



Auckland Women's Centre QUARTERLY

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Women of the Polynesian Panthers

By Ruth Busch

A wonderful evening (also empowering, stimulating and reflective to list just a few more superlatives to describe this event) took place at the Auckland Women's Centre on the 23rd of March. As a follow-up to the previous Sunday's fundraiser documentary about the Black Panther Party in the US, the Centre organised a panel discussion focussing on Women in the Polynesian Panthers and their Legacy. It was facilitated by Papatuanuku Nahi who welcomed the jam packed, mostly women, audience with a karanga that set the mood for the evening.

The speakers' panel was made up of Panther members, Miriama Rauhihi Ness and Dr Melani Anae, or (like our facilitator, Papatuanuku Nahi and her sister, Kaile Nahi-Taihia) women who traced their current activism directly to being raised by Panther parents. Sina Brown-Davis, Te Wharepora Hou member, and our speaker prior to the documentary screening, was also a panel member.

The speakers discussed racism and other abuses that had led them to form/join the Panthers in the 1970s, their numerous successes and the issues remaining to be addressed still/now. It was inspiring to hear how these women (sometimes as school girls who had to sneak out of their homes in order to attend meetings) challenged the individual and systemic racism that was so commonplace in their lives.

Drawing inspiration from the ideas of the Black Panther movement developing in the States, these foremothers and their Panther brothers made the myriad forms that racism takes visible and formulated an analysis that was both anti-capitalist and anti-racist. Their actions underscored what second wave feminists were also learning that the personal is political, that our lived experiences matter.



Pictured: Sina Brown-Davis

More than that, that activism was the answer. Pacific Island and Maori communities could not wait for the government to come up with answers to homelessness, poverty, police harassment and enforced incarceration. The Dawn Raids in 1976 underscored both the systemic racism of the Muldoon government and the effectiveness of the solutions the Polynesian Panthers came up with. Within 6 weeks of Panther action to carry out Dawn Raids on Ministers of the National Government (complete with sound systems and floodlights and press), Muldoon's Dawn Raids were halted. In addition, the Panthers led strikes, educated people about their legal rights, opened homework centres, gave rides to families of prisoners, fought for improved housing and for a better educational system.

It's hard to give a sense of the privilege that we, the listeners, felt as we heard the stories of the founding mothers of the Polynesian Panthers, this movement literally formed on the streets of Grey Lynn and Ponsonby.

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New Young Women's Coordinator, Māngere East



Pictured: Jane Paul (Ngapuhi)

We are excited to introduce you to our new Māngere East Young Women's Coordinator, Jane Paul (Ngapuhi). Jane is a 21 year-old woman born and bred in Māngere East.

She has spent the last few years following her passions including theatre, film, kapa haka and volunteering at the Mangere East Community Centre. This year she is studying for a certificate of social services at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in Māngere. She has already established a thriving Young Women's Group for AWC at the Māngere East Centre. They have been enjoying whakawhanaungatanga, learning from each other's journeys, exercising and attending local community events together. It is difficult and expensive for young women from low income suburbs to complete the 3-step process to obtain a full driver's license. In partnership with our Young Women's Group at Roskill South, they have started a new project 'empowerment through the journey of attaining a driver's license.' ■

Women of the Polynesian Panthers, continued

Their presentations "humanised" the Struggle and their present day staunchness moved us all. Each of the participants is still advocating for change and direct action. Each emphasised that many of the gains made in the past have now been eroded and/or better hidden, and that the analysis of the Polynesian Panthers is still relevant. Poverty and racism continue to be the reasons why Maori and Pacific Islanders remain at the bottom of the heap in so many areas. The fight against inequality is alive and well. Prisons are big business in Aotearoa today and the neo liberal narrative that calls for the privatisation of prisons, state housing, and child protection is proceeding apace. Lawyers, psychologists, the justice system itself all make good livings from the misery of black people. Climate change is a price being paid by the Pacific for the West's industrial development. Black lives matter everywhere.

It was wonderful to hear the history of the Polynesian Panthers told by women who were its founders. These women were part of a bridging generation: they were often first generation kiwis born of immigrant parents, attempting to envision who they were, shaped by intergenerational disjuncts between their island born/non-urban parents and themselves, trying to understand what it meant to be black and kiwi within a context of white racism.

They challenged us to re-commit ourselves to their basic principles:

- » to annihilate all forms of racism and
- » to celebrate Mana Pasifika.

They inspired us, especially the many young people in the room who were encouraged to take on the most pressing issues they face, learning from what has gone before and from what has been developed overseas but finding their own Aotearoa based answers, while standing proud. ■



Pictured: Dr Melani Anae, Miriama Rauhihi Ness, Tomo Nahi and her moko

Stellar Feminist Line-up at the Writers Festival

By Tessa Morgan

After the success of Alice Walker headlining the Auckland Writers Festival in 2014, the organisers have again produced a stellar feminist line-up. Such a selection makes sense because not only are women the biggest readers, but they are slowly eclipsing men as authors of best-sellers, as Paula Hawkin's gripping thriller *Girl on the Train* attests.



