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Ka Hao te Rangatahi: Exploring School and Work pathways for Rangatahi Māori / Youth growing up within gang space in Aotearoa.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of rangatahi Māori growing up in gang environments in Aotearoa, focusing on their educational and employment journeys. The research aims to elevate the rangatahi narratives without reducing them to mere statistics or stereotypes, highlighting their resilience and insights in contexts often characterized by stigma and judgement. Employing principles of Kaupapa Māori, Critical Pedagogy, and a waka navigation framework, this study challenges deficit-based perspectives that typically dominate discussions about gangs.

On a practical level, it advocates for trust-based partnerships with gang whānau, emphasizing the importance of honesty and respect to foster collaboration. Existing Whānau -led initiatives illustrate the possibilities of merging cultural knowledge with everyday survival, showcasing resilience as a lived reality. Theoretically, the research offers an insider perspective, positioning myself as researcher to honor lived experiences and mitigate traditional negative framings of gang spaces, instead framing them as complex sites of identity and resilience.

Ultimately, this thesis posits that rangatahi Māori in gang settings are not merely problems to be solved but are agents of hope and strength, rooted in their heritage. Their futures should be shaped by their identities rather than deficits, affirming their tino rangatiratanga and capacities for meaningful contributions within their communities.

Glossary

501's / Australian Deportees – A person who has been or is being expelled from Australia back to New Zealand.

Aotearoa – New Zealand.

Aroha ki te tangata – Unconditional love for people

Chapter – A local segment of a national gang.

Compounded factors - The experience of judgement by Māori cultural spaces towards Māori affiliated to gang spaces.

Connective Collective – Network of gang affiliated whanau.

Marginalisation context - Marginalisation of Māori and Indigenous peoples within society in the first instance and then again with Māori who are gang affiliated.

Ethnic Indigenous Gangs – Gang spaces which contain Māori (Indigenous people of Aotearoa).

Fourfold - By four times; to four times the number or amount.

Gang – *Have chosen not to define the term gang in this work.*

Gang Behaviour – Individuals who adhere to their own code and conduct.

Gang Culture – Groups who present themselves as a gang, which include habits of people in it and the way they generally behave.

Gang spaces in Aotearoa –Gang Spaces in Aotearoa.

Gangsterism – Methods or behaviour of gangsters.

Hapū – Sub-tribe.

Hau kāinga – local people of a marae.

Hītori – History.

Identity – The fact of being who or what a person or thing is.

Identity aspirations – Relates to how positive or negative participants felt about being Māori.

Identity crisis – Defined as an acute period of questioning one's own identity directions p. 65.

Identity formation – A complex process in which humans develop a clear and unique view of themselves and of their identity.

In-born – Born to a parent who is a gang member.

Inner Unity – A whole or totality as combining all its parts into one.

Instrumental rational – Levels of organization that enable the group, and its members to affectively define and achieve mutual ends.
Iwi – Tribe.
Kai – Food.
Kaikarakia – Reciter of prayer.
Kaikōrero – Speaker, narrator.
Kanohi kitea – being seen, represent.
Kapa Haka – Māori performing group.
Karakia – pray, prayer.
Karanga – to call.
Kaumātua – Male elder.
Kaupapa Māori – Māori approach, Māori customary practice, Māori agenda, Māori principals.
Kawa – Marae protocol.
Kohanga Reo – Māori language preschool.
Kōrero – talk, discuss, statement, narrative.
Kuia – Female elder.
Kura Kaupapa – Primary school operating under Māori custom and using Māori as the medium of instruction.
Level of engagement tool (LOE tool) – Tool created in this study to measure a youth connection to their affiliated gang space.
Mana – Spiritual power, status, influence, authority.
Mana motuhake – Independence, Self-determination, and control over one's own destiny.
Manaaki tangata – To care for, protect, nourish people.
Manaakitanga – Hospitality, kindness, generosity, support.
Marae – Meeting house.
Marae ātea – open area in front of wharenui/Marae.
Marae participation – Engagement with marae events, activities, and protocol.
Margins – The edge or border of something.
Mātauranga Māori – Māori knowledge: - the body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view and perspectives, Māori creativity and cultural practices.
Mau rākau – Māori weaponry.

Mauri – Life principle, life force, vital essence.

Mema – Member.

Mirirmiri – Massage.

New Zealand Gangs – Gangs located in New Zealand.

Ope – Group of people moving together.

Pakeke – Adult.

Pan-Polynesian Gangs – Early term used to describe New Zealand gang spaces.

Papakāinga / Pā / Kāinga – Original home, home base, village, communal Māori land.

Patched gangs – New Zealand gangs who place a symbolic patch (which represents their gang) on the back of a leather jacket.

Pepehā – Māori introduction of who you are.

Pēpi – Baby.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) – Requirements for rangatahi to grow into healthy adults.

Puhoro – Moko/tattoo.

Pūrākau – Defined in this work as the stories of the research participants/whanau.

Purpose – The reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.

Rangatahi Māori – youth of Māori descent between the ages of 17-25years of age.

Rangatira - Chief, Chiefly.

Research collaborator – Anyone providing an input to a particular piece of study.

Research participant – study participant or subject, is a person who voluntarily participates in human subject research.

Rites of passage – A ceremony or event marking an important stage in someone's life, especially birth, the transition from childhood to adulthood, marriage, and death.

Rongoā Māori – Traditional Māori Medicine.

Self-Definition - A person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action.

Speaking Out / Speaking To – Speaking out and back to those who hold the balance of power.

Street gangs – American style gangs.

Struggle without end – Dr Ranginui Walker's best-selling history of Aotearoa, New Zealand, from a Māori perspective.
Tainuitanga – Tainui language culture and identity.
Tangi – Funeral.
Te Ao Māori – The Māori worldview.
Te Tiriti vs. Treaty of Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi has two texts. The Māori version is not an exact translation of the English. There has been much debate over the differences – how they came to be and what they mean.
Te Whare Tapawhā – A model of the 4 dimensions of wellbeing developed by Sir Mason Durie in 1984 to provide a Māori perspective on health.
The 5 C's – Relate to the goals of positive youth development, and are outlined as follows; Competence, Character, Connection, Confidence and Caring/Compassion.
The gang space – General term to identify a gang chapter/environment in Aotearoa.
The Māori Identity Migration Model (MIMM) - Tool to gauge the motivations of Māori urban youth's migration between identity spaces as termed in The Māori Identify Migration Model, (Quoted in this work on p. 51).
Tikanga Māori – Māori custom and protocol.
Tinorangatiratanga – Self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, self-government.
Tūpuna – Ancestors, Grandparents.
Wahine – Female.
Waka ama – Outrigger canoe.
Wānanga – To meet and discuss, deliberate, consider.
Whaikōrero – Oratory, oration, formal speech-making.
Whakapapa – Genealogy, lineages, descent.
Whakapapa – Genealogy.
Whānau – Family / used in the final section of this work to describe research participants.
Whānau Unit – Relates to the immediate whānau, namely the wife/mother, child/ren, and blood/extended family.
Whānau wānanga – Family conference.
Whenua Tipu – Inherited lands.
Whenua Tuku Iho – Inherited land.
Write-forward – Self-determining our future.

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ko Papa Ka puta ko Rongo
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Ka puta ki te whai ao, ki te ao mārama
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Nui te aroha, Nui te mihi

Bonnie

Chapter One – Ka Hao te Rangatahi

Introduction to the research

1.1 Introduction

Figure 1.1: Te Tipu photo shoot, 2019 (Te Rawhitiroa Photography/ Own Photo).

The year is 3020; *our whānau are getting ready to attend the National Gang Convention in Wellington. The Wellington gang collectives are hosting all the gangs throughout Aotearoa. This is the time where all gang chapters, members and their whānau of all colours come together for an annual hui. These meetings were established in 2050 and have been going strong ever since.*

They said gangs would be eradicated by now, and in a way, they were right… out with the old and in with the new... What they did not realise, however, was that gangs were here to stay - just, a few things have changed. I am part *of the hui as* well. I am *a representative for our collective that puts forward the* voices and issues of the rangatahi; *my auntie represents the voice of the* mothers; my *father*

sits on the seat that represents the voice of the wider gang collective where we are from.
I like my role, we have organised lots of cool stuff that is fun and gets us active, along with learning lots of new things. We also deal with serious issues as well. About 15 years ago, things were bad. Lots of people did not like the changes. There was lots of fighting between the same, and different gangs... things got bad for the kids. Children were being killed in the crossfire, even worse than before. Fathers were going to jail, mothers left struggling with the kids. The government created a new initiative that recommended taking kids from families that were gang affiliated.
Children were committing suicide, from missing their families and homes. It was a sad time. Eventually, enough members and their whānau had had enough! There was a call for change, as children were dying, families weakened, and gangs from Australia were attempting to take over. With the help of iwi, hapū and marae, the gang collectives were able to reconnect, reorganise and rebuild.

There is now a sense of history, an organization in our structures, an understanding of who we are, where we come from, and our how our story and ourselves fit into the whole. The National Gang Convention is the time when we celebrate our collective history, the direction forward, and where we discuss issues that need addressing. 'New Imaginings'

The above text is presented as a form of pūrākau, a narrative approach imbued with imagination and future-oriented thinking, allowing for the expression of possibility and hope. It seems right to begin this chapter in this way, its inclusion is both intentional and meaningful positioning creativity and visionary thought as central components in the construction of an alternative future. This is what we ask of our youth today, to evoke within themselves a creative foresight necessary to carry forward the ongoing narrative of life-building. What are we building for? To nurture a greater vision, to hold onto hope, and to seize the opportunities that allow us to be happy, safe, prosperous and be thriving.

These aspirations, while visionary, are also grounded in practical imperatives. We build to ensure we have warm, safe homes, kai in our cupboards, and a level of

health and well-being from which we may flourish. It is within this broader framing that gang-affiliated contexts must be understood. Public discourse and dominant narratives frequently centre gang members themselves, often to the exclusion of the wider whānau — particularly the children — who inhabit these spaces. This study seeks to challenge and reframe such narrow representations by drawing attention to the whānau realities that are often rendered invisible, and by positioning their lived experiences as central to any meaningful analysis or intervention.

There is a lack of research in Aotearoa offering in-depth analyses of Māori children situated within gang spaces. Existing studies predominantly focus on adults associated with gangs, with very little attention given to children (Radak, 2016). What is available largely comprises Ministry of Social Development reports and a small number of independently commissioned reviews. These will be explored further in subsequent chapters, but most highlight abysmal statistics alongside an acknowledgement of significant research gaps.

A key limitation of this research landscape is the absence of first-hand narratives — the lived voices and experiences of those from, within, and directly connected to gang spaces in Aotearoa. Without these perspectives, critical validation of experience is lacking. This absence is particularly concerning given prevailing systems that prioritise policing, prosecution, and punitive responses toward adult gang members, while often neglecting the implications for the children within these whānau.

Pūrākau reminds us that stories are not just accounts of what is, but also of what might be. The absence of rangatahi voices in existing research is therefore more than a gap — it is a silencing of futures yet to be imagined. To address this silence, this study seeks to reposition rangatahi narratives as central to the conversation, illuminating how they see, feel, and navigate their worlds. This raises pressing questions: What happens to these children? How are their educational and employment trajectories shaped by the treatment of their parents or caregivers? And how might pathway navigation differ for male and female rangatahi in gang-affiliated spaces?

With these questions in mind, this study places rangatahi Māori voices at the centre, foregrounding their lived experiences of growing up within gang-affiliated environments. Their narratives are further contextualised through intergenerational perspectives, including Māori gang members, wāhine who are partners and mothers of members, and professionals working within or alongside our rangatahi Māori in these spaces. This inclusive approach provides a more holistic and culturally anchored understanding of the lived realities and potential of rangatahi Māori raised in gang contexts.

Several overarching questions underpin this work: How do rangatahi perceive and navigate their educational and employment pathways from within gang spaces? What role does cultural identity — being Māori — play in this navigation? And to what extent does stigma, particularly that associated with being the children of gang members, shape their ability to pursue these pathways?

Guided by these considerations, the research is structured around three central questions:

- What are the dreams and aspirations of rangatahi Māori growing up within gang spaces in Aotearoa?
- How can we ensure that rangatahi Māori growing up in gang spaces are supported to access and succeed in educational and occupational opportunities?
- What influences do marginalisation and cultural identity have on pathway navigation for these rangatahi?

1.2 Scoping the Research

Rangatahi Māori are at the forefront of social change in Aotearoa. Frequently referred to as future leaders, their inclusion in forward-looking planning is well documented across policy and research spheres (Brankin, 2019; Nāna et al., 2019; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2021; Te Whare Hukahuka, 2019). The challenge, however, lies in refining these initiatives by drawing upon intergenerational wisdom and grounding

them in contemporary realities. Essential to this refinement is a harmonisation of voices across whakapapa — kaumātua, mātua, and most importantly, rangatahi themselves.

