

## POLYNESIAN GANGS IN AUCKLAND AND WELLINGTON\*

### I INTRODUCTION

The concentrated attention on Polynesian gangs in this paper does not imply that these are the only gangs which exist nor that they are necessarily the most criminal or destructive or undesirable. The reason for special examination was the highlighting of their activities by the news media and the resultant public belief that these gangs were a menace to society. In addition, the recent study carried out by an Interdepartmental Committee<sup>1</sup> discovered that 70% of the gangs in Auckland which the Committee had any knowledge of, were composed predominantly of Polynesians and the Committee felt that this ethnic homogeneity was one feature which could be the source of future trouble. Moreover it is a very recent feature for in 1959 A. E. Levett (*"Gangs in Auckland"* 1959) commented on the noticeable lack of Pacific Islanders in gangs and found only two or three Maori dominated gangs.

It is pertinent to mention here that at present there are only three pieces of written work of any substance which deal with gangs in New Zealand. In the late 1950's there was a rash of disturbances involving adolescent gangs, whose activities attracted a good deal of publicity and for a while, generated considerable public concern, and it was this which led to two pieces of research on gangs (both completed in 1959) being conducted within Government agencies. The first was a study by A. E. Levett, *"Gangs in Auckland"*, undertaken while he was a Boys' Welfare Officer stationed in Auckland; the second was a report *"Gang Misbehaviour in Wellington"*, by J. G. Green, Research Officer to the Interdepartmental Committee on Adolescent Offenders (subsequently the Joint Committee on Young Offenders), which was made at the behest of that Committee. Neither report has ever been released to the public.<sup>2</sup> The third piece of writing, which has also not been published, is the Report by the Investigating Committee into Juvenile Gangs (referred to in this paper as the Interdepartmental Committee) made in October, 1970. Following a number of incidents involving gangs in Auckland and the subsequent publicity devoted to gang behaviour in late 1969 and early 1970, the joint Committee on Young Offenders formed this Committee in Auckland to investigate and report on juvenile gangs. The subsequent report covered the broad facts about gangs in the Auckland district and

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1. Unpublished report of the Investigating Committee into Juvenile Gangs, 1970.
2. Further information on these reports can be obtained from the Research Officer, Joint Committee on Young Offenders, Dominion Building, Mercer Street, Wellington 1.

included the Committee's recommendations as to how to overcome any "gang problem". (This latter section was not released to the writer.)

## II DEFINITION

### "Polynesian"

This term is used on the strength of the approach taken by Dr. P. W. Hohepa<sup>3</sup> who suggests that although the census gives an ethnic classification, it seems illogical to separate Maori from Pacific Islander rather than grouping both under the cover term, 'Polynesian' (as has been done for English, Dutch, Greek, Yugoslav, German, etc., who are classified as European). He suggests that to use Polynesian on a par with European would be in accord with 'socio-economic, ethnic and relocation facts in Auckland'; thus its use will be relevant in this paper. Moreover the similarities between Islander migrants and Maoris are manifold; both are involved in a process of rural-urban migration, both are to some degree accustomed to a rural communal life, both find themselves situated in a new alien environment, and as minority groups, they are both required to do most of the adjusting to conform to the European majority. It can be seen to be both satisfactory and convenient to use the term "Polynesian" to cover a number of races, notably the Maori, Samoan, Cook Islander, Niuean and Tongan; however any generalisation must be treated warily and this is no exception. It must be realised that there are many distinct cultural differences between each of the races, that there can be considerable antipathy between the various races (especially the Maori and the Pacific Islanders generally<sup>4</sup>) and that the races themselves may be split up into village groupings.<sup>5</sup>

### "Gang"

What is a gang? Criminologists around the world have failed to come to any agreement as to a satisfactory definition, the chief obstacle being that every individual using the term is confronted by a different factual situation and so the problem of subjective assessment creeps in. This is perhaps inescapable but certainly contributes greatly to the sensation and emotion which seem to accompany the word "gang" at present. The emotive connotations have long been with the word; in 1958 J. G. Green altered his questionnaire title from "gang" to "anti-social group" because many of his informants did not consider the groups they knew of to be gangs, since the word to them conjured up illusions of Chicago gangsters and weapons. What can be agreed however is that a gang consists of a group of people, a loose aggregate of individuals who band together. This tendency to band together in

3. *The Polynesian Urbanite of Auckland*, unpublished paper, 1970.

4. See Curson, *Polynesian and Residential Concentration in Auckland*, *Jo. Poly. Soc.* Vol. 79, No. 4, pp. 421-432 (Dec. 1970).

5. See Challis, *Social Problems of Non-Maori Polynesians in New Zealand* (Noumea: South Pacific Commission, 1953).

like groups is not restricted to the adolescent age-group nor to any particular social stratum. Associations, clubs and other groups exist as satisfying social groups for their members; through group membership the individual finds satisfaction for his personal and social needs. The question is to determine when any such social group becomes a gang and it would appear pertinent to answer this question from a number of levels.

*(a) The Gang Members*

The typical gang is loose-knit in nature, although based about a hard core of nuclear members, and the gang members are frequently seen in public. This high visibility linked with the fact that it is caused by the lower class background of the members (the lack of facilities, both at home and elsewhere, compelling them to congregate on the streets) makes these adolescent groups prone to the gang phenomenon. From their point of view, however, when does such a group become a gang? Does the fact that a number of youths gather and decide to put a name to their group immediately elevate (or degrade) the group status to that of a gang? It has been suggested in many quarters that following the Gallery programme on television,<sup>6</sup> 'gangs sprang up everywhere' in Auckland, and the reason for this assertion was that suddenly names were attached to groups. It can be seen then that the identification process of taking a name is recognised by some people as the stage when a group moves to a gang.

