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## **The Politics of Gang Research in New Zealand**

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### **Abstract**

Like many other Western jurisdictions over the past sixty years, New Zealand has had to contend with episodes of moral panic regarding the activities of youth gangs. The most recent episode occurred in 2005-2007 and was spurred by a perceived escalation in inter-gang conflict and violence in the Counties Manukau areas within greater Auckland, New Zealand. This particular episode was unique in the New Zealand context for the level of attention given to youth gangs by the government and policy makers. This paper reports on the authors' experiences of carrying out research on the youth gang situation in Counties Manukau as part of an inter-agency project to develop a response to gang-related violence. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which government officials attempted to mould the research process and findings to suit an already emerging policy framework, predicated on supporting 'business as usual', at the expense of research participants calls for great autonomy to develop and delivery appropriate youth services to their communities.

## **Introduction**

This paper and the research it reports on, adds to the growing number of studies that have explored various manifestations of Cohen's (1972) conceptualisation of moral panic as it relates to processes of marginalisation of specific populations and/or communities (for example, Furedi, 1994; Goode and Nachman, 1994; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson and Roberts, 1978; Hood, 2001; Marsh and Melville, 2011; Young, 2009). The issue that prompted our involvement in research on this issue was a perceived spike in youth gang violence in the Counties Manukau region (Great Auckland, New Zealand), a community that subsequently became the focus of a moral panic related to its supposedly 'wayward youth'.

The response to supposed 'youth gang crime' in Counties Manukau can be framed as a moral panic for three reasons. First, despite enormous media attention and claims to the contrary, the research was unable to demonstrate the existence of an extensive youth gang problem. This is an important consideration given the heightened panic that ensued following media and politicians' pronouncements of escalations in youth gang-related crime. For instance, large public meetings were called by the Mayor of Counties Manukau. In attendance were parents, church ministers, community stakeholders and local and central government representatives. The highly emotive issue led to mothers crying, fathers waving angry fists and church ministers proclaiming the need for stricter parenting and an adherence to Biblical principles for child rearing. Next, despite the inordinate amount of attention to the issue and dire predictions of 'youth out of control', no additional government resources were set aside and directed at the issue. Rather, the central government's response occurred within existing budgets. Finally, the extent of the issue was brought into question when the so-called youth gang crime wave in Counties Manukau subsided as quickly as it appeared, as the following report by Police attests:

During the period, Friday the 23 December 2005 to Monday the 9 January 2006 there were no incidents of youth gang violence or notable activity reported to or dealt with by the Police in the Counties Manukau, Auckland City or North Shore Waitakere Police Districts (New Zealand Police, 9 January 2006).

Such a drastic decrease in visibility, crime and apprehension is contrary to the way in which this type of 'social issue' evolves, at least from the view of those involved in developing and enforcing crime control policy.

The paper is made of two parts in order to provide the authors' the opportunity to discuss their personal involvement in the research and policy response to the youth gang 'issue' that occurred in Counties Manukau. The first voice (the researcher) provides a contextual background to the study. Specifically, a variety of dynamics are highlighted that added to the developing moral panic about youth gangs, silenced community voices and participation in the development of policy responses while furthering the authority of central government stakeholders. The second voice provides a critique of the way in which policy officials responded to the primary researchers work.

## *Voice of the researcher*

### **Background**

During Labour Weekend October 2005, Iulio Naea, a 38-year-old father of a reported youth gang member was murdered in Otara, Counties Manukau<sup>1</sup>. Naea's murder was thought to have been responsible for triggering a series of violence retaliations, and was later categorised as the first often supposed youth gang-related homicides in the region (New Zealand Forum, 2010).