Despite such recognition, inequalities between Māori and Pākehā persist. Shaped by more than 160 years of colonisation, these disparities remain particularly pronounced for rangatahi Māori in areas such as health, education, and employment. Issues commonly faced by rangatahi include drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, depression, low self-esteem, disconnection from cultural identity, racism, and barriers created by government systems and structures. Many of these challenges intersect, compounding the obstacles to participation and opportunity. The Ministry of Youth Development report *What's Important to Rangatahi Māori* (2010), which surveyed 51 rangatahi in Hamilton, underscored these realities by highlighting the most pressing issues facing Māori youth.

One theme emerging strongly from this report was the role of whānau. Whānau were recognised simultaneously as a source of support and strength, and as a site of stress and anxiety (Ministry of Youth Development, 2010). This duality aligns with findings from my Master's thesis, *Connection Re-Connection to Cultural Confidence via Whānau Wānanga* (Maihi, 2015), which emphasised whānau as a determinant of holistic development — physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Mason Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā model (2017) provides a complementary framework for understanding wellbeing in these dimensions, affirming that whānau are integral to the capacity of rangatahi Māori to thrive. As highlighted in the *What's Important to Rangatahi Māori* study, the attitudes and actions of adults significantly influence the developmental trajectories of their young ones. The critical question, then, becomes: how do we ensure that rangatahi have the health, wellbeing, and support required to access and succeed within educational and employment pathways?

Education emerges as a key enabler of opportunity, particularly when delivered through culturally affirming structures such as Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa, and tertiary institutions like Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Yet within mainstream education, systemic marginalisation continues to hinder Māori success. Dr. Anne Milne, in

Colouring in the White Spaces (2013), argues that education has long been one of colonisation's most enduring tools, perpetuating assimilationist policies. She calls for transformation that reshapes education to meet the needs of tamariki, rather than requiring tamariki to adapt to an inequitable system. Central to her thesis is the assertion that cultural identity is foundational for meaningful educational engagement.

This perspective is reinforced by Melinda Webber and Angus Macfarlane's Mana Tangata framework (2020), which identifies five cultural conditions essential for student success. Drawing on Royal's (2006) conception of mana as the heart of Māori self-worth, they highlight: Mana Whānau (familial pride), Mana Motuhake (personal pride and achievement), Mana Tū (tenacity and self-esteem), Mana Ūkaipo (belonging and connectedness), and Mana Tangatarua (broad knowledge and skills). Together, these conditions demonstrate how Māori students can thrive when supported by academic, cultural, and social opportunities. The framework also underscores the importance of a supportive whānau context for positive identity development, alongside the promotion and modelling of educational advancement.

Employment pathways present similar challenges. Māori unemployment remains roughly double that of Pākehā, and Māori are disproportionately represented in low-paid, physically demanding work (Tokona Te Raki — Māori Future Makers, 2022). While some progress has been made over the past decade, Māori continue to face systemic barriers across education, employment, justice, housing, and health. Māori remain among the most incarcerated Indigenous peoples globally, making up over half of Aotearoa's prison population despite comprising only 17% of the total population with wāhine Māori particularly overrepresented, comprising over 60% of the female prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2018).

These structural inequities have direct implications for rangatahi. Superu (2015) and Ministry of Social Development (2016) reports such as *What Works: Improving Outcomes for Children of Gang-Involved Parents* (2015) and *Adult Gang Members and Their Children's Contact with Ministry of Social Development Service Lines* (2016) indicate that children raised in gang spaces are at greater risk of harm,

including abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence. Gang culture is frequently framed through a lens of criminality and deviance (Kelsey and Young, 1982; Gilbert, 2010). Yet this research contends with a more complex reality: for many rangatahi Māori, gang-affiliated environments are not simply sites of risk, but also of belonging, identity, and everyday life.

My own experiences of growing up within such spaces, while navigating school and work pathways, inform the positioning of this thesis. My current educational achievements, alongside those of others with similar backgrounds, stand as testament to the potential that can emerge from environments often dismissed as hopeless. The stance of this research is not to deny the challenges of violence, abuse, or crime, but to offer a hopeful perspective: one that recognises the capacity of rangatahi Māori to thrive when their realities are understood, affirmed, and supported.

While adult gang members must contend with the consequences of their choices, their children should not inherit those legacies. Instead, their futures can be shaped by opportunity, affirmation, and culturally grounded support. Within this context, this research seeks to understand how rangatahi Māori conceive of and navigate their pathways into education and employment while being located within and affiliated to gang spaces. The chapter proceeds to outline the research journey undertaken over the past decade, offering insight into the motivations that underpin this work, before concluding with a structural overview of the thesis.

1.3 Defining key terms – a note

Figure 1.2: *Marching Competition, Hawkes Bay, 1991 (Own Photo)*

> *Home life was quiet, if we were not socialising with dad's family and his friends, we would regularly visit my mother's grandmother whom I adored and who was for us kids our rock… However apart from these occasions most of our time was spent at home till around the ages nine to ten where my mum began to get us involved in other activities, marching for me and my sister and rugby and kung-fu for my brothers.*

Snippet from *Brilliance of Resilience - Memoirs of a Gangster's Daughter* (Maihi, 2014, p. 12).

Such memories remind us that gang life is lived not only through public narratives of violence or deviance but also through ordinary rhythms of whānau, childhood, and belonging. To engage meaningfully with these lived realities, conceptual clarity is essential. The following key terms provide the foundation for this study.

Rangatahi, unless otherwise specified, refers here to Māori youth aged 16 to 25 who have grown up, or are currently growing up, in gang environments in Aotearoa. These rangatahi are children or grandchildren of Māori gang members and are raised in contexts where gang culture is both prominent and normalised. Their

experiences are shaped by familial connections as well as the broader socio-cultural dynamics of gang life.

Whānau is defined here as the immediate family unit, comprising mothers or wives, children, and blood or extended relatives. This definition is grounded in the collective nature of Māori society and the integrated structure of gang communities, particularly within the Waikato region. Based on personal observation, immediate whānau are often assimilated into the gang structure, becoming an intrinsic part of its social and cultural fabric.

Gang is a contested and multifaceted term, examined in greater depth in the following chapter. Its definition varies across societal, cultural, and institutional contexts (Maxson & Esbensen, 2012). While efforts have been made to establish universal definitions, many are shaped by prevailing assumptions and biases. One of the greatest challenges is the term's frequent association with criminality — a connotation that those within gang communities themselves often resist (Bjerregaard, 2002, pp. 32–38).

1.4 Who am I - Ko wai au?

Figure 1.3: *B. Maihi, Hemi Tapū Kōhanga reo, Kirikiriroa, 1988 (own photo)*

I am six years old; I have big brown eyes and am quiet and shy around people I don't know very well, but with my sister and brothers I am outspoken, cheeky, and loud. My hair is quite scruffy, I dislike brushing it.

.

I am surrounded by family and family friends, we are at our uncle's place, and they are drinking, we kids are attempting to play bulrush with the older kids, everything is as it should be, nothing feels out of place, this is a usual occurrence when dad, the uncles, aunties, and their friends would meet up.

Snippet from *Brilliance of Resilience - Memoirs of a Gangster's Daughter* (Maihi, 2016, p. 4).
Stories such as this remind us that gang life is not defined only by public narratives of deviance or criminality. It is also lived through the ordinary rhythms of whānau, childhood, and belonging. It is from within this lived reality that this thesis is grounded. My father, who is now deceased, was a senior member of the Waikato Chapter of the Black Power. The influence of gangs was deeply woven into both my immediate and extended whānau. I feel it is important to conduct this study to examine the challenges faced by rangatahi Māori in accessing education and employment pathways, especially those growing up in these environments. For my siblings and me, education pathways were shaped heavily by our mother's guidance, supported unwaveringly by our father.

From a young age, I was naturally curious and would often observe events around me closely. This curiosity grew as a teenager, when I sought to understand my environment more deeply, constantly asking questions about what was happening and the dynamics beneath the surface. Within our whānau, there was a deep love and respect for one another. This was shown through the close relationship between our father and his siblings, as well as the love and respect they all had for their mother, a woman known to be challenging, outspoken, and upfront.

There was, however, another aspect of our lives, which I describe with a specific term. Beyond our immediate whānau was what I call our *connective collective* — a wider network of prominent families I grew up with and associated alongside. We shared a common history, with fathers who were members of these families, and

we were proud of that connection. We grew up attending gatherings and important events together. We stood beside one another through celebrations, court cases, disputes in the streets, milestones like 21st birthdays and children's birthdays, and now, as we get older, funerals.

The death of our father, as mentioned, was unexpected. His passing marked a time of sadness and the realisation that things would change for our collective. I recognise that for myself, and for those of similar age within this collective, we grew up with a sense of pride, love, and adoration for our fathers and for each other's. Although they were far from perfect, the respect we held for them remains. It was a sign of appreciation that our father's loss was mourned not only by my siblings and me but by others across this wider collective.

Looking around at these connections during my father's funeral, knowing that we all faced the same deep loss, brought comfort during a difficult time. It was clear we were not alone in our grief, and I know the same will be true at the passing of each of our fathers. I call these men "the last of a dying breed" — shaped by their times, each unique in outlook, and once gone, irreplaceable. A new generation will step forward, though the world and society will have shifted. The legacy they create will be shaped by the choices they make.

This shared history endures. Even though the connection is not based on whakapapa or blood, it is bound by our fathers' loyalty and brotherhood, woven into our lives as their children. With this in mind, I began to narrow the focus of what could be an impossibly broad topic. After considering various perspectives and consulting with my brothers, especially those who are members, I identified one area I could explore with depth and meaning: the pathways to education and employment for rangatahi Māori growing up in these spaces.

As the descendant of this foundation, I feel a responsibility to guide and support this exploration within an academic setting, to do so authentically and in ways that honour lived realities. This research is deeply grounded in gang spaces: it reflects the experiences of rangatahi growing up within them, the adults who were once

rangatahi themselves, the wāhine who mothered and nurtured them, and the members across their various chapters, platforms, and roles.

The outcomes of these lived experiences are diverse. While each rangatahi journey is unique, they share a foundation shaped by belonging, loyalty, and identity. At its core, this is a space that holds the power to self-define without needing external validation. This reflects the wider Māori struggle to restore mana motuhake and assert tino rangatiratanga.

1.5 The research journey

Figure 1.4: *Undergrad Graduation - Te Kohinga Mārama Marae 2014*

The following is a reflection on the research journey I have undertaken. Fresh from a Māori doctoral conference, I am motivated to begin writing the methodology section of this work. Three days of presentations across diverse disciplines prompted deep reflection on the role of a Māori academic and the responsibility that comes with this position. Leaving the conference, I found myself looking back to my own beginnings in academia and the path that has brought me here. My undergraduate years, as a third-time returning student, were focused and deliberate. I had clear goals, was learning the language of new ideologies and concepts, and felt I had matured since my earlier attempts at university education.

Throughout this transition, the desire to help and serve others fuelled my perseverance, even if the specifics of how I would do so remained uncertain. What was clear was my determination to dedicate myself to this pursuit of knowledge. I committed fully and graduated with excellent results. I was inspired by the growing Indigenous movements, by Māori academics creating space within institutions, and by their courage in challenging colonial imperatives and injustices against our people. I took to heart those who wrote about the regeneration of mātauranga Māori and those who encouraged original thinking to address the many challenges facing our people then and now.

The works of Rev. Marsden, Mason Durie, and Charles Royal particularly stood out for me, along with Ani Mikaere, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and others. Their writings ignited my passion for research and encouraged me to value my own lived experiences as sources of insight. I came to understand the clarity that emerges when personal experience is coupled with honest reflection. From there, I began to transfer knowledge into wisdom, applying life lessons in practice. This shift gave me more confidence in the role and value of research, and I made a deliberate decision to focus on topics in the literature that resonated with me and to link them to my own experiences.

From that point on, I ensured that all the research I pursued was relevant to both myself and my collective. Most often, whānau and the issues affecting them were my central focus, and this doctoral work continues along that pathway. The 'why' behind this choice has never been fully clear, even after a decade of academic journeying. At first, I was uncertain about my ability to contribute new knowledge at doctoral level. Yet by centring issues connected to my lived realities, I came to recognise the strong foundation I already possessed for this journey.

The period between completing my master's degree and beginning doctoral study was one of deep reflection on my contribution to original thought. Looking back at my master's work, I recall the desire to contribute meaningfully to Māori research alongside esteemed Māori scholars. The core of that work was rooted in knowledge gained during my undergraduate years. I organised whānau wānanga, hoping to plant seeds of reconnection to whakapapa, pepeha, hapū, iwi, marae, and extended

whānau. My aspiration was that whānau members, once reconnected, would embark on a journey of conscientisation and decolonisation.

For me, these wānanga played a vital role in reconnecting with my marae, hapū, iwi, and whenua. I now hold positions representing our marae in our tribal parliament and helping manage whānau land blocks. These connections have supported me through life's challenges, and I know they will continue to do so. One of my uncles expressed his appreciation for the wānanga and emphasised the importance of our generation carrying this work forward.

