



Repurposing, Recycling, Revisioning: Pacific Arts and the (Post)colonial

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Abstract

Taking a broad approach to the concept of recycling, I refer to a range of works, from sculpture to film, street art and poetry, which depict issues of importance to Indigenous peoples faced with the (after) effects of colonisation. Does the use of repurposed materials and/or the knowledge that these objects are the work of Indigenous creators change the way we respond to these works, and if so, how?

Keywords: Pacific artists, food colonisation, reappropriation, speaking back, culture

Introduction

This study takes a broad view of recycling, looking at examples from a range of forms of artistic expression, to explore ways in which Indigenous artists in the Pacific make use of repurposed materials to criticise some of the profoundly unsettling – and enduring – effects of colonisation. While the processes of decolonisation are widely believed to have accelerated in the mid-twentieth century, as is illustrated by the Bandung Conference in 1955 and the ensuing multiple declarations of independence through the 1960s, the economic domination that was integral to imperial expansionism from the seventeenth century onwards has arguably merely shifted under the growing influence of multinational corporations and globalisation. Empires are no longer defined as controlled by national entities (Spain, France, England), rather, they are economic interests (Walmart, Coca-Cola, BP). In some Pacific countries (particularly French Polynesia and New Caledonia), there are still governmental structures in place that severely limit autonomy.

Focusing in particular (but not only) on food colonisation, I look at examples of recycling and repurposing by Indigenous artists producing both visual and print reflections on the impact of globalisation and shifting economic, and thus alimentary, parameters. The artists and their work are Michel Tuffery (Aotearoa/New Zealand, Tahiti, Samoa, Kuki Airani) for his series of *Povi* (Bulls) made from corned beef cans; Guåhan (Guam) poet Craig Santos Perez's 'Spam's Carbon Footprint', alongside Marshallese writer Kathy Jetřil-Kijiner's poem 'Hooked'; Tahitian artist Jean-Daniel Tokainiua Devatine's series of repurposed cooking pots; Tongan-born New Zealander Misa Tupou's *A Choice of a New Generation*; and New Zealand-born Tongan 'Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki's segment from the portmanteau film *Vai*. Some final consideration will be given to Cook Island artist and curator James (Jim) Vivieaere's collage *6 Tahitians, 2 in Leningrad, 4 in Pape'ete*, and to an example of collaborative street art from Tahiti. Overall, I shall focus on the idea that repurposing objects, which equates to a radical alteration of their context, creates new readings of both the objects and their original context.

The corned beef question

Michel Tuffery has explored a number of issues relating to food practices in the Pacific. His 1994 work, *Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)*, is one of his best-known works of art in his country of residence, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and overseas. The bull is created from flattened corned beef cans ("pisupo" is a Samoan term derived from the English "pea soup" and now widely applied to tinned foods). In addition to its possible

cross-cultural references to Andy Warhol's representations of soup cans, in part as a comment on replicability, Jennifer Hay points out that:

The sculpture also represents the harmful effects of a 'throw away' mentality and the impact of global trade and colonial economics imposed upon the Pacific Island culture and environment. The imported corned beef foodstuff – a staple for many Pacific Island families, is often incorporated into rituals of feasting, gift-giving and communal hospitality and Tuffery has invested the bull with a wry socio-political message. The bull sculptures are a comment on the impact of advertising and the mass consumption of corned beef on the health of Samoans. This food, introduced by Europeans, quickly became part of the staple diet causing a decline in Indigenous cooking skills. (Hay, 2005, n.p.)

Tuffery has also created tuna and turtle sculptures from flattened cans, extending his critical commentary on Pacific food issues (for example, the over-fishing of tuna).