Following the murder, the central government came under increasing pressure to provide a solution to the burgeoning youth gang problem. Notably, substantial pressure came from the Counties Manukau Mayor and the New Zealand Police. In response, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) was directed to undertake research into the issue and coordinate an appropriate, inter-agency policy response. The research component of the research resulted in one of the authors, Michael Roguski, being tasked to carry out a four-month ethnographic study. The aims of the research project were to develop an understanding of youth gangs in Counties Manukau, assess possible factors that have contributed to the emergence of youth gangs, ascertain the extensiveness and impact of youth gangs and identify elements and features of intervention models that could be developed and successfully implemented in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Manukau City is a local authority that consists of the Botany, Clevedon, Howick, Mangere, Otara, Pakaranga, Papatoetoe and Manurewa Wards. Counties Manukau incorporates the three territorial local authorities of Franklin, Manukau City and Papakura District Councils. Historically this area has been known as South Auckland. Analysis of data has been complicated by how the areas within Counties Manukau are configured by various agencies. For instance, the Counties Manukau Police District includes the territorial authority areas of Manukau City, Papakura District, Franklin District and the Auckland City suburban area of Otahuhu. Counties Manukau District Health Board area provides health services to the people of Manukau City, Papakura and Franklin districts.

The research methodology was developed to ensure a strong adherence to community participation and ownership of the data and subsequent research findings. This approach was thought necessary to secure community participation as respondents were initially reluctant to engage with the research. A number of reasons were given, but in the main participants felt their communities were over researched, especially by the public service, and they were:

Sick of sharing our experiences only for the government to ignore what we say  
and do what they wanted to do all along.

Community participant

As the primary researcher I attempted to forge community participation through promises of community hui (meetings) where residents and research participants would be able to review the study's findings and meet to discuss possible community identified solutions.

#### Locating and defining youth gangs

The research evolved with an amorphous character. It proved exceedingly difficult to marry the media, Cabinet Ministers' and the New Zealand Police's portrayal of an apparent overriding presence of youth gangs in Counties Manukau with the situation as it was reported by community-based participants. In this sense a discursive chasm was evident. On one hand government representatives spoke of the existence of criminal youth gangs while simultaneously stressing that all efforts would be made to quash the problem. In contrast, community participants spoke of normalising the presenting issues; stressing that these were young people and not gang members and pleading that their community should not be judged and labelled as criminal:

Government people say we are socio-economically deprived. Do you realise how insulting and frustrating that is when you live here and you know the community and its beauty. All I see are rich social connections and a vibrant community that is doing exceptionally well on very low incomes. Of course, what the government sees are a bunch of poor darkies. Afterall isn't that what socio-economically deprived really means?

Community participant

I attended a number of government meetings about the young gang issue and quickly became aware that the research and the policy response resembled a particularly fast moving locomotive that had lost the ability to apply its brakes. This was particularly troublesome because Counties Manukau has long been marginalised by policy makers and community members repeatedly stated their frustration at being misrepresented by public servants, politicians and the media. Further, it was disturbing to note the growing number of young people (referred to in the report as 'wannabes'), who over a three-week period proudly reported having formed some form of 'gang' membership and adopted clothing styles and physical gestures in response to the elevated media reporting. While I viewed wannabe gang membership as a reflection of normal and expected adolescent grouping behaviour this development was concerning because media attention appeared to elevate gang membership (with the possibility of criminal activity) to an aspirational level. Given these concerns, it was extremely frustrating to be confronted with governmental machinations that refused to diverge from the *problem* of youth gangs. A combination of media attention and the government's public commitment to action meant that the public service needed to be seen to address the issue, even if the problem did not exist as it was framed by media and

politicians. The following extract from my fieldwork diary outlines some of my confusion with the way the issues were being manipulated by officials:

Each of the Ministries met today to discuss the youth gang problem. I gave a presentation on emerging research findings that focused on how difficult it is to define the problem and the shifting sands of prevalence and criminality. Specifically I raised the issue it may be a misnomer to categorise the issue as youth gang and that there is a risk that by using such terms we may exacerbate the issue. After the presentation I was met with blank stares. No one commented. We then had a 15-minute break so X and Y and I went outside for a smoke. It was over the cigarette that X and Y agreed that it is obviously not a youth gang problem and they qualified this by outlining that they live and work in each of the communities in question and therefore were sufficiently informed. We then discussed the need to be careful of the terms we used and then went back up stairs to continue with the meeting. Within five minutes both of my 'informed' smoking buddies had referred to 'youth gangs' and started talking about how terrible the problem is (Researchers fieldwork diary, January 2006).

