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|  | Speak Up - Kōrerotia  Apologising for the Dawn Raids  18 August 2021 |
| Female | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access media station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana,  E ngā reo,  E ngā hau e whā  Tēnā koutou katoa  Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”.    Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.  Ko “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” tēnei, ko Sally Carlton ahau, ko the Dawn Raids te kaupapa o te rā nei.  Today we’re going to be talking about the Dawn Raids - and not just the Dawn Raids, what they were - but also the recent apology from the New Zealand government for the Dawn Raids. What’s particularly exciting about this kōrero today is that we’re going to be thinking about what does that apology mean and kind of situating it within a context of political apologies more generally.  We’ve got four guests today who all bring a range of perspectives to this conversation. We’ve got Benji Timu and Selwyn Gamble who were involved in the campaign to try and encourage the government to get involved in giving this apology. We’ll got Melani Anae who is at the University of Auckland who was involved and is going to bring a perspective on the Polynesian Panthers, and we’ve got Kathy Smiths, also from the University of Auckland who I think will be contributing mainly around situating the apology in a broader context.  So, with that in mind it would be fantastic if you could all please tell us a wee bit more about yourselves and what is it that has prompted you to get involved in today’s kōrero. Perhaps Melani, we will start with you. |
| Melani | This is a body, heart and soul project because being a member of the original Polynesian Panther party, the apology has been 50 years coming although it was in the last two years where it took on a momentum of its own and just flew. I need to be careful because I could speak for hours and hours on the Panthers but I think there’s enough literature and the documentaries and social media out there where people are now aware on who we are in terms of being activists at the ages of 16 and 17 in what I call the crucible years which is 1971 to ‘74. It was during those three years that we set up our platform, that we developed our programmes, our community survival programmes, homework centres and together with people’s union and other collaborators, we had the pig patrols and the TAB (Tenancy Agency Brigade).  So those programmes already set up prior to the Dawn Raids and so in a way it was really fortuitous because we had about 500 members nationwide and so when the Dawn Raids arrived, we were set up and ready for the fight. So really looking forward to this discussion. |
| Sally | It’s good to know that the Polynesian Panthers predated the Dawn Raids, that’s a good context to have as we move forward in this conversation as well. Perhaps Selwyn, we will hear from you next. |
| Selwyn | Cool, kia ora everybody. Kia orana. My name is Selwyn Gamble, I am 21 years old. I am a trustee for the Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation Trust [PYLAT] which is really cool to see like this sort of whakapapa of Pacific advocacy going back to the Polynesian Panthers. And what was my entryway into all of this? I went to high school in Ōtautahi Christchurch and PYLAT was having the second Pacific Youth Parliament event at my high school and I was Year 13 at the time and I was leading the PolyFest group. I asked my group if anybody could do it and nobody could at the time so I put my hand up to take part in it and I was elected as leader of the opposition party for the simulated parliament.  We are a registered charitable trust, most of us are based in Ōtautahi but we do have trustees in Ōtepoti, Te Whanganui-a-tara and Tāmaki Makaurau. We’re nationwide but we’re based in Christchurch. |
| Sally | Thank you very much, Kathy and how about we go with you. |
| Kathy | Thanks, kia ora everybody. So I’m Kathy Smits from politics at the university and I just want to say what a privilege it is to be able to participate in this conversation with people who are involved and who have been involved. So I’m really excited about it. So I have a very different background and perspective. I’m Australian - a very recent New Zealander but I have lived here for 17 years - and I teach and work in politics and political ideas and I’ve always been very interested and done a lot of work in issues around the formation of communities and national communities and diverse communities within nations.  A few years ago I got very interested in the whole question of apologies, actually around about the time that there was one finally delivered in my home country of Australia to the indigenous people there and particularly the members of the Stolen Generation. And I did some work on apologies and have written on it and have kept reading about it ever since. So my possibly small, but I hope possibly useful contribution, to the conversation will be yeah, maybe helping situate apology in that broader context. |
| Sally | Fantastic, thanks so much and finally we’ve got Benji. |
