These are the Voices
Voicing Dissent

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This text draws on the words of Dayle Takitimu discussing images capturing the protests of her tribe, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui, against drilling for deep sea oil in the Raukumara Basin, off the East Coast of Aotearoa New Zealand. The following photographs, including documentation of actions protesting the sale of state assets, were shown in Jos Wheeler’s exhibition *Voicing Dissent* at Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland in July 2014.

Voicing denial

The protests documented in these photographs relate to two issues – drilling for deep sea oil; and the sale of state-owned assets. These issues are linked by the conservative Fifth National Government refusing to respond to public protest by stating that the ‘silent majority’ are in favour of these programmes, and that only the ‘noisy few’ are opposed.

‘Even though protest is a big part of voicing our opinions, it’s a heavy thing to be thought of as, you know, not very good people, or activists. There’s a whole lot of racism involved, and prejudice... It’s a heavy thing to take on.’
– Majic Paora
Voicing disruption

Protest is an important part of public life, using disruption – of traffic, of the sounds of the city, of the transmission of information – as a way to bring visibility to an issue and demand change. But protest also disrupts personal life – family, friendships, work.

‘I no longer have a romantic view of protest. It pisses me off, no end, that... when other people get to do stuff that is uplifting for them and their families my family has to go out and protest to save my tribe from being slaughtered by this government; we’re under siege all the time – whether it be encroachment on our traditional territories, attacks on our indigenous lifestyles, forced assimilation – it’s tiring but we have no choice but to stand up to it – defiance is the only option because surrender is not tenable...’
– Dayle Takitimu

Voicing desperation

Hikoi are an act of desperation – when the representative democratic process has not worked, direct democracy is required. Pickets, demonstrations, occupations, hikoi.

‘If you think about the seven thousand things you would rather do than march down Queen Street on a Saturday morning in the middle of winter.... It’s important for us to tell our kids to stand up for what’s right – I think that’s vitally important – but at the same time we shouldn’t always be facing decision-makers that are wrong all the time.’
– Dayle Takitimu
Voicing documentation

After the protest, the images remain.

‘When you look at some of these pictures of my Te Whānau-ā-Apanui people… you can see the fear. Intense fear, that [the oil drilling company] might actually come, and they might actually do what they were threatening to do. And the absolute fear… that our government wasn’t going to do anything to stop them – but they were actively encouraging them, and at the same time they were moving the Navy, armed Police and the Airforce in against us. It became apparent to us that we were scared after they left; we didn’t really recognise that emotion during the campaign against deep sea oil, it just became apparent to us that’s what is was when they announced they were leaving and the relief washed over us.’

– Dayle Takitimu

Voicing dissent

Other political currents run through these images, linking contemporary protest with a long history of activism in Aotearoa New Zealand, often catalysed by action by Māori groups against the settler government. In her book Hīkoi – Forty Years of Māori Protest, Aroha Harris notes that ‘Modern Māori activism, with its roots firmly planted in the history of contesting and negotiating the Treaty relationship between Māori and the Crown, has been a strong and consistent feature of Māori society in the second half of the twentieth century.’

Reading these images with an awareness of history means recognising the symbols of rangatiratanga and tino rangatiratanga evident in the black-red-and-white Tino Rangatiratanga flag, and the rejection of ‘one government for all’; understanding the evocation of Papatūānuku, the earth/mother, as the victim of environmental destruction, and the fight to make space for Māori worldviews in a Western world; acknowledging the diversity of Māori identities through the presence of the flags and banners of individual tribes protesting local issues on a national stage, and the struggle to have Māori authority acknowledged by government; reaching back in time to see that Te Rārawa leader Whina Cooper setting out on the 1975 Land March to ensure that ‘not one acre more’ of Māori land would be sold to Pākehā is linked with the loss of ‘New Zealanders’ assets’ through sale into private ownership.

In the context of these protests, drilling for deep sea oil is more than an activity of extracting energy, it is an attack on the self-determination of a people. Selling state assets is more than a transaction between government and industry, it is a continued erosion of the State’s responsibility to care for this country.

Biddy Livesey
Ol' Kaupapa

why are we always on the kaupapa
always raising our fists, our voice
for the pani, for the rawakore
for our children
MANA MOKOPUNA!

our generations fight
our time to hold the hoe
paddle this waka
to another kaupapa
another fight, another downtrodden plight
every conversation, every nonchalant little thing
leads us back to kaupapa

we don't stand on soapboxes
no! we own the factory
or least the whenua it stands on
sometime long ago
we get up, we stand up
but when is the time to lie down?

Hiiikoiiiiii!!
When did ‘we shall not be moved’
become Marching, marching to the bitter end
Like a ragtime audition for the battalion

Where is the living?
When we watch our children play
soak up every smile.
Then we saddle back up
Back on ol kaupapa

How to protect those smiles?
How far to go?
I might go to prison,
but at least they're free and they know this was for them
I might be dead,
but at least they're free and they know this was for them.

They might take them from me. I'll never live again.
The thrill of battle gave us a few extra
Stories to mark our existence
In our neverending resistance
The real price?
What they really take?
The real kaupapa, the mother of all kaupapa, the fight worth fighting for,
the rumble in the ngahere
HOPE! h-o-p-e HOPE

Michelle Ngamoki
Voicing Dissent
Five Images

Jos Wheeler
AOTEAROA IS NOT FOR SALE