### **Maintaining the status quo of marginalisation**

At the heart of the amorphous nature of the moral panic was the divide between the voices of government and those of the community, with the government perspective eclipsing the experiences and needs of people living in the region. To understand why government would marginalise the community in this way, we need to understand more about the people who live there. We argue that the community's historically marginalised status provided a fertile



ground for the government's position on youth gangs to hold centre stage while local voices and experiences were relegated to the margins.

The area's marginalised status can be linked to the post World War II economy that created a significant demand for unskilled labourers. This demand was met by Māori who moved in increasing numbers to the cities in search of work where they were generally employed in low-paid manual occupations<sup>2</sup>, and supplemented in the mid-1950s onwards by substantial increases in migration of unskilled labourers from a variety of Pacific nations<sup>3</sup>. The new migrants, both Maori and Pacifica, overwhelmingly settled in a small number of Greater Auckland suburbs – initially Grey Lynn and Ponsonby and then Counties Manukau<sup>4</sup>. The migrant districts were characterised by substandard housing and crowded tenancy which contributed to negative social effects, becoming visible by the early 1970s.

Key to the ability of policy workers and media to further the marginalisation of the communities of Counties Manukau is a prevalent public perception that the area has high rates of crime. In actuality, an analysis of crime data (aggregated by age) provided no evidence of higher rates of criminal activity in Counties Manukau when compared with national rates. For instance, Figure 1 below shows that in the year ending June 2005, Counties Manukau ranked fifth out of 12 Police districts with regard to recorded crime and had one of the lowest rates

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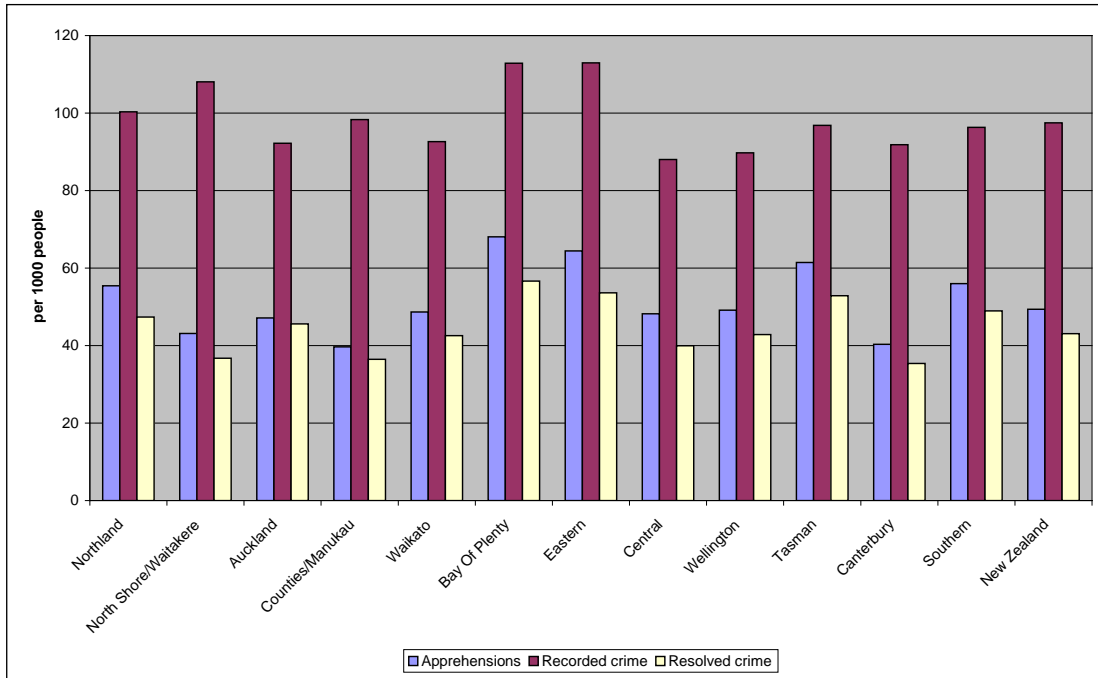
<sup>2</sup> The ratio of Māori living in cities and boroughs grew from 17% in 1945 to 44% in 1966, growing from 99,000 in 1945 to over 200,000 in 1966 (Thorns and Sedgwick, 1997)<sup>2</sup>. Migration continued so that by the 1990s almost 60% of Māori lived in urban areas.