Another uncle, the youngest of my father's siblings, began learning Te Reo Māori and continues to build confidence. A cousin, a few years younger than me, was drawn to the kōrero of our tūpuna shared by marae kaumātua and kuia. He has since developed an interest in mirimiri (traditional Māori massage) and often speaks of it with others — a significant achievement for him and for our collective. I highlight these three because their transformations stand out to me, even though I have not observed other whānau members as closely. After completing the wānanga and writing up the research, I graduated with a master's degree with first-class honours.

What followed was another round of reflection, during which I enrolled in a rongoā (traditional Māori medicine) course at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. I sought a less formal learning environment, one that would return me to a more traditional Māori way of learning. I completed it successfully and greatly enjoyed the experience.

During the following six months, my father passed away unexpectedly. His death was a profound blow for me and my siblings, leaving us reeling. The tangi was an especially powerful experience, and for me it became an opportunity to reflect on the wānanga I had undertaken for my master's. I had strongly advocated that the marae was a place of reconnection and acceptance, yet my father's tangi challenged this belief.

While sitting beside my father's coffin, I observed the marginalisation of Māori gang members within the marae space, evidenced by members being told to remove their patches before entering. Many did so willingly out of respect, but others

resisted, feeling insulted and rejected. Their refusal revealed a tension I could not ignore. It became clear that for my gang-affiliated whānau, reconnecting with Te Ao Māori and forming a strong Māori identity carried particular challenges.

Mason Durie describes Māori identity through markers such as whakapapa, marae participation, whānau connections, whenua tupu, and contact with Māori people and language (Durie, 1995). The resistance of the marae hau kāinga to our whānau members forced me to reconsider the message I had been giving — that the marae was a safe space where acceptance would be assured.

This experience shattered my belief that the master's wānanga would have a universally healing effect and that we were all on a shared journey of reconnection. Wrong on both counts, I came to realise that I had overlooked something vital. With a heavy heart, I accepted this, and in this chapter I aim to define that missing element. By drawing on the knowledge and wisdom gained from these experiences, I seek to re-create and reconstruct, positioning myself fully within the mahi.

1.6 Recognising the self in the institution

In this section, I reflect on how the university has shaped my journey — at times enabling growth, at other times constraining it. I also consider the responsibility we carry to remain accountable within these spaces. I tried to live up to the ideals of the Māori academics I admired, listening carefully and aspiring to make a meaningful contribution. Yet in my admiration I lost sight of a key element: my own context. I mimicked techniques and approaches I read about but failed to bring forward my own learning, experiences, and voice. My inability to produce original content led to resentment, which I directed outwardly toward those I had once admired. Looking back, I see how misguided this was. As a wise teacher once reminded me, "everything is worth the learning," and so I reflect again.

The works I admired have always stressed the importance of space, self-determination, and critical examination of colonial influences on the Māori mind.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) calls this the need to "decolonise the mind," to unpick the imperial illusions embedded in our lived realities. In my earlier academic years, this message did not fully register. Now, however, I see the importance of interpreting these spaces from my own perspective — one shaped by my past, present, and future.

My first two attempts at university were marked by confusion and struggle, even with basic tasks such as organising timetables or finding lecture theatres. Many times, I lacked the resources needed to properly engage. My third attempt was different: completing the University Certificate of Preparation equipped me more fully, and the maturity I had gained made my tertiary experience more successful.

Yet the institution remained intimidating. Despite my mother's encouragement and my father's support, I carried an underlying distrust. Reflecting on this, I recognised that the university did not reflect the connectedness I associated with whānau, siblings, and place. This absence of belonging shaped my experience. Even within the Māori faculty, I struggled to see myself reflected in that space.

Unable to recognise myself within the institution, I found it to be a lonely place. I justified my presence with the sentiment that "someone has to do it" — and in this case, that someone was me. At times I worried this came across as arrogance or ignorance, but it was my truth. Over the years, awards and scholarships eased some of this loneliness and provided vital support for my whānau, but they did not erase my sense of detachment from the university and its hierarchies.

Despite access to remarkable academics, I often preferred to remain detached. What mattered more to me were the challenges faced by my whānau and community. Those who rise above suffering, I believe, have a duty to give back and uplift others. For me, this is the real purpose of being at university — to discover how I can contribute and create pathways of opportunity for our people. To do this, we must speak from the heart, research with rigour, and act with integrity.

This approach has grounded me, keeping my research aligned with the realities of my whānau and wider collective, as well as with my professional experiences. My

occupational pathways have also complemented my learning: working with vulnerable whānau, mentoring youth in the justice system, developing a women's reintegration programme, and helping our iwi navigate Oranga Tamariki systems.

Through these experiences, I have come to value the interplay between experiential knowledge and academic theory. Each informs the other, offering grounded observations that emerge from spaces where challenges are concentrated. When presenting, I continue to draw on Māori scholarship, yet I remain aware of the gaps that exist when theory is tested against lived experience.

Significant barriers remain for whānau trying to reconnect with markers of Māori identity. I have seen these in my whānau, within the university, and in my professional practice. This recurring theme reminds me that there is much work still to do. Diversity must be recognised, heard, and given a genuine home through the creation of safe spaces. In such spaces, whānau may finally affirm: *I see myself… I fit… I belong.* From this simple refrain, meaningful healing and transformation can begin.

Figure 1.5: *Family Photo, Kirikiriroa 1993 (own photo)*

Memories arise fragmented and are best recalled when working with a timeline. What can be said as a definite is my dad is in and out of our lives and I remember wondering why this was. There were three of us, my older sister, myself, my younger brother and then four years later the baby of

our family, another boy. Safe to say my mother had a full plate and a lot to deal with.

Snippet from *Brilliance of Resilience - Memoirs of a Gangster's Daughter* (Maihi, 2014, p. 11).

1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapters one to four lay the foundational content that frames this research. Chapters five and six present the themes, insights, and stories shared by our whānau participants. Chapter Seven presents the research findings and includes a brief analysis of the data in relation to the research questions. Chapter Eight provides a more detailed discussion of the research findings, explores the limitations and recommendations, and concludes with an overall summary of the study.

Chapter One introduces the research by outlining the key questions and relevant issues related to this work. It provides a brief overview of the current situation of rangatahi Māori, with a specific focus on those who are gang affiliated. The chapter also explains important terms. In the second part, I share my reasons for choosing this topic for my doctoral work, including personal insights and experiences. It ends with an outline of the thesis structure, chapter summaries, and a brief overview of each chapter.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on gang space from Western and Indigenous perspectives, exploring global gang research and identifying five key development eras. It also examines definitions of 'gang' and offers a contextual review of gender dynamics within gang space. These themes are then revisited from an Indigenous perspective. The section concludes with research related to Indigenous youth in gang space, followed by a summary to close the chapter.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the environment within which gang space was established in Aotearoa. It critically examines the status of Māori and the enduring effects of colonisation, discussing both positive and negative consequences. This includes issues such as violence and the transmission of behavioural patterns across generations, as well as empowering influences like Māori resistance and resilience strategies. The chapter provides an analysis of the historical context, current circumstances, and the challenges confronting New Zealand's gang space, culminating with studies on the development of rangatahi (youth) and whānau (families) in Aotearoa.

Chapter Four outlines the principles and approaches used in this research. It begins by introducing and exploring the theories employed, specifically Critical Pedagogy and Kaupapa Māori. The following section highlights the importance of establishing an academic platform for rangatahi that values not only their perspectives but also those of their whānau. It then discusses the pūrākau method, using a waka analogy to illustrate the central role of rangatahi in this study. This section concludes with a reflection on my position as an insider researcher. The final part details the procedures involved, providing a comprehensive account of how the research was conducted, followed by a chapter summary.

Chapter Five marks the start of the research write-up and explores themes shared by the rangatahi and pakeke (adults) interviewed. Their interpretations are then aligned with the research questions posed in the introduction. The final section considers effective mechanisms that helped rangatahi and adults who were rangatahi to navigate education and workplaces, while also looking at sites of challenge they faced.

Chapter Six examines the insights gathered from the members and women interviewed regarding gang spaces here in Aotearoa. It gives voice to their interpretations of gang formation and development in Aotearoa and discusses leadership within gangs as identified by the whānau interviewed. Lastly, this chapter concludes with their perspectives on pathway navigation for their rangatahi.

Chapter Seven presents the key findings of this research and highlights the overarching themes in response to the research questions. This chapter examines effective mechanisms for pathway navigation as outlined by the rangatahi. The second part discusses the challenges faced by rangatahi in navigating pathways. Both sections emphasise key themes such as Te Ao Māori, goal setting, and whānau and home. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Finally, Chapter Eight presents the discussion, including an overview of limitations and recommendations, ending with a comprehensive summary of the thesis. The first section provides initial commentary on the findings from Chapter Seven. The second section reviews these findings and connects them where relevant to the literature outlined in chapters two, three, and four. The final section addresses identified gaps and explores how these might be bridged. Chapter Eight then discusses the limitations and recommendations before presenting the overall conclusion.

1.8 Conclusion

Like a waka setting out on a long voyage, this thesis is structured to carry its kaupapa steadily from foundation through to destination. Each chapter represents a stage of the journey, contributing to the navigation of pathways for rangatahi Māori growing up in gang-affiliated spaces. The structure that follows is intentional, guiding the reader from context and grounding, through the voices of participants, toward findings, discussion, and the horizon of possibilities that lie ahead.

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapters one to four lay the foundational content that frames the research. Chapters five and six present the themes, insights, and stories shared by whānau participants. Chapter Seven highlights the key findings in relation to the research questions. Chapter Eight provides a detailed discussion of these findings, explores limitations and recommendations, and concludes with an overall summary of the study.

Chapter One introduces the research by outlining the key questions and relevant issues. It provides an overview of the situation of rangatahi Māori, with a specific focus on those who are gang affiliated, and clarifies important terms. The second part presents my reasons for choosing this topic for doctoral study, including personal insights and experiences. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure and a summary of each chapter.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on gang space from both Western and Indigenous perspectives. It explores global gang research, identifies five key development eras, and examines definitions of 'gang.' It also provides a contextual review of gender dynamics within gang space, revisits these themes through an Indigenous lens, and discusses research on Indigenous youth in gang contexts. The chapter ends with a summary.

Chapter Three outlines the environment in which gang space developed in Aotearoa. It critically examines the status of Māori and the enduring effects of colonisation, including both harmful consequences such as violence and intergenerational behavioural patterns, and empowering influences such as resistance and resilience. The chapter concludes with studies on the development of rangatahi and whānau in Aotearoa.

Chapter Four details the principles and approaches used in this research. It introduces the theories employed, specifically Critical Pedagogy and Kaupapa Māori, and highlights the importance of establishing an academic platform that values the perspectives of rangatahi and their whānau. It also discusses the pūrākau method, using a waka analogy to illustrate the central role of rangatahi in this study. The chapter concludes with a reflection on my position as an insider researcher, a description of the procedures followed, and a chapter summary.

Chapter Five marks the beginning of the research write-up. It explores the themes shared by rangatahi and pakeke (adults) and aligns their interpretations with the research questions. The final section considers effective mechanisms that supported rangatahi and pakeke in navigating education and work, as well as the challenges they encountered.

Chapter Six presents the insights of members and women interviewed about gang spaces in Aotearoa. It gives voice to their interpretations of gang formation and development, discusses leadership within gangs as identified by participants, and concludes with their perspectives on pathway navigation for rangatahi.

Chapter Seven highlights the key findings of this research, identifying overarching themes in response to the research questions. It examines effective mechanisms for pathway navigation as outlined by rangatahi, and discusses the challenges they faced. Both sections emphasise themes such as Te Ao Māori, goal setting, and whānau and home, before concluding with a summary.

Finally, Chapter Eight provides a detailed discussion of the findings, including limitations and recommendations. It first comments on the findings from Chapter Seven, then reviews them in relation to the literature presented in chapters two, three, and four. The chapter concludes by addressing gaps, exploring how they may be bridged, and providing the overall conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter Two
Gang Spaces: Western and Indigenous Perspectives

Figure 2.1: *Tyrone 'Awa' Maihi Tangihanga 2025 (own photo)*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a historical overview of gang research, tracing its evolution through five distinct eras. These eras can be thought of as navigation markers, guiding us across different currents of thought and interpretation. In this way, the review functions like the early stages of a waka journey: it sets the course for subsequent chapters, establishes the conditions in which gang research has developed, and critically examines how these findings have impacted individuals within gang spaces. The chapter also explores international dynamics of gang formation, contributing to a broader understanding of gang phenomena. It then turns to the Indigenous experience of gang spaces, highlighting shared themes and dynamics while also noting the differences in how these spaces are interpreted in Western and Indigenous contexts. The implications of these perspectives are considered in relation to Māori rangatahi who grow up in gang environments.

In addressing these matters, research suggests that gangs often emerge in contexts of poverty and deprivation, though the way these conditions are defined varies. Many studies also concentrate on specific regions, leaving a comprehensive overview still a work in progress. Nevertheless, it can be argued that gangs — though often relatively small in scale — are a near-universal phenomenon, present across cultures and eras, from historical to contemporary times (Rodgers, 2019). As with any pūrākau, understanding these origins and trajectories helps us better grasp the present and anticipate the journeys that lie ahead. This is explored further in the following sections.