| Benji | Kia Orana tatou katoatoa, Ko Benji toku ingoa. E uanga au no te oire Vaipae i Aitutaki, e pera katoa, Atiu e Mangaia. Malo le soifua maua ma le lagi e mama. My name is Benji Timu and I thought I’d start off with a Cook Island intro because it’s Cook Island Language Week and also I happen to be from the Cook Islands. My pathway into Pacific advocacy, I guess, started a few years back. I sort of became aware of my upbringing and how protected I was in terms of understanding the sort of social issues that underlied a lot of the inequalities that were happening in our community. I went to a Catholic school and I was sort of on path to being this like saviour of our people in a western world.  So I left high school and I ended up getting my Bachelor in Architectural Studies, followed on gaining my Master’s in Architecture. During that period, I began to shift away from the church a bit more just as I began to understand a lot of those layers and how it was implemented in myisland ofSamoa, Cook Island and Niue and from then on I started to, I guess, educate myself a bit more outside of the university realm and started doing my own research. One thing I was really passionate about a few years ago was storytelling, that was evident in my architectural work, telling the stories of our people through architecture but also through film. I was really fascinated in the way that we were able to tell our stories like that and actually how we can be distorted by other people. And so I grew up in a low socioeconomic area, juxtaposing against you know Mission Bay, St Heliers, and so they’re easily overlooked when it comes to our little district.  What I sort of realised as well is that a lot of our stories were being told by One News, Three News, Police Ten 7 and it was told by people that didn’t look like us. And so in 2017 myself alongside four others, we formed a group called No 6 and our main mission is to reclaim the narrative and since 2017 until about now I’ve been doing that in different various ways whether that’s through film or whether that’s through my voice.  From that work I had the opportunity to meet The Claw like Melani and Teine, Alec and Pauline and I only met them about three or four months ago and since then it’s been a fascinating journey for myself, you know, not only learning about what had happened in the ‘70s but also all the other things that sort of tie in, the inequalities that’s been happening in our community.  As you guys know, Josiah and I, we petitioned for an apology. We did understand there was a process that was happening in the background; however, we wanted the youth voice to be known as well. Coming back to our mission of reclaiming the narrative as young people too, I think it was important for us to voice our concerns through a different way or through the digital age too. |
| Sally | Amazing intros everybody, what a wealth of experience we’re bringing to this kōrero today. Just, then, to set the scene before we get into things like talking more about the apology - I’ve got so many questions for you, Benji and Selwyn, about the actual process of it - but just to set the scene, what were the Dawn Raids, when did they occur, those sorts of things for people who may not be familiar with the context. |
| Melani | 1974 and by a Labour-led government and 1976 by a National government, state-sanctioned racism and terrorism to Pacific people, knocking on the doors, breaking down of doors, spotlights on faces, dogs barking, people hauled out of their bedrooms in their nighties or just lavalavas and taken to the police cells and shipped back to the Islands the next day.  As you may know, Cook Islanders, Niueans, Tokelauans are New Zealand citizens but Samoans and Tongans need to have a visa to come and work here. Before the ‘70s, the post-war boom created gaps in New Zealand’s economy where there were labour shortages in blue collar work and so of course Pacific people, especially Samoans and Tongans, were willing to come to Aotearoa to fill those gaps and so my parents were one of those families that came over and they came on mass and the rhetoric you will hear from all that generation, my parents’ generation, was we came for a better education for our children and for a better life.  When work was aplenty, everything was fine, visas were being overstayed, employers and the church turned a blind eye because they were really good workers, they worked for pittance, they were respectful to establishment, they did their jobs. And then the economic recession hit New Zealand, the global oil crisis and things were getting hard. The government began their project on pointing us, in the media especially, as criminals so they played the law/justice platform in their election campaigns, especially National party. So that’s when the Dawns Raids commenced in 1974.  The police and immigration department were given special access to being able to round up and deport people who had overstayed their permits and, as is well known now in terms of the discourse out there, only 30% of Pacific were overstayers and yet 90% of the deportations were… the major overstayers were from Europe, United Kingdom, South Africa. So that, that is what the apology was for.  It created layers of shame and trauma and distrust of the government and for us Panthers, that was the main reason why the apology was necessary. |