Comments such as Hay's on the "wry socio-political message" seem more than a little inadequate when juxtaposed with socio-political analysis of the impact of imported foods on Pacific Islanders' health; as the cultural anthropologists, Errington and Gewertz, have pointed out, it is not just corned beef that is to blame. The exporting of New Zealand mutton flaps, a particularly fatty cut of meat, not only has deleterious effects, such as an epidemic of obesity, but is indicative of "asymmetrical relationships". "When fatty flesh is a by-product deemed edible only in the developing world, its embodiment in the (often overly) fatty flesh of developing-world consumers lends itself to politically-salient arguments about who is dumping what on whom, and to what effect" (2008, p. 590).¹ Given this context, the "wry" commentary can, and arguably should, be read instead as a powerful indictment.

While Tuffery has allowed that there is a sense of fun in some of his work, he also states on his webpage that he uses "a variety of media and materials, from recycled materials, industrial concrete, Carrera marble, corned beef tin and other metals in the pursuit of creating artworks that enrich their surroundings and *instigate deeper awareness across our environment, cultural and historical divides*" [emphasis added]. The corned beef bull is a recurrent feature, "an articulation of [his] political and environmental concerns" (view in link note²). Of his performance pieces, some of

¹ Commentary on the impact of high-fat and high-sugar imported foods on Tonga, Samoa and Fiji reached popular media in January 2016, when Tonga (with over 90% of its population either overweight or obese) banned New Zealand mutton flaps along with American turkey tails. See Narula (2016) for a summary.

² Tuffery Sculpture. <http://micheltuffery.co.nz/portfolio/sculpture/>

which also involve *pisupo*, he states that there is “nothing ironic or distanced about these works, each piece is fully inhabited and stems from a deeply held position” (Tuffery, n.d.). Despite the slightly dismissive comment on Te Papa Museum’s webpage that the *pisupo lua afe* “combines the art of recycling with a light-hearted and ironic comment on the value of colonial economics” (Te Papa, n.d.), it seems clear that in repurposing corned beef cans, Tuffery’s intention is to send an overtly political message. It is only by ignoring the very real, physical context of that message that we might foreground any wryness or irony.

If we compare this sculpture with *Can Console*, a 1980 work by American artist Sam Verts which also uses recycled tin cans (Krier, 1988), the importance of context and the fundamental argument of such pieces as Tuffery’s becomes clear. While the reuse of cans to make a table (console) signals that rejected materials can have a further useful, and aesthetic, life, it is difficult to read any deeper meaning into the piece. Tuffery’s bulls, in contrast, not only engage in an “internal” dialogue between materials and form, but reach out further into a critical space where the observer is presented with “food for thought.” In summary, Verts’s “trash furniture” is *about* recycling as an art form; Tuffery’s sculptures are *about* the social and political contexts they reference for the informed.

At the same time, as anthropologist Nicholas Thomas has pointed out, the adoption of corned beef as part of local custom – it plays a major role in the traditional gift-giving which occurs on special occasions – can be seen as a form of appropriation and hybridisation which effectively positions the corned beef within the established parameters of the local culture. While acknowledging the health and environmental problems brought by the Europeanised diet, Thomas feels that “the bull marks the way Pacific Islanders get something from market relations that is of their own making” (Thomas, 1996, p. 341). Such a comment arguably side-steps the question of product dumping and alimentary victimisation in an attempt to assert agency on the part of the receiving culture, while also acknowledging the complex nature of these relationships.

Spamming it up

In ‘Spam’s Carbon Footprint’ which has a similar impulsion, Guåhan writer, critic and anthologist Craig Santos Perez chooses humour as a way of highlighting similar social and economic tensions. This performance piece, consisting of a semi-conversational free verse format of around 670 words, varies slightly from presentation to presentation, and in some instances ends with a resounding burp (Split This Rock). While we could choose to read this as a light-hearted piece of fun, it also references serious issues, in line with the aims of the organisation that hosts the video of Perez

in performance: "Calling poets to a greater role in public life and fostering a national network of socially engaged poets." (See note³ to view Perez in performance).

After introducing the question of SPAM® consumption in Guam, "the SPAM® capital of the world", Perez outlines some of the specific uses to which the product is put in the Micronesian country, as well as in Hawaii and the Philippines. In an echo to Thomas's comment on corned beef in the Pacific Islands, the poet comments that "Here SPAM® is considered a gourmet luxury and is often presented as a gift at birthdays, weddings, and funerals" (Perez, n.d.). However, he also gives space to criticism on two main counts.