2.2 Western Perspectives

Figure 2.2: Daniel Tito Tangihanga, 2025 (own photo)

This section begins with an exploration of international gang dynamics, focusing on recurring themes and patterns observed across global contexts. A review of the literature consistently identifies violence as a central characteristic of gang activities worldwide (Winton, 2014). An international overview also underscores the problematic nature of gangs, given their extensive reach and influence. However, much of the existing research tends to concentrate on particular regions, often neglecting a more comprehensive understanding of gangs as a global phenomenon. This has implications for rangatahi Māori in Aotearoa, as the absence

of broad, comparative studies limits the ability to see their experiences within wider international patterns, and contributes to narrow, deficit framings.

2.3 Global Gang Research

Gangs are found in many locations around the world, with their characteristics shaped by the environments from which they emerge and by the broader political and social climates in which they are situated. In support of this view, Winton's *Gangs in Global Perspective* (2014) challenges the assumption that gangs are directly linked to poverty, arguing instead that they typically arise in contexts of significant marginalisation (Winton, 2014, p. 407). Winton also highlights that gangs often emerge as a societal response to changing economic and political structures, noting that aspects of globalisation — particularly shifts in labour markets — have contributed to their growth (Winton, 2014, p. 407). For this study, Winton's perspective resonates with the question of how marginalisation, rather than poverty alone, shapes rangatahi Māori experiences in gang-affiliated spaces, particularly in relation to their educational and employment pathways.

When reviewing global gang research, Pyrooz and Mitchell's (2015) chapter *Little Gang Research, Big Gang Research* in the *Handbook of Gangs* is regarded as one of the most comprehensive assessments of the field. They tracked the historical development of gang research, identifying five major eras. These eras illustrate how research focus and definitions have shifted over time, shaping not only scholarly understandings but also the social policies that directly affect rangatahi and their whānau

The first era, the **Classical Era**, began in the early 20th century through the works of Thrasher (1927) and Whyte (1943). This era gradually declined by the 1950s (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2015, p. 41).

The second, the **Golden Era**, marked a shift in focus toward delinquency studies. During this time, significant advances were made in abstract, operational, and empirical approaches, with contributions from Albert Cohen (1955), Walter B. Miller (1980), and Malcolm Klein (1997) (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2015, p. 41).

The third, the **Social Problem Era**, saw gang research shift from sociology to criminology and criminal justice (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2015, p. 41). Earlier definitions from the Classical and Golden Eras, such as Thrasher's comparison of gangs to playgroups or the focus on delinquent peers, were no longer sufficient. By this point, gangs were increasingly recognised as engaging in criminal and violent behaviours. This framing has particular significance for this thesis, as it reflects the ways rangatahi Māori are frequently positioned within deficit narratives, raising questions about how such stigma impacts their ability to articulate aspirations and navigate opportunities.

Pyrooz and Mitchell argue that the Social Problem Era continues to this day, with criminology and criminal justice dedicating more attention to gang issues than any other discipline. This orientation also reflects the current state of gang spaces in Aotearoa, which will be explored in more detail in this and the next chapter.

The fourth era, the **Empirical Turn**, began in the late 1980s and remains influential. It is characterised by three large-scale, longitudinal studies: the Denver Youth Survey, Pittsburgh Youth Study and the Rochester Youth Development Study, which were collectively known as the Programme of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency (1986) and the first Gang Resistance Education and Training programme, established in Phoenix in 1991 (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2015, p. 42). These projects helped build a substantial evidence base on individual-level gang behaviour, shaping policies that directly impacted those in gang spaces. For rangatahi Māori, this raises a critical question: how have global trends toward quantification overlooked cultural identity and lived experience, and how might a Kaupapa Māori lens rebalance this emphasis?

The fifth era, the **International Turn**, emerged in the early 21st century. While U.S.-based research still dominates the field, this era is marked by growing international collaboration among gang researchers, with cross-national dialogue expanding beyond American networks (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2015, p. 44). For this thesis, the International Turn highlights both opportunity and absence —

opportunity in drawing comparative insights, but absence in the sense that little work has focused specifically on Indigenous or Māori youth.
Looking back to the Classical Era, Frederic Thrasher's (1927) *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago* remains one of the most cited works in gang research. Thrasher saw gangs as symptoms of community disorganisation (Dimitriadis, 2006, p. 340), arguing they emerged from deficiencies in family life, religion, education, and recreation. He believed these institutions failed to provide young people with a sense of self-directed freedom (Dimitriadis, 2006, p. 341).

A key outcome of Thrasher's study was his systematic recognition of the *agency* of marginalised youth, making him the first social scientist of his time to do so (Dimitriadis, 2006, p. 345). The questions he raised remain relevant: What defines a gang? Who belongs? Where are gangs found? How are they organised? What is their relationship to the community? And what can be done to address them? (Dimitriadis, 2006, p. 336). These questions echo those guiding this thesis, particularly the exploration of how rangatahi Māori perceive and navigate their own pathways in the face of social and cultural constraints.

Thrasher defined a gang, within his 1920s context, as "an interstitial group formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict" (Thrasher, 1927, p. 57). He described the way young people constructed their identities and relationships through what he called the *situational complex* — a web of interconnected influences that can only be understood in relation to one another (Dimitriadis, 2006, p. 339). These influences included family, media, church, school, police, and public spaces such as parks and playgrounds. For rangatahi Māori, such a framing reinforces the need to understand pathway navigation not in isolation, but as emerging from interconnected relationships across whānau, community, and wider social structures.

A second influential definition came from the Eurogang Research network, a group founded by U.S. researcher Malcolm Klein in the late 1990s. Klein, a key figure of the Golden Era, had studied gangs since the 1960s. Seeking to determine whether gang issues in the United States were also evident in Europe, he convened a small group of researchers at a 1997 conference in Leuven, Belgium. This gathering led

to a series of Eurogang workshops and the establishment of a multi-method, comparative framework for European gang studies.
The Eurogang project, as the first of its kind, sits firmly within the International Turn. One of its first initiatives was to establish a universally accepted definition of a gang: "A street gang is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity" (Esbensen & Maxson, 2011, p. 6).

While widely used, this definition has been criticised for its logical circularity: illegal activity is both a defining feature and a measure of gang membership (Curry, 2015, p. 13). Klein and Maxson (2006) argue, however, that variation in gang nature and frequency of illegal activity makes this an essential criterion rather than a circular one (Curry, 2015, p. 14). The debate illustrates how definitions imposed from outside the lived realities of gang spaces can obscure the voices of rangatahi themselves, highlighting why this thesis asks: whose definitions matter, and how can the voices of rangatahi Māori and their whānau be centred?

Walter B. Miller, another prominent Golden Era researcher, emphasised that gang membership itself was not inherently criminal. Rather, his study on *Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency* (1958) found that those who were seen as "gang members" were more likely to be youth trying to achieve status within their own class structure of lower and working class communities. Miller (1975) later identified six key characteristics of youth gangs: (1) a distinct group identity; (2) identifiable leadership (either formal or informal); (3) defined set of activities; (4) affiliation processes; (5) coordinated efforts to achieve specific purposes, often including illegal activities; and (6) control over territory, facilities, or enterprises (Miller, 1975). These attempts at categorisation shaped institutional responses, but they rarely considered the aspirations or strengths of the youth involved — a silence this thesis seeks to redress.

Other definitions moved away from illegal activity as the main focus. Curry's (2015) chapter on defining gangs recognises the debate around including illegal activity in definitions, so focuses instead on "operational definitions over lexical definitions" as the most suitable approach for gang research (Curry, 2015, p. 27).

Curry cites Brotherton (1997), Conquergood (1997) and Garot (2010) as examples of researchers who define gangs without including law-breaking. Their descriptions of gangs as being "a social construction of forces outside the gang," (Brotherton, 1997), a "particular form of literacy in symbols associated with street life" (Conquergood, 1997) and "just one form of "performance" available to students who resist their social status in the authority structure of our society" underpin Curry's view (2015, p. 27). These perspectives align with my second research question, as they suggest the possibility of seeing rangatahi Māori not simply as problems to be solved but as young people actively shaping identities and strategies for survival.

Gangs and Society: Alternative Perspectives (Kontos, Brotherton, & Barrios, 2003) further challenged conventional definitions, arguing that legal and scholarly framings are never value-free or politically neutral. This perspective emphasised the complexity of gangs as reflective of the neighbourhoods in which they are located. Venkatesh (2003) highlights Sanchez-Jankowski's *Islands in the Street* (1991) as pivotal in shifting gang research beyond criminology and into broader sociological analysis. This shift parallels the kaupapa of this thesis, which locates the study within Māori and Indigenous Studies to better illuminate how cultural identity shapes the pathways of rangatahi Māori.

In this study, I position gang members and their affiliates as the primary experts, aligning with the Kaupapa Māori framework that underpins this work. The aim is to privilege the voices and experiences of those directly involved. While I sought definitions created by gang members themselves, none were found in the literature. This absence reinforces the importance of the current research, which deliberately centres rangatahi and whānau voices to ensure that their lived realities shape the definitions and understandings of gang spaces.

This study is situated within Māori and Indigenous Studies, rather than criminology, where much gang research has historically been located. This positioning is deliberate. The majority of gang members in Aotearoa are Māori, and the rangatahi growing up in these spaces are also Māori. Accordingly, this research re-centres the discussion from a Māori and Indigenous perspective, aligning with

the overarching aim of this thesis: to understand how rangatahi Māori imagine their futures, navigate pathways, and enact cultural identity within the realities of gang-affiliated spaces.

2.4 Conceptualising the gang

In conceptualising what a gang is and what it stands for, Avelardo Valdez (2003) highlights the importance of developing a typology when researching gang spaces. He argues that there is a need to recognise the significant diversity and differences that exist within gangs today (p. 13). His study primarily focuses on Mexican American gangs, offering valid comparisons across ethnic, racial, and subcultural groups (Valdez, 2003, p. 13). Although centred on Mexican American contexts, Valdez's work provides a strong foundation for this section. Notably, he outlines categories for gang formation based on social factors, which include social gangs, cultural gangs, delinquent gangs, and criminally oriented gangs. The concept of "party gangs" has also been introduced more recently as an addition to gang typologies (Valdez, 2003, p. 13).

Valdez further classifies gangs based on their level of organisation. Some are loosely structured, while others are highly hierarchical, featuring distinct leadership or more sporadic forms of authority. He also identifies organisationally unstable gangs characterised by impulsive behaviour. Researchers have likewise attempted to categorise gangs by their stages of development, from early formation to eventual decline, noting differences in stability or transience (Valdez, 2003, p. 15). Membership categories include "original gangsters" (older, founding members), regulars (long-term stable members), marginal members ("rascals" or "pee-wees"), and "wanna-bes" (potential or aspiring members) (Valdez, 2003, p. 15). Multigenerational factors also contribute to status within gangs. Additionally, as noted earlier, gangs are often categorised by the nature and extent of their criminal activities. Another criterion is the complexity of rules and rituals, developed primarily to protect honour, territory, and solidarity (Valdez, 2003, p. 15).

Valdez's summary highlights the emergence of new gangs increasingly disconnected from community-based family networks, with shifting economic conditions among urban minorities acting as a contributing factor (Valdez, 2003, p. 16). He suggests that minority groups form the majority of gang members, attributing this to high unemployment, poverty, welfare dependency, and single-parent households (Valdez, 2003, p. 16). Fraser and Hagedorn (2016) extend this view, noting that gangs are also convenient targets for authorities, providing justification for control and intervention, and sustaining patterns of urban segregation. This connects with Thrasher's enduring assertion that gangs cannot be understood in isolation, but only through their interaction with wider society and the state (Dimitriadis, 2006, p. 339). Public discourse reinforces this association, with gangs commonly portrayed as violent and dangerous, particularly in response to rising crime rates (Hauck & Peterke, 2010). Rodgers (2019) further observes that gangs are often mobilised strategically by politicians and authorities to advance broader government agendas.

The work of Victor Rios in *Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* supports these assertions, particularly in his analysis of the hyper-criminalisation of marginalised youth. Rios outlines the detrimental effects of stigmatising and humiliating punishments designed to "correct" already disenfranchised young people (Rios, 2011, p. 21). Similarly, Ailsa Winton argues that the origins of youth gangs lie less in criminality itself and more in identity politics framed by systemic marginalisation (2014). Her perspective connects with earlier discussion of Winton's (2014) work on marginalisation and resonates with this thesis's concern for how cultural identity shapes rangatahi experiences.

Winton acknowledges that violence is inherent in certain aspects of gangs, but she stresses the importance of situating this alongside other forms of violence present within gang spaces. She distinguishes between structural violence — manifested in exclusion from legitimate means of livelihood — and symbolic violence, expressed through the stigmatisation of groups and individuals (Winton, 2014). These insights echo observations made at my father's funeral, where stigma and exclusion were experienced directly.