From the members' point of view, the naming process could be the initiation of the gang, because it provides them with an identity (something which they may lack as individuals) and also leads to external recognition from the community. It has long been accepted that, for many gang members, it is the search for identity which draws them to the gang for its distinctive uniform, its group norms, its intra-gang loyalty, its rituals and its leadership, so the identification process of adopting a name may be seen to be the essential element in the group to gang transition.

However the loose-knit character of the gang lends itself to the position that anybody who needs an identity or wants attention, can paint a gang name such as "Stormtroopers" on his denim jacket and verbally claim members. This situation has been struck in Auckland where immediately following the publicity given to the Stormtroopers, every young Polynesian (especially those from Otara) in contact with the police claimed he was a member of the Stormtroopers. Even now there are a number of youths in the South Auckland area who dress as, and regard themselves as Stormtroopers, but are not members of the formal organisation. Similarly in Wellington the Mongrel Mob received widespread coverage in the press after the gang fight at Pekapeka and the immediate reaction from every Maori youth who

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6. W.N.T.V. 1, July 14th, 1971.

came into contact with officialdom, was to claim that he was a member of the Mongrels. Also, due to the fringe membership nature of many gangs, members can be attached to more than one gang, and this leads to individuals changing their allegiances according to the circumstances.

So, although it can be said that a group may become a gang when it adopts a name, the point at which an individual becomes a member cannot be determined with any real certainty. This does not affect the entity of a gang but it means that the true extent of this gang will always be unclear.

The other difficulty encountered in placing any emphasis on the naming process is that it discounts the possibility of the nameless gang. Such a gang may also perform the functions of a gang but for some reason is not regarded as a gang in the same light as that with a name. It is interesting to note that J. G. Green in his study found only five gangs with a title in Wellington, yet he considered that twelve other groups, which he found, were gangs despite the fact that they had not adopted a name. It would seem that the situation in Wellington today is much the same. It would appear that the nameless gang is not considered to be a fully fledged "gang" as far as the members are concerned, but its existence must be noted because its activities are basically the same as those of the named gang.

*(b) The Public*

The combination of an emotive form of action which is difficult to sympathise with and actors from a socially distant status group of low power and high visibility makes adolescent gang behaviour highly vulnerable to stereotyping and distortion. The general tendency which people have of putting names to things and the obvious susceptibility of the lower class stratum to such labelling mean that a friendship group of children of lower class origin may be called a gang, but one of middle class origin will remain beyond the label. For not only are the lower classes more visible but in this society they are regarded as failures, having failed or been failed in the material system, and so the danger of a stereotype gang arises.

However labelling probably goes further than this socio-economic feature, it engulfs an ethnic feature also. To the public, a group of unidentified children, hanging around on the street corner may be a gang. If the children are clearly lower class and long-haired, or rough in appearance the group will probably be a gang, but when the street corner group consists of Polynesians it is a gang. So whereas to gang members a group becomes a gang when it takes a name, to the general public a street corner group, especially if it is brown and clearly lower class, is a gang.

As far as the public is concerned, the emphasis on the naming process may not be as great. A group becomes a gang in the eyes of the public when it is partaking in criminal activity (and this is

learned most frequently from the news media) or more often when it is behaving in an anti-social manner. Anti-social behaviour may be no more than congregating on the streets aimlessly, but it is the element of fear and suspicion, in the minds of the public, as to the potential danger of such a congregation, which makes them pin the gang label to it. This fear and suspicion may be seen to be the operative mechanism, although the fear may be misguided in the sense that the youths probably do not offer an actual threat; however it is very real in the minds of the beholders as they imagine the threat to physical well-being and to property.

Fear also explains why attention is focussed upon Polynesians. It has been suggested by a prominent Maori that there is a white fear predominant among middle class society that since Polynesians are a different colour they will behave in a different manner and upset the equilibrium of the European way of life. The uncertainty felt by Europeans as to how the Polynesian will react leads to the isolation of Polynesian groups. Perhaps the European is further afraid that the Polynesian with a different *genre de vie* will change the western civilised society, and so he is aghast at the Polynesian way of life because it does not conform with his.

The element of fear may not merely extend to a middle-class, middle-aged fear of a Polynesian take-over, it may be seen to be a fear of youth in general. The older generation's concern that the youths of today are "not like we used to be" is a concern that has been present since the time of Socrates. The non-conformity added to youthful rebellion leads to a fear that society's norms will be threatened, and this further contributes to the fear of gangs. Certainly the gangs do nothing to dispel such fears; on the contrary some of them aim at creating and nourishing a fearful image.

(c) *The News Media*

As far as the news media are concerned, they will only pay attention to a group of youths when they have behaved deviantly enough for their activities to be news. Such a group will then be called a gang because the word "gang", loaded as it is with emotion and sensation, has greater news potential. Unfortunately groups are more prone to sensationalism if they are composed chiefly of Polynesians since 'race' is one of the most over-exposed yet still news-worthy topics of today. Just as unfortunate is the fact that news in most instances means concentration on the negative rather than any consideration of the positive. The result is that the media's attention to gangs and gang violence may tend to encourage groups of youths to indulge in certain forms of behaviour purely to attract attention. Indeed many people contend that the publicity given to gangs has led to an increase in gangs and gang behaviour, and that it is the media's attention which is harmful.

