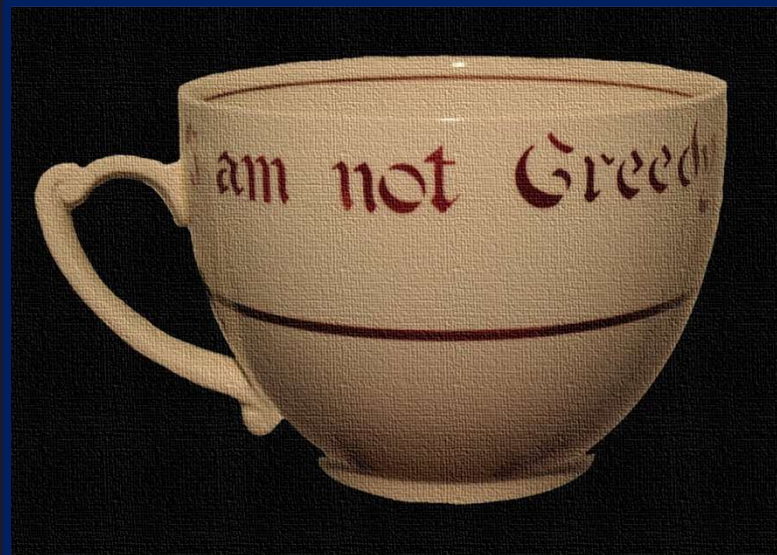


# “I’m not greedy but I like a lot”: attitudes to consumption in an oversized teacup

Dr Helen Ramoutsaki  
Adjunct Research Associate  
The Cairns Institute  
[helen.ramoutsaki@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:helen.ramoutsaki@my.jcu.edu.au)

[helenr.com](http://helenr.com)



*With images by Helen Ramoutsaki and Anna Guthrie.*

My name is Helen Ramoutsaki. I am an Adjunct Research Associate with the Cairns Institute, a performing poet working in the Environmental Arts and Humanities, with a Wet Tropical focus.

## Abstract

Human values and behaviour at both individual and societal levels can influence the success of goals for global sustainable development. This creative practice-embedded presentation addresses self-interested overconsumption in relatively affluent societies, such as Britain, the United States and Australia. Such excessive consumption challenges attempts to achieve balanced, equitable economies and sustainable lives within the more-than-human world. Kate Raworth’s alternative Doughnut Economics model makes explicit the overshoot into environmental degradation and the shortfall in relation to the twelve social priorities of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2017). However, Schokkaert’s critique of the model acknowledges that while individuals can act altruistically, we cannot ignore the “self-interested free riders” and the state as “an instrument of the powerful and rich to exploit the poor” (2019, p. 130). The normalisation of exploitative excessive consumption is evident in material culture. The chance find of an oversized vintage teacup made in England, inscribed with the motto, “I’m not greedy but I like a lot”,

led me into a creative and historical investigation of how the meme has been applied to corrupt councillors, over-taxing politicians, invading national leaders and to the enjoyment of home comforts in the form of a good cup of tea or cocoa. Taking the teacup and other oversized vessels with their accompanying slogans as materialised metaphors of excess consumption and unequal power relations demonstrates relative advantage, disadvantage and attitudes to the concept of greed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, compared and contrasted with contemporaneous attitudes. My grandmother alter-ego, MC Nannarchy, expresses her findings in her idiosyncratic spoken-word rapping style with a satirical message in her role as the Minister for the Economy and Gastronomy, delivered over her very capacious evening cup of cocoa.



## Acknowledgement

With gratitude, I acknowledge the Kubirriwarra Eastern Kuku Yalanji bama on whose bubu I live and work, paying my heartfelt respects to the Elders and Ancestors.

I also acknowledge all Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of this country and pay my respects to the Traditional Owners and Elders, past and present, of the land on which we stand today, the Djabugay, Yirrganydji and Gimuy Yidinji peoples.



The accompanying *Nannacocoa Eco-No-Mix* spoken-word rap performance from MC Nannarchy is an example of my creative practice-embedded research in performative mode (Ramoutsaki, 2023). References in the text and images are put into context through this discussion, which correlates the ceramic vessels shown with attitudes to consumption in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain and its then colonies, compared to contemporary attitudes in parts of the developed world.



# Positionality

This discussion of over-consumption and its effects on sustainable development have been influenced by my Anglo-Celtic background, with its complex coloniser / colonised relations.



