Dancing with the stars: notes on constructing a critical management studies locale in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Abstract

Like most social science researchers working in Aotearoa/New Zealand and other non-metropolitan sites, Management researchers face a choice as to the kind of response and relations they develop with the core of our field located, in the main, in the metropolitan centres of the United States and the United Kingdom. In this paper we use points from our own work on music in organizations to identify three possible responses that researchers take up: ‘franchise’, ‘margin’ and ‘locale’. We suggest that developing a critical management studies locale in this place involves challenging both ‘franchise’ and ‘margin’ approaches and developing a position that works with local empirical and theoretical materials and issues, and challenges and re-appropriates, in distinctive ways, imported theoretical/conceptual machineries.
Introduction

As compared with management researchers working in the United States of America or the United Kingdom, management researchers working in Aotearoa/New Zealand confront an extra challenge as a consequence of their location: what relation to develop with the ‘centre’ of their discipline which for the most part is located ‘elsewhere’. As to the kind of relations involved, we might identify three different kinds of responses. Firstly there is the ‘franchise’ response. This involves importing and applying as precisely as possible the research questions, methods and frameworks developed elsewhere. In some opposition to this importation/replication relation we would identify the ‘move to the marginal’ response. Here researchers seek out and develop unorthodox, non-mainstream and possibly marginal problems and resources in part as a response to their marginal location. A third response, involves turning our location into a locale. Developing a locale does not involve ignoring or dismissing the ‘centre’s’ theoretical machinery but involves challenging and appropriating this as part of a response to the empirical and theoretical materials found or experienced in this location. Developing a ‘locale’ also involves speaking ‘back’ to the dominant theoretical and conceptual machineries of the ‘metropolitan centres’.

Below we identify some of the dynamics of centre-periphery relations in the research game as it is being elaborated locally and globally. Then using points from our own work that explores music in organizations, we discuss how it elaborates each mode, and how we are looking to strengthen the possibility of doing ‘distinctive/extraordinary’ work that is both of this place and talks ‘back’ to a theoretical canon that originates in the
situations and subjects of ‘those places’ namely the UK and the USA. Our hope is that by discussing our work within the context of the changing nature of the research ‘game’ as it is developing in this place, (e.g. Performance Based Research Fund), we can promote discussion about the development of a more coherent critical management research ‘locale’ in this place.

The Challenges of Our Location

National and institutional research audit processes, such as New Zealand’s Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) place a premium on ‘world class’ or ‘internationally competitive’ research (see Figure 1). In the introduction to the 2003 PBRF results the higher education funding body, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), reported that it

‘makes no apologies for establishing a high benchmark for the achievement of world-class standing and for requiring the 12 peer review panels to apply the agreed assessment framework in a rigorous and consistent manner. A relentless focus on verifiable quality is essential if the tertiary education sector is to achieve and sustain internationally competitive levels of research excellence. (2003:85)’

As many are aware the audit processes for which New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission ‘makes no apology’ involved the evaluation of a research portfolio from more than 8000 New Zealand academics in 2004. Working in secret and without the possibility of review or feedback to those submitting their portfolios each of 12 subject panels assigned individuals a ‘quality category’ (A, B, C, R) based on (but not determined by) a numerical formula. Here features of the submitted portfolio were assigned numerical values with the sum of these located on a scale where ranges of scores were assigned the characters ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘R’. Each of these categories was then further identified as signifying a particular kind of research with the letter (see figure 1). An ‘A’ category was identified as ‘world class’ or ‘internationally competitive’ research activity. The secrecy of the panel deliberations, the lack of any review or possible challenge together with the numerical method aim to assure those involved that the ascription of a quality category is objective measure unsullied personal, political, disciplinary or institutional differences and dynamics. Just 5 percent of the 8013 submissions to the PBRF were rated ‘A’ – that is world class (figure 1).
Recently a briefing to the new Ministry of Education (released to the public) (2005) provided a short discussion of OECD figures on how New Zealand research ranks alongside other nations. The Ministry noted that New Zealand ranked second of 22 countries included in the scale in terms of research outputs per million dollars invested (two-thirds of outputs come from universities). New Zealand researchers ranked tenth (10), or just above the median, in terms of the number of outputs produced per person. It also noted, without comment, that New Zealand researchers ranked twenty-ninth ($20^{th}$) of 22 in terms of the citations of their work (2005:69 my emphasis). These rankings suggest an anomaly. Average level of productivity, one might assume, might result in, as ranked against other nations, average levels of recognition or citation. Sadly this is not the case. Recognition does not follow productivity or investment. How might we explain this? If we assume that citation is a reasonable indicator of contribution to a field of research then perhaps the work is poorly done, is poorly recognised or diverges, or is distinctive, from whatever it is that we take to be ‘international’ research. All three explanations are possible. We do not discount the first at all, but will focus on the latter two more directly.

