

# DISCUSSION

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**SHILOH GROOT, BRIDGETTE MASTERS-AWATERE, CLIFFORD VAN OMMEN AND NATASHA TASSELL-MATAMUA**

‘Knowing that your fellow citizen has the same rights as you do humanises us all.’

**G**uy Standing’s words have served as the launching point from which this book began. The book is a call for us all to renew our commitment and dedication to building diverse and powerful movements for a secure, stable and equitable society. To do so we must address inequality, as all peoples within our communities experience it. The book offers a revived purpose: not to surrender to economic and social practices as if they were inevitable and immutable but rather to pursue a common security that would enhance our communities.

One of the strangest and most prevalent (colonial) myths of our time is the myth of the ‘individual’. We are all individuals: self-contained vessels, islands unto ourselves . . . or are we? The individuality myth is so pervasive (and heavily marketed) that it permeates every aspect of our society — and often goes unquestioned. Indeed, as a political ideology, neoliberalism emphasises individual responsibility and freedom from collective obligations. Capitalism is the spoilt and greedy child of this philosophy.

Our neoliberal society’s present emphasis on individualism creates a version of human beings that can undermine our efforts to build healthy and inclusive communities. An increasing proportion of New Zealanders are living uncertain lives, battling poverty and seething with

frustration and anger at the political elite who dismiss their concerns. They are the unemployed, those working multiple part-time jobs, the underpaid, and senior citizens who struggle with dwindling benefits. They are also those unfairly dismissed, politically ignored, culturally ostracised, and trying hopelessly to stretch inadequate budgets to feed their families. Our neoliberal society treats the precariat as a group to be criticised, pitied, demonised, sanctioned or penalised for seeking help. They are the ‘individuals’ who made ‘bad choices’, who didn’t try hard enough, or who simply need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. In this context, social issues have become redefined as *personal* issues.

None of authors who have contributed to this book has claimed that individuality and personal responsibility are unimportant. Rather, they have all highlighted how such concerns only provide part of the picture of *who* we are and *how* we become who we are. Many of the decisions affecting the lives of the diverse communities who comprise the precariat are made above and beyond them. It may be useful at this point for the reader to think to themselves about the various communities to which they belong: What political decisions affect them? How are they imagined in the political arena?

Each chapter has asked the reader to consider the following questions: Who is the precariat? Why is it growing in our country? Why should we care about it? And what do we as a nation need to do about it? The authors answer these questions through publicising the everyday struggles of Māori, Pasifika, migrants, refugees, families, the young and old, able-bodied and disabled, housed and homeless, and gender diverse. Each discusses how political, civil, cultural, social and economic rights have been denied the precariat. In this sense, the precariat is more than just a class-in-the-making; it is a social condition. Each author has promoted solidarity across liberation struggles and advocated for change at personal, community and national levels. Each of us must undertake the task of understanding, and making, change — together, and not imagined in academia alone. It is up to us as members of our various communities to promote advocacy and take action.

This book attests to the ideal that *people* are interconnected. Many

different cultures across the world acknowledge the interconnected nature of humanity and the world in which we live. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) provides a framework that reminds us that our social and emotional wellbeing is intimately interwoven with our connection to land, language, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community in a way that is seamless and uncontrived. Similarly, all the authors in this book have deliberately drawn attention to how human life is woven into relationships and situations and is not independent of environmental context. We are never truly separate from one another. It is from an understanding of our interconnectedness that we can resist, act and meaningfully work to address the struggles impacting on the diverse communities that comprise the precariat.

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini*

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).