The first is the impact on population health due to consuming such a high-fat food on a regular basis: "The end result can be found in the newspaper's obituary pages. In 2004, Public Health reported that heart disease was the leading cause of death on Guam, representing 33.7% of deaths." The second is the overwhelming reminder of the foreign origins of the product: "Not coincidentally, SPAM® is also popular in Hawaii, the Philippines, Okinawa, and Saipan, all places with a history of a U.S. military presence. In fact, SPAM® may have been responsible for Hitler's defeat. The Allies would not have won WWII without SPAM®" (Perez, n.d.). The reference to U.S. military presence is a telling one: it evokes both the wartime use of Guam as a vital military base, and the efforts of local Indigenous people to maintain some control over their land – a struggle that continues today (Kaur, 2019). When Perez writes "Headline: Guam Struggles to Find Its Roots From Beneath Growing Piles of SPAM®", reinforced by multiple references to the product in the text of the poem (38 times), the foodstuff is transformed into a metonymic reference to the omnipresence of American, and in particular American military, influences in the unincorporated territory.⁴ The repetition of the ® symbol alongside the trademarked name serves to also underline the idea that food, essential to human survival, can be controlled not by the consumer but by the producer – a key notion we see again in relation to Marshallese writer Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's poem 'Hooked'. Moving from a description of the deprivations afflicted under Japanese occupation, with children suffering desperate hunger ("rows of ribs smiling / grotesque grins through skin"), through the arrival of food-laden Americans ("this shining tower / of food") to addiction to greasy, salty foods such as spam, the by now diabetic protagonist is indeed hooked on this unhealthy bounty: "He had been hungry. / He would never be hungry again" (Jetñil-Kijiner, 2017, pp. 14-15,18). Food colonisation, initially a result of outside influence, may in the end be self-enforced, as we shall see again with Devatine's work.

³ Craig Santos Perez, Spam's Carbon Footprint. *Split This Rock*. <https://www.splitthisrock.org/poetry-database/poem/spams-carbon-footprint>

⁴ Like Puerto Rico, Guam has a limited degree of self-government but citizens may not vote in American elections.

This reminder of multi-national alimentary colonialism and its effects on the health and well-being of Indigenous populations, here linked explicitly with militarism, can also be found in a more compact, visual form by Misa Tupou. In a piece titled *A Choice of a New Generation*, a drinking coconut is cut in half horizontally to reveal an inserted Coca-cola can. While Karen Stevenson (quite rightly) sees this as an expression of dual identity as experienced by young Pacific Islanders (Stevenson, 2008, p. 18), we can also read it as an indictment of the multinational dominance of sugary soft drinks and their deleterious effects on the health of Pacific peoples.

Diets high in sugar are known to increase the likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes, “a major public health problem that disproportionately affects Asians and NHPs” [Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders], and has genetic as well as environmental causes (Kirtland et al., 2015). Even with recent corrective changes to methods of measuring diagnostic blood sugar levels, “revised rates of diabetes ... are still very significant – 15.6% in Fiji; 19% in Tonga; and 24.3% in Samoa. These figures are three to five times higher than in neighbouring Australia, where approximately 5% of people have diabetes, and much greater than the estimated global prevalence of 10%” (Tukuitonga, 2016; see also Taylor et al., 2016). An important factor in this developing predisposition appears to be the rapid change of lifestyle and, with it, dietary change. While this is particularly acute in the move to an urban environment, it is also clearly attributable to the importation and increased consumption of such products as Coca-cola, in place of healthier alternatives such as coconut water (incongruously now filling the shelves of Western supermarkets as a health drink), or water, a vital element of human nutrition.