The following chapters will explore these issues in greater depth. Rios further outlines several mechanisms of "punitive social control," such as incarceration, which have profound impacts on young people and ripple effects on the children of incarcerated adults (Rios, 2011, p. 37). His work draws on Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1978), which exposed how media and politicians sensationalised crime among Black communities to provide scapegoats in times of economic crisis (Rios, 2011, p. 7). Rob White (2013) builds on this by arguing that "gangs" are socially constructed labels emerging from moral panic, which misrepresent lived realities and distort public understanding (p. 2).

An important strand of this literature focuses on masculinity. Adam Baird's (2012) study of young men in Medellín, Colombia, explores how gang environments function as spaces for constructing masculine identities. His work, *The Violent Gang and the Construction of Masculinity Amongst Socially Excluded Young Men*, argues that the "ganging process" has a practical logic, offering a structured context for socially marginalised youth to forge identity (Baird, 2012, p. 180). Similarly, Hagedorn (2008) asserts that aggressive masculinity, expressed through territorial defence and power, is a dominant feature of gang culture.

Other scholars highlight how hegemonic masculinity is reinforced within gangs. Luyt and Foster (2001) describe masculinity as a collective process granting access to power and privilege, often expressed through domination of women and subordination of male peers (p. 2). Messerschmidt (1997) adds that gangs provide an environment for young men to navigate structured powerlessness (p. 70). Hypermasculinity, in this sense, is used to bolster self-esteem threatened by marginalisation (Luyt & Foster, 2001, p. 1). These findings align with earlier points on marginalisation, reinforcing that gang spaces both reflect and amplify structural inequalities, while simultaneously offering young men opportunities to assert identity and belonging.

Research also confirms the heightened role of violence in gang life. Curry, Decker, and Egley (2002) argue that membership significantly increases exposure to both violence and victimisation. Carlock and Lizotte (2015) highlight the broader impact of gang violence on entire communities (p. 186), while Decker (2007) outlines two

perspectives: violence as a function of turf disputes, and violence as a social process (p. 394). The latter aligns with Loftin's (1986) contagion theory, which views violence as reciprocal and escalating, spreading through social processes (p. 550). These debates also point to the intensification of violence as gangs become more entrenched, particularly through increased access to firearms (Carlock & Lizotte, 2015, p. 179).

Large gang membership numbers amplify these dynamics, fuelling cycles of retaliation and ongoing disputes (Decker, 2007, p. 394). Violence is also used strategically to recruit new members and strengthen unity (Decker, 2007, p. 395). In recent years, Winton (2014) notes a shift in gang research from questioning whether gangs exist to examining how and why they form, and the differences between them. This development reflects recognition that existing theories are insufficient to capture the complexities of contemporary gang life.

Overall, research on gangs is evolving, creating opportunities for new frameworks (Fraser & Hagedorn, 2018). Rigid definitions have proven inadequate; instead, it may be more useful to view gangs as existing along a continuum (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Winton, 2014). This perspective acknowledges the complexity of gang groups and connects directly to this thesis's kaupapa: to move beyond narrow criminological definitions and to centre the voices of rangatahi Māori in understanding how they navigate pathways within and around gang spaces.

2.5 Gender dynamics in gang space

Research has consistently shown that gangs are predominantly male-dominated in their formation, status hierarchies, and behaviours. Influential early studies—those that set the agenda for years—focused almost exclusively on male gang members (Campbell, 2010; Shaw & Skywalker, 2017; Cureton, 2000; Moore & Hagedorn, 2001; Gutiérrez-Adams et al., 2020). As a Classical Era researcher, Thrasher's male-centred perspective on female gang members shaped the literature for decades. This omission is significant for this study, as it signals how the voices of

wāhine Māori in gang spaces have likewise been marginalised, despite their central role in shaping whānau realities and influencing rangatahi pathways.

Thrasher (1927/1963) argued that typical social patterns of behaviour among females were contrary to gang activity; he perceived girls and women as non-violent and therefore unlikely to engage in such activity. While acknowledging that some females joined gangs, he considered them a small proportion of permanent members (Thrasher, 1927, p. 228). By associating males with violence and females with sex and promiscuity, he tied women's roles heavily to sexuality (p. 229). Building on this, Golden Era researcher Walter Miller (1975) classified female gangs into three types: (1) mixed-gender gangs, (2) auxiliary female gangs affiliated with male gangs, and (3) independent female gangs. These early framings highlight how wāhine were defined by their relationships to men, rather than by their own aspirations or agency, raising questions about how rangatahi wāhine in Aotearoa negotiate identity and opportunity within such environments.

Miller identified family problems, drug use, and abuse as key factors in female gang involvement (cited in Miller & Brunson, 2000, p. 422). Because early gang research centred male behaviour—especially destructive and violent acts—female gangs were often ignored or trivialised on the assumption that girls did not participate in such activities (Miller & Brunson, 2000, p. 424). Laura Fishman was among the first to challenge this, studying an African American female gang in Chicago in the 1960s and bringing attention to women in gangs. Her work anticipated the importance of centring lived experiences—a principle that underpins this thesis and guides the focus on rangatahi Māori voices.

Fishman's work highlighted the need to view women in gangs without demeaning, chauvinist, racist, or misogynistic bias (Fishman, 1995). A further landmark was Anne Campbell's (1992) study of three New York gangs, in which she spent six months with each group and centred one woman in each case. Campbell created space for these women to tell their stories—reflecting on past and present experiences and imagining futures. Her research underscored the importance of social networks and relationships formed within gangs, which often met needs for connection and human contact. This resonates with the aspirations of rangatahi

Māori, whose pathways are likewise shaped by collective belonging and whānau connection, whether supportive or constraining.
Joan Miller and Rod K. Brunson (2000) show how gender is unevenly treated in gang research. Scholars frequently mark female gangs as "gendered" while analysing male gangs primarily by activities, structures, and criminal behaviours. This creates the mistaken impression that gender matters only for young women (Miller & Brunson, 2000, p. 419). Research from other male-dominated contexts (fraternities, athletics, military) demonstrates the value of examining peer and organisational dynamics to understand how women are treated (p. 419). Moore and Hagedorn also note a common perception that male gang involvement—even when illegal—aligns with societal expectations of masculinity, whereas female gang membership is seen as deviant and a clear violation of traditional gender norms (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001, p. 2). For rangatahi wāhine, these gendered assumptions deepen stigma and shape the opportunities (or exclusions) they encounter in education and employment spaces.

Campbell (1990) argued that as gender roles shift, violence has become an increasingly salient aspect of some female gang identities. Vigil (2003) similarly observes that young women, like young men, face cultural conflict, poverty, and family/school challenges; they may also experience devaluation, constrained gender expectations, low self-esteem, and sexual abuse and exploitation (p. 3). Researchers disagree on the impact of female gang membership—some frame it as empowering or "liberating," while others emphasise harm or "social injury" (Curry, 1998; Campbell, 2010; Shaw & Skywalker, 2017; Cureton, 2000; Moore & Hagedorn, 2001; Gutiérrez-Adams et al., 2020). This debate is relevant here, as it highlights the tension between agency and constraint that rangatahi Māori wāhine must also navigate in their pathways.

In the United States, most identified female gangs are predominantly African American or Latina, with a smaller but growing number of Asian and White groups. In the United Kingdom, research—whether on male or female gangs—remains comparatively limited. Although scholarship has expanded, female perspectives and experiences are still under-represented (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001, p. 6). In Cape Town, South Africa, girls often join gangs for a sense of belonging in

fractured and violent communities (Shaw & Skywalker, 2017, p. 3). Across these studies, common themes emerge: gangs can offer refuge from victimisation at home and a means to assert independence from family, class, and cultural expectations. Yet experiences are not unproblematic; Moore and Hagedorn (2001) report sexual abuse and exploitation of female members by male gang members (p. 4). These findings invite reflection on rangatahi wāhine Māori—how do they reconcile belonging and survival with the risks of exploitation, and what pathways might support them to thrive beyond these contradictions?

The UK report *Girls and Gangs* recounts severe sexual and physical abuse experienced by female members (The Centre for Social Justice, n.d., p. 7). In Cape Town, sexual abuse, rape, and gender-based violence are common within gangs (Shaw & Skywalker, 2017, p. 4). Moore and Hagedorn (2001) also found that female gang members were frequently characterised by sexual activity and sometimes served as weapon carriers (p. 2). In the U.S., drug offences are among the most common crimes committed by female gang members.

Male gang members are generally more likely than females to commit serious crimes; however, because males outnumber females, arrest patterns may also reflect enforcement bias (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001, p. 5). Youth surveys show female gang members' offending rates are lower than those of male gang members but higher than those of non-gang females—and even non-gang males (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993, p. 6). Although many women in gangs report incarceration histories, reliable data remain limited. This lack of data echoes a broader research gap: the silencing of women's voices, which this thesis seeks to challenge by centring wāhine perspectives alongside those of rangatahi and pakeke.

One exception is Belknap and Bowers (2016), which includes a section on incarcerated gang women. Co-author Molly Bowers recounts serving five years of a 16-year sentence and describes the ethnic composition of women's gangs—African American, Latina, and White (p. 220). She notes differences in how these gangs functioned. For African American and Latina women, gang "family" was a central identifier; among White women, identifying as gang members was often not permitted, and affiliation was channelled through male partners. If a partner was

expelled, the woman was also expelled (Belknap & Bowers, 2016, p. 221). This underscores how membership can be tied variously to family or romantic relationships. Interviews with women leaders in Cape Town likewise indicate that, despite women's multiple roles, leadership structures remain patriarchal and largely controlled by men.

Even when not at the front of "gang wars," women often bear the consequences. Organisational instability increases risk for women who depend on key male members for protection from violence (Shaw & Skywalker, 2017, p. 4). In Miller and Brunson's study of Mexican American gangs, roughly half the members viewed female members as "possessions" (Miller & Brunson, 2000, p. 419). For rangatahi wāhine Māori, these dynamics raise pressing questions: how do gendered hierarchies within gang spaces intersect with broader systems of marginalisation, and how does this shape their ability to access education, employment, and cultural identity as pathways forward?

Sutton (2017) argues that girls and women in gangs experience multiple forms of oppression—within families and within gangs (in Gutiérrez-Adams et al., 2020, p. 292). Case studies by Gutiérrez-Adams and colleagues show common factors among female gang members (gender, class, histories of abuse), alongside important differences (nationality, race, sexual orientation, motherhood) (Gutiérrez-Adams et al., 2020). A cross-cultural constant is that most female gang members have children; while many male gang members also have children, caregiving responsibilities typically fall on women. When male gang members in Los Angeles were asked about key turning points, they emphasised the gang, drugs, or arrests; by contrast, women more often cited marriage and motherhood (Belknap & Bowers, 2016, p. 219). Despite this, the study of female gangs remains limited and methodologically challenging, often yielding unrepresentative samples (Belknap & Bowers, 2016, p. 223). This underscores the need for more comprehensive, culturally informed research on women's gang membership and affiliation—particularly work that recognises wāhine Māori not only as whānau anchors but also as rangatahi navigating their own educational and occupational futures.

2.6 Indigenous Perspectives

Figure 2.3: *Tyrone 'Awa' Maihi Tangihanga, 2025 (own photo)*

2.6.1 Indigenous Gang Space

A key difference between gang spaces from an Indigenous perspective lies in the context of their formation. Just as every waka carries the imprint of its builders, so too are Indigenous gang spaces shaped by the weight of colonial histories. These spaces did not emerge in isolation; they are carved out of social landscapes already marked by dislocation, alienation, and state control (Taonui & Newbold, 2016; Andrae et al., 2016). Importantly, Indigenous gang experiences are not uniform, for they developed in distinct historical and social contexts (White, 2009, p. 48). Yet what binds them together is the enduring legacy of colonisation, particularly the role of state-run systems such as social welfare and the criminal justice system, which have profoundly shaped Indigenous lives (Taonui & Newbold, 2016; Andrae et al., 2016; White, 2009, p. 48). An example can be seen in the work of Dr James Diego Vigil, who grew up in California and became one of the first barrio (Latino neighbourhood) scholars to write from an insider perspective (Weide, 2021, p. 1). Like a navigator mapping the stars from within his own sea, Vigil exemplifies the grassroots gang researcher, approaching his work as a 'homeboy' studying the community in which he was raised. His contribution was groundbreaking, both for his ability to build trust with marginalised populations in the U.S. and for his development of the Multiple Marginality theoretical framework (Vigil, 2003, p. 7). He is widely credited as the first "organic intellectual" from the barrio, showing

how street youth from the most excluded communities could earn doctorates, create new frameworks, and chart new directions for their people (Weide, 2021, p. 1).

