In her editorial to the Special Edition of *Third Sector Review*, Brenda Gainer, then President Elect of ISTR stated that the primary interest of ISTR is the promotion of international conversations among scholars. She suggests that ISTR has “an activist as well as an academic perspective [and that our work] is situated within an ideological context of social purpose” (in press). Gainer urges researchers “to examine critically many of our beliefs about the third sector ...[because] ...theoretical breakthroughs will take place [only] as the international research community becomes pluralist not only in its membership but in its ideas and basic beliefs about the sector” (ibid).

Despite calls for plurality of voice, our experience of work in the third sector suggests that our conversations are often still dominated by functionalist paradigms. These are conversations about how to ensure the better functioning of individual third sector organisations, the sector as a whole, the relationships between the sector and local and regional governments, and how to increase the opportunities for third sector organisations to ‘partner’ with governments or private sector businesses for sponsorship or other [mutual] advantage. This observation is not to diminish the necessity and value of such research. Our response to Gainer’s call, however, is to amplify more critically orientated voices.

Drawing together the conceptual framework generated by scholars in subaltern studies (Prasad 2003) with the research methods associated with critical appreciative inquiry (Grant and Humphries 2006) we are finding that speaking in The Subaltern Voice (TSV) allows for the formulation of questions and expressions of findings not easily voiced through other research paradigms. This voice has the potential to contribute to a radical transformation of thought and practice in, and through, third sector activities. To speak in this voice, we suggest, is to take up Gainer’s ‘activist’ ideal into research praxis.

Using the lexicon of subaltern studies, we posit that Capitalism (‘The Master’s house) remains the neo-colonial force that harnesses all creatures and Earth to its service (Humphries and McNicholas forthcoming). It is an economic system that promises wellbeing to those who commit to its service. Where this wellbeing has not [yet] eventuated, its immanence is promised through the collaborative achievements of The State, The Market, and The Third Sector acting in harmony towards the ideal of social justice and environmental responsibility. Yet everywhere one looks, The Master’s house is characterised by (often well hidden) inequality and despair for many. The smoke and mirrors for this obfuscation is often provided by both those in housekeeping positions as well as by those who are most precariously tenanted in The Master’s house. This situation, we argue, is in part engendered through the reification and depersonalisation of The Master’s intentions, our actions, and our collective distancing from the unjust and dangerous systemic outcomes we have before us. In this paper, we turn towards the espoused intent of both western forms of capitalism and of democracy; inclusiveness, security and justice for all, with an increased focus on the wellbeing of the planet. But are capitalism and democracy up to the task?

Capitalism and democracy have been the dual organising principles of countries now incongruously called ‘western’ but the reach of which is now intensifying globally. Democracy provides the legal framework and the wider social policy directives to enable The Master his existence and tenure. From a subaltern standpoint, Democracy appears too weak to require...
The Master's architects and technicians to return to the drawing board to discover or uncover intentional or unintentional harmful directives. This much we have seen in the response to the economic crises we are told is recovering. But this recovery, if it is real, is not the ‘natural adjustment of market forces’ as The Master’s voice would have it be. It has not come about without the State’s redirection of much community wealth not only in dollars, but in efforts to re-stabilise the system and to reassure populations. The Third Sector continues to care for (and hide from visibility) many of the human victims. Even with the most optimistic reading of The Master’s intent much of the Third Sector, we believe, serves as handmaiden to both The Master and his enabling companion, Democracy. The sector is harnessed to their service by their contribution to social order[ing], their rescue and reintegration of the openly injured, the crafting of doctrines of hope for those in despair, their tidying-up of the messy out-houses of The Master’s Estate, and the covering over of the intractable poverty, illness and alienation experienced by many.

The paper will describe “Fault-Lines” at home and abroad and provide a critical review of the current community/government relationships and the emerging interest in a greater market-sector engagement in the addressing of social justice through the invigoration of social enterprise. Thus we bring to the conversation invited by Gainer, an example of third sector researchers as a critical voice from Oceania, a conversation about the processes and consequences of intensifying globalisation on our forms of reasoning, organising and experiencing life here in the Liquid Continent. Here indigenous peoples and later settlers are all under pressure to serve The Master. For many this service does not translate into inclusion, wellbeing, or empowerment. We are exploring to what extent, as Third Sector researchers, we can remain in a research relationship with the State, The Master, and with leaders of the sector while speaking in The Subaltern Voice.

Gainer, B. (in press). The Connections between Regional and International Research in, with and for the Third Sector. Third Sector Review.

