

Editorial Introduction: Towards Sociologies of Hope in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Hope, today, does not come easily.

(Lockie, this issue)

At a time marked by environmental crisis, social inequalities shaped by rapacious capitalism, colonisation, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is easy to be consumed by dread or resignation. In response, contributions to this special section of *New Zealand Sociology* explore sociologies of hope. Through theoretical exposition, poetry, photography and reflections on research and teaching, the contributions ask what hope looks like in a world of crises, what role sociology plays in fostering hope, and what the theoretical contours of sociologies of hope in Aotearoa New Zealand may be.

This special section comes at a time when sociology globally is rediscovering hope and its theoretical possibilities. Theorisation of hope flourished in the utopian scholarship of post-World War II, but sociology neglected hope in the latter half of the 20th century, to the extent that Swedberg could observe in 2017: “Sociologists have paid very little attention to hope, and what they have said is fragmentary in nature. It would seem that the classics were more interested in hope than modern sociologists have been” (p. 37). Part of this neglect could perhaps be attributed to the theoretical dominance of other related terms in sociology—action, social change, empowerment, social justice, emancipation (Scribano, 2024). But it also reflects the rejection of the “totalising” impulse of Marxist thought on the left in the latter half of the 20th century, as the failures of socialist experiments paralysed utopian imagination, naturalising an ever-more totalitarian capitalism (Lockie, this volume). This “undercurrent of pessimism” in sociology (Lueck, 2007) positions academic cynicism as a realistic understanding of society, where a focus on hope may be condemned as naïve (Johnson, 2005).

However, hope is making a resurgence in sociology internationally. Academic articles using the keywords ‘sociology’ and ‘hope’ have steadily increased over the past decade and have doubled since the start of the pandemic (Figure 1). Health sociology led the way in critiquing individualised, psychological notions of hope, situating it within broader social frameworks (Petersen & Wilkinson, 2015). Recent publications, including a 2023 special issue in *The American Sociologist* and an upcoming volume edited by Gili and Mangone (in press), focus on re-establishing a broad sociology of hope, rooted largely in the utopian sentiments of Bloch and other post-World War II European theorists (Gili & Mangone, in press; Scribano, 2024). Why the emphasis on hope now? As Georgia Lockie argues in this volume, the current moment is marked by a hegemonic crisis of capitalism; while structurally dominant, neoliberal ideology can no longer capture and guide the social imaginary. This moment of rupture that is seeing the rise of ugly authoritarian impulse also offers opportunities for new political and emancipatory possibilities.

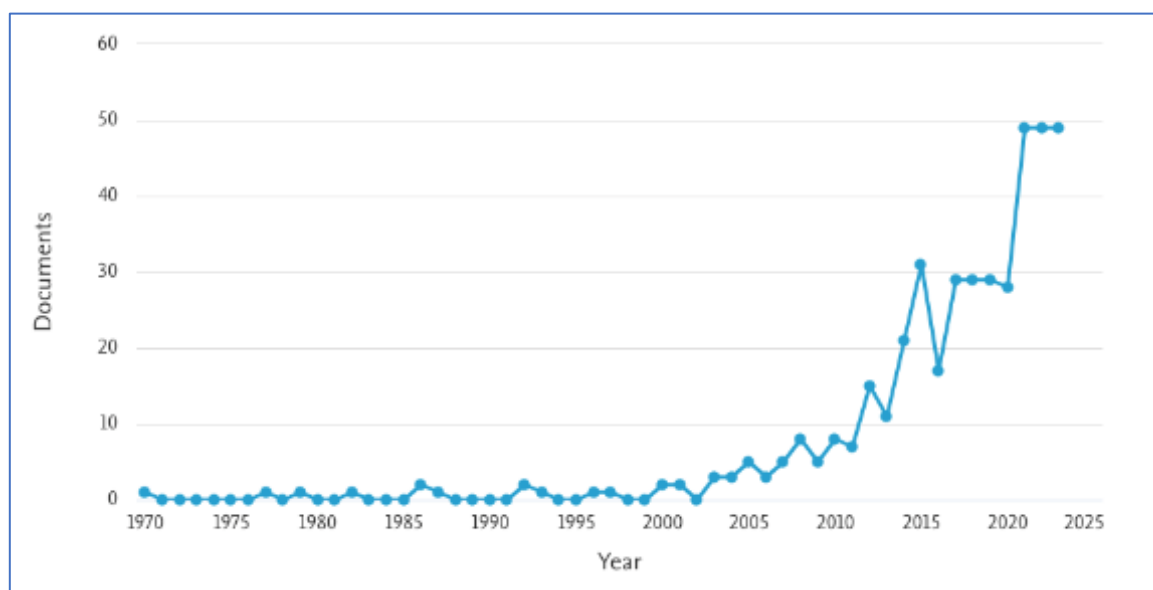
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Figure 1: Publications in peer-reviewed journals and books with keywords 'hope' and 'sociology' between 1970 and 2023