Water, water, everywhere

Fresh drinking water is an essential for human existence. It too is increasingly commodified and commercially exploited; within the Pacific the Fiji brand has been the subject of a well-known conflict between the Fijian government and the American-owned Fiji Water company (NPR, 2010). Indications are that ownership of and access to fresh water will become an increasingly fraught issue in the future: “While the popular press has focused on the threat of inundation of island coastal areas by rising sea levels, perhaps the most critical near- and long-term threat to these nations is the possible impacts of climate change on freshwater quality and availability” (Burns, 2002, p. 115).

Vai (Arahanga et al., 2019) is a portmanteau film, consisting of nine segments by nine Māori and Pasifika female directors. The title refers both to the name of the main character Vai, whose age ranges from eight to eighty, and to the importance of water (*vai/wai*) in Pacific identities. The film opens with a quotation from renowned Pasifika

poet and academic Teresia Teaiwa: “We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood”. Water (either salt, or fresh, or both) features in each of the nine film segments.

I focus here on the story set in Tonga, directed by noted Tongan women’s rights activist ‘Ofa Guttenbeil-Likiliki, in which thirteen-year-old Vai and her younger brother Elivisi are sent by their grandmother to collect fresh water so that she can make traditional medicines. While the film does not refer in so many words to the difficulties involved in ensuring a steady supply of fresh water, the implications are visually obvious. The two children push a rusted-out wheelbarrow filled with reusable plastic bottles along the beachfront, where houses have been constructed just a few metres from the water. In some places, due to rudimentary fencing or plantings, the two are required to wheel their barrow through the shallows. There is water everywhere, but not of the drinkable kind.



Figure 1. *Vai* - Tonga Writer/Director ‘Ofa Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki
Image courtesy of BSAG Productions Ltd and the New Zealand Film Commission

It is clear that even a very small rise in seawater level will flood existing housing. But this may not be the most urgent problem faced by these people; in Guttenbeil-Likiliki’s film the large green plastic tanks attached to each house for storing rainwater, as well as the reluctance of some neighbours to share their supply, are reminders that a number of islands and their inhabitants are totally reliant on this form of collection. As environmental law expert William Burns points out, “On some very small low-lying PIDCs [Pacific Island Developing Countries], such as Tuvalu, the northern atolls of the Cook Islands, and some of the raised coral islands of Tonga, rainwater collection on roofs or community buildings is the sole source of fresh water” (Burns, 2002, pp. 115-116). On other Pacific islands, rising sea-water levels are contaminating the water tables beneath them.

While the narrative of this short piece focuses mainly on Vai's hopes of becoming a singer and her meeting with a well-known Tongan entertainer who promises her singing lessons, reminders of the other meaning of her name are everywhere, along with pointed indications of the scarcity of clean drinking water. The plastic that threatens the planet's seas is here an essential piece of equipment. Drinking bottles are not temporary, throwaway items but crucially reusable. Their presence in the film serves to signal both the preciousness of resources and the potential impact of their over- or under-supply (plastic as well as water) and the precariousness of island economies. We may also read into the visibility of reusable plastic a reminder of the ways in which the massive dumping of (non-reused) plastic into the ocean is creating major concerns about pollution, including the invasion of nano-particles into the environment and the accumulation of plastic junk in the oceans' gyres (GSUTV).

Culture, nourishment and regulation

While all these examples speak to the distancing of Indigenous Pacific peoples from traditional foods, and refer, even if only implicitly, to negative effects on their health, Tahitian artist Jean-Daniel Tokainiua Devatine takes a pointed look at colonial interference with Indigenous food practices in a 2013 work, *'E aha te ma'a?* which repurposes aluminium cooking pots.

Taking as his conceptual starting point the idea that "culinary practices are indicative of conditions of access to resources, customs, consumption patterns, sociability, material [and economic] living conditions" (Te Pū Centre des Métiers d'Art, 2016), Devatine directs our attention to the interplay between settler-imposed regulations and traditional foods. The work features three cooking pots with images and words etched onto them. The three lids feature images of food animals – a dog, a shark and a turtle. On the base of each pot are inscribed the texts of legal injunctions relating to foodstuffs and their preparation, clearly a product of post-contact, local legislation. On the sides of the pots can be found recipes for preparing traditional foods banned by law. (View the installation in note⁵).

