

## Communicating towards justice in 'The Subaltern Voice' (TSV)

---

**Maria Humphries**  
**University of Waikato**

**Patty McNicholas**  
**Monash University**

**ABSTRACT:** We write with a voice of the marginalised in mind, as both marginalised women scholars writing from a critical perspective on human organisation and as privileged human beings with concern for those more dangerously excluded from The Master's House. The voice we raise does not plead for assimilation into circumstances as they are. It calls for radical change. Our ideas originate in research with Māori women accountants employed in organisations expressing commitment to Māori involvement. From that research we learned that aspiring to bicultural ways of being in a context prematurely deemed post-colonial is fraught with risks of co-option and unintentional collusion. Accordingly we are committed to further exposing neo-colonialism and to experiment with The Subaltern Voice (TSV) as a heuristic for this work. Asking what might be said in TSV that is different from what can be said in more commonly heard voices calling for inclusion has brought us to new thoughts about our own engagement with 'The Empire'. Not only as it continues to colonise Māori locally and indigenous peoples globally, but from the myriad of places we take our positions to speak, sometimes 'from the margins' and other times from within the relative comforts of The Master's House.

**KEY WORDS:** subaltern, heuristic, Māori women, indigenous, marginalisation

### **The Never-Ending Story: Neo-colonialism and Us**

Based on their reading of post-colonial studies Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) call for a much greater diversity of voices to be formed through and amplified from communication scholars. They invite dialogue to "reimagine the scholarly community of organizational communication as a transdisciplinary and transgeographical entity capable of disrupting contemporary hierarchies of knowledge and making sense of [what they perceive of as] our flattening world" (p. 264). We are happy to respond! We, like Broadfoot and Munshi, do not see ourselves as teachers and researchers as outside of the processes of exploitation and injustice that concern us. There is no doubt, however, that as scholars, even from marginalised disciplines and perspectives, we are given a relatively comfortable and comforting part to play in the desire of The Master to be seen as liberal, inclusive, and tolerant of dissent. We (are given room to) work 'outside' of the 'in-group' as we address the issues of injustices as we perceive them when The Master, or even our fellow subjects, do not necessarily concur with our views. Our voices, when well 'managed' are a constant source of information for the incremental adaptation of The Master's regime that makes his house more colourful, his rooms ring with diverse sounds and his kitchen aromatic with diverse culinary expression.

Critical organisation scholars are joining activists and creative practitioners in a call for a re-evaluation of the all encompassing and destructive force of The Master. They expose and challenge his sense of entitlement, his cavalier assimilation, and his rage at and destruction of all that appears to stand in the way of his power and control, achieved and maintained by military, economic, or cultural imposition. But critical scholars do not stand outside of this dynamic. How can we, as scholars, acknowledge personal privilege subsidised by the systemic exploitation of others. How can we turn our privileged knowledge of exploitation into an assertive voice for change, a voice exposing our collective implication without loss of respect for self and others? Through the kind of self reflexivity proposed by Shome (1996), our attention is drawn to our own participation in the drama of the ever intensifying colonisation of the life world (Deetz, 1992). Much of our work is located at and thus speaks from “the margins” – but not as refugees as Broadfoot and Munish (2007) express their experience (p. 252). Although privileged scholars (but female and of critical theoretical orientation) we were never secure[d] enough in the sanctuary of The Master’s House ‘to flee’. We were never at his hearth! And here in the both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ positioning, we suggest lies our strength. In this paper we are preparing an amplifier through which we intend to stand with Young (2003) to call ‘The Master’ to “change the [very] terms and the values under which we all live” (cited in Broadfoot & Munshi, p. 254).

We begin the paper with a brief summary of the rise of and challenge to a de-spiritualised economic rationality that predominates in almost all dimensions of human endeavours. We suggest that the insights needed for radical transformation may be found in the voices so often silenced, watered down, repackaged or dismissed. We then introduce our ongoing reflections on the conversations generated from our research with Māori women accountants. We offer this reflection as an example, an invitation to greater respect for the knowledge brought by the women in our study. Such enhanced respect could contribute to the restoration of spirit in our communication with each other and with Earth who sustains us. As a means towards such spirited communication, we introduce and explore our emerging notion of The Subaltern Voice (TSV) as a heuristic, a voice through which to intensify the consideration of the continued harnessing of human and natural energies to the economic agenda of the few – the neo-colonial project, as we see it. We argue that the discourses of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and sustainability do not measure up to their espoused commitment to address exposed exclusions, let alone transform deeper systemic injustices and the gross environmental degradation threatening all life on the planet. These discourses may well be among the most subtle of The Master’s hegemonic tools for self preservation. We conclude that, taking an authoritative voice to call from the margins for radical change to The Master’s House (not merely appealing to be let in) brings added dimension to our task as scholars, citizens and activists. The example we give, is how, by first acknowledging TSV in the narratives of Māori women accountants, we might then imagine such a voice for *Papatūānuku* (Mother Earth). And *Papatūānuku* will most certainly have something to teach us.