| Sally | Benji and Selwyn, I’d be interested to hear if you guys have any sense of what Melani was just talking about there, the legacies of the Dawn Raids within your families or within your communities more broadly. |
| Benji | I didn’t have any family members that were directly affected by the Dawn Raids but I did have family members that had complications with immigration issues. I had stories of my uncle, you know, as soon as he hears a knock on the door he runs through the back and climbs fences. |
| Selwyn | Mine’s actually a new addition because it’s something I’ve only learnt about a couple of weeks ago because my mum has spoken up about it but that’s part of the findings that’s happening because of this apology. My great aunty, she was one of the first Tongan people to come down south in Ōtautahi after the Second World War and she was part of the Dawn Raids, she was hiding other Tongans and other Pacific people from the police.  I think there’s kind of a sort of mindset that it just happened in Auckland but actually it was happening all around Aotearoa. Yeah unfortunately she’s passed away now so it’s hard to get details but it’s something I’d actually like to look into some more. It goes to show that this isn’t a closed ended thing because of the apology, it’s actually still going and it will still keep going. |
| Sally | It’s great that you’ve raised about the fact that all this discussion is prompting reflection and prompting more people to stand up and talk about it, it’s got to be a great thing in terms of coming to terms with or trying to process or trying to move on and heal from what’s happened. |
| Melani | Totally, since the apology was announced, the floodgates have been opened. I’ve had several calls from a Tongan gentleman who said that he couldn’t tell his wife that as a 20-year-old he was dawn raided and he was with his 17-year-old cousin at the time and he told me that up to that point, he couldn’t even tell his wife and she wondered why every time the Dawn Raids were mentioned, her husband would just clam up and not talk and so he felt he could be free now to talk. Some of the Panthers’ own families have opened up, have said that they hadn’t even told their own sister that they’d been dawn raided. Tingilau Ness’ sister, who used to be on nightshift at the hospital, told him for the first time in over 50 years that she was so scared of leaving the house to go to work of being picked up by the police. This is amazing. And there’s other stories. I read on social media the story of a woman and her two babies who hid in a wardrobe when the house was being raided and she heard the policeman come into the bedroom where she was hiding, open the wardrobe, shone the torch on her and her two kids, close the doors and yelled out, “Nope, nobody in here” and he went out. So the stories go both ways: the policemen who were forced to do things they weren’t wanting to do and survivors and victims now feeling not guilty, feeling free to really relive that experience. And to me that’s been the best thing that’s come out of the apology is the freedom of our people to be who they are and not being afraid and not be ashamed. |
| Sally | Kathy, is that something that you’ve noticed in terms of your work on other apologies, that the actual act of that apology, that formalisation of talking it through, has prompted people to feel more comfortable with it? |
| Kathy | Absolutely, completely, this is a very often noted phenomenon with apologies. You know, for obvious reasons the apology brings things out into the public, right, and for the government making the apology, there’s a ‘taking on’ of responsibility and there’s an acknowledgement. And for the people who are receiving the apology, there’s this acknowledgement of self-worth and that acknowledgement of self-worth, there’s an acknowledgement of the worth of the experience of people who went through it.  So it’s very common in cases of apology for that to be accompanied by a big public conversation and discussion in which people can actually bring up their experiences and have them made publicly known - and of course the prime minister referred to this as part of what she wanted to happen as a result of the apology.  And if you compare this, say, to what happened with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology to indigenous Australians - very similar, right. There was a Royal Commission, there were many people who had not been able to tell their stories, as Melani talked about, you know, people in their own families, but also these stories became then part of the common currency and experience of the broader community as well. They folded into school curricula, they folded into university curricula, so it’s this full acknowledgement and this… The great things about these apologies is they work on a personal level for people who are bringing up these stories and have that acknowledgement but they also work on a communal level, right, because, you know, this then becomes part of the currency of what New Zealand history is and New Zealand history is also the stories of people who experienced those raids. So yeah, I’m very excited about this aspect of the apology. |