Vigil's lived experiences of class exploitation and racial oppression shaped his holistic, multidimensional approach to gangs (Vigil, 2003, p. 8). He identified the multiple forms of marginalisation faced by barrio youth and showed how these intersect to compound disadvantage. His framework, later recognised under the broader concept of intersectionality, emphasises that marginalisation operates across multiple axes, with race and ethnicity as central (Weide, 2021, p. 2, 5). Vigil also reintroduced anthropological perspectives into Critical Gang Studies, using case studies and historical analysis to situate gangs in broader contexts (Vigil, 2003, p. 8). Perhaps most importantly, his work restores dignity and humanity to some of the most marginalised members of U.S. society, recognising their survival amid poverty, racism, xenophobia, patriarchy, and hyper-criminalisation (Weide, 2021, p. 2). These insights provide a bridge for this thesis, as the role of racial and ethnic identity as axes of marginalisation is central to understanding rangatahi Māori experiences in Aotearoa.

Further attention to Indigenous contexts was given at the symposium *Sites of Survivance: A Global Symposium on Indigenous Street Gangs* (2017). The gathering brought together researchers from Canada, Aotearoa, and Australia to discuss Indigenous street gangs. The symposium introduced the concept of "survivance," defined as *community survival and resistance to colonialism*—an expression of agency in response to historical legacies and ongoing impositions (Henry, 2017, p. 5). Here, Indigenous gang spaces and street lifestyles were recognised as providing belonging within violent settler structures. Survivance acknowledges both the historical shaping of Indigenous peoples through exclusion and control, and the continued effects of these processes in contemporary life. This framework is vital for delineating the boundaries within which Indigenous gang spaces must be understood.

The symposium also underscored how discriminatory policies and practices continue to shape Indigenous life chances (White, 2009). Métis scholar Robert Henry's research provides further insight. His Master's study in Prairie City

(Canada) examined youth gang members, noting that definitions of gangs were often mediated through media, films, and video games—predominantly American in origin (Henry, 2009, p. 8). Local First Nations communities expressed concern about gang labelling, fearing that it invited intensified policing and further marginalisation of Indigenous youth (Henry, 2009, p. 73). His doctoral work expanded this focus, analysing Indigenous masculinity and gang involvement through an Indigenous lens. Henry argued that Indigenous gangs are routinely defined by officials as deviant and placed at the lowest tier of organised crime, while media portrayals further cement stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as inherently violent (Henry, 2015, p. 9). He attributes this to entrenched socio-political histories of poverty, fragmented identities, and intergenerational trauma (Henry, 2015, p. 11). Central to his argument is that incarceration disrupts Indigenous male role models, shaping concepts of masculinity and identity in harmful ways.

In Australia, Rob White's research highlights the role of social identity in gang formation. He argues that identity—rather than ethnicity itself—is the key factor, with gangs often forming as expressions of resistance to ethnic labelling (White, 2008). From an Aotearoa perspective, Indigenous gang spaces are linked to alienation from ancestral lands, loss of language and culture, marginalisation within settler systems, and racial discrimination (Taonui & Newbold, 2016, p. 3). Taonui and Newbold (2016) observe that Indigenous-ethnic gangs in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand emerged in post-colonial states where Indigenous peoples became minorities (p. 10). For Māori, this has produced devastating effects: "Māori gang aggression is an outward projection of the internalised anger derived from oppressive socio-economic, political, and cultural forces. Internalised within a colonised society this anger may invert upon itself: the oppressed attack the likewise oppressed as a self-perpetuating, cancerous malevolence" (Taonui & Newbold, 2016, p. 10).

Andrae, McIntosh and Coster (2016) argue that the State remains the most powerful institution in Aotearoa, with both historical and contemporary forms regulating and shaping Māori lives (p. 121). They contend that colonisation and the suppression of Indigenous identity are causal factors in Māori over-representation in the

criminal justice system (p. 125). This pattern is reflected internationally, with Indigenous peoples in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa all disproportionately incarcerated (Andrae et al., 2016, p. 120). These outcomes are linked to criminological frameworks that view Indigenous peoples as "problem populations" requiring social control. Further, Māori are often represented in media through anti-Māori stereotypes, reinforcing narrow and stigmatised portrayals (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Peters-Little, 2003).

Research in Australia also shows the lived effects of racism. Ziersch, Gallaher, Baum, and Bentley (2011) found that First Nations peoples in Adelaide experienced disenfranchisement and barriers in almost every sphere of daily life (p. 64). Andrae, McIntosh, and Coster (2016) argue that criminological research itself contributes to silencing Indigenous perspectives, embedding settler-colonial logics of crime control (p. 121). It is within these contexts that rangatahi Māori growing up in gang spaces must navigate the dual challenges of marginalisation and colonisation while striving to forge pathways in education and employment.

Henry further observes that societal representations of Indigenous peoples create spaces and identities that marginalised youth may embrace. Media portrayals shape public perceptions of gangs, intensifying stigma (Henry, 2009, p. 8). For some Indigenous males, masculinity becomes closely linked to incarceration, gang involvement, and illegal economies (Henry, 2009, p. 13). These dynamics illustrate how colonial constructs—especially the criminal justice system—continue to define Indigenous lives and futures (McIntosh & Coster, 2017, p. 4). Like voyagers setting out into seas defined by shifting winds and dangerous currents, rangatahi Māori must learn to read these tides of marginalisation while steering their waka toward futures of possibility.

2.6.2 Indigenous Gender Dynamics

There is a limited body of research on Indigenous women who are, or have been, involved in street gangs, and more research is needed—particularly work that centres their life histories. The previous section highlighted the high incarceration

rates of Indigenous peoples, which result from the settler state's dominance through multiple systems and processes (McIntosh & Coster, 2017). However, far less is known about the incarceration rates of Indigenous women in gang spaces. Clark (2019) notes that for Indigenous women in Canada, the racialisation of incarcerated women is not new, leaving them especially vulnerable to discriminatory practices such as isolation and solitary confinement. Indigenous women often serve their entire sentence because they are labelled high-risk offenders—a designation not consistently applied to non-Indigenous women (Clark, 2019). Understanding their plight, Clark argues, requires an examination of Canadian colonialism.

This section highlights two projects that help outline key factors affecting Indigenous women in gang spaces. Much of the existing research on women in gangs is written by frontline workers who reflect on their professional experiences rather than from the perspectives of the women themselves. There are, however, exceptions, including Dennehy's (2000) study, which examined the lived experience of women in gang spaces and Robert Henry's (Amber et al, 2021) collaboration with indigenous women who were previously involved in street gangs or lifestyles on the streets.

The collaboration between Metis researcher Robert Henry and the indigenous women described above resulted in their book, *Indigenous Women and Street Gangs: Survivance Narratives.* The book offers critical insights on their experiences by centring the voices of Indigenous women themselves. Henry critiques the tendency of researchers to "speak for" Indigenous peoples, arguing that this reflects entrenched assumptions that they cannot articulate their own experiences (Amber et al, 2001, p. 17). Because settler societies persist in interpreting Indigenous realities through their own lenses, the risk of misrepresentation remains high (Amber et al, 2021, p. 17).

Henry argues that social inquiry is essential for developing intersectional approaches to the complex realities Indigenous women face. It also prompts critical questioning of why Indigenous women encounter disproportionately greater risks than non-Indigenous women in Canada (Amber et al, 2021, p. 20). Working alongside six Indigenous women, Henry co-constructed life narratives that revealed

experiences of violence, trauma, loss, and addiction linked to gang and street lifestyles. These narratives, grounded in lived experience, were both illuminating and groundbreaking (Amber et al, 2021).

The women's stories traced interactions with education, child welfare, policing, and justice systems, while also exposing the enduring impacts of settler colonialism, racism, and intergenerational trauma (Amber et al, 2021, p. 20). Their accounts are raw and unflinching, yet one of the most powerful themes is the refusal to be positioned solely as victims. Instead, the women emphasised resilience and strength in the face of immense adversity.

Henry terms these accounts "survivance narratives"—stories that embody survival, resistance, resurgence, and growth (Henry, 2021, p. 20). The women described experiences of violence, abuse, and institutional racism, but also framed empowerment in their ability to share their stories and assert agency. This challenges preconceived notions that women in gangs are merely exploited by men for sexual or other purposes.

In Aotearoa, Indigenous and ethnic minority gangs tend to admit more women than motorcycle gangs, although this usually occurs in unpatched "gangsta"-style gangs (Taonui & Newbold, 2016, p. 1). Nevertheless, research on Indigenous women in gang spaces remains sparse and largely male-dominated. Against this backdrop, the work of Te Atawhai Nayda Te Rangi, *He Reo Kō, He Reo Areare / The Liberated Voices of Wāhine within a Gang Collective* (2017), is particularly significant. Her project focuses on six wāhine associated with the Mongrel Mob, alongside her own lived experience within gang settings. Access to these women was possible because of established relationships, underscoring the importance of insider connections for meaningful engagement (Te Rangi, 2016, p. 33).

As an Indigenous insider researcher, Te Rangi reflected critically on her dual role. Post-interview reflections deepened her relationships with the wāhine and strengthened the research process. The women's stories highlighted cultural alienation, economic hardship, and the intergenerational abuse experienced by Māori men, women, and children in gang environments. These issues were later

echoed in a Waitangi Tribunal claim initiated by Te Rangi (2016, p. 47). Her work also confronted the prevalence of rape and abuse in gang spaces during the 1970s and 1980s, while documenting shifts in attitudes and practices in later decades (Te Rangi, 2016, p. 48).

The findings of *He Reo Kō* trace the journeys of these wāhine from mothers to grandmothers, culminating in positions of authority as family matriarchs (Te Rangi, 2016, p. 48). Education emerged as a key pathway for transforming lifestyles, improving employment opportunities, and strengthening whānau wellbeing. Te Rangi described these interviews as "highly contextualised, powerful sources of knowledge" that required her to be mindful of her responsibilities as a researcher (Te Rangi, 2016, p. 36). She also reflected on perceptions that her work positioned her as a spokesperson for all wāhine Māori in gang spaces (Te Rangi, 2016, p. 50).

Te Rangi further noted that, unlike her own departure from the gang environment years earlier, the women she interviewed remained within it. This distinction highlights the different vantage points from which insider researchers may approach such work (Te Rangi, 2016, p. 46). The women's continued navigation of gang life underscores the evolving and enduring challenges they face.

These two projects are highlighted for two reasons. First, they centre the lived experiences of Indigenous women, rather than positioning them as subjects of external study. In doing so, they allow for co-constructed narratives that affirm agency. Second, they build directly on earlier discussions of Indigenous peoples and colonisation, illustrating how poverty, alienation, and intergenerational trauma create the conditions for gang formation. This affirms the work of Indigenous researchers who argue that Indigenous gangs develop wherever colonised populations are relegated to marginalised underclasses (Taonui & Newbold, 2016; Henry, 2021; Te Rangi, 2016; Andrae, McIntosh and Coster, 2016).

2.6.3 Indigenous Youth and gang spaces

In her work *Indigenous Youth, Nationhood, and Politics of Belonging*, Joanna Kidman (2015) identifies that Indigenous youth do not necessarily align with the notions of belonging, home, civic harmony, and nationhood central to settler or Crown discourses. Instead, they often feel excluded or marginalised by such concepts (Kidman, 2015). Consequently, Kidman examines how Māori rangatahi navigate their own divergent interpretations of national identity. She positions Māori youth as active historical agents who create their own recollections and practices of belonging, which exist outside normative and official discourses (Kidman, 2015). She also acknowledges the diversity of Māori youth identities, emphasising that this diversity is rooted in past conflicts and the ongoing challenges of what it means to be Māori in a contemporary context. It is within this space of negotiation, Kidman argues, that counter-narratives emerge, offering Māori youth alternative histories and ways of belonging (Kidman, 2015).

I immediately draw connections to section 3.3.1, outlined in the next chapter, which speaks to the first generation of Māori gang members in Aotearoa. Their voices, captured within *The Gang – Report of Polynesian Youth Forum 1972*, reflect the ongoing impacts of what it means to be Māori in a society shaped by colonisation. Their accounts suggest the emergence of a counter-narrative—gang culture—as a distinct way of belonging. Furthermore, the work of Goodwill and Giannone (2017), *From Research to Practice: Bridging the Gaps for Psychologists Working in Indigenous Communities Affected by Gangs*, highlights the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in Canada across multiple systems, including child welfare, the judicial system, and community probation. These dynamics mirror the systemic challenges faced by Māori in Aotearoa, as explored in the following chapters.

Goodwill and Giannone's (2017) research notes that survivors of gang life often trace their pathways from government foster care to provincial or federal corrections. The overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in child welfare systems is linked to systemic racism, funding shortfalls, and policy deficiencies, particularly around Indigenous child welfare education (Goodwill & Giannone, 2017).

Compounding this, Canadian government policies have imposed tougher laws and harsher prison sentences for those identified as street gang members.

Gang policy and legislation, however, have failed to address the intergenerational trauma and systemic violence inflicted on Indigenous communities by colonial agendas (Goodwill & Giannone, 2017). The consequences for Indigenous youth can also be seen in White's (2009) research, which provides insights into Indigenous youth in Australia and the dynamics of their gang involvement. White shows that for many Indigenous young people, gang participation is deeply tied to family membership and obligations.