<sup>3</sup> As a result, whereas in 1945 fewer than 2,000 Pacifica lived in New Zealand, by 1956 the number had grown to over 8,000 and by 1966 it was over 26,000 (Thorns and Sedgwick, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> The two most striking demographic features of the Counties Manukau area are a young age structure and a high proportion of Māori and Pacific people. The latter feature underlies the former as Māori and Pacific ethnic groups have a younger age structure than European/Pākehā. Counties Manukau has a young population with 39% of people under 23 years compared with 34% of the total New Zealand population. In Counties Manukau 22.5% of the population were estimated to be aged 10-to-23 years at June 2005. This compared with a national figure of 20.7%. Counties Manukau has a relatively high proportion of children aged under 10 years (estimated to be 16.7%) compared with nationally (14.3%).

(along with Canterbury and North Shore-Waitakere) of Police apprehensions and resolved crime<sup>5</sup> compared with other districts.

**Figure 1: Crime Statistics for 12 Police Districts. Year Ended June 2005**



Source: Statistics New Zealand website.

A second factor that advanced the moral panic over youth gang crime was a heightened international awareness of youth violence and vandalism associated with French civil unrest that occurred between October 27 2005 and January 4 2006. During that period riots had spread through Paris and a number of other French cities, concentrated in lower socio-economic areas with high percentage of immigrant and/or non-white populations. So strong was concern arising from the riots and the possibility of unrest spreading to New Zealand that media reported the Prime Minister as having:

<sup>5</sup> Recorded crime is defined as all reports of incidents, whether from victims, witnesses, third parties or discovered by Police, and whether crime-related or not, will result in the registration of an incident report by Police. The incident is recorded as an offence if a) the circumstances as reported amount to a crime defined by law, b) there is no credible evidence to the contrary, c) an incident was not reported as an offence, but upon investigation Police determine that an offence is likely to have been committed. Resolved crime is defined as recorded crime for which an offender or offenders have been identified and dealt with. Apprehensions are defined by a person having been identified by Police as the offender and, where appropriate, dealt with in some manner, such as warned, prosecuted, referred to youth justice family group conference and/or diverted.

. . . watched the television coverage of the riots spreading throughout the suburbs of French cities and saw it as a result of “the frustration and despair of marginalised communities with high levels of unemployment and deprivation” (Toli, 2005).

Further evidence that gang-related issues were foremost in the public psyche is reflected in reports that Wellington hospital’s neurosurgery ward was under lock-down because of fear of inter-gang violence (Dominion Post, 2005a). Further, fear was raised about the incidence of gang-constructed traps and cyanide poisoning surrounding marijuana plots (The Dominion Post, 2005b).

Associated with a growing fear of youth gangs was a fear of New Zealand’s cultural decline as influenced by the United States-derived hip hop and gangster rap culture and media associations of this form of music with criminality. These fears arose in media reports and in the various public meetings called by the Mayor of Counties Manukau<sup>6</sup> during which hip hop music, culture and artistic expression were considered highly influential in youth gang membership and activity.

Finally, the construction of a growing youth gang problem in New Zealand was reinforced by continuous media representations of gang criminality and growing membership (with much of the reporting going uncontested or challenged). Within these media portrayals gangs were associated with firearms (Radio New Zealand Newswire, 2006b), drugs (The Dominion

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<sup>6</sup> Concerns about linkages between music, youth culture and crime have arisen at various times in New Zealand over the past sixty years. The concerns expressed by officials and media about the ‘immorality’ of rap and hip hop closely mirroring the cries of immorality associated with post-war Bodgies and the Widgies (see Manning, 1958; Levett 1959 and Green, 1959).