| Sally | Benji and Selwyn, anything else you’d like to add about the context of the Dawn Raids themselves or the legacies, before we move onto our first song? |
| Selwyn | Yeah I mean, I think it’s just something that I found that was really interesting was during those times, relations between New Zealand and the United Kingdom were sort of waning as they worked towards integrating more into Europe with the European Economic community. It’s almost scary the timing of that, how with Brexit and everything and breaking from that and then looking to setting up free trade deals with New Zealand as a modern state, it’s almost that weird full circleness of it that’s going on that I just find really strange and sort of what does that speak to about our colonial legacy as a British colony. It’s something I think a lot about, you know, what does decolonisation look like and what are the legacies of that having British systems as a country. It leads to stuff like this, doesn’t it, really, and it’s lasting. You know, you could talk about all the theory that you want but when you’re experiencing it, you feel it, yeah. |
| Sally | Okay we might have our first song then. Melani you suggested ‘Thou We Are’ by Unity Pacific. |
|  | **MUSIC BY UNITY PACIFIC – THOU WE ARE** |
| Sally | This is Speak Up – Kōrerotia and today we’re talking about the Dawn Raids. We’re talking with Kathy Smits, Melani Anae, Selwyn Gamble and Benji Timu. I’d like to talk now about the campaign, the movement that grew in the last couple of years to push for an apology. |
| Melani | For you young ones, you need to know that everything has a whakapapa, every event has a genealogy, a *gafa*. The whakapapa of the apology is really important, the whakapapa of the apology happened two years ago on a programme The Project, TV3. It was a programme that was highlighting Pauline Smith’s, another Panther’s, book called *The Dawn Raids* and so the programme was talking about the Dawn Raids book and also interviewed me about the Panthers and the Dawn Raids and what it was like and the reverse Dawn Raids that the Panthers carried out on the politicians. And Mark Richardson, actually, at the programme as an aside said, “I think the government needs to apologise to these people for the Dawn Raids” and that’s when the idea was out there on the screens. It took on a life of its own two years ago when a Labour list MP, Liz Craig, decided to take it up with her colleagues in parliament who are Claw and plus in our Educate to Liberate programme in schools, some of the questions from students who were saying oh has there been an apology yet.  So we were getting this feedback from teachers and students in the schools about why there wasn’t an apology and then we heard about Josiah and Benji’s work in terms of their petition and so it all seemed to tie in, the timing was immaculate, perfect for the big push for the apology and so for two years we’ve been having conversations with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples and the culmination of that, we actually submitted, The Claw submitted our shopping list to the government for the apology and that culminated in the beautiful ceremony.  Actually what was beautiful about it was the government finally being culpable for the terrorism of the Dawn Raids. |
| Selwyn | From our perspectives as young people, I think something that was really important to us was responding to the Polynesian Panther’s call for this by petition. I think something that was very important was having somebody who could represent both the South Island and the North Island. Josiah is from Dunedin actually but he is based in Christchurch at the moment and having Benji being up from Auckland, I think that was something that was very important to get this as widespread as possible. |
| Benji | I thought it was really important to tap into our networks given that this happened outside of our existence pretty much and so like for myself for example, I knew nothing about the Dawn Raids in high school, even in university as well. You can imagine what my reaction was when I found out that the Dawn Raids had a really traumatic past and whakapapa, that it sort of sparked a curiosity into our legacy as Pasifika people in Aotearoa and just you know, unravelling all those layers, it kind of explained a lot about the sort of racism that was happening.  For example, you know, I went to a predominantly Pākehā school, the comments that I would hear quite often really mirrored, I guess, how the government felt about us in the ‘70s. It even got to the point where I was actually quite violent in my first year of high school, you know being suspended. I’m not proud of it but I used to beat up a lot of white kids because of their racist comments and this is only because I came from a predominantly Pasifika school, 99% Polynesians, primary school and then I moved into high school where we were probably maybe 10%. Being a minority in a school, you know, I really, really felt it especially through the casual racism that happened. |