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Figure 1 Research Categories

- “A” signifies research of a world-class standard
- “B” signifies very good quality research
- “C” signifies good quality research
- “R” signifies that the Evidence Portfolio did not meet the requirements for a “C”.

(TEC, 2003: 6, ‘Overview and Key findings’)
here. In other words, explanation for this divergence not related to resourcing or productivity, but in location-related factors.

Recent scholarship that explores the character of international research practice highlights the centrality and dominance of the United States and Britain in the construction of ‘international research’ (Paasi, 2005; Uskiken and Pasadeos, 1995; Westwood and Clegg, 2003). This is not simply due to the sheer numerical concentration of researchers in these locations but more importantly to the concentration of publishing outlets (particularly journals), learned societies, and more recently citation technologies in these locations all controlled by the local inhabitants (Paasi, 2005). The effect here is that social science research undertaken by the ‘locals’ and published by ‘local’ journals in the US and the UK particularly (and particular locations within each of these places) amounts to ‘NATO’ ‘headquarters’ has become institutionalized as ‘international’ research.

In management and organization studies the dominance and centrality of ‘North Atlantic theories of Organization’ (NATO) in defining and reproducing the field (through its journals, conferences and societies) is well-known (Clegg et al, 2000; Westwood and Clegg, 2003; March and Sullivan, 2005; Prichard et al, 2004; Prichard, 2005; Usdiken and Pasadeos, 1995). The upshot of this is that location — particularly the distance and difference from the networks of researchers, key institutions and the associations that amount to the ‘core’ of the field — has a strong bearing on the character and recognition of the work done (even when productivity or resourcing is average or above average).
Researchers located at the core of the discipline or field find that what is recognized as ‘world-class’ or ‘internationally-competitive’ is, largely, directed and organized by their own local research communities. In other words researchers located 'here' confront a problematic that their colleagues at ‘NATO HQ’ can ignore: how to engage in research whose content, method, and format is at a distance and to varying degrees distinct from the particular location in which they find themselves. Of course there are dynamics that reduce these divergences, including the dispersal of US and UK researchers to peripheral locations, the training of researchers in metropolitan locations, international collaboration, and conference and study leave. While we acknowledge these, and engage actively in these ourselves, we recognise that these elements do not, in and of themselves, lead to ‘international recognition’. What is required is something else which we identify as a response to the ‘centre-periphery’. In our view there are at least three kinds of responses to this problematic.

Perhaps the most widespread response to centre-periphery relations of a particular field is imitation or mimesis. This might be called the ‘franchise’ response. Work done ‘there’ is repeated ‘here’ in similar or refined form. Under this arrangement institutions and frameworks are imported that attempt as far as possible to reproduce the conditions, approaches and frameworks of the ‘centre’ in peripheral locations. Such work requires high levels of international mutuality, engagement, support and interconnectivity. Establishing the same epistemological traditions, conceptual models and theoretical stances in a new location is problematic. Particular economic, social, political and historical contexts often furnish implicit nuances that shaped those traditions and
constrain their reproduction elsewhere. At the same time our peripheral location has its own particular conditions and dynamics that are unlikely to make it receptive to importation. The ‘franchise’ may simply not make sense in a different location. Local empirical conditions and resources might enliven certain features. But they might disable others in ways that lead to weak or poor recognition by metropolitan researchers. For example the population and size of institutions in New Zealand make institutional governance research problematic and potentially weakens the relevance of the findings based on the sample from this location.