### **De-spirited Organisational Discourses [In]Forming Meaning.**

From the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Western-inspired bifurcation of positivist science and spiritual knowing travelled with the ever extending reach of the empire. Religious missionaries, anthropologists and natural scientists served at times as vanguards,

scouts, evangelists, and as recorders and arbiters of knowledge and truth. Based upon their 'discoveries', western white men became judge and jury of other ways of knowing, and as executioners when those other ways stood in the way of the predominantly economic aspirations of this empire we metaphorically refer to as The Master, a metaphor borrowed from subaltern studies. Today, white, Western-orientated patriarchy still serves the interests of very few, yet draws in all to its service in the vast and ever-tightening hegemonic reach of The Master. The ideals of democracy, human rights movements, and sustainability discourses are treated as functional pawns, drawn in or excluded from the plot with a specific end-point in sight: dominance of one human being over another, human beings over Earth and all her creatures. It is the story of economic rationality, an informing story that is dangerous for most and needs radical re-telling if justice and wellbeing for all is to be achieved and the wellbeing of Earth is to be assured.

Integral to the form of reasoning favoured by The Master is the limited form of economic rationality that has dominated much of management thinking for decades. The veracity of this form of reasoning is increasingly challenged by such authors as Prichard (2006) and Mumby and Stohl (1996). The confluence of this rationality with the pre-eminence of positivist sciences has been well rehearsed (e.g., Frenkel & Shenhav, 2003). Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) argue that the influence on communication studies of such confluence can be understood in pragmatic terms. They argue that the way to academic validation for scholars of communication was paved by those who could frame the discipline in the positivistic terms of engagement endemic in the Academy. With Broadfoot and Munshi, we suggest that those who call for a more critical discourse, a discourse less instrumental, more relational, more generative than the prevailing ways of knowing, still often find themselves on the margins of the Academy. The fork in the path taken by post-positivists however, has now been well justified and validated in various organisational disciplines (see, for example, Prasad, 2003) and some communication scholars are an integral part of this movement towards a more influential voice for those who speak in and for other ways of knowing, other ways of being.

As in all human drama, the exploitative drama of colonisation requires many characters to play their inter-related parts. Most of us are implicated, and many of us are multiply positioned. It appears that no matter how radically and cleverly scholars have been able to expose exploitations of concern and our own participation in them, it is very difficult to find a position to stand that has full integrity with our espoused ideals of justice and our calls for environmental responsibility. Many of us fly to conferences held in overly air-conditioned hotels. We eat overly packaged foods grown in overly fertilized soils that despoil the waterways. We benefit from general tolerance of low-wage manufacturing and the purported efficiency gains of outplacement and off-shoring. Our lives and livelihoods are subsidised by the ongoing removal of indigenous peoples from the lands they have lived on for centuries as The Master's envoys continue to 'discover' the natural wealth still to be extracted from their traditional dwelling places and their ancient ways of knowing: concepts inextricably linked. As advocates of more critically-oriented organisational studies with attention to the transformational mandate associated with this way of reasoning, how do we, as critical organisation scholars, teachers and researchers, strengthen our voice in the achievement of the changes we call for, when we ourselves are so implicated in the manifestation of injustice and environmental degradation?

The harnessing of the efforts of many to the benefits of a few is a drama causing universal (but not uniform) distress to (the) people the world over, to Earth, and to the many creatures that rely on her for flourishing. While our story might seek engagement at any point on the temporal compass, we begin with a reminder of how the *spirit* was taken out of Western reasoning--arguably the most powerful move in the ever extending reach of the permissive discourse of The Master. To engage with The Master at all, for example, is to agree not to bring the spirits, the ancestors, our emotions or our intuitions to the table, as employees, scholars or activists. For many indigenous peoples, as for many feminists, this is a fraught bifurcation leaving many significant contributions unspeakable. This bifurcation needs re-connection if more robust visions of justice and wellbeing are to be manifest.

Many important ideas and aspirations are embedded in the stories of indigenous peoples and in their intention to live their own narratives. Tolerance of the Master's institutional purchase and watering down of these ideas and aspirations, and the harnessing of their reinterpreted stories to the service of The Empire, is to accept the loss of the potency of their potential contribution to the necessary transformation of The Master's House if espoused values of justice and environmental responsibility are to be met. In our struggle to get our mind around these issues, we return and reflect often on earlier research conversations with Māori women accountants, conversations that exposed and explored their aspirations to be heard by their employers in a way that would enhance, not diminish, their aspirations for the thriving of *Te Ao Māori* (The Maori World).

### **Maori Women Accountants - Multiply Positioned in the Unfinished Story of Sovereignty**

In conversations undertaken with Māori women accountants, we talked together about the challenges for them of becoming accountants and of being employed in commercial accountancy firms, while at the same time desiring to remain faithful to the values of *Te Ao Māori*. Both the women and the firms with whom they are employed expressed various levels of commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi (hereafter Treaty) and to EEO for Māori staff. Yet, statistical indicators suggested that little progress had been made to ensure Māori women are (becoming) part of the leadership of these firms. The evidence of discrimination against Māori women in professional contexts is well known to us as researchers and to the participants in the conversation. We were curious about the imperviousness of this situation.

Our research intended to develop in ourselves and with our research participants a deeper understanding of “the intentional and finely crafted nature of the system” (Kendall, 2006 cited in Mertens, 2009, p. 57.) that appears to make espoused commitments so very difficult to enact. We were interested to explore how it was to *be* in such organisations when one's aspirations are to contribute to the flourishing of *Te Ao Māori*. The women talked of their perceptions about the reasons for their continued marginalisation and their selective inclusions and exclusions based on their perceived organisational usefulness as conduits to Māori clients. Some of the women we talked with, openly expressed the need to include Māori knowledge and values at the centre of the firm as necessary for both the Treaty and to any notion of EEO to make sense to them (see, for example, McNicholas, Humphries, & Gallhofer, 2004). Despite espoused institutional commitment to the Treaty and to gendered and race-

focused EEO in New Zealand professional firms, the voices of these Māori women accountants on these matters were barely heard, and when heard, only selectively attended to.