One of my great-grandfathers and his sisters taking tea in the late 1890s

28 September 2023

I'm not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki

Some of the artefacts you have seen in the images are legacies from a side of my family who were English tea merchants and cotton cloth manufacturers in the nineteenth century, with all the exploitation implicit in those practices. The heights of their fortune didn't last as they fell into bankruptcy, yet they maintained a social and financial status which allowed them to continue to participate in the Victorian era conspicuous consumption.

## The Power Pour

How do trends in ceramic tableware reflect changing attitudes to consumption in the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries?



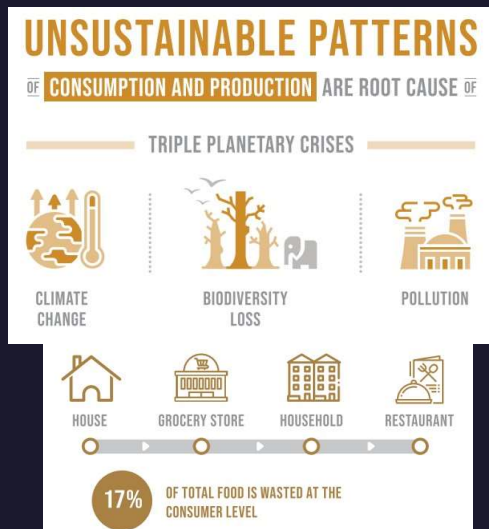
28 September 2023

I'm not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki

5

The research question for this project relates to changing attitudes to consumption across a particular timeframe. Geographically, artefacts I present come from Britain, Germany, the United States of America and Australia as (generally) high-income economies. The domestic placement of these artefacts points to power relations and resource allocation in the personal sphere. However, the consumption of cocoa, tea and coffee involves national and international power relations and systemic injustice in patterns of production, consumption and exploitation: points touched on in MC Nannarchy's *Nannacocoa Eco-No-Mix*.

## Responsible consumption, production and sustainable gastronomy



“Sustainable gastronomy means cuisine that takes into account where the ingredients are from, how the food is grown and how it gets to our markets and eventually to our plates.”  
(United Nations, 2023)

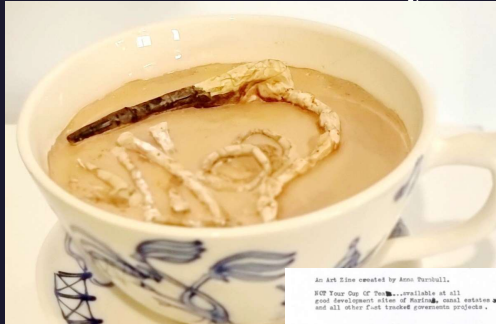
28 September 2023m not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki

(United Nations, 2022)

6

The United Nations sustainable development goal twelve emphasises responsible consumption and production, understanding that we need to change the patterns which cause climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution (United Nations, 2022). Food is one aspect of this challenge, addressing the goals to end poverty and hunger (United Nations, 2023).

## metonymies & metaphors



Guthrie, 2022



28 September 2023 I'm not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki



7

In MC Nannarchy's *Eco-No-Mix*, food vessels stand as metonymies / synecdoches for food consumption and also operate as metaphors for attitudes to overconsumption, inspired by the work of a Queensland ceramicist and a series of serendipitous finds. In Anna Guthrie's 2022 *Not My Cup of Tea* art project, teacups and drinking tea act as metaphors for attitudes towards overdevelopment and species loss from a proposed marina development in Moreton Bay, which further endangers the Eastern Curlew (Guthrie, 2023).

The day after Anna presented her work at the James Cook University Environmental Communication symposium last year, I stumbled upon an oversized vintage teacup and saucer at a local charity shop. The motto, "I am not greedy ... but I like a lot", explicitly connects attitudes to overconsumption to the material artefact.

## Material metaphors: pointing to patterns of consumption

Ceramic tableware as the  
source domain



Patterns of and attitudes  
to consumption as the  
target domain

28 September 2023

I'm not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki



With their varying sizes and their markings, the ceramic tableware pieces not only stand for consumption but inform us about it in more detail. For example, the mottos act as memes, reflecting the contemporaneous culture. The ceramics are acting as the source of a conceptual metaphor, the idea of a type of object through which we can understand the idea of the target domain, patterns of consumption. However, they are also material metaphors when the source, such as a teacup, is actually present in a material form. There is a tangible correlation that activates the target domain. If I drink from a full 'I am not greedy' cup, I am manifesting overconsumption. In addition, investigating the source domain further adds to the understanding of the target domain, as found in changes to the backstamps of vintage tableware, showing the shift to the consumption of electrical appliances that accompanies the consumption of food.