Gloria Steinem

Gloria Steinem, a feminist activist for more than sixty years, has been seminal to the development of 20th century feminism. Founding editor of *Ms Magazine* in 1972, her memoir, *My Life on the Road*, is her most recent achievement; it chronicles her lifetime of touring the world for social justice causes. Considering the current political climate in America, and in particular the mounting anti-woman sentiment spouted by Donald Trump, as well as evidenced in the closing of abortion clinics throughout the country, Steinem's insights on the 'State of America Panel' should be fascinating (and potentially disturbing!).

Barbara Brookes

Barbara Brookes, one of New Zealand's best historians, has just released her new, and long-overdue, *A History of New Zealand Women*. While the history of men in New Zealand is unusually rich, little scholarship has been devoted to New Zealand women's experiences. A deeply ironic truth considering how often we are reminded that New Zealand women were the first in the world to get the vote. Barbara, a feminist historian, has previously focused on abortion in New Zealand and England and is currently interested in the history of women's care work.



Carmen Aguirre

Carmen Aguirre is a Canadian actor and playwright who will be discussing her new memoir, *Mexican Hooker #1*. An actor, the title refers to Carmen's frequent typecasting in stereotypical and racist roles due to her Hispanic (Chilean) heritage. This book is her own narrative of confronting the man who raped her when she was 13. She is also the author of *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter*, in which she focuses on growing up with her mother who was both a radical feminist and prominent activist against the fascist Pinochet regime in Chile.

Susie Orbach

Susie Orbach, author of the feminist classic *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, will be here to discuss her current activism against media pressure on women that fosters negative feelings about their physical appearance. Susie played a key role in bringing problems of women's relationships to their bodies and their eating into mainstream thought. Her message of loving your own body is perhaps even more topical than when her book was first published in the 1970s, considering the rise of social media and the body-shaming culture of hashtags such as #healthyeating and #fitspo.



Hanya Yangihara

Hanya Yangihara book *A Little Life* has been widely celebrated as one of the most moving – if not unsettling – books written recently. Exploring the depths of masculinity and male sexuality in a group of four male friends, Hanya also tackles head on sexual abuse and the ramifications of such violence over one's lifetime. Hanya's graphic distortion of the American dream is at times almost too much to bear, but owing to the clarity of its writing and the uniqueness of perspective, it is one of those books and, she is one of those writers, you never quite stop thinking about.

Jeanette Winterson

Jeanette Winterson is an English award-winning adult and children's writer who became famous with her first book, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, a semi-autobiographical novel about a sensitive teenage girl rebelling against conventional values, including heteronormativity. Her autobiography *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* (2011) is witty, fierce, and celebratory - a tough-minded search for belonging. As well as appearing on her own at the Festival, Jeanette is also speaking with her partner, Susie Orbach. ■

Newsletter - new name, new look

After nearly 20 years, we have decided to change the name of Gossip magazine to the Auckland Women's Centre Quarterly. We also arranged for Toni Chase to refresh the design. While the valuing of women's voices, interests and experiences, the reason behind the name Gossip originally, will remain at the heart of the newsletter,

we thought it was time for a new name. The Auckland Women's Centre Quarterly both reflects that there are four editions of the newsletter every year and that we will continue to bring you a range of articles and thought pieces on topical issues as well as updates about the Centre. ■

SKIP Community Garden Opening

The SKIP Community Garden Opening in April was a wonderful celebration of positive parenting and single mum families.

Organised by SKIP Single Mums, coordinated by Philippa and Rochelle Carr (our SKIP Coordinator) everyone enjoyed the face painting, garden, singing, planting and yummy healthy food.

Twenty-eight single mum families, local community members, the Roskill South Young Women's Group, AWC supporters, the Waitemata Local Board Chair and three other Board members were amongst the guests.

We were entertained by speeches from two single mums, children displaying their drawings of the garden, and songs by the Roskill South Young Women's Group.

Vernon Tava, from the Waitemata Local Board, spoke about how the garden reflects the Board's focus on child-friendly spaces, and Rochelle spoke about the SKIP Positive Parenting values on which the garden is based. ■



Pictured: Roskill South Young Women's Group with Waitemata Local Board members



Pictured: Cecilia & her daughter

Auckland Women's Centre



Contact & Services

Contact us

09 376 3227 x 0
info@womens.org.nz
www.awc.org.nz

Centre Hours

Monday to Friday
9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Library Hours

Monday to Friday
9:00 am - 4:00 pm
First Saturday
of the month
11:00 am - 1.30 pm

Services

- + Free Info, Referral and Advice
- + Community Education
- + SKIP Single Mums Positive Parenting Project
- + Community Events
- + Counselling

- + LGBT support
- + Low Cost Massage
- + Self Defence Classes
- + Opportunities to talk and support feminism
- + Diversity Forums
- + Young Women's Youth Development Projects