The espoused commitment to justice, gender equity and a Treaty consciousness by the accountancy firms, yet their weak attention to the commitments, skills and knowledge of the very people who could bring them the necessary information, contacts and processes, continued to puzzle us. On the surface, it makes no functional sense for firms to espouse a liberal attitude to both the inclusion of Treaty commitments and the recruitment of Māori women accountants if these voices of knowledge about the exclusions or the aspirations for inclusions are to be watered down or ignored. Liberal and functional explanations of this resistance to change did not suffice. As researchers we needed to think again. We re-read the transcripts many times and became very sensitized to the fluctuations in the narratives expressed by the women. Commitment within and among the narratives of justice at times appeared to suggest that mere inclusion would at least be a starting point for future deepening of conversation. To be in the room, if not at the table, was expressed as at least a step in the right direction. For those 'at the table' there was a conscious commitment to, or piqued observation of holding radical tongues in order to remain in the conversation. All the women in our conversation, however, called for inclusion of Māori within accountancy firms with the explicit intent of enhancing the vibrancy of *Te Ao Māori* within and beyond the firm. All were committed to serve their employers and to bring their specialist knowledge to the table. Yet not much has changed.

As researchers reflecting on the aspirations, strategies and frustrations expressed by the women and the selective organisational response to their willingness and courage to expose their experiences of institutional sexism, racism, and the less than robust expressions of Treaty commitments, we would argue that many opportunities to move towards deeper notions of bicultural transformation and a more robust commitment to diversity justice are lost. These women are the voices of experience: they are the experts who know where and how expressed institutional ideals are not being met. We became increasingly interested in the various voices through which they were attempting to communicate their aspirations, in the conversations among ourselves and within the firms that employ them. We noticed that the voices used were at times appealing for notice, at times, puzzled by invitations to engage but cavalier dismissal of their presence. We heard stories of disappointment and anger, of hope and commitment to change. Hardest to detect but definitely discernable was the voice of authority: the voice from the margin calling for the ceasing of all neo-colonial action, calling for the right of *Te Ao Māori* to flourish. We became very interested in understanding this voice and in being a part of its amplification, not only in our commitment to a greater honouring of the Treaty of Waitangi in our corporations, but in our own understanding of the more general deflections, diminishing and denial of the authoritative voices calling for radical change on many fronts, including a voice for Earth.

In our search for understanding, we turned to the scholarship developing in subaltern studies, scholarship that has been most explicit in naming The Master *as* The Master and which provides critical management scholars with such rich insight into his intention to remain The Master. Colonisation has by no means reached its zenith. The imagery provided by subaltern scholars is abrasive to those who (wish to) see

the system as just, as hopeful, and emancipatory. It is an imagery perhaps shocking enough to awaken the imagination. Using our imagination to create an imaginary voice as loudhailer, is the task to which we now turn.

### **Pressing the Imaginary to Uncover The Resilience of the Master**

Broadfoot and Munshi (2007) invite the use of the ‘imaginary’ to “explore alternative ways of conceptualising and to give voice to the silenced rationalities subsumed in mainstream discourse of organisational communication” (p. 249). Why do we see this as a worthy project to pursue? No matter where we look, whether it be to the limited inclusion of Treaty considerations, or to the weak response to discrimination against people based on gender, race, age, bodily and mental wellbeing that result in continued statistical evidence of their marginalisation, expert and courageous voices calling for radical change are deflected, diminished or dismissed. The emerging call to greater environmental responsibility is still limited by the prevalence of contemporary economic wisdom, arguably the discourse that has led us to the mess we are in.

Some of the Māori women accountants in our conversations continue to want to believe that by learning the tools and the conventions of the Master they could enter his house and influence his governance. They believed that laying out the values they aspired to could bring greater justice to their communities. This aspiration is of the same order of aspirations by which so many feminists and other marginalised people were drawn to the discourse of EEO, and it is the same process of assimilation, the grooming out of their uniqueness and radical insight that weakens the transformational impact these voices may have had. What is this uniqueness? In the case of Māori women accountants with a clear aspiration to honour and enhance *Te Ao Māori*, for example, comes a voice for the environment, radically different from the voice of economic reasoning so dominant in the accountancy profession and organisational disciplines generally. By watering down the values of the Māori women who make it to employment in accountancy firms, the firms and society at large lose the very unique perspective and insights they bring as Māori women, including the opportunity to bring into our collective consideration a different voice of Earth, the voice of *Papatūānuku*, who lives, breathes, holds our *tūpuna* (ancestors) and our future children in her, and whose life we destroy to the peril of our own. We are both saddened and frustrated by the diminished respect for these women demonstrated by the profession and wondered how this might be otherwise. What discourses do we have to draw on that are not as readily assimilated as the current discourses of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) or biculturalism, as they are now expressed?