An alternative to the ‘franchise’ approach is the divergence and marginality response. We might call this the ‘margin’ response. Such work seeks out marginal research traditions whose very character, motifs and sensibilities speak to one’s context and allow a level of non-compliance with the field’s core traditions. In a sense marginal positions are proxies for questioning of the 'franchise' (importation/reproduction) response without raising the indifference, domination, subordination, subjection and exploitation that are part of these relations. The pursuit of the margin signifies difference, divergence, diversity without resistance or challenge. More positively the pursuit of the ‘margin’ allows context specific research activity, celebration of the local, and disengagement from what is taken to be the ‘orthodoxy’ of metropolitan agendas. Of course ‘marginality’ is unlikely to be recognized or identified as internationally competitive or ‘world-class’. Such a response we would suggest explains the relative strength of critical management studies in non-US locations such as New Zealand and Australia.
A third route, and the one we seek to propose as the necessary next step for critical management studies scholars in New Zealand and other non-metropolitan locations neither makes a virtue of marginality nor seeks to replicate the work underway in metropolitan centres (or provide empirical produce for the metropolitan theoretical ‘chefs’). Our ‘third route’ meanwhile attempts to create a locale from the empirical concerns and experiences of the location, and to challenge and possibly appropriate for different purposes, imported theoretical and conceptual machineries. Creating a ‘locale’ involves responding to the colonial and neo-colonial aspects of academic knowledge production and speaking ‘back’ to NATO. The creation of a ‘locale’ recognizes that one cannot do without the ‘centre’, but neither should one emulate it or assume or manufacture marginality as a response to it. What’s involved is appropriating and changing and ideas, concepts and voices that speak to the centre.

Of course Critical Management Studies is a metropolitan creation (Fournier and Grey, 2001). Its key protagonists are located on both sides of the Atlantic and its key conferences and events are held in the UK and as part of the US Academy of Management. And yet as various commentators note, CMS has always been more of a political movement than a theoretical or empirical project (Tinker, 2002; Rowlinson and Hassard, 2000; Zald, 2003). It key feature is the attempt to bring discussion of issues of domination, discrimination and exploitation to the analysis and engagement with management knowledge and practice. In recent times it has also begun to explore problematics related to the global distribution of resources, forms of knowledge and post-colonial themes. As such then, CMS is not attempting to build a theoretical apparatus or
position. Rather, CMS is more a position from which to engage with a set of issues that include relations of power and distribution of resources – including intellectual resources and the power relations embedded in academic research. CMS as a label is simply a point of convergence that provides a means by which management researchers located ‘here’ could begin with local issues and concerns and critically appropriate and challenge the theoretical and conceptual machinery of metropolitan centres. Furthermore, given the critical eclecticism at the heart of the CMS project, we would suggest that it is no coincidence that researchers located in marginal geographical positions find it a useful ‘label’ around which to organize and develop their research locale. For us the inspiration for such a position begins in the embodied and intrinsically localized practice of listening to music in a place, and performing music as an expression of community solidarity. In the remainder of this paper we explore how our own work expresses the various positions noted above.

**Constituting the locale: start with the local, start with oneself**

In 2003 Craig Prichard, Janet Sayers and Ralph Bathurst, all of Massey University pitched for a small amount of internal research funding for three projects that all address music in workplaces and organizations². The broad research question is: how does musical consumption and/or performance help to organize work and the management of

² As often happens with New Zealanders, Craig and Janet, who work in different locations, had met each other on a bus between the destinations of Critical Management Studies Conference in Lancaster and the SCOS Conference in Cambridge in 2003 — needless to say, both held in the UK. In discussing research interests Janet mentioned to Craig Ralph’s PhD research into organizational aesthetics and orchestras, and as Craig had just convened a stream at the CMS conference on music at work, Craig contacted Ralph on his return to NZ, and the group was formed.
that work. The research involved three case studies of: a refugee community that supported a music group, a factory where managers had banned the use of personal music machines after more than 20 years of supporting their use, and an investigation of music in commercial exercise regimes (group fitness sessions, aerobics or jazzercise).

As some of our colleagues have noted, music is not a central topic of organizational analysis. Of course the music industry is a relatively frequent empirical site for research work in management and organization studies, but the study of music itself and its relation to work and organizing is a marginal endeavour (see Albert and Bell, 2002; Prichard, Korczynski and Elmes, forthcoming). By taking up this topic we can be seen to be adopting a ‘margin’ response (as discussed above). At the same time this response is also an attempt to begin the conditions and experiences in which we are personally located into our professional work. Music is not just a topic. It speaks to each of us intimately in different ways. Each of us in different ways has an embodied, aesthetic and emotional relationship with music (and dance). In this sense the music at work project is not simply a move to the margin, but a means of bring what is local and meaningful for

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3 Ralph’s theoretical proclivities and his background have led him on a PhD journey through musical philosophy and aesthetics, with a side-trip through the music@work group into researching how refugees in New Zealand use their musical cultural capital to gain economic and social footage into New Zealand society. His orientations are primarily philosophical, ontological and aesthetic, and his international conferences and networks are in Arts Management and in the relatively new Art of Management conferences. Janet is interested in the interface between popular culture and management and organization, especially as it relates to service experiences. Standing unsteadily between traditional labour process interests, and cultural studies, she attends CMS events but is more drawn towards the SCOS group, because of their interest in symbolism and openness to ‘wayward’ ideas. Craig Prichard academic education is found in critical organizational analysis and higher education research. Since returning to New Zealand in 1998 he has also developed a strong interest in the problematic of location as a signifier of academic and professional work.