How should we read these objects, transformed as they are from their original purpose into a work of art? The first, and possibly subconscious association between colonisation and cooking pots, evokes the many cartoons about missionaries featuring on the menu of the peoples they were attempting to convert. This "persistent" trope that can be found "in Europeans' obsession with Africans and Pacific Islanders as cannibals" (Torgovnick, 1990, p.189), was still active as recently as 2011, when it was

⁵ Centre des Métiers d'Art de Polynésie française. Tokai Devatine Installation
<https://www.facebook.com/831550423574058/photos/tokai-devatine-installation/1987278298001259/>

widely reported that a German tourist had been eaten in the Marquesas (Hollingshead, 2011). There is of course some irony in these cartoons, cooking pots having been introduced to local Indigenous cultures by the very would-be settlers who became their contents.

Devatine's project, on the other hand, stresses the more complex issue of the impact of colonisation on traditional food practices. Legislation, ostensibly in the interests of public health and welfare, strictly limits the conditions under which foods may be prepared within a commercialised system, thus impeding people's ability to feed themselves. Recipes, too, can be seen as a way of systematising food preparation. Although they are, here, in juxtaposition to the laws that render them illicit, a form of resistance, they can also be considered as a written code imposed on a traditionally oral culture in which knowledge is passed on through practice and observation. Indeed, the pots themselves are symbolic markers of the radical transformations brought by colonisation, including the fact that the local population, in enacting laws banning traditional foods, are themselves perpetuating the imposition of colonist-initiated restrictions (Devatine, 2020).

The purpose of repurposing

All the above examples illustrate ways in which Indigenous artists have recycled from their problematised real world elements of food economics in order to create works of art which not only entertain but also invite the observer to reflect. Whatever else these pieces are "about", they also speak to imbalance, inequality, and the damage inflicted on Indigenous health and well-being.

It is not possible to discuss disruptive European practices within the Pacific without mentioning the most damaging of all, the numerous nuclear tests that took place under French, British and American direction between 1946 and 1996. The long-term effects of the radiation produced are still being worked through, particularly with regard to French Polynesia. The question of whether radiation effects are "transgenerational" or not remains controversial (Le Boisselier & Lecas, 2018).

But where science requires evidence and the pursuit of supposed objectivity, art can give expression to protest much more freely. One of the most obvious means of such expression in contemporary society is through street art, in which walls may be repurposed into platforms for the rejection of authority. The contemporary origins of such displays, in early name "tags" back in the 1960s, were already declarations of belonging and even ownership, generally made by members of an underclass. "Tagging and its messages communicate claims to territory.... These signatures and marks that are so much part of the visual culture of our cities give voice to those

seldom heard by local government, welfare agencies, and the brokers of art and culture” (Mallon, 2012, p. 451). More sophisticated use of these public spaces, an “aesthetic occupation of walls” (Smith, 2017, p. 252), has led to a move from unsanctioned display to invitational performance, often within the framework of special events or festivals.

The municipality of Pape’ete, on the island of Tahiti, has hosted such events over the past few years. Launched in 2014, the Festival de Street Art de Tahiti Ono’u has repurposed bare walls into display spaces and transformed several unattractive buildings into thought-provoking, and sometimes challenging, images.