The observation of a reflection on the limited and limiting responsiveness to the insight of Māori women accountants committed to the de-colonization of the knowledge, the organisation and the practices of accounting in the service of The Master was a significant turning point in our thinking. One need only to observe photo-opportunities at the G8 and G20 meetings to see that, despite decades of supposed commitment to EEO and Affirmative Action (AA) agendas, the profile of the current rulers of the universe has not been radically altered over several hundred years. Women are not included in leadership in any significant numbers. The continued plundering of indigenous peoples, the taking of their lands and their herding into modern reservations (be they physical camps and compounds or low-wage labour market prisons), continues unabated. Where (limited) redress is being

achieved for marginalised of all description, such redress is based on the logic of market compensation and perhaps a little greater (than before) access to the more comfortable outhouses of The Master's domain on the condition they become complicit in the maintenance of order. Thus the more privileged of the marginalised continue to be drawn into a web of exploitation: women reigning over the further depression of life conditions of other women,<sup>1</sup> indigenous peoples competing in the race to rape the oceans and employing the same wage-diminishing tactics, just as the Master requires us to do.<sup>2</sup> We are not excluding ourselves from this analysis. White (men) remains right. And we concur. They may find room for 'the other' so long as this 'other' does not rock the boat too much and helps retain the order that preserves the hierarchy of privilege and the ultimate power of The Master. A little rough water may be exciting, may even titillate the Master's conscience, but will only be tolerated within the bounds of reason, and the bound(arie)s of reason(ableness) are still set by The Master and The Master is still [mostly] white and right(eous).

The superiority of whiteness is a social construct, created by some white men but in all our names. This construct informs both the past and the present and affects each of our daily lives. All of us who are white receive white privileges. As white people, we keep ourselves central, thereby silencing others. If we look at race in North America as only a black-white construct we miss the true purpose of the system. We must be aware of how the power holders oppressed all people of colour to shape the country as they wanted it. Racism is one of several systems of oppression. Others are class, sexism, heterosexism, the institutionalized primacy of Christianity, able-bodyism. These systems work toward a common goal: to maintain power and control in the hands of the wealthy, white, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied men (Kendall, cited in Mertens, 2009, p. 57).

Where does one go with an analysis such as this that is well born out in the weight of much evidential research describing such discrimination (including our own) yet seemingly making so little difference! It would seem that we are all implicated. It would seem we all have a responsibility in the maintenance or challenges of the status quo: But how? The hegemonic reach of the Master is so profound, in ethos and in practice! Examining the intersections is essential to understanding the intentional and finely-crafted nature of the system.

According to Kendall (cited in Mertens, 2009) "We can dismantle it [the system] if we know it well and work together toward that goal" (p. 57). But we cannot learn it if our thoughts are to be contained by the limitations of the lexicons of EEO and the modern new darling: Sustainability. With Lorde (1981) we doubt that even fantastic competency with The Master's tools will be sufficient to transform his house. It is this train of thought that invited us to experiment with a much more radical voice occasionally detectable in our conversations with Māori women but often subsumed by the Voice of Reason, the Voice of Pragmatism, the Voice of Need (for a job, for inclusion), the Voice of EEO often assumed to be the spoken Voice of Justice. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Child poverty and the gap between rich and poor exacerbated in NZ in a period when the seven top jobs were held by women and the country was firmly governed according to the principles of neo-liberalism. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Minister of Social Development, Paula Bennett and the Minister of Education, Anne Tolley, are overseeing cuts that will predictably affect already vulnerable women and children to their disadvantage

<sup>2</sup> There is evidence to suggest that when Maori enter the global economic system, they, like the rest of us, comply with The Master's demands to exploit those available for such exploitation (Humphries et al 2007).

fluctuations of the voices we noticed in our research conversations with the Māori women accountants were also noticeable in other aspects of our work. In paying closer attention to ourselves we became more focussed on the multiple positions many of us find or place ourselves in as a matter of course, as a matter of survival, even when we call for radical reformation of our organisations (and thus our society).

Exposing the contradictions within or across particular narratives provided by trusting research participants to themselves and to the wider readership of a research community is a matter fraught with ethical issues for a researcher. From a particular position, problem articulation and proposed remedies take on a specific hue. Living (and describing) a reality as ‘an insider’ is always perspective bound, as are the observations of ‘outsiders’ on such perspectives. An ‘outsider’, as researcher, may bring diverse readings to those fragile articulations through respectful or disrespectful exposures with the power and the privilege of a research publication as authority. How to invite a closer inspection of such self exposure, those differences within and across specific narratives as narratives that serve The Master’s House, is especially difficult when a reflection on such narratives might demonstrate an individual’s conscious or unconscious willingness to compromise his or her deepest held values. To admit such complicity to ourselves, let alone to one another, can be highly unsettling. To allow them to be exposed in the public arena for common reflections takes an act of courage. It seems to us, that this must be a basic step towards transformation of selves, necessary for the transformation of organisations and thus society writ large. How can we make such reflection on self, as individuals but also as a species, more palatable when the really difficult questions and articulations are so readily diminished or deflected? We might begin by acknowledging that all humans, not just the courageous people allowing their narratives to be exposed to scrutiny, may engage in a variety of justifications and delusions to make life liveable. This does not make us bad people. To suggest so would be to further press us into denial of the very universal involvement in the keeping of the Masters’ Empire that we must address if justice on so many dimensions is to be achieved and if Earth is to be engaged in a relationship of respect. We need to admit that to invite ourselves to expose our own collusions and collaborations is a very sensitive and courageous task. It is a task to which we now bring our experience with Critical Appreciative Enquiry (Grant & Humphries, 2006).

### **Critical Appreciative Enquiry – An Examination of ‘Selves’ in the Neo-Colonial Drama**

*In moving to transformative politics we need to understand the history of colonisation but the bulk of our work and focus must be on what it is we want, what it is that we are about and to ‘imagine’ our future. (Smith, 2003, p. 3).*

In reflecting on the persistence of mono-culturalism in Aotearoa, on discriminations based on gender, race, sexual orientation, perceived attractiveness, age, able-bodiedness and more, and the weak response to the environmental crises here and world-wide, we are thinking about the many courageous voices of resistance and protest, and the numerous calls for and experiments with transformation that have been and are being voiced. Those seeking a re-organisation of humanity are not short of analyses or courageous actors. Yet The Master’s House still stands – and we do not see a crumbling of its foundations in the very near future. How then do we build on all that is useful to amplify calls for transformation?