| Melani | When the Panther Claw heard about Josiah’s and Benji’s petition, we were over the moon because we know that the true evolution in this country will happen from the young people, it will happen with the youth and that’s in our Educate to Liberate programme where we share our platform and the three-point platform is: peaceful resistance against racism; number two: mana Pasifika, celebrate, be proud of your ethnic identity; and number three: educate to liberate. So we tell these young people if you take that platform and live it, then, you know, change will happen.  And so when we saw these young people take on the call for petition, we said yes you know, that’s what we need and we know that that’s the revolution that’s going to happen. Government isn’t going to change like we would like the government to change in terms of the whole upheaval of the school curriculum to expose racism and celebrate harmonious race relations. Change will come from these young people and so we are happy to pass the mantel on to this informed and educated generation.  Already some of the schools are asking the right questions and forming groups that will highlight and shine the light on things that they are worried about in their own hoods. You know things that are impacting on them and their families because you know, let’s face it, racism is racism and will always be there. It’s one thing when we think today that oh, we’ve got to truly diverse, culturally diverse New Zealand now. Well we have on the surface and what’s gurgling below is the systemic racism that’s keeping the stats as they are in terms of Māori and Pacific people failing all over the place across all the socio-economic indices. What’s going on really? And until those statistics change, we all know that systemic racism is operating quite nicely thank you.  And that’s the job of the youth, is to shine the light on it, don’t be swayed by the surface things that are happening and be forthright in carrying the platform. I mean that’s what New Zealand needs. We’ve got a chance to show the world how to live together in harmony, we’ve done it before, we stood together in the 1981 Springbok tour as a nation, no colour, creed, religion or anything, just fighting the beast which was apartheid. And we can do it again but we can’t do it with a misinformed and miseducated youth because they are the leaders of the future. |
| Sally | One thing I wonder about, this intergenerational theme that you’re raising here, is the power of social media in terms of this campaign and in terms of pushing for the apology and that’s something that Benji and Selwyn and young people more broadly have such a great handle on and being able to mobilise the power of social media. |
| Selwyn | I think we’re very fortunate in a sense to live in a country of such because you know, if you’re thinking about larger nations maybe such as the USA, it’s so easy to get caught up in the bureaucracy and have your voice lost and there are multiple avenues on how you can approach something if you want to speak up. If systems are having you down, all you have to do is get loud and go on the radio, you can make submissions, you can write letters, we’ve seen it with protests, there are multiple avenues and we have the population to be able to do so and people are utilising that and I think more so on a generational basis.  I think people are more aware and I think there’s a willingness to have a discussion about our rangatahi here in Aotearoa. I think using the systems and making the most out of the situation that we have, people are, yeah, are using it more. I think we could go stronger, personally, but I think it’s a start and I think we’ve just got to keep going. |
| Kathy | I could maybe just add a little bit to that and it’s especially really interesting because there’s often a perception that young people are not so politically involved because of the focus on social media and all of that, that you know we’ve all been privatised. But I think this is really mistaken. You know, what we saw with the apology was a prime example: social media activism linked to actual real world activism that produces an event, you know a wonderful event. I also think this is a really good sign… we see this in Pasifika movements, Māori, for young women who are using the internet in a way that will really sort of agitate for real world political change. So yeah, it’s great. |
| Melani | When we go out to the schools, the students say, “How can we be activists, how can we be Polynesian Panthers?” and I said well you know, back in the day we had no cell phones, that showed that you can do it with just your hands and a heart. You’ve got the tools now and I said to be a Polynesian Panther you have to use your tools - it’s a new time, a new place, you use the power. |
| Sally | What was the idea behind an apology? Why an apology? What is the potency that comes with a formal, a political apology? |