Voted most popular of its year, 2015, the *Tahitienne en rouge* (Tahitian Girl in Red) is a collaborative effort between Seth (Julien Malland), a French “graff-trotteur” or “globe-painter” and HTJ, a local Polynesian graphic designer. While HTJ (Hell Ton John) was born in Paris and came to the islands only as a very young child, his adoption of, respect for and commitment to, local culture is clear in most of his work. His website displays numerous examples of Tahitian-inspired designs, although they are often in pastel or jewel colourings (View at HTJ Artworks note⁶). Also evident on the Street Art Avenue website is a further example of the artist’s use of the double mushroom cloud which figures in the mural.⁷

On close examination, two elements of the decorative motifs, principally in the work of HTJ, stand out. Alongside more traditional motifs found in carvings and tattoos, and representations of local flora (such as *tiare* and hibiscus), are two reminders of nuclear testing: a radioactivity symbol on the girl’s *pāreu* just above her waist, and the mushroom cloud explosion in the background just above her knees. While Seth’s main influences are held to be Hugo Pratt, Hayao Miyazaki, Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt (Wikipédia), there is clearly another artist’s presence reflected here. There is something unmistakably Gauguinesque about the sleeping form of the girl and the brightly contrasting colours of the red and white cloth and background. (View in note⁸). These colours, and other similar motifs are used, for example, in *Femmes de Tahiti*, 1891, and *Jour délicieux*, 1896. Most obviously, they reference and arguably parody *Otahi*, 1893. (View in note⁹). The somewhat grotesque display positioning of the prone female body on Gauguin’s canvas is reworked to evoke an innocence that has been cruelly exploited – as the nuclear-related icons remind us. The same colours and display posture are also strongly linked to the “vahine” stereotype as illustrated,

⁶ HTJ Artworks website <http://www.htjartworks.com/murals/>. See ‘Tahitian Girl’.

⁷ Street Art Avenue <https://street-art-avenue.com/2015/05/julien-seth-malland-ono-u-festival-tahiti-11326>

⁸ There is in fact a Gauguin work titled *Petite Tahitienne en rouge* (1894), which displays to a male observer a standing female figure wearing a *pāreu*.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gauguin_1984_La_Petite_tahitienne_en_rouge.jpg

⁹ View Gauguin’s *Otahi* 1893 at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paul_Gauguin_093.jpg

notably, by the logo for Hinano beer, manufactured by the Brasserie de Tahiti which operates under the aegis of Coca-cola Amatil.¹⁰

The mural is thus demonstrably a multi-layered form of reappropriation and recycling in response to the initial European appropriation. An earlier example, a collage by Cook Island/New Zealand artist Jim Vivieaere¹¹ titled *6 Tahitians, 2 in Leningrad, 4 in Pape'ete*, features a postcard photograph of four Tahitians below a monochrome reproduction of a Gauguin painting set against a background of a woven mat. By draining the colour from the Gauguin image and positioning it in the photograph in the lower postcard, Vivieaere appears to reverse the perceived strength and importance of the juxtaposed pieces. The use of the woven mat as a unifying frame also serves to anchor the images in their real island origins, and to highlight both colonial (museum collection) and touristic (postcard) aspects of the two representations. The work evoked this comment from anthropologist-critic Nicholas Thomas:

Six Tahitians used representations of Tahitians that were evidently voyeuristic, and drew attention to the absurd remoteness of the painting from the people notionally depicted, but suggested that a sea change was underway, in the sense that an artist could turn the tables, using Gauguin as found material, in the way that the French painter had once used found Polynesians. Moreover, this notion includes a recursiveness: it is not just that a Polynesian artist reappropriates the imagery, but that *the reappropriation defines the Polynesian artist as a critical commentator*. The work suggests the speaking position and the capacity to produce distance, to proffer and withhold imagery at the same time. (Thomas, 1996, p. 328, emphasis added)

While not all the art works examined in this study fit within a strict definition of recycling – if taken to mean the reuse of objects and their repurposing for a usage other than their initial one – I suggest that they are all testament to the “recursiveness” that marks the assertion of resistance and difference. This “speaking back” through art was a well-known preoccupation for Vivieaere. When asked to curate the 1994/1995 exhibition of work by “Polynesian artists” which would become known as *Bottled Ocean*, and for which Tuffery would create the first of his corned-beef bulls, Vivieaere was initially hesitant. A year previously he had organised an exhibition titled *Southern Response to Northern Possession* in Bremen, Germany (Gifford, 2006), based on his response to museum displays of Oceanic artefacts. His concern for *Bottled Ocean* was that it not be simply an assemblage of exotic, “other” Polynesian artists, but should instead

¹⁰ The logo was designed in 1955 by Swedish-French artist Pierre Heyman, who settled in Tahiti and whose art is unmistakably influenced by Gauguin. One of the shared elements is the voyeuristic positioning of the vahine, whose back is towards the viewer.