Kate Raworth's *Doughnut Economics* model makes explicit the overshoot into environmental degradation and the shortfall in relation to the twelve social priorities of the UN sustainable development goals (Raworth, 2017). The model is extremely useful for demonstrating that the social shortfall leaves people and communities in the metaphorical 'hole' in the middle of the doughnut and for leading initiatives that address this. However, a critique of the model acknowledges that while individuals can act altruistically, we cannot ignore the "self-interested free riders" and the state as "an instrument of the powerful and rich to exploit the poor" (Schokkaert, 2019, p. 130). The now commonplace sizing up of tableware demonstrates the normalisation of exploitative excessive consumption as evident in contemporary material culture. For example, note the oversized pink cup without a motto in the above image. I found this brand new at a garage sale the same day that I found the vintage "I am not greedy" cup.





There is a marked contrast between the purposes of the vintage and modern oversized cups in my collection. The vintage cups were produced as jocular exaggerations: novelty talking-points or mocking political figures for their greed. The jumbo contemporary cups are everyday offerings as part of the regular range of sizes. Only the recent plate held by MC Nannarchy continues the 'I am not greedy' tone in its motto but not its size. It offers a twist on the idiomatic warning about excess, 'Too much of a good thing ...', which has an implied conclusion, 'is bad', but instead the plate adds 'is wonderful'.

## When greediness became an apologetic object of fun

In referring to the Archbishop of Canterbury the Primate mentioned how at breakfast that dignitary used what was known as a miner's cup, about three times the size of an ordinary one, and on it was inscribed the words "I am not greedy, but I like a lot."

(Auckland Star, 1897)

**AT TABLE**

Always Wash your Hands and Face before coming to the Table.  
Do not put your Knife to your Mouth.  
Look after Other People; do not Help yourself only. Do not be greedy.  
Do not Speak nor Drink with Food in your Mouth.  
Turn your head away from the Table and put your Hand or Handkerchief before your Mouth when you Sneeze or Cough.  
Do not sit with your Elbows on the Table.

(Queensland Department of Public Instruction, 1898)

28 September 2023

I'm not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki

11

The first mention of a large cup with the "I am not greedy, but I like a lot" slogan comes in the Auckland Star newspaper in 1897 (Auckland Star, 1897). Interestingly, it is the Archbishop of Canterbury who is using the cup in his domestic routine. While this implicates him in the conspicuous consumption of the Victorian era, the anecdotal tone suggests that the use of the cup was not taken negatively, but as amusing evidence that the 'dignitary' is not elitist. However, I suggest that humour could also have been used to deflect some measure of guilt at a time when good manners were important, and schoolchildren were explicitly taught not to be greedy (underlining mine) (Queensland, 2019). Newspaper articles show that the cups were given as gifts or prizes, causing laughter among the people present. I found advertisements for 'I am not greedy' cups on sale through to 1936. In 1953 The Cairns Post advertised a selection of 'Jumbo cups' with slogans, including one with "All Gone" at the bottom inside, like the cup I found in the charity shop in the same Far North Queensland region (The Cairns Post, 1953). From then on, references to the 'I am not greedy' cups are in collections rather than for sale new. The slogan was used to advertise food items such as John West Salmon in 1938 (The People, 1938) and Lurpak butter in 1960 (The Birmingham Mail, 1960). From then on, it seems the phrase "I am not greedy but I like a lot" all but faded from popular usage.

