



The Platform: The Radical Legacy of the Polynesian Panthers

By Melani Anae. Wellington, Bridget Williams Books, 2020. 226 pp., notes.
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Book Reviews

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Melani Anae's book exhibits the legacy of the Polynesian Panthers, one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most iconic organizations that educated, facilitated, and promoted a safe and peaceful community of Pacific Islanders living in the 1970s. Set in Auckland's inner-city suburbs of Ponsonby and Grey Lynn, *The Platform* recalls the radical activism of an organization known as the Polynesian Panthers, mostly made up of New Zealand-born children to Pacific migrants bringing to light and challenging racism and oppressive systems within their communities.

Anae lets the reader know from the onset that her book is not just a history of the movement of the Polynesian Panthers Party (PPP), but rather an account of her journey as one of its main members. Anae's depiction and stories of the Polynesian Panthers highlight a short history of the organization and a timeline of significant events addressing pressing issues affecting New Zealand's Pacific communities. PPP came up with a seven-point platform with the letter of each point that spelt the word 'Panther'. The platform demanded basic human rights afforded to them as Pacific migrants and New Zealand-born citizens including decent housing, good education, an end to police brutality, and self-determination. According to Anae, the unfair treatment of local Pacific Islanders by the New Zealand Government and local New Zealanders became the catalyst for starting their organization 'to make life better for Pacific people' (p. 44).

Interestingly, Anae recollects how the Polynesian Panthers grew in solidarity with worldwide groups and organizations fighting for similar rights and freedoms. The Polynesian Panthers effectively networked with the American Black Panthers and union organizations in Aotearoa, and supported social movements against apartheid, the Vietnam War, and local Māori Indigenous issues over land and self-determination. Their constant networking and collaboration helped strengthen the 'radical' platform of the Panthers.

The Platform is part of a series of books organized by BWB Texts providing deep topics for discussion on New Zealand history, Māori studies, women's studies and contemporary themes by notable New Zealand-based academics and writers. Anae is no stranger to Pacific Studies. Her expertise in the fields of migration, politics of identity, and Pacific urbanization is apparent throughout the book. Not only has she researched, lectured, and published thoroughly on these topics, but her personal experiences give deeper meaning to this study.

Multiple themes are woven together in *The Platform* highlighting activism emerging as a result of systemic racism through immigration policies against Pacific peoples, but one theme that stands out is Anae's cultural identity as a New Zealand-born Samoan. The Prologue sets an Indigenous context to the book by describing her *malu* or Samoan *tatau* (tattoo). The *malu* carries a valued significance in Samoan society and is regarded as *measina* or a 'treasured' practice. As such, Anae's book is a symbolic *malu* and she is metaphorically the *tufuga ta tatau* or tattooist. The process of getting a *malu* can be a daunting experience as the teeth of the 'au (chisel) puncture the skin with red blood oozing out of the marks. The completed *malu* will display beautiful marks and decorative patterns; however, symbolically, hidden beneath the beauty is a journey reflected through 'stinging pain, suffering, sorrows, happiness, love' (p. 12). That, too, is reflective of Anae's lived experiences as a Panther depicted throughout this small but well-informed book.

Protest and Resistance Studies is not a new field within the Pacific region, and this book contributes to the ongoing discussions within Pacific historiography of local struggles in and outside of Indigenous homelands. Although it reads like a story about PPP, the themes of Pacific identity and empowerment through Anae's perspective are the emphasis. More

importantly, Anae is interested in sharing the lessons she has learned as a Panther to teach Pacific empowerment to all communities and walks of life, but more so to the growing number of Pacific youth in New Zealand today. The ‘educate-to-liberate’ approach by the Panthers was not only for white New Zealanders and *tangata whenua* (‘people of the land’, Māori people), but their Pacific communities. The platform was effective, but I would have included a little more on the challenges faced by PPP from within the community and how migrants eventually learned to appreciate and benefit from the PPP platform.

Anae begins and ends her book with her *malu* (tattoo). The process of achieving the *malu* is difficult, but so too was the struggle she and hundreds of Pacific and non-Pacific Islanders experienced throughout the years in Aotearoa. Although some Panthers are no longer active members, they continue to serve their communities through the platform they set up decades ago. The mantra of ‘Once a Panther, always a Panther’ is more than membership as a Panther, but it is a commitment to fighting systemic injustices in their different forms throughout society and throughout the world. Indeed, Anae writes about the different successes of the Panthers, but believes the platform needs to remain active in current discussions for change. More importantly, Anae states that the push for change should be done within the contexts of ‘ancient wisdom’ of *alofa* (love), *tautua* (service) and *fa’aaloalo* (respect). These Pacific ideologies made the Polynesian Panthers unique within their transnational spaces and left a ‘radical legacy’ for future activists to follow.

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Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World. By Quito Swan. New York, New York University Press, 2022. 352 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, index. ISBN 9781479885084 (hbk), 9781479867929 (ebook). US\$49.00 (hbk).

In *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*, Quito Swan recounts the history of 20th-century Oceania from the perspective of African Diaspora studies and Black intellectual history. Focusing primarily on Melanesia, he analyses the ways in which this region fits into the framework of Black internationalism which emerged as a response to slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. Terms like discrimination, apartheid, and racism come up throughout the book and attest to the hardships endured by Pacific Islanders at the hands of colonizers. Black internationalism is thus central to understanding Melanesia’s struggles for independence and the nuances of its anti-colonial movements.

Swan adds a unique dimension to the decolonizing narrative by outlining Melanesia’s interactions with several African countries. These interactions were political, academic, cultural, and religious in nature. Consequently, new Black internationalist relationships were forged, enabling the formation of political parties, grassroots organizations, and a local media in the lead-up to independence. Swan portrays women as being at the forefront of these unprecedented developments while speaking out against colonialism and advocating for women’s rights. For both men and women, environmental issues, particularly opposition to nuclear testing in the region, were also high on the agenda, affirming a certain rise in Melanesian nationalism and self-determination.

Swan deserves credit for his work in light of the linguistic, cultural, and political diverseness of Melanesia. Although he depicts colonialism as being inherently unjust and dehumanizing, this is not to say that the British, French, Americans, Indonesians, and