Post, 2005b; Radio New Zealand Newswire, 2006d; New Zealand Herald, 2006a), graffiti (New Zealand Herald, 2006b) and violence (Cummings, 2005; New Zealand Herald, 2006b; Timaru Herald, 2006; Radio New Zealand Newswire, 2006f). Further, within a three month period what was a problem in one geographical location had grown to encompass other areas within New Zealand. Suddenly gang problems had erupted in Whangarei (New Zealand Press Association, 2005), Whanganui (Radio New Zealand Newswire, 2006f), Timaru (The Timaru Herald, 2006a and 2006b) and Palmerston North (Cummings, 2005). So common were reports about youth gang activity that it could be argued that public safety justified the government's response.

While these factors created an environment in which the youth gang moral panic flourished it is noteworthy that government representatives actively silenced alternative perspectives by accusing communities of apathy. For instance, in February 2006 a representative from the New Zealand Police criticised the Counties Manukau community for its high levels of apathy about youth violent crime (Radio New Zealand Newswire, 2006a). In this situation, because the community was not perceived to have sufficiently rallied against youth gangs then the community needed to be chastised. Similarly, blame was laid across a variety of local bodies who were accused on minimising the youth gang problem. For instance, The Police Association's President, Greg O'Connor stated that:

. . . many local authorities don't believe they have a gang problem because they don't see active violence on their streets (Radio New Zealand Newswire, 2006c).

We argue that the communities needed to be silenced because of Police agitation for increased resources and the public relations opportunities the youth gang crisis presented to that particular agency, and also to 'tough on crime' politicians, members of the public service and the media. Throughout the youth gang research multiple attempts to increase Police resources were made by representatives of the New Zealand Police and local government (Radio New Zealand Newswire, 2006c) and to increase the amount of Police discretionary power to be able to appropriately and expeditiously deal with the burgeoning problem. Similarly, in his first public address on the issue the Mayor of Counties Manukau, Sir Barry Curtis, stressed that there was a need for more youth workers (The New Zealand Herald, 2005). As such, multiple examples were offered where youth gangs were used to underscore the need for increased resourcing.

Aside from accusations and blame directed at the various Counties Manukau communities, government agencies made no effort to control the panic through the use of appropriate terminology. Instead, emotive terms were employed and, despite the research providing evidence to the contrary, government representatives continued to use youth gang and gang/crime-related rhetoric when discussing the issue amongst themselves and with media. In this sense, it can be argued that the potential for material gain for government agencies was instrumental in the consistent use of inappropriate terminology to characterise the situation, and silence the community perspective.

A final means of silencing occurred in the latter stages of the research. Earlier promises of community meetings to address the research's findings and provide an opportunity for public participation in jointly arriving at solution(s) were retracted without apology. As such, the community was once again treated in an unethical manner by public servants (see Tauri,

2009). Further, those who had decided to participate in the research because of the promise of future participation in the policy response had their distrust of government affirmed. Poor community engagement practice was so rife that I was chastised for having distributed copies of the draft research for peer review as:

We can't trust them [community representatives] not to give it to the media  
(Government official).

Sadly, the emergence of a youth gang problem in Counties Manukau provided central and local government with resourcing and public relations opportunities. As such, the depth or extent of the youth gang issue was irrelevant as pervasive media attention provided government with an opportunity to agitate for more resources, or affirm already existing work programmes and funding allocations. The opportunity afforded the Police by this project, to potentially increase resources, and for central agencies to protect current spend and projects and the potential for improved public relations meant that strategies had to be employed to silence opposing voices and perspectives. We argue that these factors, when combined, acted to maintain the political and policy status quo to the detriment of a historically marginalised community; as maintaining the status quo required the communities in question to be publically constructed as deprived, apathetic and fostering criminality.