## Greedy politics: guilt



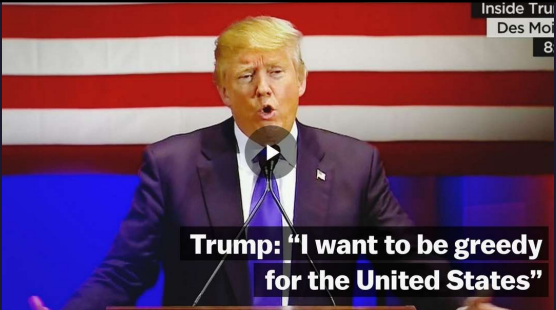
28 September 2023

I'm not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki


The earliest mention of the “I am not greedy, but I like a lot” phrase in Australian newspapers was in 1888, condemning a rival newspaper proprietor’s monopoly on local government advertising (Avoca Mail, 1880). It is therefore not only associated with economic greed but also greed for power, as shown in the 1929 and 1941 cartoons about Australian Prime Minister Bruce’s push for increased Federal power and Hitler’s invasions in Europe (Glover, 1929, 1935; Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, 1941). The ‘I am not greedy’ cup above shows an image of American president William H Taft, produced in Germany for an American importer between 1909 and 1916, most likely around the time of the presidential election which he lost to Woodrow Wilson. The same style cup with an image of Theodore Roosevelt, the other candidate, was produced by the same pottery. The cup is described on some collectible websites as a campaign mug and the slogan as Taft’s, but I cannot find any evidence for this. As they were produced with images of two of the candidates, it is more probable that they were intended to satirise and denigrate them. The message is that political greed is wrong.

## Greedy politics: (self) glorification

28 September 2023



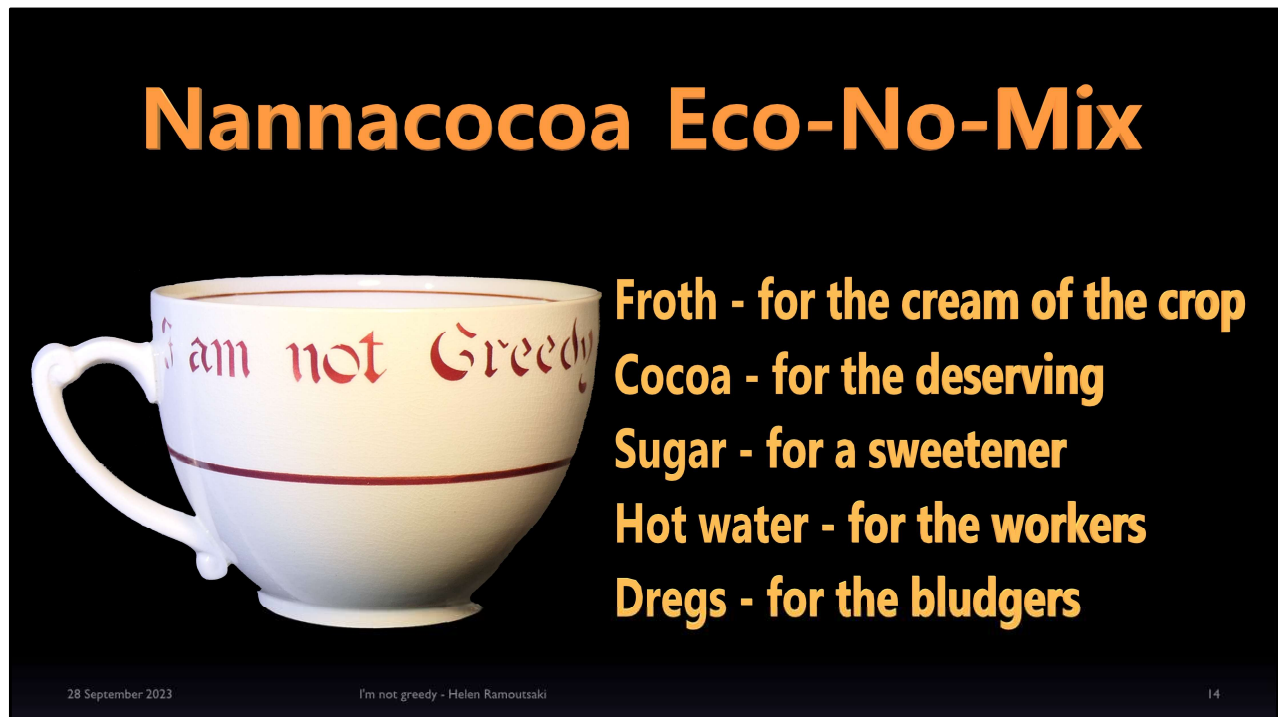
<https://www.vox.com/2016/1/29/10866388/donald-trump-greedy>



<https://www.facebook.com/RobertKiyosaki/photos/a.199144716787110155066689991788>

In some contemporary political rhetoric, the greediness of the rich is glorified, while the poor are accused of being greedy. Claims are made that it is not greedy to increase your wealth, yet expecting equitable treatment is being greedy. Rampell (2019) notes that Trump ran his 2016 campaign on greed and racism, boasting about his wealth. Declaring at a rally, “My whole life I’ve been greedy, greedy, greedy”, he went on to promise that he would use that skill on behalf of the nation. Rampell was sceptical on the basis that he has a record of blurring lines between personal advantage and professional responsibilities. Robert Kiyosaki glorifies the rich by accusing the poor of being the greedy, wanting to take the earnings of the rich – a popular meme on social media. There is no nuance in the argument or acknowledgement of the disadvantage the ‘poor’ are placed in by those who are using investments to prosper (Kiyosaki, 2017). The actual message is that avarice and acquisitiveness are a positive traits.