It is harmful in a number of ways. First it depends how much attention a gang gets from the media, how distorted its image becomes

— the Stormtroopers is a gang which has suffered in the past from bad publicity, their image is such that their name causes more of a flurry in the world of modern media than a number of gangs whose behaviour is more extreme. Secondly, the tendency of the media has of highlighting the Polynesian gang members can only be harmful to the Polynesian people. It implies that all gangs are Polynesian whereas European gangs and gang members do exist, and can only further distort public opinion both as to the Polynesian crime rate and to the Polynesian people. Thirdly, the emphasis on a minority group of Polynesians, and in fact the minority activity of such a group, can only be to the disadvantage of the majority in that it disregards their behaviour completely. The result of all the publicity is that the word “gang” is now on everybody’s lips, and the public are deceived as to the extent of gang behaviour; and the extent of Polynesian participation in gang activities.

Opposed to the contention that publicity has harmed the gang situation, is the claim by members of the news media that the attention to gangs has made society “fully aware that a serious problem existed in its midst.”<sup>7</sup> Whether or not the people involved in news media work are in a position to judge, let alone qualified to say when a serious social problem arises, it appears that they do hold themselves out as moral entrepreneurs and it must be admitted that they do have a lot of influence in this society. Therefore, their decision as to what is a social problem may be extremely important, and even if it is wrong, can carry a lot of weight. The answer provided by the media that their coverage did highlight a social evil, thereby motivating sections of the community to do something positive is supported. In fact after the Gallery programme, there were many positive reactions, including an offer of \$100,000 by an Auckland director to build a community centre in South Auckland, and an offer by a Nelson resident to pay a trained person to work with the gangs.<sup>8</sup> However it seems that the news media in seeking news has in fact created news, and created publicity which the gangs might thrive upon. The danger arises because it is easier to find evidence of disorder, and in presenting it to increase the disorder than to do the opposite.

#### (d) *The Police*

Police recognition of gangs is not limited to the discovery of them after a public disturbance or the like; both the operation of the Youth Aid Division and the effective patrolling of an area ensure this. In essence however to the police a gang becomes a problem when it is involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour. Most policemen do not consider offences committed by individual gang members to be a gang activity, nor evidence that a gang exists; their prime

7. Major-General W. S. McKinnon, Chairman of N.Z.B.C., quoted in *New Zealand Herald*, April 27th, 1971.

8. See *The Listener*, August 10th-16th, 1971.

concern is the deviant or criminal activity indulged in by gangs *in toto*. Of course the police attitude is coloured greatly by the fact that their chief job is crime prevention, so it is therefore obvious that they do not view gangs as causing any problem unless or until they behave criminally. However, this is not to say that the police do not recognise gangs until they indulge in criminal behaviour. On the contrary the police are very aware of the existence of gangs; it is their job to ensure that crime does not stem from them, but the police are not as quick as the general public to label a group of youths, and in fact regard groups with some tolerance.

The allegation raised against the police is that members of the force go out of their way to antagonise gang members, and the contention goes as far as to allege police brutality to gang members. It is natural for gang members, who are very anti-establishment in nature, to accuse the police who are in essence the very authority they are opposing, but it is difficult to find proof of any antagonism or brutality. Of course it is easy for reporters seeking news to pose (subtly or not) leading questions in order to get the answer they want from gang members, but whether these answers are actually the truth or not is a different matter altogether. Obviously the youths will relish an opportunity to accuse the police of brutality or the like, especially when these gang members have a police record. On the other hand, the allegations which have been raised, although not supported by any substantial evidence, have not been altogether denied by the police. This tends to suggest that there was some truth in the claims. It must be noted however, that the possibility of a Judas or two in the police force is not too remote to be a reality; after all policemen are just another section of the public, all with individual prejudices, likes and dislikes, and there are bound to be some who feel more strongly about gangs than others. It would not be unfair to say, that should gang members again be asked questions as to police antagonism, they would still claim that it existed. In fact it is obvious that if the complaint is merely caused by the existence of police patrols, and the gangs think they are being hounded because a police car passes them every now and then, then it will always be raised. Moreover, police surveillance, which after all is part of their job of crime prevention, is today being stepped up with the advent of twenty-four hour patrols, conducted by the Youth Aid Division in conjunction with the Department of Maori and Island Affairs. These patrols have been introduced in Auckland as a means of ensuring that gang violence does not occur, but if the gang members wish to see it as further evidence of police antagonism then obviously they will.

### III THE EXISTENCE OF GANGS

Gangs are not a phenomenon of the 70's, rather they are a natural occurrence and likely to exist in any society. It is interesting to look briefly at instances of gang misbehaviour in New Zealand.

The "Saints" in the 1950's, a gang organised for crime, committed over \$60,000 worth of burglaries. Levett in 1959 found forty-one gangs in Auckland, and Green found seventeen in Wellington. Criminally the situation was such in 1961 that Mr. Justice Hardie Boys was reported as saying that "the evidence of gangs or mobs was a recurrent disturbing feature in certain of the trials before the Supreme Court in Auckland".<sup>9</sup> The ethnic homogeneity with which this paper is concerned may not be as recent as sometimes expressed. In 1954 Joan Metge<sup>10</sup> found that in Auckland many young Maori people formed "gangs" and Levett in fact commented in his paper that "there is a social and group problem with Maori youth in Auckland City, indicated by the high crime rate, and made more urgent by the Maori birth rate and by the urban drift of the Maoris".<sup>11</sup> It would seem then that Polynesian gangs have been present for some time, but now the numbers have increased because of the influx of migrants from the Pacific Islands and the never-ending urban drift of the Maori.

It is pertinent at this stage to discuss several features relevant to all gangs and later to mention some of the reasons for the Polynesian involvement.