Our research experience tells us that there are a myriad of stories that demonstrate the selective hearing of The Master, his co-option and harnessing of ideas that may decorate his House in the colours of the oppressed, and the (perhaps unwitting) ways we all collude in premature integration that results in the assimilation of difference at the overall expense of the marginal. This harnessing of the diverse to the service of The Empire can be seen as a dis-service to the ideals of inclusiveness espoused by The Master in the first instance, but can also be read as a loss to all who seek a more radical transformation. The significant insights that might really re-work the foundations of organising human endeavours more justly are lost. We have called this outcome the diversification of the insignificant and the homogenisation of the profound (Humphries & McNicholas, 2008). By learning to appreciate the values and aspirations of those calling from the margins, their call not merely to be let in but for a radical reconstruction of our ways of being, we stand to gain more than the incremental tinkering in The Master's House will ever achieve.

The desire to move forward from merely observing that the women we talked with spoke out in a variety of voices drew us to a reflection on that very observation. We wanted to find a way to retain their critical insights and to appreciate their courage and difficulties. In other work we have already explored what we see as the weaknesses of appreciative enquiry in the face of an oppressive system. Drawing together the self reflection called on by Shome (2003) and our own interest in developing a form of Critical Appreciative Enquiry (Grant & Humphries, 2006) appears to open a way to bringing ourselves and our collusions into the conversation in a new way. Critical theorists with an intellectual link to Gramsci, invite the exposure and transformation of the hegemonic aspects of any regime. Both the positions of privilege and of subjugation may be consciously acknowledged or hegemonically held in place. By requiring a critical discipline of ourselves, then appreciating that we all speak in many tongues and wear many hats in the drama of life we can more easily acknowledge that this is not just the case for the people whose conflicted and inconsistent narratives we have as the researcher privilege to deconstruct and expose. It is very uncomfortable to begin to notice this in one's own being. A critical and appreciative reflection on this complicity, however, brings us as researchers, to a much more focussed sense of responsibility. What then, can we do to bring our espoused values to greater expression and devoted to organisational change? To honour our collective and individual human frailty, but to draw on our human courage, we propose the conscious donning of the metaphoric mantle of The Subaltern. Dressed in this magical, inspirational mantle, TSV may be amplified. It reaches for others who are willing to speak in this voice. Thus we propose TSV as a powerful heuristic device for transformation to a more inclusive society, not by the assimilation of the more articulate marginalised satisfied with mere inclusion, but a transformation of our way of being that does not include any structural exclusion.

### **TSV as Heuristic Device in the Discourse of Emancipation**

We are positing TSV as a heuristic from which intentional action may be generated. A heuristic device is:

[A]ny procedure which involves the use of an artificial construct to assist in the exploration of social phenomena. It usually involves assumptions derived from extant empirical research. For example, ideal types have been used as a way of

setting out the defining characteristics of a social phenomenon, so that its salient features might be stated as clearly and explicitly as possible. A heuristic device is, then, a form of preliminary analysis. Such devices have proved especially useful in studies of social change, by defining bench-marks, around which variation and differences can then be situated. In this context, a heuristic device is usually employed for analytical clarity, although it can also have explanatory value as a model. (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O88-heuristicdevice.html>)

We are interested in what we can learn through the wider use of our heuristic from our research about oppressions yet to be transformed. We sought a voice that may move us towards universal inclusiveness expressed in espoused democratic ideals and the associated aspirations to justice. Subaltern studies provided us with the metaphors we are finding helpful in the articulation of such a voice.

Basic to subaltern studies is the notion that The Empire (a metaphor that we take to stand for Dominant Power metaphorically expressed as ‘The Master’) is an intentional and damaging social fabrication. The Master’s House may be used as an image to express the formalisation of the rules and the manners of The Empire, that assure all those privileged to enter behave in ways that do not bring the house into disrepute and thus bring down The Empire. The House rules and manners may hold in place privilege and subjugation, and make it clear that those who cannot or will not comply will be punished or be required to leave.

Spivak (cited in Kilburn, 1996) points out that in Gramsci’s original work ‘the subaltern’ signified ‘proletarian’ whose voice was structurally written out of the capitalist bourgeois narrative. Spivak however, does not like the misappropriation of the term by those who simply want to claim disenfranchisement within a hegemonic rule. Their gripe, she argues, is that they are not included in the privileges of the elite, and want to be. Exposing and transforming the conditions of their particular exclusion need only meet their personal aspirations to win their future silence. Countless numbers of women now holding secured positions in The Master’s House, for example, feel no obligation to acknowledge the work of the liberal feminists who opened the door for them. They appear to have no need to examine their part in the exploitative regimes of capitalism or to address ongoing patriarchal power. What then, does it mean to speak in TSV?

Subalternity is not just a synonym for subjugation. According to Kilburn (1996), Spivak objects to the sloppy use of the term subalternity and its appropriation by the marginalised, by people who are not specifically subaltern. “Subaltern,” Spivak insists, is not “just a classy word for oppressed...for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie.” (p. 2). It is this distinction that we are amplifying in this paper. TSV does not call for inclusion in the system as it is in the way an EEO voice might call for. TSV is the voice that expresses conscious knowledge of the myriad ways subjugation and marginality are held in place. It is the voice of experience. But most importantly, it is the voice of conscious knowledge of one’s inferior position that calls for something other than mere assimilation. Spivak cites the work of the Subaltern Studies group as an example of how this critical distinction can be enacted. The strategy is not to assume one can *give* the subaltern voice. The subaltern already *has* a voice. The task is to help clear a space for the subaltern to speak: But how?