Goodwill's (2016) Canadian research further illustrates the impact of intergenerational transmission of gang culture, showing how children raised by gang-affiliated parents are strongly influenced by social learning and behavioural modelling, shaping their own trajectories. In Australia, White (2009) found that in Darwin, family engagement within gang spaces often constituted the only meaningful social contact for Indigenous youth. These young people simultaneously faced the daily realities of racism enacted by local non-Indigenous communities.

White's findings highlight systemic racism and discrimination as an everyday reality for Indigenous youth, leading to experiences of humiliation and social harm. Location became a flashpoint for these dynamics, as territorial identity combined with gang affiliation created concentrated forms of belonging (White, 2009). White argues that the origins of this disruption can be traced back to the forced separation of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands (2009, p. 9). This loss has produced precarious, often dysfunctional circumstances for many Indigenous youth.

Within this dysfunction, gangs function both as supportive whānau and as surrogate families, providing structure and identity (White, 2009). Yet the reliance on gangs also exposes the inadequacies of existing support initiatives and prevention programmes, which often fail to address the underlying complexity of these issues. A further challenge lies in the lack of expertise required to assist youth navigating

destabilising environments such as foster care, compounded by separation trauma and intergenerational gang membership.

Goodwill (2016) highlights the importance of "intervention" rather than "prevention," noting that current strategies fail because they do not recognise the deep personal attachments that bind individuals to their gang spaces. Her research underscores that these attachments—whether to surrogate families, sources of employment, or outlets for coping with stress—often outweigh external motivators for change. She argues that counselling approaches must centre attachment relationships, while incorporating culturally distinct concepts of Indigenous relationality, to strengthen connections to sources of identity and validation (Goodwill, 2016).

Another key point underpinning this understanding is that Indigenous nation-building is essential for reducing the effects of colonisation (Goodwill, 2016). Addressing the ongoing impacts of assimilation, cultural genocide, and racial marginalisation requires acknowledging how deeply colonialism continues to shape Indigenous realities. Since rangatahi are the future, addressing these legacies is both urgent and necessary, even if such change still feels distant.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined research on gang spaces from both Western and Indigenous perspectives. From the Western standpoint, poverty, lack, and social marginalisation are consistently identified as contributing factors to gang formation. Yet these perspectives also reveal a limitation: studying gangs in isolation from their wider social, political, and cultural contexts provides only a partial understanding.

In contrast, Indigenous perspectives offer a deeper, more holistic account of gang spaces, situating them within the enduring legacies of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and systemic exclusion. These frameworks emphasise not

only the structural conditions that contribute to gang formation but also the ways Indigenous peoples respond to such conditions through agency, resilience, and survivance.

Across the international literature, common themes emerge—marginalisation, violence, and identity—though their expressions differ depending on historical and social context. Importantly, Indigenous scholarship insists that these experiences cannot be understood apart from the colonial histories that shape them. This chapter has also highlighted the gendered dimensions of gang research, showing how women's voices and lived realities have often been silenced or marginalised, and how more recent Indigenous-led research is beginning to redress this imbalance.

Finally, a notable gap remains: there is little research focused on the children and rangatahi who grow up in gang-affiliated environments. Their stories—shaped by both whānau strength and systemic marginalisation—are central to this thesis. In the chapters that follow, these rangatahi voices are brought to the forefront, offering critical insights into how they envision their dreams, navigate pathways into education and employment, and draw upon their cultural identities to steer their own waka through turbulent waters. The next chapter shifts from the global context to the specific realities of Aotearoa, examining how Māori experiences of colonisation, dislocation, and resilience have shaped the formation of gang spaces here.

Chapter Three

The Aotearoa Landscape

Figure 3.1: *Tyrone 'Awa' Maihi Tangihanga, 2025*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by examining the underlying effects of colonisation for Māori, before moving to an exploration of the strategies that have been employed to resist its impacts on our lived experiences. It then considers the role of gangs in this broader context, and invites a conversation about the positioning of Māori in gang spaces, alongside the concepts of Tino Rangatiratanga (Māori sovereignty) and Mana Motuhake (self-determination and autonomy).

The chapter also traces the origins of gang phenomena from a uniquely Aotearoa perspective and discusses current developments while highlighting key challenges. In its final section, it turns to the resistive strategies used by Māori to confront these challenges in distinctly Māori ways. Building on the previous sections, it concludes with a focus on the environmental impacts of these dynamics on rangatahi and their whānau.

3.2 The Underlying Drivers

Figure 3.2: *Te Tipu Photo shoot, 2019 (own photo)*

3.2.1 Colonisation

The previous chapter explored the inherent attributes of Indigenous gang spaces, drawing on global examples alongside those from Aotearoa. Currently, New Zealand Parliament, 2022). As Māori, we are the Indigenous people of this land, with ancestral ties intricately connected to whenua – the lands upon which our ancestors lived and survived.

At the core of an Indigenous worldview lies a reverence for whenua and the ancient knowledges that reflect the interconnectedness of all living things. For Māori, this interconnectedness is embodied in the concept of whanaungatanga, which speaks to the relationality and responsibilities of living as whānau. Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal (1998) defined whānau as “literally meaning birth”, describing it as a group of individuals who share in the one life, assisting and supporting each other (p. 215). He further stated that “for connected Māori, the whole world is one whānau”, framing whanaungatanga as both a relational ethic and an ontological orientation. Therefore, whanaungatanga can be understood as the art of establishing relationships and interconnectedness. Within this framework, life is conceptualised

through relational connections, emphasising the interconnected nature of all things (Royal, 1998, pp. 215–216).

In contemporary society, however, there exists a risk that behavioural patterns and modes of connection—rooted in whakapapa and the knowledge of maintaining close physical and emotional bonds—may become disrupted. Such disruptions contribute to the fragmentation of individuals or groups. Disconnected Māori, operating within this context of fragmentation, experience interrupted identities due to the influence of colonial traditions and social norms. This results in a schism that, as previously noted, significantly contributes to numerous adverse outcomes experienced by Māori communities (Kruger et al., 2004, pp. 12–13).

Aotearoa has a long history of discrimination against Māori through the justice system, dating back to the 1950s, beginning with the removal of youth from their families into boys' homes, where state discipline, cultural suppression, and compliance were prioritised. The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care's (2024) summary of Māori survivors highlights the impact colonisation and discrimination have had on Māori. Over many generations, the Government, at times actively assisted by churches, pursued colonial and assimilationist policies aimed at breaking down Māori authority and social structures and asserting government control over Māori, their land and resources. The subordination of Māori power and authority, the deprivation of an economic base and dispossession of land and resources, and the denigration of culture and assimilation have caused severe intergenerational impacts that are still felt today. These, coupled with societal, structural, and institutional racism, have resulted in Māori bearing the brunt of inequities and distress, including poverty, intergenerational trauma and poor health, educational, and employment outcomes.

Again, contributing factors are outlined as colonisation (Andrae et al., 2016, p. 8). Deficit statistics remain for Māori in the education and employment sectors as well. Although recent figures show some improvement over the last decade, Māori still remain at the lower end of the education and employment spectrum. The enduring impacts of colonisation, including urbanisation, social isolation, and the disruption of whānau roles, continue to affect Māori communities (Cooper & Wharewera-

Mika, 2009, p. 5). These challenges are further exacerbated by the imposition of Western philosophies and practices within education, social services, and the justice system, which often conflict with Māori frameworks for wellbeing and development. These factors have influenced how whānau engage both individually and collectively at various stages of their development (Cooper & Wharewera-Mika, 2009, p. 5).

The disputes surrounding the English and Māori versions of the Treaty are well documented (Orange, 1992). The Māori version, known as Te Tiriti o Waitangi, was signed by a significant number of Māori chiefs and was intended to safeguard Aotearoa and the rights of Māori by affirming our Tino Rangatiratanga, as articulated in the three articles of Te Tiriti. In this version, it was clear that the Crown and its people were authorised to govern themselves within our country, with specific rights regarding land sales. In contrast, the English version, The Treaty of Waitangi, asserts the Crown's absolute sovereignty over all of New Zealand and its people (Orange, 1992).

In light of this, the current question is: what does Te Tiriti o Waitangi mean for Māori whānau today? The principles derived from Te Tiriti include the following: Treaty partners are required to act reasonably and in good faith; the Crown is granted the freedom to govern; the Crown has a duty to actively protect Māori interests; Māori retain rangatiratanga over their resources and taonga, and are entitled to all the rights and privileges of citizenship; and the Crown has a duty to consult with Māori (www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz). The principle that most strongly safeguards the interests of whānau is the Crown's duty to actively protect Māori interests. This principle mandates government support through the implementation and action of policies that directly align with the ways in which Māori whānau can be nurtured and protected on their path towards Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi has established a pathway for Māori to continue resisting colonial attempts to subjugate them. The colonisation of Indigenous peoples worldwide follows similar patterns of discrimination, and recent research increasingly acknowledges colonisation as a fundamental causal factor in the

ongoing detriment to health (Reid & Robson, 2007; Durie, 2017). In this context, specific connections between the processes of colonisation and violent behaviour within Māori whānau, hapū, and iwi have been identified. Kruger et al. highlight that the contemporary consequences of the breakdown and dysfunction within whānau and hapū have led to widespread whānau violence and systemic dysfunction (as cited in Cooper & Wharewera-Mika, 2009, p. 5).

The ongoing violence epidemic is pertinent to highlight in the context of the discussions surrounding violence, which is prevalent within gang disputes and environments. This issue extends beyond gangs, as the violence epidemic is widespread across the various structures that make up Māori communities, particularly within whānau, hapū, and iwi. While violence is present not only within Māori communities but also across ethnic groups throughout the country and globally, this study specifically focuses on the persistent violence affecting Māori, which can also be attributed to gang spaces in Aotearoa. For many whānau, violence has become a normalised aspect of daily life, persisting as a mode of interaction across generations (Wilson, 2016, p. 32).

The breakdown of traditional cultural practices that once provided alternatives to violence was catastrophic for Māori, contributing to the loss of protective factors that would have otherwise prevented the abuse of Māori wāhine and children (Cooper & Wharewera-Mika, 2009, p. 6). Research indicates that rates of family violence, including the abuse of children, are disproportionately higher within Māori populations compared to non-Māori populations. Kruger et al. (2004) characterise the violence within Māori whānau as a learned behaviour transmitted across generations, emphasising that it will take considerable time for whānau violence to be unlearned (p. 13).

The effects of whānau violence on Māori is described as "the most pervasive and profound because it violates us. Violence is the language of the powerless. The presence or absence of violence is indicative of the state of wellbeing or dis-ease of whānau, hapū, and iwi" (Kruger et al., 2004, p. 13). Kruger et al. describe the systemic response to whānau violence as a "naughty system," which is characterised by a punitive approach to the perpetrator and the isolation of the

victim within a system that punishes and reduces whānau violence to criminal and deviant behaviour without considering the context in which it is created and maintained.

Kruger et al. (2004, p. 17) further argue that this approach is anti-whakapapa, as it isolates the perpetrator as an individual, detached from their collective responsibilities and mutual obligations. Research indicates that alcohol and drugs play a significant role in many crimes, with Indigenous people being significantly more likely to be under the influence at the time of the offence (Allard, 2010). Statistics show that Māori individuals entering prison have often experienced high levels of exposure to family violence, with 60% of Māori inmates having previously been victims of family violence. Additionally, 63% of Māori men and 37% of Māori women in prison have prior convictions related to family violence. Women in prison, in particular, report exceptionally high levels of exposure to family violence victimisation, with 68% of women (compared to 52% of men) having experienced such victimisation. The literature in this area underscores a shared historical context, emphasising the strong link between the contemporary challenges faced by Indigenous peoples—such as high rates of poverty and violence—and the enduring impacts of colonisation.

Māori women face disproportionately high levels of harm and death, largely due to intergenerational family violence that has been perpetuated across generations. This violence contributes significantly to the physical and emotional suffering they endure, with some cases leading to fatal outcomes. Violence is passed down through generations, with Māori children being more likely to grow up in households where abuse and violence are prevalent. This cycle of violence becomes normalised due to the lack of opportunities for whānau to learn non-violent methods of interaction and child-rearing. Māori children are significantly overrepresented in child mistreatment statistics compared to other children in Aotearoa. Understanding how historical events like colonisation and injustices influence the current wellbeing of Māori and other Indigenous peoples is essential when addressing family violence. Recognising the impact of these past factors helps us to better understand the challenges Māori and Indigenous communities face in relation to family violence (Kruger et al., 2004; Cooper & Wharewera-Mika, 2009; Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Wilson, 2016; Dhunna et al., 2018).

In the twenty-first century, the effects of colonisation remain deeply entrenched, and Māori continue to navigate within settler frameworks that have come to be seen as the dominant, universal norm. The impacts of colonisation, as discussed in this section, are evident in the loss of the Māori language, the disruption of traditional Māori ways of life, beliefs, values, and philosophies, and the erosion of social structures and systems of discipline and justice, leading to a profound loss of identity. Additionally, colonisation has played a significant role in the formation of gang spaces. The long-term consequences of colonisation have left Indigenous peoples globally in a state of profound social, economic, and political marginalisation, resulting in severe and ongoing challenges that hinder their ability to heal (United Nations, 2018, pp. 6–7).

