, with 69,500 (57.7 per cent) female and 51,000 (42.3 per cent) male. This gendered differential is

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likely to arise from the higher prevalence of temporary work — such as casual employment in retail and services — among females, especially those navigating child-rearing burdens.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1.** Composition of Māori precariat and non-precariat by gender.

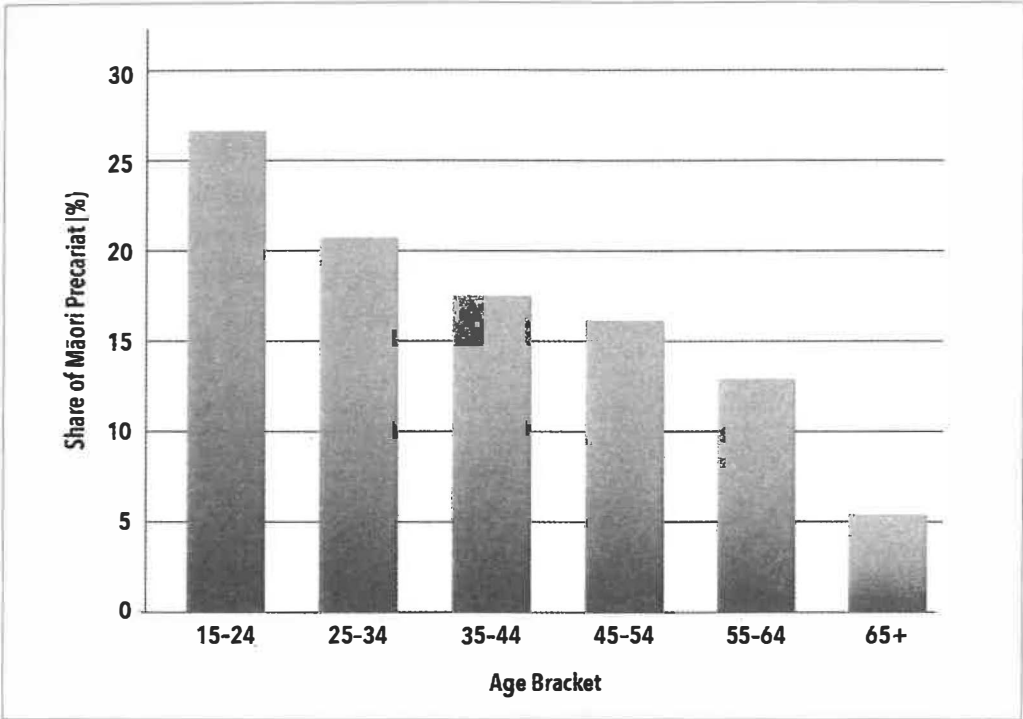
|  | Male    | Female  | Total (Male + Female) |
|--|---------|---------|-----------------------|
| <b>Māori Precariat</b>                   | 51,000  | 69,500  | 120,500               |
| <b>Māori Non-Precariat</b>               | 202,000 | 207,000 | 409,000               |
| <b>Total (Precariat + Non-Precariat)</b> | 253,000 | 276,500 | 529,500               |

As shown in Figure 1, the Māori precariat is concentrated in younger age brackets. About 26.6 per cent of Māori in the 15 to 24 age group are in the precariat, and 20.7 per cent in the 25 to 34 age group. The distribution of the Māori precariat is lower across older age groups — 12.9 per cent in the 55 to 64 bracket and 5.4 per cent in the 65-plus bracket — because, in general, people in older age groups are more likely to have established careers in permanent employment, and because there are more Māori in youthful population brackets overall.