We took what we learned from the conversations with Māori women accountants

into our classroom where we are exploring the apparent resilience of injustice with a different group of women. These women, like the Māori women accountants in our original research, are personally very familiar with and articulate about their own positioning on the margins of The Empire, as women and as organisational employees across a range of professional careers. These women have come back to post graduate studies with profound questions about the apparent intransigence of injustice in their communities of practice despite espoused organisational commitment to Treaty or EEO policies. In their study of their experiences with attempts to influence organizational change, we invited them to try on the identity of the subaltern as one would don a mantel, a costume, as a creative, intentional act of the imagination. We invited them to observe what voice sounds out, what communication is possible when dressed in that garb, and to pay special attention to what can be said that is silenced when dressed in another costume. The participants in this experiment with voice are both Māori and Pakeha women each expressing a keen sense of responsibility for social transformation. Segments of the conversation below illustrate the usefulness of TSV to their thinking about both the issues of biculturalism, but also the oppressions of gender. Speaking in this voice moved them swiftly from the functionalist discourse of much of the literature they have been schooled in to an expression more typical of critical management studies, even if this had not yet been a significant part of their previous education.

On the value of staying on the margins rather than being seduced into The Master's House, one woman wrote that remaining:

*outside this metaphoric house for the subaltern group does ensure its integrity is not contaminated by the institution of this main house. The pressure or force of the main group holding forth would be too great for TSV..*

Each woman in our conversation, however, was aware of and willing to acknowledge how much of The Master's House we (need/desire to) use. No matter how staunch our analyses they recognise that we cannot be entirely free from The Master's House. From the requirement to pay our water bills and our rent to keep ourselves and our children clean and warm they wondered about how one might be more conscious of this (selective) use:

*... I had a vision of me ducking into the house to have a hot shower and a feed, do my washing and then...*

And by being increasingly conscious of this participation in The Empire ourselves, we are more able to 'think into' the many voices we use in our head to understand and justify what we are engaging with:

*It's interesting at the moment, as I take our children to kindi everyday I hear lots of voices in my head. They are voices concerned with who is at the kindi and who isn't, and how it might feel to be Maori, Indian, Asian in this context, and what my*

*responsibility is in this regard. Our children are learning Te Reo Maori... which is neat, but it's funny, it feels lost - like it's hanging in thin air and can't breathe - like the grounding isn't there, just language, and what is that without context, history. Maybe the kindi can tick the boxes, but...*

However, the difficulty of extracting oneself from the hegemonic reach of the Master is readily acknowledged:

*[However] I cannot think of any group which has entered 'The House' and been able to remain entirely true to itself...*

*This morning I have been wondering whether we could somehow infiltrate the Masters house and evolve some stuff happening in it... or would it compromise us and we are better to stay out?*

Difficult questions about a radically repositioned self become possible and their experience as 'housekeepers' resonate in their articulations:

*How do we refuse the offers of the Master's house - and the associated bad decor, poor view, yukky air freshner smell, not our choice of music, overcrowding, mealtimes that don't agree with us, lack of choice re menu/time to use the bathroom, unfair housework roster - and how do we take out what we need in enough quantity/quality to set up the little whare with each other?*

Many have experience of what it means to hold one's tongue in the hope for the achievement of a greater dream. Holding firm to one's ideals, however, is to risk banishment and recognition that such banishment also incurs personal loss:

*I have been grappling with the individual violent behaviour of people in our families and communities, and how our refusal to engage with or accept this behaviour puts us 'out of the house' - and the people/children/family members we leave behind and miss.*

And from analyses to speculation about re-positioning:

*So, The Master's House (the global economy) is the big one taking up loads of space, but not all the space ... and then there might be all these other houses dotted around the place, very small but serving a function anyway, perhaps global social enterprises are the houses next door? Food sovereignty, Transition towns, the Kyoto protocol, G8/G20 protests...*

By 'trying on this mantel', the thoughts of the women in this conversation can be seen to move from the personal to the political and from the local to the global with ease. Practical, daily necessities and deep concern with social injustice and leanings towards greater environmental responsibilities can be contemplated in the same thought. The women are released from the narrow economically determined values of much organizational analysis so typical in the literature they study and the professional training they have had.

TSV, although well connected to a theoretical discourse, has come from our imagination of a unique voice, spoken from one who has chosen to wear the mantel of the subaltern for a moment, for a project, or for a lifetime of commitment to organisational change. We recognise that there are weaknesses in the fabrication of this identity. There will be those who don the mantel opportunistically, those who have no right to wear it. But this disingenuity is not unique to this mantel. There will be those who speak with TSV who would gladly settle for assimilation. Such opportunistic or false claims would soon be exposed, as was the nakedness of Emperor by the voice of an innocent.

By speaking with TSV we would bring all we think we know to the conversation and tease out the ideas till we were ready to act. And we would accept that we might not get it right the first time. Why would we, people concerned with social processes, not be at least this creative and courageous in our thinking?

*NO! We cannot be merely re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Rather, we will all set to work very hard... at great risk to us all... it uses every bit of the Titanic to make a new vessel, with special places for the babies and the weak.*

Has our heuristic device been found useful to date in inviting our companions to self reflection, a commitment to a more radical organisational analyses and a hope for the transformation of all we find undesirable in ourselves and our ways of organising?