| Melani | When Alex gave his speech on the stage in the townhall, he did say that people call us activists, some people call us revolutionaries but we were just seen as *moepi* through our parents and their generation which is ‘bed wetters’, right. But at that moment on the stage we were *moepi* who became VIPs and that’s because… that’s because we finally got the government to proclaim that it was racist. End of story. |
| Kathy | People often say we’re living in an age of apologies and certainly since like the 1980s there have been a lot of apologies delivered by states around the world and by groups, by churches, religious organisations. This I guess started maybe in the ‘70s when West Germany apologised to the Jewish people for the Holocaust but since then there have been many other apologies.  So I think this does kind of create when we might call a norm, an idea that it’s possible for this to happen, this can happen, we see it happening in other kind of contexts and then to ask the question what kind of apology would be meaningful. So there have been many apologies delivered in New Zealand as well as around the world but they’re often very distinctive and I think the apology for the Dawn Raids was particularly distinctive as well. Of course culturally distinctive and framed in a way to create the most meaning for people involved. So I think there is this definite idea out there that states can apologise.  Then of course there is a lot of debate of whether is an apology enough, is an apology just symbolic, what would it mean if it were just symbolic, is there an important dimension that is symbolic and what will follow obviously is a big issue. So people talk about apologies and think about them and they’re real political options. |
| Selwyn | What we found with this apology in particular, is that people feel various different feelings and I think it is really important to emphasise that all of those are OK because we’re all going to react to it in a different way and just actually letting that play out is super important. We’re not all going to feel one uninformed feeling, are we, because that’s just not who we are as a people. We’re all unique, we’re diverse and it affects us in different ways. |
| Melani | What I think stands out about New Zealand’s apologies though, they’ve only been to the Chinese, Samoa and now to Pacific people in New Zealand. They’ve been to three ethnic minority groups and that’s what makes New Zealand’s apologies stand out. For the Panthers, the main point behind what was good about the apology was a time for healing, healing, that was a people-centred outcome that we wanted. As I said before, we had a shopping list, we didn’t want it just to be words, there had to be real outcomes.  So to me, for the Panthers, our main thrust was a time of healing - not only for the people and the victims but for the government to heal itself and start thinking about the ideas that gave rise to the Dawn Raids, that gave rise to Parihaka, that gave rise to all the fights that we’ve had in Aotearoa, to rethink and maybe change. And that’s what the Panthers stood for. We needed to conscious-ise three sets of people: tangata whenua, the dominant palagis and our own people, our own elders. This apology is only a start. Heal, look after the body and soul of the people and peoples who are affected and the get the strength to that. |
| Sally | I just like to reiterate for people listening who may not be familiar: those two apologies, the two previous New Zealand government apologies that Melani referred to, were both in 2002 under Helen Clark and the first one was to the Chinese community for the poll tax, which was around Chinese migrants coming into New Zealand - so that was an apology for that racist policy - and a second one was an apology to Samoa about the New Zealand occupation and the injustices that were committed during that time, for introducing the flu to Samoa and the pandemic that occurred there.  So we’re going to have our second song which is ‘United We Stand’ which was a song that Benji, you suggested here. |
| Benji | We sing it after every visit. So I had the chance to tour with The Claw across the motu to Wellington and up in Kaitaia and every time The Claw did a session with the kids or the community, you know, we’d end it with that song. It’s funny because I actually didn’t even know the song before I first heard it but now I know it really well, to the point where I can sing it with…. |
| Selwyn | Yeah same here, actually. |
| Sally | Lovely OK here we go, ‘United We Stand’. |
|  | **MUSIC – UNITED WE STAND** |
| Sally | This is Speak Up – Kōrerotia and today we’re talking about the Dawn Raids. |