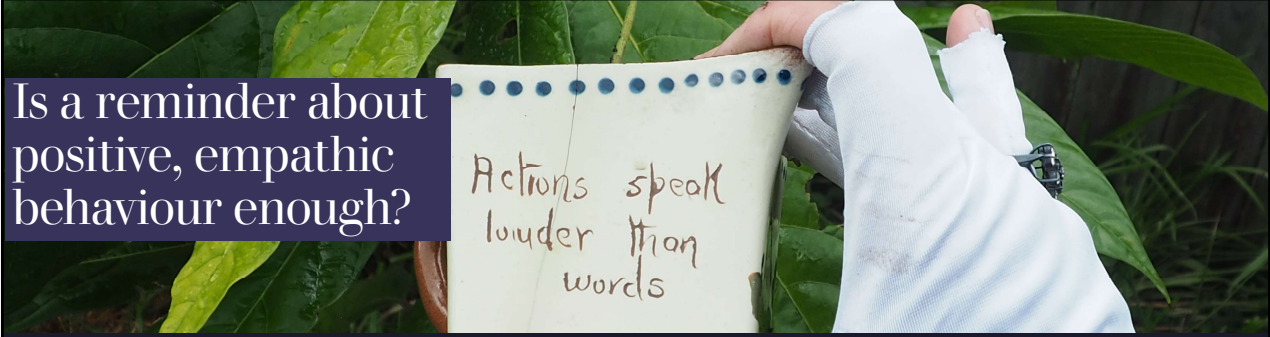


Perhaps these commentators would approve of MC Nannarchy's *Nannacocoa Eco-No-Mix* model.



MC Nannarchy's art presents an alternative academic voice, using the results of research in performative presentations that allow audiences to access ideas through playfully serious dialogue. In the *Nannacocoa Eco-No-Mix* rap, she uses self-satire to direct attention to traits she knows she shares with others - but with a twist. A reminder by the 'actions speak louder than words' jug tips her into admitting that she needs to behave better. As a comic fool, her role is to learn her lesson, putting aside her greedy ways with her Eco-Mix. Given the traditional role of the fool or guiser, she does not lose credibility in this about-face. If she can change, so can others. Activist art may not always provide answers, but it points to possibilities.





Is a reminder about positive, empathic behaviour enough?

- More psychological entitlement and narcissistic behaviour in higher socioeconomic class participants
- But asking them to first list three benefits of viewing others as equals evened the scores

(Piff et al., 2012; Piff, 2014)

28 September 2023 I'm not greedy - Helen Ramoutsaki 16

The possibility of change is supported by a series of studies by Paul K. Piff in the USA. These show that upper-class, higher-earning individuals demonstrated higher levels of psychological entitlement and narcissistic personality tendencies and behaviour. However, when these participants were reminded of egalitarian values by first listing three benefits of viewing others as equals, their displayed narcissism decreased to the level of the lower-class participants (Piff, 2014). Conversely, a previous study had found that asking lower-class individuals to first list the positive qualities of greed increased their levels of greed-driven unethical behaviour to the level of the higher-class individuals (Piff et al, 2012). Perhaps many people in the cultures under discussion do not need to change on a core level. They may, however, need to be reminded of positive values that support actions towards sustainable development.



In MC Nannarchy’s *Nannacocoa Eco-No-Mix*, the ‘I am not greedy cup’ is finally subverted with a new message and form of the materialised metaphor. The “*I am not greedy but I like to share a lot*” cups nest recursively, showing both proportionality of portions when separated and a pooling together of liquid assets when they are nested. The inner and outer text takes the “I am not greedy but I like a lot” motto and a new motto: “being mindful in consuming, open to serving with heart, to share with others”. Read from outside then inside each cup in turn, they interweave as the affirmation: “I am being mindful, not greedy, in consuming, but open to sharing with heart, I like to share a lot with others” (Ramoutsaki & Guthrie, 2023).