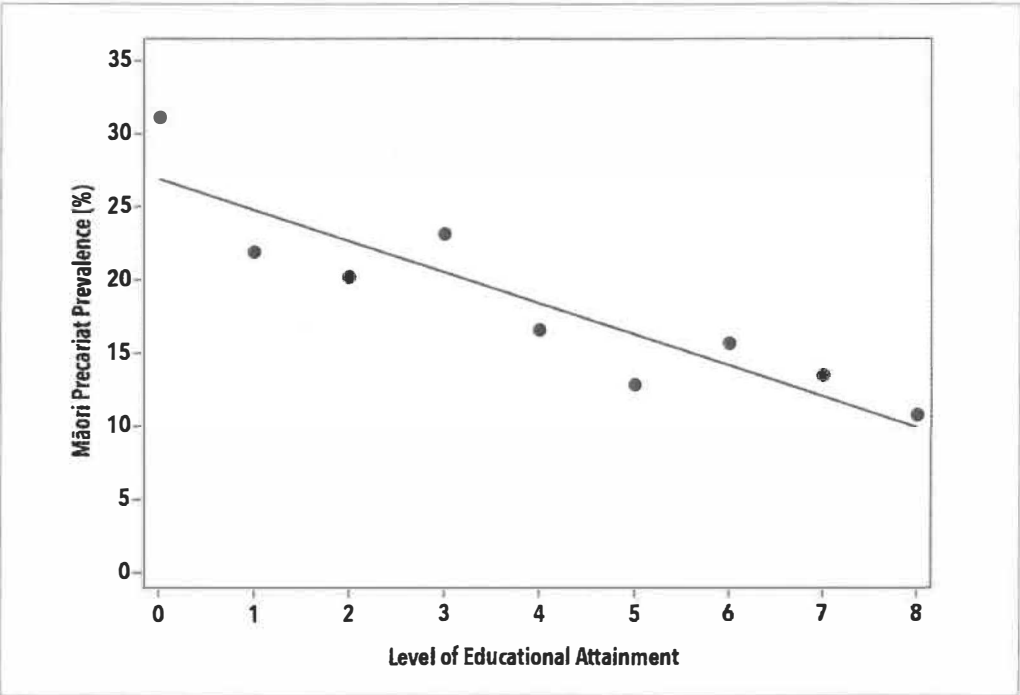
In Figure 2, we plot the prevalence of Māori precarity for each level of educational attainment and find a clear association between the two: those with higher levels of education are less likely to be in the precariat. For instance, 30.9 per cent of Māori who have no qualification are in the precariat,<sup>5</sup> while only 13.4 per cent of Māori who obtained a Bachelor's degree are in the precariat. This finding is consistent with previous studies that report lower levels of educational attainment among those on social security benefits or in temporary work.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 3 maps the prevalence of the Māori precariat for each region in Aotearoa. At one pole, Gisborne and Southland emerge as regions with the highest prevalence of Māori precarity, both at 31 per cent, followed by Northland, Bay of Plenty and a residual category of South Island regions, all at 28 per cent. This pattern is likely due, in part, to relatively high levels of Māori employment in seasonal industries — such as meat processing or horticulture — that play a central role in these regional economies. At the other pole, Otago, Canterbury and Wellington all have less than 20 per cent of their Māori populations

**Figure 1.** Composition of the Māori precariat by age.



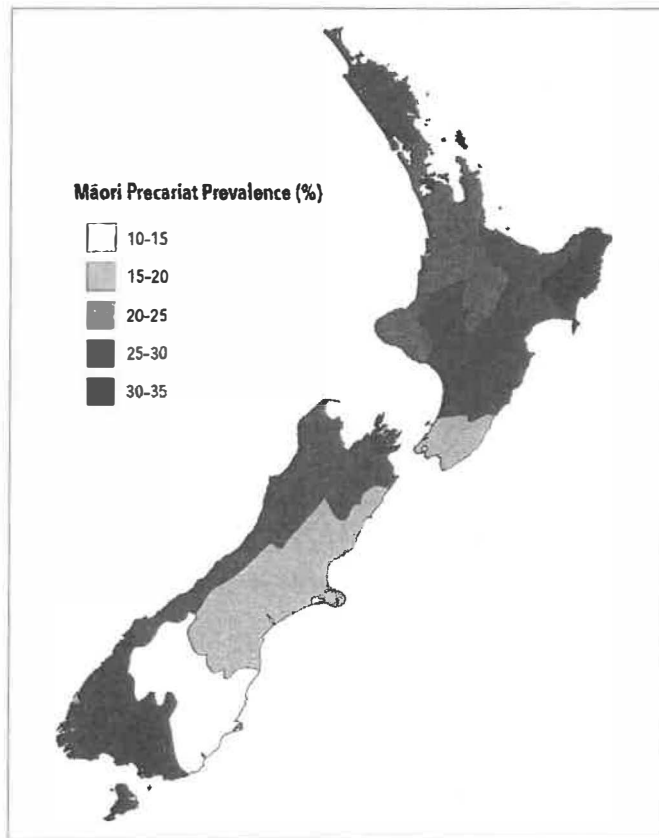
**Figure 2.** Prevalence of the Māori precariat by level of educational attainment. Note: level of educational attainment 0 is no qualification; 1 to 6 corresponds with NCEA Levels 1 to 6; 7 is Bachelor's degree; 8 is Master's, Doctorate, and other postgraduate degrees.