## *Juan's story*

### **Reflections on the politics of gang research in New Zealand**

Sir Humphrey: The public doesn't know anything about wasting government money. We are the experts.

Yes Minister - *The Economy Drive*

The following section is written primarily from the perspective of the official given the task of 'minding' the primary researcher, Dr Michael Roguski, as he proceeded with his analysing the data he gathered in the field.

#### Background on my role in Michael's project

At the time Michael was carrying out field work on the 'youth gang situation' in South Auckland, I was employed as a Regional Policy Advisor in the same agency, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). It was not long after Michael had returned from fieldwork that I was contacted by a senior advisor in the agency who expressed concerns about the research (especially the analysis) and its implications; intimated that the primary researcher had little idea of what they were doing and asked if I would provide 'quality assurance' as the analysis and finding stage progressed. At this point the official who sought my involvement hinted at 'broad' issues with the researcher's work, without qualifying their concerns. I readily agreed to assist but made it clear I would base my observations on a thorough reading of the research material and engagement with the primary researcher.

After reviewing the documentation produced to this point I concluded that the researcher's work was methodologically sound and his analysis and representation of data accurate. In fact, some of the analysis was highly innovative and, in the context of previous research on the New Zealand context, groundbreaking. For example, his determination that the police, media and political representation of the 'youth gang problem' in Counties Manukau was greatly exaggerated, thus underlining that yet again, the political elite and policy industry had overreacted to wildly exaggerated and inaccurate media reports<sup>7</sup>. This finding was made more auspicious (and worrying, at least from a community level) by the fact that police had to acknowledge that their 'data' on youth gang membership was highly inaccurate, and that violent crime could not be attributed to 'gang members' to the degree that they and media representatives were claiming. Other significant findings included that community members believed that imported government programmes/interventions were failing due to their unsuitability for those communities; that communities preferred to be empowered to develop their own solutions to social issues (such as youth crime and gangs); and that militaristic policing 'styles' had contributed to poor police/community relations. There are many other important findings from the research, too many to list here, but the ones mentioned here provide clues as to why Michael's work meets with so much resistance at the local, policy and interagency levels.

Policy workers' issues with the research and subsequent analysis had little to do with the quality of Michael's work. Michael's sin had been to subvert a number of unwritten conventions that govern policy making in the social and crime control sectors of New Zealand's public service, including (but by no means exclusively):

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<sup>7</sup> However, it should be noted the media is not entirely at fault in this regard as much of what they reported on the youth gang and crime situation in South Auckland was fuelled in part by exaggerated comments on youth gang crime by policy workers.



- try not to ask questions that enable community members to talk about their experiences of government policy or interventions (unless the questions focus on the positive or the answers can easily be presented as such);
- never ask people of their experiences of other agencies policies or interventions, as this may cause ‘relationship’ difficulties prior to or post-release of the findings (although, if the findings are adverse they are likely to be a) altered, or b) not released); and
- all research and /or evaluation is to be about *the* institution and *not* the community.

So what was the reaction to Roguski’s research, and more particularly his analysis and findings? These can be grouped into the various levels of bureaucracy the worked past through on the way to becoming ‘policy’, namely the unit, policy and interagency levels:

The Unit level - ‘strategies of resistance’ employed within the research unit of MSD included asking me to provide ‘quality control’ over Michael’s researchers analysis and reporting, frequent requests for drafts of various chapters, most of which went without comment. This resulted in the primary researcher having to continuously backtrack on various chapters which significantly slowed his progress. This ‘strategy’ can be blamed in part on the lack of sector knowledge and expertise of the senior managers involved, but also the fact they were continuously ‘measuring’ the likely impact of the analysis and findings on internal, agency relationships, especially with policy workers.