MC Nannarchy's final point about resource-sharing and frugality is situated in the domestic sphere, pointing to individuals as drivers of change: putting the power in the hands of people who keep shining a light on the benefits of altruistic action. Considering that seventeen percent of food is wasted at a consumer level, this is significant. Changes in lifestyle norms can put pressure on power structures up the political hierarchy and, importantly, give hope in a world that, as the UN secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, pointed out recently, is becoming unhinged because of "existential threats and ... global failures to cooperate on solutions" (Ryan, 2023). So, we come to my backyard: where the other members of the multispecies gardening collective are in action, and I am prompting myself with reminders to put words into action ... and helping MC Nannarchy plant cocoa trees.



## References

- Auckland Star. (1897, 30 November). Anglican Gathering: Welcome to the Primate. *Auckland Star*. <https://www.news-papers.com/image/933298942>
- Avoca Mail. (1880, 9 March). "I'm not greedy, but I like a lot" principle. *Avoca Mail*. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article201526117>
- Queensland, E. (2019). 'Good Manners' chart. Retrieved 26 July from <https://education.qld.gov.au/about-us/history/history-topics/good-manners-chart>
- Fromer, J. E. (2008). *Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*. Ohio University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jcu/detail.action?docID=1743704>
- Glover, T. (1929, 5 August). "Not Greedy - But They'd Like A Lot ". *Sun*. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article222960429>
- Glover, T. (1935, 17 November). "Not Greedy, But He Likes The Lot ". *Sun*. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article230186295>
- Guthrie, A. (2023). *Not my cup of tea* [Ceramic and textual art]. [Ceramic artwork installation and zine images in response to threats to the Eastern Curlew from development in the Caboolture River, Queensland.].
- Kiyosaki, R. (2017). *It's The Poor Who Are Greedy, NOT The Rich* Retrieved 19



September, 2023 from

<https://www.facebook.com/RobertKiyosaki/photos/a.199144716787/10155066689991788>

Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate. (1941, 20 January). Not Greedy - But He Wants The Lot. *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article140432357>

Piff, P. K., Stancato, D. M., Côté, S., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Keltner, D. (2012). Higher social class predicts increased unethical behavior. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS*, 109(11), 4086-4091.

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1118373109>

Piff, P. K. (2014). Wealth and the Inflated Self: Class, Entitlement, and Narcissism. *Personality & social psychology bulletin*, 40(1), 34-43.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213501699>

Ramoutsaki, H. (2023). *MC Nannarchy's Nannacocoa Eco-no-mix Rap* [Multimodal poetic performance]. Live publication in performance.

Ramoutsaki, H., & Guthrie, A. (2023). *I'm not greedy but I share a lot* [Ceramic and textual art]. [Five nesting ceramic teacups and Nephila pilipes teapot with visual and interconnecting textual art].

Rampell, C. (2019, September 26). What drives Donald Trump? Greed, and greed alone. *The Washington Post*.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/what-drives-donald-trump-greed-and-greed-alone/2019/09/26/927fccde-e099-11e9-be96-6adb81821e90\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/what-drives-donald-trump-greed-and-greed-alone/2019/09/26/927fccde-e099-11e9-be96-6adb81821e90_story.html)

Raworth, K. (2017). Why it's time for Doughnut Economics. *IPPR progressive review*, 24(3), 216-222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/newe.12058>

Ryan, B. (2023, 19 June). *The UN General Assembly is meeting in New York. Here are some key takeaways from day one*. Retrieved 20 September, 2023 from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-20/un-general-assembly-2023-day-one-takeaways/102876984>

Schokkaert, E. (2019). Review of Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics. London: Random House, 2017, 373 pp. *Erasmus journal for philosophy and economics*, 12(1), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.23941/ejpe.v12i1.412>

The Birmingham Mail. (1960, 21 April). Lurpak butter advertisement. *The Birmingham Mail*. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/852390015>

The People. (1938, 19 June). John West Salmon advertisement. *The People*.

United Nations. (2023). *Sustainable Gastronomy Day 18 June: What is Sustainable Gastronomy?* Retrieved 12 July from

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/sustainable-gastronomy-day>

United Nations. (2022). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*.

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>

# Thank You

Dr Helen Ramoutsaki  
Adjunct Research Associate  
The Cairns Institute  
[helen.ramoutsaki@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:helen.ramoutsaki@my.jcu.edu.au)  
helenr.com