| Kathy | One of the things people often say, you know about apology oh it just words you know or it’s just symbolic. Of course there is a symbolic dimension to the apology because it’s… the prime minister speaks on behalf of the whole nation and she says she stands there as a symbol of the nation. But I think one thing we would not want to do is underestimate the importance, the symbolic importance, of an apology. It’s not enough in itself but it really does meet that kind of public acknowledgement of what was done, that what was done was wrong, that expression of regret and remorse and the recognition and restoring of that sense of self-worth to the people who were the victims of the Dawn Raids is really crucially important and that was really so beautifully done with this apology, with the Samoan ceremony.  So there is a symbolic dimension but then of course there’s what does happen next and sometimes apologies are followed by reparations, often followed by programmes designed to try to address the ongoing effects of what was done. So this speaks to what Melani was talking about with the ongoing racism in New Zealand. So you know, I mean there, what we’ve got is the programme of educational scholarships and the programme for visiting leaders from our Pacific Island people.  The cultural dimension or the symbolic dimension of what is done is crucially important and how it is done is important, it has to be done right. Canada had to apologise twice to indigenous Canadians, the first time it really wasn’t done with full participation and the ceremonial and inclusions dimensions are so important. So that’s important.  But then what’s really important is what happens next. So the apology is kind of a stage in a whole social movement forward. So we talked about all the work that was done by the Panthers, by young people leading up to it - there’s that and then there’s the apology and then there’s the ongoing thing. People think of it as a one event but it’s really a stage in that ongoing event and campaign. |
| Sally | What a perfect segway into the next thing I’d like to be thinking about which is firstly, how did you feel hearing the apology after all this emotion that’s been building up for decades, but also, what are we thinking, what are we hoping as we move forward from that staging of the symbolic action? |
| Melani | In our shopping list that we left with the government, we were clear as to what we wanted. We wanted an apology as well as one hundred annual scholarships, the overhaul of the current educational curriculum to include the compulsory teaching of racism, race relations, the Dawn Raids and Pacific Studies and the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi as the cornerstone of harmonious race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand across all sectors and assessed as achieved standards across appropriate non-history subjects. That was our shopping list.  What we actually got was watered down: some national Pacific scholarships and two other education gestures that were really already in place. You know, a publication about experiences of the Dawn Raids and the provision of resources to those schools who were already teaching them. Ka whawhai tonu mātou - the fight goes on. We know that education is the key - that is why our parents came to this country, for a better education, and somehow it’s been subsumed under a whole lot of different careers, mainly sports, creative stuff, but we need more academics and more people.  It was at university where I became empowered to understand about my pain and angst and anger against the system. It was at university that I learnt oh, it’s not my fault, it’s society, this is the way society works - and this is the message we need to get to our children and future leaders of the country. Knowledge is power and I think that’s what the government is afraid of. An informed, well-educated proletariat who will be able to fight and stand for themselves. It’s not surprising that we got those gestures and as I said, the fight must go on. |
| Sally | Benji and Selwyn, how did you feel firstly on hearing… on witnessing... |
| Benji | Yeah I felt pretty good but I couldn’t help but be cynical on their deliverables as well because you know, as you guys have mentioned, the battle is still going on. But also, just taking note that the Dawn Raids is a product of deep racist philosophies that is still around within the government and in our society and so just understanding that this is, I guess, the tip of the iceberg that we’re addressing. There’s so many different other issues that’s happening in society and so it’s good to be happy with the little win such as the apology but you know, that actually started 50 years ago; you know, Melani said it started two years ago, I actually think it started 50 years ago when the Panthers first started.  You know the Panthers weren’t only fighting against the Dawn Raids, they were fighting against so many different things. You know I learnt about black birding by Uncle Tigi and you know, these are the different legacies that New Zealand government has left us. It is interesting that they did leave out the compulsory teachings of the Dawn Raids… well not only the Dawn Raids, you know, other things that have happened in our Pacific community and I do feel the same sentiment as Melani when they say they’re afraid of us being knowledgeable.  A prime example is ourselves as well, you know, I was educated in University, Selwyn is in uni and you know, we’re all quite powerful with our knowledge and so you can imagine what uproar would happen when you would have 100 of us, 1000s of us educated and knowledgeable of all the different facets of the way our society was built - on stolen land, on cheap labour, there’s so many different layers to it. And so you know, the Dawn Raids is only the tip of the iceberg. Actually the tip of the tip of the iceberg. |