The Policy and Interagency levels - if resistance at the unit level was motivated by a concern for political relationships with internal units, then at the policy level it was about maintaining control of the policy parameters and the political relationships of the agency to other agencies and ultimately to Cabinet. At time the policy response to

Roguski's research bordered on the farcical. For example, too often the researcher would send material out as completed (based on the assumption that no response = agreement to content), only for policy workers to insist their input had not been sought and/or received, despite email evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, part way through the analysis and reporting phase, policy representatives had organised an interagency committee that included most of the key social policy and crime control players, including, Police, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth Development. This group had been working on a 'plan of action' (the Plan) to respond to the core issues, except the plan that was eventually released bore little resemblance to a) the key issues identified by the research and b) the solutions identified by the community itself, as well as ignoring participants criticisms of the prevailing policy and intervention paradigm currently being employed by the Policy Industry in their region (see further discussion below).

Our suspicions that a policy response was being developed without the support of research evidence was confirmed after a senior policy manager enquired of me as to the status of the research was going. On being told we were about half way through she replied:

'Oh we can't wait for the research, we have already decided on the policy levers'.

This statement was confirmed when the Plan<sup>8</sup> was finalised and released.

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<sup>8</sup> Known as *The Plan Action: Improving Outcomes For Young People In Counties Manukau*, 2007: available on the Ministry of Social Development website.

## The Plan

The Plan provides an exemplar of a number of policy-making pitfalls in the New Zealand context. First of all is the issue of *retrofitting of research on to pre-determined policy outcomes* was a significant feature of the interagency development of The Plan (see Tauri, 2009 for a discussion of this process in the crime control sector). To say that Roguski's research was *retrofitted* on to the final policy response is no exaggeration as the evidence is overwhelming. In this instance Policy and the inter-agency process simply took Michael's research and glued the 'acceptable' elements of his work on to a policy response that further marginalised the community. For example, the version of the Plan released to the public is missing two important chapters written by Michael, 1) analysis of the participants 'issues' with current policies and government initiatives and 2) the issues the community believes are important and how best to respond to them, namely through community empowerment<sup>9</sup>.

### **Explaining the community-research-policy-intervention disconnect**

To understand the disconnect between Michael's research, the views of participants, and the actions of policy workers, we have to recognise:

- the political nature of policy development and research in the New Zealand public service's social policy sector (especially in relation to youth or adult gang-related issues); and
- that the public service in New Zealand uses ritual to ensure it maintains authority over the policy process.

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<sup>9</sup> The extent to which senior policy officials in the Ministry were divorced from the social context has driven home to the researcher when he was asked to explain a) what he meant by a 'community action' approach and b) why he used it in his research, and after he had done so was informed by said official that 'government does not do that, it does government action'.

### The Plan and the politics of youth gang policy

As Tauri has discussed elsewhere (2009), New Zealand's policy industry considers itself to be working in an 'evidence-based [policy] environment'(EBP) (see Bullock et al, 2001; Cook, 2001 and Davies, 1999). This belief is supported by a survey of a range of documents produced by the industry including *Statements of Intent, Briefings to Incoming Ministers*<sup>10</sup>, annual reports and high-level portfolio-specific strategies where much is made of the evidence-based nature of policy and decision-making by that particular agency. The purpose of these instruments is to enhance the impression that:

The advice and decisions of policy makers are based upon the best available evidence from a wide range of sources; all key stakeholders are involved at an early stage and throughout the policy's development. All relevant evidence, including that from specialists, is available in an accessible and meaningful form to policy makers (Great Britain's Centre for Management and Policy Studies, cited in Reid, 2003: 6).

The response to Michael's research and my observations of the research/policy intersection demonstrate that the policy industry in New Zealand's adherence to the principles of EBP is often driven more by political considerations than with ensuring quality outcomes in the 'real world' (see Packwood, 2002; Parsons, 2002 and Perri 6, 2002 for a discussion of this issue in other jurisdictions). That policy making concerns itself with 'politics' should come as no surprise if we view the process less as an 'objective, scientific, rationale endeavour', and more in line with Edelman's (1988: 16) description of it as "... a set of shifting, diverse, and

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<sup>10</sup> Known in Industry parlance as 'BIM's', these documents are generally provide a high level overview of an agency's core business and provided to incoming Ministers' immediately after a general election or if a sitting Minister is replaced at any time during the electoral cycle.

contradictory responses to a spectrum of political interests” that take place in a social context Schon (1979; 1983) describes as ‘messy and unpredictable’. To understand the policy response to Michael’s work we first need to suspend belief in the dominance of a ‘rational EBP environment’ and acknowledge policy development for what it is: an ideologically driven, political process that serves the interests and concerns of policy-making institutions, the political elite and the careers of individual policy workers (see Tauri, 2009), and not, as the senior policy manager mentioned earlier told Michael, to enhance community empowerment.

