Gangs, Social Disorganisation & “Organised” Crime

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Analysing chronic youth co-offending

- Organisational models
  - Hierarchies
  - Networks
  - Something else?
Rhizome

- ‘[T]he rhizome is an acentred, nonhierarchichal, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organising memory …, defined solely by a circulation of states’ (p.21)

- ‘There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines’ (p.8)

- ‘[A] rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded’ (p.9)
“Crime gang creeps up on Adelaide”

• Article in January 2007, Adelaide Advertiser
• “Adelaide has reacted with justifiable alarm at revelations of a gang of lawless Aboriginal youths who have terrorised the city for more than three years”
• “With unusual alacrity, police have detailed the activities of a gang of about 50 mostly Aboriginal youths, loosely centred around five families”
• Ongoing media interest, attention in this issue
Operation Mandrake

- Established by SA police in 2003
- Repeat serious youth offending patterns with significant indigenous component, described in the media as the “Gang of 49”
- Special police task force established to deal with this (evolving) group – Operation Mandrake
- “To Break the Cycle” Report – Social Inclusion Unit, SA government, David Cappo
The Nendi model

- David Kennedy and the Boston Gang project
  - Pulling Levers
- Establishment of the Nendi working group
  - Police, social services, indigenous community members
  - Academic participation in identifying the ‘problem behind the problem’
- High political, community, police sensitivities around this issue
Key offences

- illegal use of a motor vehicle
- serious criminal trespass
- robbery
- larceny not of vehicle
- receiving and unlawful possession
Small group responsible for majority of crime

- 15% of POI group responsible for 33% of offending

- 50% of high rate group exhibit age of onset at $\leq 14$ years

- Persistence (sustained criminal careers)
High rate offenders:
Actual custodial days served

• Average of 3.5 years in juvenile / adult custodial facilities
The [police] all know me ... As soon as they see me they come straight on my case ... Like, even in town when I’m shopping with my mum – just recently – and I was out, a cop knew me ... Bang, he just come straight up to me [and] says, ‘I want to search you’ ... And my mum was like shocked that he just come up and said [that]. Like he didn’t say, ‘What’s your name?’, cause he knew it ... He goes, ‘I know your history’ ... and he goes, ‘Empty out your pockets’. And he didn’t find nothing ... It was just disrespect and embarrassed me in front of my mum ... It made me feel, like, upset. I was like shattered because they come and done it in front of my mum. It would have been better if they took me to the station ... Cause you’ve done wrong in the past they think you’re always going to do wrong ... So it’s like every time they see you, it’s like they’re trying to pin you to anything they can. (A, 24:18 I2)
social services

I: Has there ever been anyone that you have come in contact with [like] social workers, release workers, [where you’ve thought]: ‘I can relate to them, they can help me, they understand me’. Has that ever happened?

P: I suppose it has always sort of been a mismatch. Because most of the social workers that are in here ... look at us young people that come through the juvenile system and just think that we’re not worth it, you know, we’re not worth their help or something, I don’t know. (K, 2:50 I2)
Prisons as social learning, networking

P: It's just ... the same shit day in, day out. No responsibility. Oh, except for wipe the windows every now and again ... On the outside you've got rent to pay, bills to pay, shit to do ... Here you've got nothing to do ...

I: ... [D]o you feel as though you're learning anything from being in here?

P: Oh yeah, I learned the other night how to get through a VY [Holden Commodore] immobiliser ... that's about all I learnt. (U, 31:53; 32:1)
More learning networks

Participant: Like in one instance we had a boy here, he come in here for – he broke into a house for the computer parts because he was a bit of a computer nerd and the lady was home and he ended up getting done for home invasion and before he even come in here, he didn’t know how to steal a car and when he left, you know, he knew how to steal about 15 different sort of cars. And he just – he knew how to [. . .] by-pass like alarms on the houses. Yeah, you learn a fair bit of shit from coming in here.

Interviewer: Is there any way of stopping that or is that sort of inevitable?
Participant: Yeah, that’s just inevitable. You can’t stop that. It’s going to happen – you know, just passed down from generation to generation pretty much. . . .

(O, 39: 1)
“Get me out of here”

- Networks of escape
  - Horizontal and vertical networks
    - ‘strength of weak ties’ - Granovetter
    - ‘bridging ties’ (horizontal) v ‘linking ties’ (vertical) [Stretzer 2002]
The problem of peers

I got pushed straight back into my environment where, you know, where I do all my crime, so . . . They [i.e. my friends] heard, you know, that I'm out and they, you know, come to my house . . . I let 'em in and shouldn't of . . . Like, you don't — you don't think straight when you do it. You just — you just think about the car you're gonna steal. You don't think about the staff here or you're just coming straight back into custody. You don't think about it until you're in the back of the police [car] there, you know, that you're comin' back here. (K 39:12)
Interviewer: One of the... things that a lot of guys... find... difficult... when they get out is when their mates... say, “Come on, let’s do this.”

Participant: See, that’s what I don’t want to do. The cunt that I used to do crime with, I’m going to fucking grab him and I’m going to kick absolute shit out of him, just so I can say, “Look, mate, fuck off, I don’t know you... get the fuck out of my life. You’re just locking me up, cunt. Where were you when I was doing fucking ten months [inside] for... you when I broke that cunt’s jaw? Where the fuck were you? You were out here snitching me in, mate.” I’ve got to fucking get rid of them, man... I can’t—I can’t live life this. It’s not good... It tears me up, man, every night. Every single fucking night I lay in bed thinking, “What the fuck am I doing here, man?” (J, 40:49).
Finding ‘vertical ties’

Participant: I've got to meet new people and if I see that they're—oh, some of my old mates, I've just got to... tell them, you know... I can't just think, "Oh, yeah, I'll see you around some time."... I've just got to say, "Look—just get away from them," you know... Even if they say, "Oh, you know, there's a big scam, we'll get fucking twenty grand," you know, I've just got to think, "Oh, they're full of shit anyway," you know. (D, 35:22, I2).