Source: Data from Scopus

Articles in this special section

Contributions to this special section share similarities with the international literature on hope but also develop conceptions of hope distinctly rooted in Aotearoa New Zealand. Georgia Lockie's article "Hope dialectics" provides a theoretical foundation for hope drawn from the Marxist tradition and Bloch's work, exploring how dialectical utopian thinking can offer immense resources for hope in the current moment. Susan Wardell's contribution, "Bees hope: Poetic reflections on theorising hope in a more-than-human world", asks: "How human is hope?" Reflecting on her experiences as a beekeeper, Wardell's poetry and accompanying exegesis challenge anthropocentric views of hope and invite us to consider our relationships with non-human actors in shaping hopeful futures. Beban et al.'s "Grounding education in practices of hope: a case study of He Kaupapa Tūmanako" reflects on a team of Massey University sociologists' engagement with high school students. Their initiative, He Kaupapa Tūmanako/Project Hope, draws from theoretical traditions in Mātauranga Māori and the Frankfurt School to approach hope as a practice grounded in connection.

Contributions by three postgraduate sociologists first presented at the SAANZ 2022 student plenary reflect on hope in the relationship between academia and social change. Terina Kaire-Gataulu's "The discipline of hope" draws on a legacy of scholarship from Marx to Moana Jackson to argue that hope must be disciplined—that is, channelled into sustained efforts for social transformation. Byron Williams, in "(Re)applying the radical tradition of sociology to urban racism", looks to radical anti-racist scholarship, arguing that sociologists have concrete roles to play in anti-racism by conducting research that exposes racial inequalities, and using research methods that work collaboratively with communities. And Hafsa Tameez's "Sounds pretty hopeful to me: Hope for sociology in fostering social change" reflects on her experiences working in conservation to ask how hope can be cultivated within sociology when the agency and impact of much sociological research is less than we expect.

The final two contributions focus on youth and hope. The collection "Practising hope through slam poetry" features 10 slam poems written by high school students from across Aotearoa New Zealand. The poems reflect on a range of issues from climate change to bullying and AI, and serve as calls to action. Bonnie-Estelle Trotter-Simmons' review of the recent book *Fierce Hope* (Nairn et al., 2022) explores how

youth activists in Aotearoa sustain collective action through hope, highlighting the ways in which hope, collectivity and care are central to social change efforts.

Toward sociologies of hope in Aotearoa New Zealand

As a collection, this special section gestures toward sociologies of hope that are attuned to the social, ecological and political contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand. The authors emphasise that hope is not an abstract concept nor a fleeting feeling; rather, hope is intimately tied to material conditions, racialising capitalism, the legacies of colonialism, and relationships with humans and more-than-human worlds rooted in diverse knowledges and worldviews. As such, we do not propose a singular sociology of hope for Aotearoa New Zealand, but instead recognise the multiplicity of ideas and practices of hope that are emergent here.

Within this multiplicity, several themes are evident throughout the contributions. First, the authors conceive of hope as collective; it is not merely an individual state, but a collective practice grounded in relationships within and beyond academia. This emphasis on relationality connects with utopian traditions, anti-racist and community-centred research, and Mātauranga Māori conceptions of hope as relational and rooted in whanaungatanga and whakapapa. The contributions in this section also draw strongly on hope as a dialectic that insists on holding together both the positive and the negative. In this way, the authors go beyond a naive optimism to recognise the challenges of present conditions while remaining attuned to other possible futures persisting through, or brought into being by, those conditions. Thirdly, this dialectical orientation demonstrates that hope is not simply about imagining a better future but about actively working towards it. The authors in this special section urge sociologists to consider their roles and responsibilities in enacting social change through their work. In this sense, this collection aligns with the emerging international scholarship that seeks to reclaim hope from neoliberal co-optation. Hope is a contested terrain—one that can either reinforce the status quo or serve as a catalyst for radical change. A challenge for sociologists in Aotearoa New Zealand, then, is to remain critical of how hope is mobilised in both discourse and practice, while also recognising its potential as a force for collective social change.

With this collection, we seek to open up new avenues for thinking about hope in sociology and invite readers to join us in exploring what hopeful sociologies in Aotearoa New Zealand might look like.

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