

## **Introduction**

This special edition of *New Zealand Sociology* is one of the outputs of the joint TASA / SAANZ conference held at The University of Auckland, December 2007. The theme of the conference was ‘Public Sociologies: Lessons and Trans-Tasman Comparisons’. At this we were very fortunate to have Professor Michael Burawoy as a keynote speaker. Professor Burawoy presented in a number of fora and pursued his contention that our discipline has both an opportunity and a responsibility in the current context to engage with non-academic audiences. This recasting of Mill’s formulation was timely and energising. Professor Burawoy’s rallying call for a public sociology was further engaged with and elaborated on by Professor Barry Smart in his keynote address. It was pleasing to see the case made for sociology’s continued relevance, indeed, *necessity*. It was also a genuine pleasure to welcome scholars from “across the Ditch”. Collaboration with our Australian colleagues can only enhance the discipline here as well as overseas. The editorial team of this special edition are of the opinion that the withdrawal of the New Zealand section from the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand in the late 1980s hindered the public and professional profile of our discipline. One of the greater success stories of the joint TASA / SAANZ conference was the very apparent synergies between an agenda for public sociology and the ‘Indigenous’ stream of the conference. In no small part this also reflected the welcome provided at the *whare whakairo* of the University Marae, Waipapa, and the simply inspirational addresses from Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Professor Ian Anderson. The outputs of this stream are intended for publication elsewhere, and we look forward to this eventuating.

In the articles that follow we offer a sampling of the riches that the conference offered. We hope that we have given a sense of the vast range of topics that sociologists engage in (represented here as gambling and its technologies, emotions, the environment, indigenous land rights, journalism and law, mothering, policing, politics, religion, sexuality, theology). Collectively they help remind us that no topic should escape sociological scrutiny. You will note the range of authors, from PhD students to Professors, and the range of theorists employed, from Ahmed to Zizek. A range of methodologies are similarly utilised, including social surveys, close readings of academic texts, policy analysis, and discourse and narrativity theory. Having said this, there is a genuine unity in this diversity, and this reflects the imperative that Burawoy expresses in his public sociology: *they all engage with issues that absolutely matter*.

***Bruce Curtis, Steve Matthewman, Tracey McIntosh.***