### (1) Type of Area

The areas in which the gangs "hang out" and the areas in which individual gang members live are sometimes quite different. For example, it was found by reference to fourteen members of the Junior Nigs, who were in the Owairaka Boys Home, that twelve came from outside the Ponsonby area where the gang met.<sup>12</sup> With this warning in mind, there is still a consensus of opinion that due to environmental conditions three focal areas for gangs exist in Auckland — Ponsonby and the inner city, Otara, and the Western District. Characteristics of these areas can be listed:

#### *Ponsonby.*

The inner city area of Auckland marked by many old and derelict houses, overcrowding by European standards and the number of children in the streets. Facilities are very limited although there have been one or two notable efforts to ease the problem, e.g. Boystown and the Ponsonby Community Centre. Depressed and ghetto characteristics appear throughout the area.

#### *Otara.*

As has happened in most state housing areas a sudden migration of nearly 20,000 people has resulted in a non-community. Otara is

9. See *New Zealand Herald*, May 16th, 1961.

10. *A New Maori Migration* (London: Athlone Press, 1964), p. 201.

11. Levett, *Gangs in Auckland*, 1959, p. 7.

12. Informal survey, unpublished, by P. Harwood, Auckland Community Activities Officer.



an unbalanced community with an over-representation of unskilled young adults and young families. The area has yet to be sufficiently developed as regards community facilities — it seems that state housing areas are planned purely to house people and not as places to live — one is struck by the number of idle youths in this state housing jungle.

*The Western District.*

Also a relevantly recent housing area with a predominance of working class homes. There is a dearth of employment in this area, meaning that the adults have to travel long distances to work so the children are without supervision for longer spells. Also youths cannot find employment in the area, so remain idle and hang around the streets.

In Wellington similar areas exist — the inner city suburb of Newtown, and the state housing area of Porirua — however there are only a few gangs in Wellington and no real areas of gang concentration.

**(2) Formation**

The gangs have a spontaneous and unplanned origin, the natural outgrowth of a number of youths with things in common. The groupings are natural also, the individuals drift together not only through common links but moreover through natural proximity. It is suggested that there is no element of race at this very elementary level of companionship. A number of proposed reasons for the formation of gangs:

(i) Members have the same socio-economic background and come from the same area, so it is natural for them to group.

(ii) The forming of a gang is a response to developmental difficulties encountered at school. These risks may be met for a number of differing reasons: there may be a complete lack of parental interest in the child's achievements, a lack of facilities within the home for study, a lack of administrative control within the school, or a lack of attention paid to the individual child by the teacher. All these factors amount to a situation where a child, who is not succeeding at school and has no encouragement to learn, thinks it is better to play truant. Soon his friends play truant at the same time and a gang forms.

(iii) A gang is a means of escape from authoritarianism; gang members seemingly share a suspicion of the adult world in general, represented by parents they disagree with, school teachers they did not get on with, work bosses, traffic officers, policemen and the like. Without exception, Levett's forty-one gangs regarded authority as hostile to them, and the gangs of today are no different. Stemming from this anti-authority attitude is a desire to be left alone in their own peer group, rather than being organised or controlled.

(iv) The members need an identity and the gang provides this.

(v) Self-protection. Gangs form as members find a need to find protection against other gangs. While this is a means to justify their own aggressive behaviour there is little doubt in the minds of many gang members that this is the reason for their existence.

(vi) Mutual support and excitement. In many instances the gang members have nothing to do and nowhere to go, so what is more natural than to 'hang around with a gang' and 'catch the action'.

### (3) Structure

#### (a) *Sex*

Gangs are predominantly male; however there have been exclusively female gangs which were subsidiaries of male gangs, including the Tribe, the Wild Ones — reputed to be wild both physically and morally — and the Gins, female counterparts of the Nigs, and in most instances male gangs have female camp followers. On occasions these girls act to incite gang members into fighting for their favours, and insults directed at the girls of one gang by members of another may also precipitate an incident. This, together with the sexual behaviour indulged in, caused the Interdepartmental Committee to be most disturbed at the extent of the involvement of girls with the gangs, saying that it "appears to be more serious and destructive of self-respect than is the typical misbehaviour of the males". However female involvement is not new; Levett remarked on it in 1959, nor is it different.

#### (b) *Age*

It seems that there are now three levels of involvement in gang activity: (1) 10-13, (2) 13-17, (3) 17 plus. These three age groups may represent three types of gang, ranging from the primary school gang to the gang of school leavers, and it has also been suggested that as far as criminal activity is concerned the gradation of age groups provides a picture of the different levels of offending by gang members, ranging from petty pilfering to serious offences against the person. However the three age groups additionally represent some sort of hierarchial system — one moves from the TYs to the Junior Nigs to the Nigs as one grows older or satisfies varying criteria. A feeding ground of 'little brother' gangs means that the gang's permanence is assured. Not even a feeding subsidiary is necessary; for the notoriety of some gangs serves to attract to their way of life some of the younger impressionable children. So a pattern of continuing membership, even if not structured, may emerge.

It appears that gang members lose interest in gang activities once they have reached young adulthood and have settled in steady jobs or have steady girlfriends. For some, however, gang membership continues into adulthood, e.g. Hells Angels, Highway 61 (two motor-bike gangs), Mongrel Mob and Stormtroopers.

(c) *Organisation*

As yet only one or two gangs have a formal organisation. The Stormtroopers are the most structured gang in existence at present. They have a committee, a bank account in which club funds are kept and a membership card system which was established to protect gang members from outsiders bringing the gang into disrepute. They also have established club headquarters in rooms above a shop in Otara, which was provided by one of the prominent members of the community who has assisted them in their activities. The Mongrels in Wellington have now also become more structured, holding gang meetings, having a defined leadership and keeping a club bank account. Most other gangs are structured only to the extent that they have nuclear members who are normally the leaders.