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in the precariat. Again, we suggest that this is largely a product of Aotearoa's regional industry structure. For example, Wellington is specialised in the provision of services to government, which offers relatively stable employment.

**Figure 3.** Prevalence of the Māori precariat by region. Notes: regions include Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Manawatū, Wellington, Canterbury, Otago, Southland, and a residual South Island group (Tasman, Nelson, Marlborough, and the West Coast).

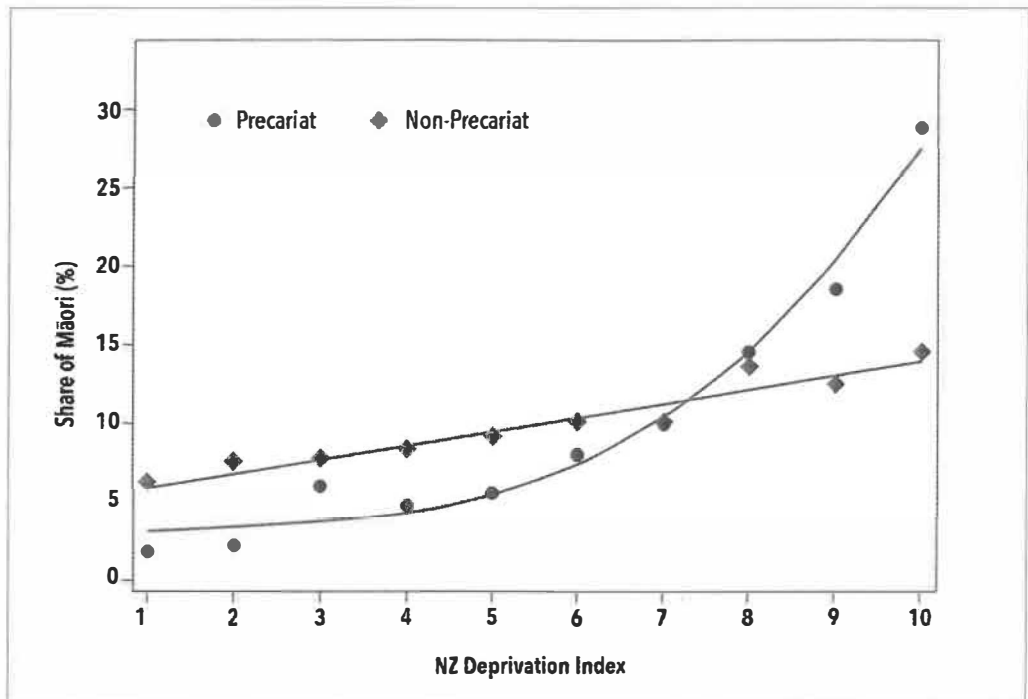


In Figure 4, we plot the composition of the Māori precariat and non-precariat at each level of the New Zealand Deprivation Index.<sup>7</sup> This shows that the precariat is overwhelmingly concentrated within the most deprived neighbourhoods of Aotearoa: 28.9 per cent are in the poorest deprivation areas, followed by 18.7 per cent in the next poorest, and half the population of the Māori precariat is positioned in deprivation areas eight or greater (where 10 is the most deprived).<sup>8</sup> Only 1.7 per cent fall within the least deprived areas. For the Māori non-

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precariat, 14.7 per cent are in the poorest deprivation areas and 6.2 per cent are in the least deprived areas.

