Title: Raising One’s Voice to The Insistent Hand of Neo-Colonialism

Andrina Thomas, Maria Humphries

University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

• The research problem to be addressed...?

Social Enterprise is seen as a part of the transformation of the injustices that have come to be associated with the ever lengthening and intensifying reach of capitalism. This dynamic is highly visible in the Pacific both in the increased exposure of the insistent hand of neo-colonialism historically and in its expression on the present day. Current attractions to micro-financing and social enterprise are being invigorated as a voice for radical transformation that brings justice and environmental security to a community. This trend may harbour risks for the very people deemed to be supported by it.

• The research question...?

Can such projects herald a new age of universal inclusiveness that are both respectful of indigenous sovereignty and restorative of Earth?

• Informing theories:

Subaltern Studies and emerging theories about the ‘Solidarity Economy’

• Methodology

Critical appreciative enquiry

• Key findings?

The researchers walk a fine line between the immediate needs of the local population and the need for a more critical reflection of the faith and hope placed in ‘social enterprise’ as a harbinger of radical reformation.

Destabilisation of village life and associated urbanization is deemed an inevitable part of ‘globalisation’ in the Pacific. For many women and children, this process has led to destitution and sometimes prostitution that endangers the health and wellbeing of the people concerned and may undermine more desirable forms of development in which even the most vulnerable of people can expect to flourish. According to the call for papers,

the third sector is playing an important role in providing social services, contributing to policy development, advocating for the rights of poor and oppressed people and for women’s rights, contributing to livelihoods and reduction of poverty when the state and market cannot or will not do so, making international aid more effective, growing social capital, contributing to social enterprise and social entrepreneurship, and in many other ways.
We are exploring this hopeful call through a critical appreciative enquiry (Grant and Humphries 2006) into the achievements of social enterprises that promise to bring opportunities to women who are poor and through whose achievements, it is hoped, well-being of communities will be enhanced.

Gainer (in press) calls for a plurality of voices from Third Sector researchers to ensure that the ideals about the Third Sector and its value are not harnessed to the interests of the powerful. She sees regional research as the place where we are most likely to see the highest degree of critical thinking and of just plain resistance to ideas about the third sector that have become hegemonic. We need more of this. We need to examine critically the many ideas that we accept in this field as fundamental and true....It is through recognition that what we often take to be fundamental principles of the third sector and its values globally are really ideological beliefs associated with specific cultures and countries. Theoretical breakthroughs will take place as the international research community becomes pluralist not only in its membership but in its ideas and basic beliefs about the sector.

What voice do we as researchers have to engage in transformational actions that will draw us closer to a justice that is respectful of all and includes the wellbeing of Earth in all considerations? We draw our theoretical approach from subaltern studies (Prasad 2003). We explore the potency of The Subaltern Voice (TSV) to examine the promise and risks of a more critical engagement with the Master (Humphries and McNicholas forthcoming). We raise this voice as a loudhailer to draw attention to the effects of intensifying globalisation on the lives of the people it promises to enhance. Within this globalisation, will 'Social Enterprise' encourage more humane systems of trade and exchange than that which is currently offered as the path to development, or might it be more critically viewed as a Trojan Horse? We demonstrate TSV as a useful voice to honour and celebrate the significant contribution such organisations make to the individual lives that are affected by their investment, and the courage and tenacity of the women who take up these challenges. However, we wish also to enquire into the systemic issues that arise when we focus on an image of poor and vulnerable women, invited to step onto the bottom rung of a very precarious ladder, a ladder positioned on the shaky floor of The Master’s house. As they step on to this ladder, the very authority of indigenous women may be further diminished along with the dilution of indigenous authority the world over.

Can the confluence of the United Nations’ Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with the more recent Declaration of Indigenous Rights bring both the remedial energies needed to restore the authority of the female person in a post-colonial future, a future in which indigenous identity is respected and not homogenised through the increased assimilation into the every strengthening reach of the global market that serves The Master at the expense of the many?

We review the increased interest in Social Enterprise as a remedial contribution to the fragmentation of indigenous economies. We then turn to the CEDAW and The Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous peoples devised to enhance justice. We invite an exploration of the proposition that the Global Market may not deliver the universal inclusion needed for human security and environmental wellbeing. We describe an alternative under consideration, The Solidarity Economy and we consider the viability of this idea for the flourishing of the communities of concern.