(d) *Uniform*

Most gangs adopt a distinctive form of dress even if it is just the writing of a name on the back of a denim jacket. Some gangs have used particularly emotive forms of emblems, such as Nazi insignia, primarily to draw attention to themselves but probably also as an expression of their anti-establishment ideology. The Stormtroopers now have a special dress uniform which they only wear on gang occasions, but other gangs are not so organised. The Mongrel Mob's uniform is distinctive in that all members wear gumboots, the toes of which have been said to be filled with lead — however there has been no official evidence of this.

#### IV THE POLYNESIAN INVOLVEMENT

(1) *Areas*

The areas in Auckland previously mentioned have an unusually high proportion of Polynesian residents, about one-third of the respective areas total populations in 1966 and undoubtedly many more today. This fact means that the areas will be attractive to Polynesians because the Polynesian population will be large enough to offer the securities of Polynesian cultures, and it appears that the proportions will at least remain constant. In addition to the fact that the focal areas for Polynesian gangs in Auckland are heavily populated by Polynesians, is the point that the Polynesian population is much younger than the European. The communities at Ponsonby and Otara are both very young — in Otara it is estimated that 62% of the population is under 21 — and this youthfulness is in no small way attributable to the Polynesians; the Polynesian population in New Zealand being, in general, far younger than the European. A study undertaken by D. T. Rowland<sup>13</sup> of Maoris in Auckland found that the Maori age structure was extremely youthful in relation to the European population — 47.8% in the 0-14 age bracket compared to

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13. *The Maori Population of the Auckland Urban Area* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Auckland University, 1969).

29.8% European. Similarly as far as the Pacific Islanders are concerned, G. T. Kitto<sup>14</sup> discovered that 47.2% are under 16 in relation to 34.5% European. This of course means that the number of Polynesian children to be found in any strong Polynesian area, such as Otago, will be extremely high — in fact Kitto found that 53% of those children attending primary school in Otago were Polynesian — and so will the number potentially susceptible to participation in gangs.

Moreover the rapid rate of growth of Polynesian society is of concern. In 1966 of a total 610,000 in the Auckland area, 56,000 were Polynesian and it is estimated that by the mid-1980's there will be over one million people in metropolitan Auckland of whom 200,000 will be Polynesian and well over half will be under 15 years of age. Indeed it is further estimated that in fifteen years' time there will be 350,000 children in Auckland under 15, one-third of whom will be Polynesian. It seems obvious that if Polynesian dominated areas exist now, then they will surely continue to do so.

## (2) The Cultural Response

The Interdepartmental Committee felt that a high proportion of Polynesian youths were involved in gangs as a cultural response to their urban environment. The Committee considered that many of the parents did not have the time to supervise their children or more important, to give them the cultural identity which is so "necessary for the growth of their children's self-esteem and ability to function effectively in the urban society". Polynesian children then become the product of a "cultural void", they are children who have not been adequately socialised in either Polynesian or European cultures. There are two spheres of this future conflict:

### (a) *The family.*

Although the loose communal authority is satisfactory in the island village or rural marae, the discipline afforded by the extended family does not fit the urban situation where the European influence of the nuclear family is greater than any Polynesian culture. The Polynesian community is then dangerously weakened in some social aspects, especially in the supervision of children in the urban setting, where the authority of the extended family or community for the care of the young has diminished, without the necessary increase in the powers and responsibilities of the nuclear family. So although the child is free to stay in one home or another in the island village, this freedom has dangerous consequences in the New Zealand city, where the peer group of boys can move and act with only the most minimal of parental restraint.

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14. *Non-Maori Polynesians in Three New Zealand Communities: A Geographical Study of Some Aspects of Migration and Settlement* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Auckland University, 1969).

To a considerable extent their troubles are of their own making as they strive to maintain a traditional way of life in an alien environment requiring an entirely new approach; but were they sufficiently trained and assimilated the problem may be removed. It is thought that the next generation of immigrants will be far more easily assimilated due to the educational course all students receive on the islands now, especially the social studies course pertaining to New Zealand, but that may be too late.

To the Polynesian, security is found amongst people or in a social group, and it is obvious that Polynesian children in a cultural void will seek security, so they will be peculiarly susceptible to gang behaviour. On the other hand security to the European is gained by personal achievement in a material world, with emphasis placed far more on the individual, so the European child may rely more on himself and his family than on members of a gang for security and identity (which he has no lack of anyway).

(b) *The school.*

By ignoring ethnic identity and other cultures, school as an institution fails to capture the interest of Polynesian children. School is irrelevant to their membership group and fails to motivate them to participate in its activities other than sport. By being poorly motivated, Polynesian children fail at school, as the sense of failure deepens the school becomes a place where self-esteem is lost, and negative attitudes become manifest in the flouting of authority, truancy and other petty misdemeanours. Children in these circumstances are in the pipeline to gangs outside the school.

It appears that the education system often rejects the Polynesian child, there being little individual attention, and in particular the majority of schools maintain the aim of inculcating European values with little regard to the cultural background of the Polynesian. Having to sit behind a desk for five and a half hours playing with a meaningless curriculum does not appeal to the Polynesian child, so he yields to the temptation of playing truant. Truancy is associated generally with a relative lack of school success, and Levett in his study of the Kensington Youth Club<sup>15</sup> found that truants also had inferiority complexes but once their trust and interests were won, they were eager to do better at school and were above average intelligence. Polynesian children also suffer from this inferiority complex — e.g. the Maori race is often treated as inferior by such remarks as “the Maori way” of doing something — and when it is linked with their lack of identity it is easy to see how they form gangs for the self-support and self-confidence. A gang becomes their haven; since they are not brought up in their own culture they have the feeling of not being accepted by either side, the home or the school.