*Yes the idea of the TSV does hold hope for me....*

*The metaphor is so useful to me - we do this stuff in Narrative Therapy and it is remarkably powerful...*

*The subaltern voice is a VALUABLE voice --- one that may be formed from/out of a realization of marginalised values and experiences - but a voice which speaks for ideas and values that are different from the mainstream/Empire - yes - thus challenging of hegemony- but NOT [merely] in order to be assimilated (as one might think of an EEO argument) - but to be honoured - to be used to INSIST on the validity of this voice - as one might think of a Te Tino Rangatiratanga [self governance] positioning. Thus you can see, in organisational policy the EEO position becomes a weaker transformational approach - may be even a colonising approach - when thought of in relation to gender or culture, for example. An approach for transformation honouring the subaltern voice might be*

*the radicalisation we need IF the values of (more radical) feminists, indigenous peoples, environmentalists are to be appreciated and institutionalised to their full effect.*

To date our heuristic has allowed us to work with the stories of research participants who have been willing to describe their experiences from the margins of professional organisations (McNicholas et al., 2004) and to engage with the expressions of those experiences with an ethic of critical appreciative enquiry (Grant & Humphries, 2006). We appreciate that they, Māori women ‘on the margins’ of accountancy firms and the women in our classrooms have insights and voices that are unique. They have necessary information if the aspirations for a robust bicultural nation are to be manifest into reality.

The call for a respectful relationship between those who wish to express deeply differing worldviews begins with a requirement for those in power, not only to listen but to hear and to act with integrity towards life enhancing change. We suggest that communicating the desired values and calls for institutional change may benefit from an amplification of and a greater respect for TSV. We can see that conversations *about* TSV bring hope and courage. We see glimmers of how TSV can open minds and embolden voice and action in engagement not only with the issues of biculturalism, but to move us to a more open critique of The Empire and can inspire an environmental commitment in which the holistic ideas to be found in *Te Ao Māori* bring *Papatūānuku* to the conversation.

We are at risk of losing the very ideas needed for radical transformation, precisely because of the constraints placed on what can be said or heard in the ever powerful control over reasonableness exerted by the economic rationality that prevails. This is not news to a readership of critical communication scholars; yet, our collective analyses have had minimal effect. How can our observations be made more audible? By being *encouraged* to speak in TSV voice, despite the shocking recognition of our own complicity, by working with interlocutors to not fear this voice in their own reflections on self, by not being willing to tone down our stories of our experience with or of The Master, we can perhaps better understand how The Master sets about seducing/disciplining the voice of challenge to complicity or subjugation. With TSV voice secured at the table, perhaps we can more openly work to transform ourselves and our organisations with conscious attention to the co-options and complicities; we can then voice more robust assertions of our dreams, even if that does mean learning to hear a more spirited, perhaps a more abrasive voice in ourselves and from others.

### **Mother Earth: Speaking to Us in TSV**

We, the people, have colonised Earth. As in the drama of all colonisations, there are many characters to take form, many parts to be played. We know ourselves to be participant in the drama of her colonisation. We imagine Earth speaking in TSV, calling us to account for our exploitation of her. This appreciation of the relationship with Earth as Mother is an image generated from *Te Ao Māori*, where this image has not been groomed to confluence more comfortably with western (economic) or rationalist ways of knowing. TSV appears to resonate with the researchers who imagined this with us:

*I like the idea of the environment, of the earth calling us, talking to us, asking us to take more care. Her voice can be extremely challenging and then doing something that goes against her can make you feel sick. So the voice can be powerful, calling us to account....*

In this paper, we have described how we came to hear TSV in the stories of our research participants. We have wanted to place the amplifier over their calls for respect for and inclusion of *Te Ao Māori* in their places of employment. We have described our extension of this idea to our teaching and research and how the students and researchers practicing to communicate in this voice believed that they were able to articulate more assertively their experiences of and insight into the injustices they are concerned with. Should such an imagined condition become reality we would be ready to move our currently weak metaphoric positioning of *Papatūānuku* as subaltern in our imagination to an entity that really exists and is actually able to communicate with her creatures, and will not be harnessed to the material interests of a few. If this act of the imagination were manifest in practice, we might then learn from her directly. And only when the *Atua* (Gods) of *Te Ao Māori* are understood as real voices will we, New Zealanders, be able to claim Aotearoa as a deeply bicultural society. We propose that when we allow our imaginations to hear Earth speak in such a voice, we will hear that she does not intend to be the handmaiden, door mat, or apologist for The Master and that she will respond assertively to her abuse with the powers at her disposal. It would be wise for The Master and his functionaries, to pay attention. Earth, in this dramatisation, is speaking from a periphery made very precarious for her and for us. Calling to us in TSV, what might she be inviting us to think about as we offer our remedies to the problems facing humanity? It is from those who are under immediate pressure from The Master to tone down their voices, as are the Māori women accountants who dream of and work for the flourishing of *Te Ao Māori*, that we can take our lesson in listening.

Most of the people on Earth and Earth herself have now been harnessed in the service of The Master. Most of us have experience of being subaltern: the Māori woman or man in a professional firm, the casualised housekeeper in the many service jobs, the over-worked and straight-jacketed executive secured in the most luxurious rooms of The Master's House. The idea that there are few of us who could articulate or sustain the voicing of TSV perfectly consistently at all times is unrealistic and thus demoralising and undermining of those who would venture out to speak in such a voice, if only fleetingly. But many of us could wear the mantel from time to time. We believe such a voice could enter the communication that is currently awash with rescue remedies for The Master's House at the expense of the wellbeing for many and the increased harm and even death to the most vulnerable.