¹¹ Jim Vivieaere curated the exhibition in which Tuffery's *Pisupo* first appeared.

challenge the observer. “The positioning of the art, the lack of labels and the diversity of the work were, said Vivieaere, artificial problems for viewers to actively deal with” (Te Ara, n.d.).

Whether this resistance to categorisation and/or relegation to a merely decorative level can reasonably be labelled as “postmodern”, “ironic”, “humorous” or even “parodic” is a moot point. While the reuse of found objects clearly marks the works discussed as a response to contemporary or historic influences, we should take care not to dismiss this impulse as a mere echo; echoes are a matter of repetition, and what we see here is instead (r)evolution.

Telling a new story

American artist Joy Taylor explains that artists recycle for several reasons: “Many of the artists who prefer to recycle found objects in making new work like either the surface appearance of the material or its shape, or *they appropriate something of the object’s original meaning to tell stories in the objects they make from it*” (Herman, 1998, p. 22, emphasis added). These stories may of course vary considerably from those originally told by the makers and users of the repurposed objects. In addition, they may be dual or multiple, as Tuffery explains: “‘Pisupo lua afe’ was about the impact of global trade on Pacific Island cultures. It was also about the way an imported commodity – corned beef – has become such a key part of Polynesian customs like feasting” (Mallon & Pereira, 1997, p. 121). In other words, the original “story” (of successful international trade) is subsumed in the artwork to questions about local impact, both positive and negative. If we look at each of the examples referred to in this paper, we can see the same twist to the original story. Both spam poems are very similar to the *pisupo* retelling, as is the Coca-cola-coconut; the presence of repurposed plastic bottles in *Vai* replaces a narrative of sporty portable rehydration with a more desperate account of scarcity, pollution and everyday struggle. Devatine’s cooking pots protest the loss of alimentary independence and highlight the consequences of self-colonisation. The *6 Tahitians* juxtapose Gauguin’s representations of languid island sensuality with a more contemporary and realistic story of tourism and the value accorded to such representations over people, and hence to Gauguin’s and touristic images over Tahitians. The narratives emerging from the street art example, in addition to alluding again to the French artist’s objectification of his subjects, also accentuate a highly damaging and dangerous series of nuclear experiments carried out in colonised territory, as well as referring, if more indirectly, to both the myth of the vahine and the negative impacts of (American-owned) alcohol production. In short, the new stories told by these repurposed objects are, implicitly or more overtly, critical.

The recursiveness referred to by Thomas is largely dependent on involving a form of “speaking back”. This must inevitably raise the question of whether there is a difference between an Indigenous response with critical comment emanating directly from the so-called subaltern position, and one made by a non-Indigenous “speaker-on-behalf” (Spivak, 1995). When Vivieaere was called upon to curate what became the exhibition *Bottled Ocean*, he expressed a strong desire to see no further “Polynesian” exhibitions, saying “the only reason we are here is that we are Polynesian – not on our merits but because we’re the ‘other’... We don’t need Polynesian shows. I would like to see it as the last” (City Gallery Wellington, n.d.). Clearly this is a rejection of the practice of relegating such diverse creators to a single category. Perhaps it is a mistake, then, to single out Indigenous artists simply because they are Indigenous. However, as I have argued above, it is important to acknowledge the position and context from which such artists speak/create: these works are not merely aesthetic objects, but carry important messages about the continuing impacts of colonisation *on the colonised*. While non-Indigenous artists, such as the creators of *Tahitiienne en rouge*, may join Indigenous ones in their role as commentators on and critics of colonialism and its continuing effects, it is surely the colonised, “other” voices that must – and do – speak most loudly.

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