Not only does the education system place the Polynesian at a

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15. Digest of the University of Otago Medical School 1957, Vol. 4, No. 6, p. 31.

disadvantage from the teaching level, it also treats the children badly on an administrative level. On many occasions in Auckland young Polynesian truants have been returned to school by the police, only to find that they have been marked present on the roll. Moreover some schools do not consider the young Polynesian on a par with the young European, as is evidenced by the reply of a headmaster when confronted by a pair of young Polynesians returned to him by the Youth Aid Division, "I do not want them, they are nothing but offal."

The result of the education system at present is that many young Polynesians just go to school to eat their lunches, they do not learn, they end up playing truant and roaming the streets in gangs.

### (3) Attitudes to Crime

As far as Pacific Islanders are concerned there are a number of cultural reasons for their participation in various activities. Fighting to the Islander is a game, not an offence, and is an accepted pastime both formally and informally. Until a young man marries and settles down in his early twenties fighting is apparently of little serious consequence, but not so in New Zealand. Secondly the hotels in New Zealand are the warmest and most luxurious places to the Islander, so he spends a lot of his time in them, drinking on occasions for the same reason that he drank in the Islands — for the purpose of becoming drunk. The third factor is that insults are treated more seriously by Islanders than Europeans — "the offence is insult, not assault" — consequently the chances of misunderstandings are considerable.

These features may tend to the situation whereby the European boy will refrain from acting, but the Polynesian will not and he may commit an offence which in his own culture is not an offence. In addition to this it will be found that on occasions the commission of offences is actually condoned by the parents. For example, a report of gang activity in Auckland<sup>16</sup> stated that when the boys' parents heard of the thefts their sons had committed, they admonished them, not for their wrongful deeds, but for their omission to come home and share the proceeds. Later when the police came to the household to take one of the boys away with them, the boy was farewelled in hero fashion by most families in the street because he had adhered to the extended family custom and shared his proceeds.

### (4) Discrimination

It is important to realise that the presence of Polynesians in New Zealand cities and towns in any large numbers is only a phenomenon of the last decade. Hence the host society has had only a short time to develop any hard and fast concepts of racial discrim-

16. *Pacific Islanders in Auckland — Crime* (unpublished, 1970).

ation. A problem of sorts does exist however, even if only because the physical differences between Polynesians and Europeans are too obvious not to be noticed by all. Most people have at least developed an 'attitude' towards the influx of non-Europeans, even though after a few years the local people become accustomed to seeing brown faces about the streets and public places. Local attitudes might almost be summed up in the words of one Auckland pensioner, ". . . of course we don't believe in any discrimination, we just don't want too many Islanders in our street . . . ."

There is a general tendency among New Zealanders to associate colour with low social status and undesirable cultural traits. Indeed it was this tendency that prompted L. S. W. Duncan to comment<sup>17</sup> that the bad reputation that Polynesians have, coupled with the publicity given to the Polynesian crime rate, makes policemen very aware of Polynesians. He suggests that it is therefore very difficult for policemen, under this social pressure, not to notice minor infringements because they feel compelled by the attitudes of the vocal sections of the public to take action. The 'discrimination' is not new for in 1958 Sheffield<sup>18</sup> suggested that the "present stage of development of public opinion towards the Maori people" was such that a Maori boy was more likely to be brought before the Court on an occasion where a European might well get by with a reprimand. This will apply particularly where the Polynesian population is densest and there is no doubt that a similar opinion can be put forward today as far as the gang members are concerned, so adding another factor towards the peculiar susceptibility of the Polynesian to gang activities.

## V GANG BEHAVIOUR

Mr. P. Amos M.P. said in speaking of gangs that "there is an entirely mistaken view among most of us in the establishment that because young people get together they are bad".<sup>19</sup> This statement quite neatly covers the gang situation; many activities involving significant numbers of gang members are not disruptive or socially unacceptable ways of behaving, yet the word 'gang' conjures up illusions of big fights or criminal behaviour.

The typical gang activity seems to be the congregating of members during leisure time, after school or even during school; they meet in the streets or in milkbars or coffee bars and 'hang around together', enjoying the company and security afforded by the gang. On the majority of occasions that a gang is seen in public it will be behaving within socially accepted standards; however the actions coming from the congregation are spontaneous and it is obvious that anti-social or

17. *Crime by Polynesians in Auckland: An Analysis of Charges Laid Against Persons Arrested in 1966* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Auckland University, 1970).

18. *Maori Theft* (unpublished M.A. thesis, V.U.W., 1958).

19. *New Zealand Herald*, July 20th, 1970.

deviant behaviour will arise easily. It is also obvious from the informal organisation of the majority of gangs that there will be little planned activity, and an even smaller amount of total gang participation in any activity.

There is no evidence at all to suggest that organised criminal activity is the basic reason for the existence of gangs, or their main activity. Nor does the complexity of the needs and aspirations of gang members suggest that their motives are simply criminal. However the tendency of gang members to commit criminal offences is high, and this, coupled with the odd criminal incident of gang behaviour, means that gangs may pose a problem.

Whether or not the offending of individual gang members is a result of membership or not cannot be determined, although it may be said that gangs provide the environment in which young offenders come into contact with one another. However, there is little doubt that, as individuals, many gang members have appeared before the courts. In a study made of one hundred gang members by the Child Welfare Officers in Auckland it was found that some of the children had committed offences under the age of 12 and some of the older members had substantial lists of offences.<sup>20</sup> The majority of offences were in the shoplifting/theft category, the next highest relating to breaking and entering, theft and burglary and car conversion. However there was no evidence that these offences were committed in the company of large groups of youths; most offences committed with associates rarely involved more than two or three.