*Te Ao Māori* invites us to bring *Papatūānuku* into the conversation. Hearing TSV speak as Mother Earth in Aotearoa is one step towards hearing the call from the indigenous voices globally. It may be thought of as one example where taking up the mantel of the subaltern and calling for attention to relationships, all our relationships, can open new levels of communication among divergent values. Imagining *Papatūānuku* to be speaking in TSV until her voice is equal to all others seems like a useful invention. To be willing to give voice to the many ways most of us experience marginalisation in The Master's House, The Empire, is to add to the veracity and tenacity of the

call from Māori that insists on a robust bicultural future; that we all learn to value and benefit from diversity, not as a charming decoration of The Master's House, but an inclusive and just future for all. We look forward to seeing what this 'thought experiment' might bring to the discussions of the prevailing rhetoric of biculturalism, a discourse that seems to have done so little to change the real circumstances of most Māori in Aotearoa.

We must become clearer about what our social constructivist assumptions can bring to the wider understanding of systemic injustice and environmental harming. From this position we posit that *all* theories and their constituent fictive entities are social fabrications. The Master's Economy and its supporting organisations are as much acts of the imagination as is our imagined subaltern voice. That we can amplify the exposure of such constructs as servants of The Empire, manifest as a seemingly naturalised reality through the policies and practices generated from their framing is a constructive and positive contribution. By reminding ourselves of their origin in the imagination we open the potential of other creative ways to influence change. In this paper we are inviting greater use of a subaltern identity and to try this identity on as one would any mantle, as a creative, intentional act of the imagination and to see then what voice sounds out, what communication is possible, bringing every fibre of one's experience to the yet unscripted part. The character thus enacted draws purposefully on the experience of being on the margin but does not seek simple assimilation. The voice that will sound out is the authentic voice of the life that one lives in one's unique place 'on the margin'. This voice will carry information vital for the transformations necessary for justice and environmental responsibility to move beyond the assimilations that currently continue to serve The Master.

## References

- Broadfoot, K., & Munshi, D. (2007). Diverse Voices and Alternative Rationalities: Imagining forms of Postcolonial Organisation Communication. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 21(2) 249-267.
- Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. State University of New York: Albany.
- Frenkel, M., & Shenhav, Y. (2003). *Decolonising organisation theory: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism*. Paper presented at the third Critical Management Studies Conference at Lancaster University, UK.
- Grant, S. & M. T. Humphries (2006). Critical evaluation of appreciative inquiry: Bridging an apparent paradox. *Action Research* 4(4), 401-418.
- Humphries, M., & McNicholas, P. (2008). *Yes! Bring Te Reo to Work! No! Do not expect a fundamental change to the Empire*. ANZAM. Auckland.
- Kilburn, M. (1996). *Glossary of Key Terms in the Work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Glossry.html>.
- Lorde, A. (1981) The Master's tools will never dismantle the Master house cited in Trinh T Minh-Ha 1987: "Difference: 'A special third world women issue'" *Feminist Review*, 25, 5-22.



McNicholas, P., Humphries, M., Gallhofer, S. (2004). Maintaining the Empire: Māori Women's Experiences in the Accountancy Profession. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 15(1), 57-93.

Mertens, D.M. (2009). *Transformative Research and Evaluation*. NY: The Guilford Press.

Mumby, D., & Stohl, C. (1996). Disciplining organisation communication studies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 10 (1), 50-72,

Prasad, A. (Ed). (2003). *Postcolonial theory and organizational analysis*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan.

Prichard, C. (2006). Global politics, academic dispositions, and the tilting of organisation communications: A provocation to a debate. *Management Communication Quarterly* 19 (4) 638-644.

Shome, R. (1996). Postcolonial interventions in the rhetorical canon: an 'other' view. *Communication Theory*, 6(1), 40-59.

Smith, G. (2003). *Indigenous Struggle for the Transformation of Education and Schooling* G. H. Smith The University of Auckland, N.Z. Keynote Address to the Alaskan Federation of Natives (AFN) Convention. Anchorage, Alaska, U.S, October, 2003 Hingangaroa Smith, The University of Auckland, N.Z. <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/Curriculum/Articles/GrahamSmith/> Downloaded 11/6/09

Young, R. (2003). *Post Colonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: U.K. Oxford University Press.

### **Acknowledgements:**

Ngā mihi nui kia ngā wāhine toa who were willing to be part of the conversations, both those who were in the original group of Māori women accountants, and those working in the postgraduate programme in critically orientated management studies at the Waikato Management School.

**Associate Professor Maria Humphries** is employed by the Waikato Management School at the University of Waikato. Maria has been teaching, researching and writing on diversity management and in critical management research and pedagogy since 1990. Prior to that, she was one of the early 'Treaty Educators' among Pākehā.

**Dr Patty McNicholas** is a Senior Lecturer at Monash University Clayton campus in Melbourne, Australia. While her teaching is primarily in financial accounting, her research interests focus upon the critical and social analysis of gender/ethnicity/class/cultural issues in the accountancy profession. Related issues of concern are environmental accounting, sustainability reporting, stakeholder engagement, social and environmental accountability and climate change. Patty is of Ngāti Whātua and Ngāti Maniapoto descent.

Copyright of Communication Journal of New Zealand is the property of New Zealand Communication Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.