| Sally | I feel that’s a real shame not including the teaching of it, especially given that from 2022, possibly 2023, there’s going to be compulsory New Zealand history education in schools. That would be the perfect way of incorporating it into the curriculum. |
| Melani | I’m not worried because over the last ten years we’ve been going to almost 30 schools in Auckland, every year they ask us back. Those teachers are informed and enlightened and love their students and talk to them and they are now becoming teachers themselves. I mean my students, I’ve taught the Panthers’ story and the Dawn Raids to my university students since 2005 and since 2005, they’ve become teachers and two of them have incorporated Pacific Studies within their curriculum, right, and so that’s what’s worrying them at the moment. They can teach it but it’s not achieved, it don’t count for nothing when the students want to go to university. So that’s what our push, is therefore making Pacific Studies on the same par as history where that’s the only subject where you can learn about the Dawn Raids and get accredited university pass.  I’ve got heart. We’ve spoken to thousands of students over the last ten years and hundreds of teachers and we are getting new schools and all sorts of schools asking us to come out there. So we’re not too worried because we know that it’s… you know, in years to come, in terms of our Panther mantra and our relationship with tangata whenua, we have always respected and held tangata whenua in high esteem. For example, at university I would not have lobbied to build a fale Pasifika at the University of Auckland if there was not a marae. I felt OK, cool well I can ask for a fale Pasifika now because tangata whenua is there. And so this is the amazing thing, next year it will be compulsory for Māori history to be taught. In the future, I’m thinking 2023, ‘24, ’25, Pacific Studies will become compulsory as well, that’s how we’re going to improve our race relations in this country. I’m really, really positive it’s going to happen. OK Benji and Selwyn, OK? |
| Selwyn | Without a doubt. Maybe just to add to that, I think there’s also that thing where I don’t think New Zealanders, at least from the Pākehā population, they don’t think of us as a Pacific nation. Like, this is actually Polynesia and you know, that word in itself is a problematic label but I’ll use it for now. New Zealand as a modern state still has a colony, Tokelau, I would love to see that conversation brought up. We don’t seem to address it, we still have a colony you know, we still override their decisions. It’s really important that we make sure that it is in our education policy. I think policy is the best way to incite action from government, government making policy: if they can have racist-mandated policy, then they can have policy to uplift that to start the beginnings of amending those wrong doings. You know, Polynesian Panthers have their shopping list, you know, it’s not like those things haven’t been said, they’re out there now, they know. They know exactly what’s being outspoken. We’re not being muddy about it, we’re not being ambiguous, they know, they know exactly what we want and the ball is in their court now, the ball is in their court. |
| Sally | Wonderful and rich kōrero, I’ve massively enjoyed myself. We are running out of time, though, so anything you’d like to say, final thoughts as we wrap up. |
| Melani | Power to the people. |
| Selwyn | I agree, yeah. Tangata whenua, always tangata whenua first and foremost and then everybody else. Treaty inspired, it’s important, it’s important to honour the Treaty always. |
| Benji | Power to the people and yeah, definitely thinking about the government responsibility to Te Tiriti is really, really important too. It’s the same fight. Also just want to mention that you know, this fight isn’t in isolation, it also goes alongside all the other social issues because it’s all affected by the same poison which is racism. |
| Kathy | Really everything that Melani and Selwyn and Benji have said. I mean to remember the need for ongoing change, the symbolic dimensions of the apology were important, it was great to see that, it was great to see forgiveness but there are ongoing affects of the Dawn Raids and effects of the much broader racist attitudes of the time and yeah, I also hope that those can be changed. And I teach in a university too so, like Melani, I think universities are really a great place to help young people get together, raise consciousness and sometimes raise the consciousness of their academic staff as well, you know, and then to move out there into the world. So yeah, I look forward to seeing it. |
| Sally | Faa’fetai -thank you so much to all of you. I was so much looking forward to this conversation and I’ve really enjoyed it. So thank you very much and just inspiring all of you that you are involved in this work and that it’s really hopeful to see the proof that actually something can happen from advocacy so that’s been really wonderful and inspiring to see. Thank you very much all of you. |