L. S. W. Duncan<sup>21</sup> considered the number of persons charged from the same incident in order to determine gang offending; however he faced obvious difficulties because different charges could be laid against different persons in a gang for the same incident. He also found that only one person might be arrested although other members were involved in the same incident and either escaped or their activity was not serious enough to warrant arrest. A warning that figures may belie the true picture is offered by a report of the Papatoetoe incident in May, 1970. It appears that the Auckland police barracks were called out to deal with a "rampaging gang", fifty policemen and two hundred gang members were allegedly involved but only six arrests were made.<sup>22</sup> Duncan found that there was no information on the charge sheets which could suggest the type of gang offending often feared by the public.

Few charges can be laid where a large number is involved, but the other side of the coin is shown by the example mentioned in a police report of a gang of 22 with 55 admitted and 200 suspected crimes against them.<sup>23</sup> This shows the large numbers of charges that

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20. See the Interdepartmental Committee Report, p. 3.

21. *op. cit. supra*, n. 17, p. 16.

22. *New Zealand Herald*, May 10th, 1970.

23. *op. cit. supra*, n. 16.



could be laid following incidents involving only two or three youths, the cultural tendency of sharing the spoils meaning that more charges of receiving are possible. It is difficult then to rely on statistics to discover gang behaviour.

Nevertheless certain activities, which are pursued by a number of youths belonging to a gang, are popularly called gang activities. In particular this includes the inter-gang fight and the criminal invasion of property by a gang. It is pertinent at this stage to discuss a number of the prominent gang incidents to discover whether Polynesian gangs are in fact dangerous and do pose a problem.

(1) 8 May, 1970. In an incident in Papatoetoe, 200 youths went on the rampage through the streets, brawling and smashing windows. There was never any indication of the ethnic composition of the youths, but the blame for the fracas was put on the Stormtroopers. The publicity which followed included a report of an interview with Inspector P. J. Gaines<sup>24</sup> in which he considered the bulk of the gangs (he said there were chapters) were Polynesian with about 10% being European. He commented that "they are causing the police concern because the streak of criminal element is right through their numbers. With a bit of incitement they can turn a crowd into a rabble. We are concerned at the danger to people and property before we can get there." Little wonder that it was on the basis of this article that the Gallery programme was initiated.

(2) 14 August, 1970. A car of Stormtroopers thought that the occupants of a van had given an offensive sign, so they followed to 'have it out'. The alleged signaller was dropped with a bottle, and received a fractured skull and pieces of glass embedded in his head. This is the sort of incident that is dangerous; here it was Polynesian members who were involved.

(3) 10 April, 1971. "The Battle of Pekapeka." About a dozen members of the Mongrel Mob were at the centre of a melee in which one youth was stabbed and many others injured in the fierce onslaught of what has been described as 'beserk' Maoris. It was brutal, there is no doubt of that, for gang members wielded bottles and chains, but what was not broadcast was the fact that basically it was an inter-gang rumble. Whether provoked or whether purely under the influence of alcohol, the Mongrels had moved on to a gang of 'bikies' known as Satan's Slaves, a European gang.

The Mongrels are nearly all Maoris, and the media had a picnic in describing the danger of such a gang;<sup>25</sup> no mention was made of the other gang.

Confrontations between a Polynesian gang and a bike gang, usually predominantly European but with Polynesian members, are frequent.

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24. *New Zealand Herald*, May 20th, 1970.

25. See, for example, *New Zealand Truth* for April 20th and May 4th, 1971.

The Polynesians seem to be easy targets, and take all the blame so the bikies escape both the publicity and often the police.

(4) 2 May, 1971. At a dance in Otara organised by the Storm-troopers a gang of motorcyclists intervened and a brawl resulted. The dance was held outside and the intrusion was made when police had to leave the area to check hotels which were closing, so it appeared well planned. This example of a motorbike gang causing all the trouble but escaping relatively cheaply is apparently quite typical in Auckland and has led to some bad publicity for Polynesian gangs.

(5) 26 May, 1971. Members of the Satan's Slaves in Wellington had made a molotov cocktail to scare members of the Mongrels. A brawl ensued and the Mongrels were beating the bikies up until stopped by a passer-by. This is an example of similar behaviour in Wellington; another being the shooting incident on 5 June, 1971, where bikies (not from a gang) had been angered by the Mongrels, the result was that five Polynesian youths received bullet wounds.

It can be seen that a number of incidents which do receive extensive coverage and relate to gangs are not the result of Polynesian membership, but more the result of provocation or interference of another gang, normally a motorbike gang.

A motorbike gang including as ringleaders some Polynesians was responsible for a nasty incident before Christmas, 1970, at an hotel where student teachers were attacked and injured, and in July, 1971, the same gang went on an 'orgy of violence and destruction' in a northern hotel.

(6) 5 July, 1971. At the Kaupakapaka Hotel the gang smashed glasses, bottles and furniture (damage approaching \$1000) and injured two patrons. Arrests later substantiated the fact that the leaders were Polynesians and the interesting factor was that there were members aged well into the twenties and one in his thirties.

(7) 7 June, 1971. Gangs were blamed for provoking the fracas at the Peacemakers Club in Symonds Street, Auckland. Members of Hells Angels, Highway 61, Black Panthers and Mongrels were involved in one of the worst street brawls Auckland had experienced. For two hours bottles, abuse, and even molotov cocktails were hurled across Symonds Street; as a result many arrests were made and the indication was that Polynesians were chiefly involved.

(8) 22 August, 1971. A gang of variously armed youths left a trail of destruction, injuries and theft in three Auckland suburbs. Intruders at a party produced clubs, metal bars, chains, and injured three persons, one critically. Later in the night, the same group made two other unprovoked attacks, beating up two youths, then bursting into a house, dragging a boy out, and smashing six windows in the house.