4 Ralph is an ex-orchestral viola player and music teacher, Craig spent the last five years playing guitar and singing in a Celtic band and Janet (while declaring she has no musical talent whatsoever) takes embodied interest in dance and musical consumption.
us in our everyday lives into our work. In what follows we discuss each of the three projects in more details in relation to the response framework outlined above.

Janet Sayers

My research project in the music@work research group has been on the work of group fitness instructors working with music. We have conducted 12 interviews (with the help of a research assistant and a colleague) with group fitness instructors and have been doing participant observation work also, which basically means we have been attending group fitness workouts. We have collected secondary materials: organizational material such as training and marketing material and speeches. In addition we conducted a large survey of in the fitness industry which aimed to replicate a study on aesthetic labour conducted by a team based at Strathclyde University (reported in Nickson et al., 2000;Nickson et al., 2001), a relationship that developed because of a visit to the UK in 2003. I have now written a stream of conference papers attempting to position the work in ways that might fit into NATO theoretical frameworks. My first attempt at writing on this subject was presented at Manchester at the Work, Employment and Society Conference, 2004 (Sayers & Bradbury, 2004) in a theme on emotional and aesthetic labour. A second paper explored one idea originating in the first paper: that group fitness workers’ ‘labour’ in 1-2-3-4 time, the musical timing of the workout, in conjunction with the customer. This paper was submitted to Time and Society and is still in review (Sayers, 2005, in review). In a third paper I explored the symbolic nature of the musical embodied experience of dancing to music in an exercise workout at the SCOS Conference in Stockholm this year,

5 As an initiation into the international dynamics of academic discourse I recall vividly at this conference a discussion I had with a renown labour process person in the UK who advanced the view to me that nothing outside of the UK on the labour process was theoretically significant because the Europeans can’t speak English, although the Americans were grudgingly said to be doing a few interesting things.
whose theme was Excess (Sayers, 2005). A small audience of about 7 was rather bemused by my presentation, but I was buoyed up by the encouragement of two ‘overseas’ academics whose work I read and admire.

In addition to attempting to mix it with NATO, I have also been working with a ‘sports’ academic (Dr. Trish Bradbury) and aiming the work into a more practical and applied audience. Trish has delivered several papers on our behalf at sports conferences (Bradbury & Sayers, 2004; Bradbury & Sayers, 2005) focusing on the ‘appearance’ work of group fitness workers.

As you can see from the activities above, we have done a lot of work in this project, and delivered at a number of international conferences, but the focus now is on getting at least one ‘decent’ (i.e. Europe or US) journal article out of it. We now intend to submit a paper to a Special Issue of The International Journal of Work, Organisation and Emotion, on: “Emotion and Aesthetics” (edited by Philip Hancock, Melissa Tyler and Sam Warren). Ralph Bathurst has come on as co-author in order to help with theorising the relationship between emotions and aesthetics, an area of his expertise. In addition, a more applied paper is planned which will engage with the particular ‘style’ of one well-known group fitness franchise (including both musical and visual aspects to style). We are hoping to link the ‘style’ of this group fitness franchise to its iconic New Zealand identity.
Craig Prichard

My music at work research involves two strands. Both begin with ‘local’ empirical problematics that coincide with an effort to bring some connection between my professional work as a researcher and my music. As noted above, the empirical target was the attempt to explain the withdrawal of personal music machines (walkmans) from a factory environment after more than twenty years of use by production workers (Prichard, 2005). The case is not unique as there are other factory environments in New Zealand that have also recently withdrawn music machines and still others that continue to allow and even support their use. Indeed it seems clear that the use of music machines is part of the general struggle between workers and managers over non-work practices in the workplace. The second empirical project, not supported by the research funds, is work on the use of ‘charivari’ by academics involved in challenging change processes at Massey University in 2001 (Prichard, 2004). This instance of use is set within and alongside a long history of the use of music and noise as both a form of protest and control. This project aims to explain the particular dynamics that music/noise unlocks as a weapon for re-ordering and organizing social relations.