**Figure 4.** Composition of the Māori precariat and non-precariat by New Zealand Deprivation Index. Note: the index is on a scale from 1 (least deprived) to 10 (most deprived).



Notably, there were very few differences between Māori precariat and non-precariat in terms of their cultural knowledge and participation on the metrics available to us. For instance, 51 per cent of the precariat knew their iwi (tribe), compared to 55 per cent for the Māori non-precariat. Questioned on the importance of involvement with Māori culture, 50 per cent of the precariat indicated it was either very or quite important, compared to 45 per cent for the non-precariat; for both groups, only 10 per cent indicated that Māori culture was not at all important to them.

The Māori precariat and non-precariat both indicated they had experienced discrimination and stigma, and at broadly similar levels. For instance, 18.7 per cent of the Māori precariat said they were discriminated against while trying to get service in a shop or restaurant, compared to 15.2 per cent of the Māori non-precariat. At work, 20.7

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per cent and 17.0 per cent respectively indicated they had experienced discrimination. Experiences diverged more for discrimination while trying to get a job: 22.8 per cent of the Māori precariat compared to 13.4 per cent of the Māori non-precariat.

### CONCLUSION

At 22.8 per cent of the Māori population, the Māori precariat is a sociological category that is worthy of investigation — particularly as we likely undercount their extent. This emerging group is disproportionately female, young, and has low educational attainment. Another notable feature of the group is the higher rates of prevalence in regions associated with meat processing, horticulture and other seasonal employment. The Māori precariat is also overwhelmingly concentrated within the most deprived neighbourhoods of Aotearoa. However, the value attached to Māori culture and experiences of stigma for the Māori precariat are largely equivalent to the Māori non-precariat.

The fact that the Māori precariat is concentrated among youth poses a pressing sociopolitical issue. On the one hand, if little action is taken to address this cohort of young Māori who are largely detached from the labour market, we can expect a growth in anomie and resentment towards the formal institutions of our society.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, since Māori culture is valued by this group, there is an opportunity for cultural engagement to offset some of the negative experiences of precarity — though culture alone is unlikely to resolve all the difficulties of precarity.

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- 1 Statistics New Zealand, *Flexibility and Security in Employment: Findings from the 2012 Survey of Working Life* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, 2014).
  - 2 Statistics New Zealand, 'Household Labour Force Survey' (June 2015), available at: <http://www.stats.govt.nz/infoshare/> [accessed September 19, 2015].
  - 3 Statistics New Zealand, *Te Kupenga 2013: A Survey of Māori Well-being* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, 2013).
  - 4 Statistics New Zealand, *Flexibility and Security in Employment*.
  - 5 For all Māori aged 15 and over, an estimated 26.9 per cent have no qualification.
  - 6 Sarah Crichton, *The Impact of Further Education on the Employment Outcomes of Beneficiaries* (Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment,



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- 2013); Sylvia Dixon, 'Temporary Employment and the Quality of Temporary Jobs', *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations* 36 (2011): 1–20.
- 7 The New Zealand Deprivation Index estimates the relative socio-economic deprivation of census meshblock areas on an ordinal scale ranging from one (least deprived) to ten (most deprived). The index reflects eight dimensions of social and material deprivation: income, employment, communication, transport, support, qualifications, owned home, and living space.
  - 8 Neighbourhoods in the most deprived group include, inter alia, Mangere Central, Otahuhu West and Otara North (South Auckland); Crawshaw and Insoll (Hamilton); Porirua Central and Cannons Creek (Wellington); and Aranui (Christchurch).
  - 9 Darrin Hodgetts, Kerry Chamberlain, Shiloh Groot and Yardená Tankel, 'Urban Poverty, Structural Violence and Welfare Provision for 100 Families in Auckland', *Urban Studies* 51, no. 10 (2014): 2036–51; Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (London: Routledge Classics, 2005).