(9) 24 August, 1971. A man was assaulted with a wooden baton, and two other persons injured by a gang who also smashed light fittings in the house.

These are the type of incidents which are disturbing, and which do seem to indicate that there is a problem posed by Polynesian gangs. The extent of the problem however, may not be as great as people think. The outbreaks of violence are only infrequent, they have been occurring throughout the history of New Zealand and certainly will continue to occur sporadically. At present there is no indication that gangs are causing any spate of crime or violence, and certainly the police do not consider the gangs to be causing any trouble over and above that normally caused. It could be said in fact that gang members, who commit offences are not really in a different category from any other juvenile delinquents, and that the problem is not one of gang behaviour, but one of juvenile delinquency.

### *Brown Power?*

Racial animosities or tendencies are often attributed to gangs, as is evidenced by the following headline in an Auckland newspaper — “Racism is spurred by hate leaflets; Maori leaders and police in Auckland are worried over gang violence by teenage Maoris and Islanders — bashing and vandalism which appear increasingly to be anti-Pakeha”.<sup>26</sup> However, leaders of gangs alleged to have anti-white attitudes vehemently deny such allegations and at present there is no real evidence to show that specifically any anti-white activity is undertaken by such gangs, although at the Maori Young Leaders Conference 1971, there was strong talk of getting arms and fighting the whites for their rights.

Nevertheless, the existence of Polynesian gangs provides great potential for a person who wants to bring out a racial problem and it is feared by many people that European radical groups may try to infuse ideas into gang members and thereby use the gangs as political levers to further their own causes. By transferring slogans from Black Panther and Marxist literature to the New Zealand situation the Polynesian gangs could be made more militant and could possibly become racist. However Polynesian elders feel that European radical organisations are for European “hang-ups” only, that the Polynesians still have their communities and are not yet deculturated in the sense of the American negro who has been deprived of his culture for centuries, so the application of such slogans is neither apt nor wanted. There have been a few gangs which have adopted such names as Black Power or Black Panther, but welfare workers in contact with these gangs consider that the members were naively unaware of the implications and ideology of the names.

At present then there is no real “brain power” activity coming from the Polynesian gangs.

## **VI CONCLUSION**

At present in Auckland and Wellington there are a number of gangs which are predominantly composed of Polynesians. Polynesians

26. *Auckland Star*, February 28th, 1970.

appear to be more susceptible to gang membership and gang behaviour than Europeans, because they are virtually in a cultural vacuum. They are neither accepted at home, where their parents live under one culture, nor at school, where their teachers indoctrinate them with another culture, so the Polynesian children faced with this bi-cultural world find themselves without any cultural identification. It is this lack of identity, coupled with a feeling of inferiority and a desire to be recognised by somebody, which leads to these children forming gangs. In addition, the Polynesian finds his security amongst people or in a social group, such is the strength of his communal nature; however the European finds his security through his own personal achievements in the material world which he has created. This obvious clash between reliance on the community (or extended family) and reliance on the individual (or nuclear family) shows that there will be a greater tendency for Polynesians to group together than there will for Europeans.

The Polynesian gangs which do form are natural and they are healthy, especially when they provide both a haven and an identity for their members. However the emphasis placed upon them by the news media has prejudiced public opinion against them. There is a disproportionate coverage of Polynesian participation in gangs, and an inadequate coverage of the normal activities of the gangs, so it is little wonder that there is a fear of Polynesian gangs predominant in the minds of the public. Blame nevertheless must also rest with the community at large for not assisting the Polynesian children to escape from the cultural vacuum, for the discriminatory attitude with which members of the community view the Polynesian, and for thereby not helping to overcome any social problem, but passively allowing it to increase.

The problem which Polynesian gangs pose at present is more a social problem than one of law and enforcement. Polynesian gang members do not provide any extraordinary dangers in the area of crime. There will always be juvenile delinquents and gang members seem to be juvenile delinquents only, they do not come into a different category because they are members of a gang. However, the behaviour that gangs indulge in does include an area where total gang participation means that they provide a very real danger to physical well-being. This area to date has consisted of a number of inter-gang fights, which have included provoked and unprovoked outbursts of violence, and a couple of violent attacks made by gangs upon members of the public. The remark in the 1970 annual report of the Justice Department, that "New Zealand cannot hope to escape entirely the almost world-wide trend towards violence in all its forms", shows that violence is now accepted as being part of the society in which New Zealanders live. Indeed there have been violent outbursts, similar to those described within this paper, occurring infrequently for decades and many in the past have been caused by gangs. So it may be said that Polynesian gangs do not pose any danger which is either over

and above juvenile delinquency, or not present in society already. Nevertheless violence is not condoned by anybody, even if it is natural in any society, and since gangs can and do participate in violent conduct, they can be seen to be dangerous, and cannot be dismissed as not providing any criminal problem. The occurrence of violent behaviour, however infrequent, can therefore mean that Polynesian gangs are potentially harmful and it is this potential which has to be watched. Whether it is a potential to violence over and above the potential of other groups, or other people in the community is not known. Obviously any potentially violent group of people will need to receive more than a passing glance from police patrols. Nevertheless, since the occasional violent outburst involving Polynesian gangs has been isolated and separated from other violence in the society, it must be accepted that the public now believe that these gangs do endanger the society. However mistaken this belief may be, and whether the isolation of the Polynesian gangs is the result of a European fear, or of the news value of the Polynesian, the position today seems to be that Polynesian gangs do exist and sometimes they have indulged in violence. These occurrences have led to the opinion that there is a danger of future violence, but any view must be purely subjective in nature, and it must be noted that it is this subjectivity which has already been the cause of the distortion of the 'gang situation' today.

J. D. HOWMAN.