Ralph Bathurst

My research among musician-refugees grew out of two important life experiences. Firstly, I began my working life as a music teacher in a large secondary school, in an age of booming science departments. The arts, and especially music, were at best considered irrelevant and at worst a waste of time. For many of my students, music was a marginal activity that bore little or no relevance to their future working lives, and they resented being forced to study it and take it seriously. In response, I found myself being as much a
persuader as an educator — persuading them of the value of music to their becoming fully rounded human beings. Secondly, in recent years, I acted as a volunteer support person for refugee families settling in New Zealand. Families, estranged from their home lands (Middle East, Asia and Africa) are invited to settle into an unfamiliar country, where the cultural values are often at odds with their past experiences. As a result, they feel marginalised and uncomfortable with their new surroundings, and many struggle for years before finally identifying with the label *Kiwi*.

Musical refugees, then, represented an ideal opportunity to discover how people at the margins use their cultural capital as a way of integrating into their new surroundings. Following Bourdieu’s notion of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), I was interested to observe how these musicians used their talents to integrate into New Zealand society and exchange their skills for social and economic capital. I spent time with the Burundian Drummers, a group of musicians who rehearse each Saturday afternoon in the back yard of a state housing area on Auckland’s North Shore.

Important events within this community, most notably the Burundian National Day, are marked with lively drumming and dancing. What surprised me about this group is that they do not use their musical skills as a means of employment or of assisting them to become Kiwis. Rather, they use their drumming as a way of preserving their culture and of inducting their New Zealand-born children into the Burundian way. Here a marginal group chooses to remain at the margin, for it is in this marginality that their unique identity is preserved.

Furthermore, it was in the cause of the preservation of their uniqueness that the leader of the Burundian community in Auckland declared to assembled audience at their
National Day Celebrations in July 2004, after a stunning performance of drumming and dance, ‘Don’t you wish you were Burundian?’ This leader invited us to the margins, for here is where uniqueness and difference is really experienced and it is here that new identities are formed.

**Making some sense of our ‘dance’ around the edges**

The music at work project, aside from the empirical projects themselves, can be read as an attempt by the researchers, each in sometimes different ways, to address the problem of responding to centre-periphery relations. While in some respects the overall project and each case study itself could be read as a search for the margin or entertains the sensibilities of the margin, each project is also an attempt to produce a locale. We start in each case with our own experience and concerns — subjective experiences, embodied experiences, emotionality, our self-reflexive relation with others’ experience, and in community relations, in whatever forms these take. As such the projects are all inevitably located within a critical interpretativist tradition (one begins with people and their understanding and experiences). But beyond this none is tied to or attempting to flatter particular ‘NATO’ research problems or questions. Rather each is involved in what we might call the ‘barbed-wire’ activity of attempting to cobble together and move between sets of conceptual resources that in terms of the particular location seem to make sense.

Of course at the same time we are not unconcerned about the problematics of getting some attention for such work from ‘there’ (‘there’ being the place that seems to anoint us with credibility as far as the PBRF is concerned). But rather than attempt a ‘franchise’ or
‘margin’ response, our work points toward the attempt to constitute a locale. A locale, in research terms, is a space that begins with the local and non-local resources and attempts to fashion something distinctive from both. This might seem, to some, to be, at times haphazard and to even violate the coherency and consistency of some ideas, concepts and frameworks. This is inevitable: turning a location into a locale involves altering the meaning and purpose to some degree of the resources and material used to construct that position. Improvising involves putting something to work in ways that were not intended by the original authors. Thus constructing a locale is not without its disappointments and challenges in relating to those original authors and the traditions that support them. This is not to dismiss NATO debates and theoretical frameworks and methodological traditions but rather to beg, borrow and steal from them in ways that turn location into a locale, a space from which to address both local issues and concerns and to speak ‘back’ to the ‘centre’. Of course as members of a community engaged in a competitive PBRF system we are caught between a rock and a hard place. We have little option but to participate and compete. If we want to continue to work in this critically inclined management community then we need to find ways that speak critically about management in ways that can be recognized in Europe and the US. And yet this ought to be done, in our view, in ways that draw on strong, evocative empirical materials that are distinctive of this place, that develop and use concepts that are distinctive and resonate with ‘this’ place, and to improvise with imported frameworks and concepts. Of course the research audit processes will continue to use terms like ‘internationally competitive’ and ‘world-class’. The task then is not to see this as the inevitable necessity of ‘franchise’

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6 If we were looking for a metaphor for such work we might see this mode of engagement is akin to the barbecue or beach fire traditions of the antipodes.
research but as an invitation to appropriate and fashion our own and the centre’s terms and practices into those that make sense in this place. Surely this is what is ‘really’ meant by ‘internationally competitive’ or ‘world-class’?

References


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