#### The policy process as an exercise in ritual and myth-maintenance

Understanding the policy response to Michael’s research can be illuminated if we consider the importance of ritual and myth-making/maintenance to the public service. Alvesson and Billing (1997) describe three basic formulations through which corporate culture is expressed and reproduced, i) through *artefacts* - physical objects like furniture, logos, and dress that convey meaning within an organisation; ii) through *metaphors* –“culturally rich verbal expressions” (1997: 125), or verbal symbols, creating “vocabularies to facilitate and guide interpretations”(Ibid: 125) of what is going on in an organisation, and lastly, through *rituals*. In this schema rituals are activities that occur within and between corporate operators, corporations or institutions and ‘outsiders’ that include certain repetitive patterns which contain symbolic and expressive elements that confirm existing (or newly constituted) power relations, institutional values and attitudes. Suk-Young (2009: 3) describes how ritual(s) serve an important function in organisational activity because of the part it can play in enabling officials to overcome “coordination problems” (2009: 3), such as external scrutiny of the policy making process or decisions about resource allocation. Rituals also function to ensure that individuals and agencies represent themselves, to each other and the public, as

demonstrating (through actions and rhetoric) the core ethics, principles and goals that drive organisational activity. Therefore, myth-maintenance (supported by ritual) is particularly helpful to organisations, including the public service, for controlling *internal* coordination problems (i.e., competition within and between agencies for finite resources) and *external* one's (i.e., nullifying the potentially politically damaging impact of independent, public scrutiny) "because myths, by their very nature, disguise and manage the emotional impact of the stories they tell" (ibid: 5), and often play a useful role in hiding the 'real story' behind the intent and likely impact of specific policies.

The rituals that form the basis of much of the policy industry's activity can be grouped into identifiable formations that are linked to shoring up myths that sustain the authority of policy makers. These groupings include:

*rituals of deceit* - refers to activities such as carrying out research or a literature review that involves purposely ignoring evidence, research, etc, that contradicts the pre-determined political/policy platform of an agency or Ministerial directive;

*rituals of inactivity* - used in the event of a highly charged, political issue arising, agencies swing into action and can include such activities as establishing unnecessarily large interagency committees, overly complicated work programmes, etc, aimed at slowing down political/public scrutiny of previous and current agency activity; and

*rituals of deception* - commonly used by criminal justice officials who need to retrofit research or policy to a social issue for which it is unsuited, or to a pre-determined policy workstream (see Tauri, 2011).

Many of the rituals highlighted were brought into play by policy workers when it became apparent that Michael's research posed a potential 'coordination problem', namely a) a potential loss of 'control' over problem definition, b) the possibility of publication of community criticism of previous policy responses and c) having to engage with participants over the identification of solutions. The *rituals of deceit* are apparent in policy representatives having organised the inter-agency work programme without the research input and ignoring key findings of the research that contradict the pre-established policy position of various agencies. Even more apparent was the blatant use of *rituals of deception* by officials, highlighted in the policy implementation phase where Roguski's research was clipped and retrofitted onto the Plan. Potentially annoying sections were ignored; those sections that demonstrated the 'youth gang' crime wave was little more than a media/politician and police induced moral panic, and demonstrated that the community thought little of government's tendency to hoist upon it imported programmes ill suited to the social context they lived in. And of course there was the section that gave voice to participant's desires for their communities to be empowered to find solutions to their issues. What they got instead, was business as usual, in the form of a reallocation of existing funding to pre-established programmes for which agencies could offer little evidence of socio-cultural viability, or positive outcomes.

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