3.2.2 Tino Rangatiratanga – aspirations and tensions

Māori, as the Indigenous minority group in Aotearoa, face a continual struggle in navigating their position within society. Despite the ongoing challenges they encounter, Māori persist in striving for equal access to power and resources which were guaranteed under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, signed between Māori and the British Crown in 1840. The hardships Māori have faced throughout history as a result of constant breaches and the failure to uphold guarantees made by the Crown have been well documented.

This persistence is best captured in Ranginui Walker's (2004) work, especially his book *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou*, *Struggle Without End* which documents the struggle Māori have faced and continue to face in achieving equality and self-determination. Walker highlights the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundational document that has enabled Māori to pursue self-determination and find a path forward despite colonisation. The significance of Walker's work lies in its depiction of the resilience and resolve of Māori to reclaim Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination) and Mana Motuhake (sovereign autonomy)—the right to control their own futures from a distinctly Māori perspective (Walker, 2004).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2006) highlights the significant impact the neoliberal agenda of the 1980s had on Māori, which created substantial disparities not only between Māori and their non-Māori counterparts but also among Māori themselves. Deregulation and re-regulation of the economy, along with major reforms in education, health, and justice systems, were central to implementing the neoliberal agenda and contributed to the further destabilisation of Māori society. Māori have a long and rich history of actively resisting colonisation and fighting to maintain Māori identity, rights, and self-governance. Key examples of this include Kīngitanga (the Māori King Movement), the Māori Women's Welfare League, and the establishment of a Māori religious movement by Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana. In 1972, members of the activist group Ngā Tamatoa, Victoria University's Te Reo Māori Society, and the NZ Māori Students' Association presented their petition calling for the recognition and revitalisation of the Māori language. These actions reflect the ongoing Māori struggle for cultural and political autonomy.

This period is often referred to as the Māori Renaissance—a movement advocating for Māori self-determination through collective action, which stood in direct contrast to the neoliberal emphasis on free-market competition (Walker, 2004). Another significant response from Māori was the establishment of Māori-initiated institutions, starting with kōhanga reo (early childhood Māori language learning centres) in the early 1980s (Reedy, 2000).
The kōhanga reo movement had a profound impact on Te Ao Māori, igniting a resurgence of Māori cultural identity and language revitalisation. The first kōhanga reo was established in Wainuiomata, Wellington, followed by kura kaupapa (the Māori equivalent of primary schools), offering a learning pathway for tamariki who had attended kōhanga reo. The kura kaupapa philosophy is deeply embedded in the knowledge, attitudes, and values of Māori society. Wharekura were later established to extend Māori-medium education into secondary schooling. Wānanga were also established to provide culturally appropriate learning environments for Māori at the tertiary level. While initially focused on te reo and cultural programmes, wānanga now deliver a wide range of qualifications, including business and social work. The distinctive feature of wānanga lies in the values that guide these institutes; they are grounded in a predominantly Māori perspective while also being welcoming to people of all ethnicities (Reedy, 2000).

A marked contrast exists between the neoliberal agenda and the ethos of the Māori renaissance movement: one is based on free markets and individual rights, whereas the other promotes inclusivity and collective participation. In this context, we examine how Māori, as the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, have endeavoured to assert themselves as a self-determining people amidst the dominant influences of the settler state. The effects of these efforts will benefit future generations of tamariki and rangatahi Māori, providing them with spaces to affirm their Māori identity. This will help them feel secure in their cultural heritage, despite the external pressures they may face.

The marae serves as another significant symbol of Māori resilience in the face of colonialism. It represents the connection of people to cultural spaces and has remained despite efforts by the Crown through policies of assimilation and integration to diminish its influence (Aikman, 2015). Traditionally, the marae was the heartbeat of a hapū; it was the living quarters and was often fortified to protect from external threats. All daily activities took place within the marae space, or papakāinga/pā/kāinga, and it was the collective responsibility of all who resided there to care for it (Wanganui District Council, 2013).
Aikman (2015), in his work *Within the Fourfold: Dwelling and Being on the Marae*, speaks to the metaphysical dimensions of marae. He coined the term *fourfold* to symbolise the dimensions of Heaven, Earth, Divinity, and Mortals. He describes the marae as the living embodiment of the tūpuna after whom the wharenui is usually named. The gables, or maihi, represent the arms or fingers; the tāhūhū (ridgepole) forms the spine; and the poutokomanawa (central post) represents the heart of the ancestor. In this way, the marae is a space where descendants are sheltered within the embrace of their ancestors.

It is generally accepted that many Māori today are disconnected from their whakapapa and marae (Durie, 2007). Colonisation is widely acknowledged as the main reason for this disconnection (Pihama & Cameron, 2012; Smith, 2006; Smith, 2012; Pihama, Tiakiwai & Southey, 2015). Recognising these gaps has led to the creation of initiatives at whānau, hapū, iwi, and government levels to rebuild connections to Te Ao Māori, emphasising the importance of cultural customs and

practices for wellbeing (Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2021). Nonetheless, disconnection remains evident—in whānau environments, in the challenges Māori face in contemporary society, and on the marae itself, where practising and adapting tikanga continues to be difficult. Most significantly, this disconnection is often internalised: *Who am I? How do I fit? Where do I belong?*

The marae therefore remains both a symbolic and tangible representation of what it means to be Māori. It can be likened to a lighthouse, offering a beacon to call us home. In this way, marae represent safety—a haven for Māori amidst ongoing struggles to reclaim space and place. They stand as sites of resistance, alongside the wider Indigenous narratives of survival in the face of settler-state domination.

Reflecting on my own experiences of marae, there were times I recall strong participation, and other times when it was sparse. As a child, marae meant food, dishes, watching relatives converse, exploring the landscape, and sitting in the wharenui listening to kaumātua. I enjoyed singing when I knew the words, but struggled with the expectation to sit quietly. I came to understand that the pictures on the walls were relatives who had passed, tūpuna whose names adorned the wharenui.

As a teenager, however, marae became less appealing. I found it boring, weighed down by endless cleaning and chores. My perception shifted from comfort and safety to disinterest. Taima Moeke-Pickering's (1996) thesis on Māori identity within whānau highlights that identity formation is shaped by politics, location, and environment. During this period, I attended a Māori boarding school emphasising tikanga Māori and kapa haka. Being far from home, my connection to my marae waned.

At sixteen, I returned to Hamilton and attended a local high school. I opted out of kapa haka, treating Māori as a subject rather than a passion. Visits to the marae became infrequent. My mother, who had by then completed her university studies and was working for the local council, prioritised career and whānau life, and this too shaped our reduced presence on the marae.

My experience reflects Durie's (1999) observation that the culture of the marae exists outside everyday life for many Māori. I took my connection to marae for granted, assuming that belonging was guaranteed through whakapapa. Boarding school had expanded my view of Te Ao Māori beyond my own marae, and when I returned as an adult, I realised reconnection required choice and effort. My master's journey provided that opportunity, setting me on a path back to my marae.

Thus, marae are both safe spaces of belonging and sites of tension. They call us home, yet also confront us with questions of identity and belonging when disconnection has occurred. The anxiety of engaging with relatives who are strangers, despite whakapapa ties, underscores this tension. For Māori, the marae remains a critical anchor—sometimes distant, sometimes close—but always present as a site of identity, resilience, and return.

3.2.3 Expressions of Mana , Indigeneity and gang spaces

In traditional times, there was a clear understanding of who one was as Māori—an understanding that was whole and not yet fractured. Identity was anchored in one's hapū and reinforced through key landmarks: place of birth linked to whenua (placenta/land), maunga (mountain), awa (river), and moana (ocean). Knowledge was highly valued and expressed through pūrākau, karakia, and waiata, and reflected in whakairo and raranga—art forms often seen upon waka and within marae.

The importance of te reo Māori in transmitting knowledge is vital to maintaining culture, beliefs, and traditions. This transmission establishes the foundations upon which Indigenous identity and a sense of being Māori are built (Walker, 2019). Walker argues that Māori philosophy is a birthright and that revitalising it is essential to cultural reclamation—especially for those who have experienced disconnection from language and culture. At the same time, our experiences as Māori are not uniform: iwi and hapū have distinct identities shaped by their own histories, cultures, and traditions.

Markers of Indigeneity outlined by Walker include whakapapa links and understanding how these connections pertain to the self. The traditional kinship structure—whānau, extended whānau, hapū, iwi—emphasises Māori as a collective people. How these groupings influence Māori identity in contemporary times warrants further examination. What role do marae, hapū, and iwi play for whānau involved in gang culture and its spaces? As discussed earlier, early gang formation among Māori often drew from those disconnected from Te Ao Māori due to colonisation and assimilation, offering context for the fragmentation of traditional kin structures and identities seen in the over-representation of Māori within gang spaces.

The challenge lies in the limited evidence about how actively Indigenous identity and culture are practised within whānau associated with gang spaces. While there are visible examples of disconnection, this cannot be generalised. Gang spaces are territorial and, like hapū contexts, each is unique and diverse.

Further research is needed to understand how gang-affiliated whānau locate themselves as Indigenous within these spaces and whether some choose disconnection—and why. During interviews for this thesis, I spoke with the leader of a gang space whose late father spent some thirty years shaping their group upon a Te Ao Māori philosophy. Chapter Six discusses that interview in detail, but several questions arise here: does explicit alignment with Te Ao Māori indicate that an Indigenous gang space exists in Aotearoa—and to what extent? How do such groups position themselves within a broader Indigenous context? Linking back to the marae discussion, we must also consider the quality of the relationship between connected and disconnected Māori who are gang-affiliated, and how that relationship impacts marae: can it be reciprocal and respectful, or do power dynamics require one to submit to the other—and why does that matter?

My observations of hapū/marae spaces suggest they can sometimes be judgemental—often, understandably so. A fictional example illustrates this: hapū whānau who are gang-affiliated have created havoc in the past; other whānau become wary whenever they are on the marae or in the rohe. The gang-affiliated

whānau sense this wariness, feel judged, and resist connection. That resistance can become intimidation, generating resentment on both sides.

Within my own iwi, there appears to be little direct relationship between iwi structures and gang-affiliated whānau, although connections between iwi, hapū, and marae remain. How, then, might relationship-building be facilitated when tensions have persisted for years? One pathway is the Hui Whakatika process (Bateman & Berryman, 2009), a Māori-grounded approach akin to restorative justice.

Hui Whakatika rests on four key concepts: (1) reaching consensus through collaborative decision-making; (2) reconciliation that seeks a settlement acceptable to all parties; (3) examining the broader context of wrongdoing, recognising that fault may lie on both sides and avoiding blame-apportionment; and (4) restoring peace, prioritising the return of harmony over simply determining whether a breach occurred (Bateman & Berryman, 2009, p. 8). These are enacted through four phases that work together to achieve durable resolution.

Given this context, there is a potential path forward for whānau who are disconnected and gang-affiliated. By addressing the intersections of cultural identity, community belonging, and social support, the pursuit of Mana Motuhake for all Māori—including those in gang spaces—becomes tangible. Recognising these factors can help restore Mana Motuhake and contribute to the overall wellbeing of our people, including those navigating the realities of gang-affiliated life.

3.3 Aotearoa Gang Landscape

Figure 3.4: *Waikato BP Rangatira, 2025 (own photo)*

3.3.1 History

The previous sections provided an overview of the historical placement of gang spaces in Aotearoa. This section identifies the specific historical factors that directly contributed to their emergence. Building on earlier discussion of colonisation and urbanisation, the rise of gangs in Aotearoa was also strongly shaped by economic cycles. Gilbert notes periods of prosperity—particularly from the 1960s to the 1980s—when ample employment enabled early members to prosper. Conversely, downturns in employment coincided with growth in gangs and membership, as unemployment and limited prospects drove people toward gangs as a coping response. Harry Tam similarly highlights the effects of colonisation and urbanisation as markers of gang development (H. Tam, personal communication, 26 July 2019). Gilbert further stresses that for Māori, colonisation and assimilation intensified these impacts, reflecting wider Māori experience. Kelsey and Young (1982) also shows how media shaped early perceptions, documenting a shift from a "mild gang problem" to a major "social crisis" in 1978–1979—"the year of the gangs." Government responses matched public concern with hard-line suppression and expanded police powers, mirroring international patterns discussed earlier. At

the same time, media often recast gangs as a "racial problem," with some commentators reading gangs as symbols of Māori self-autonomy (Tino Rangatiratanga), despite the participation of Pacific and other ethnic minorities (Kelsey & Young, 1982).

In the 1970s and 1980s, multiple conferences and reports attempted to address the "gang problem," including *The Gang – Report of Polynesian Youth Forum 1972* and the *Report of the Committee on Gangs 1981*. These generated recommendations such as subsidised work programmes, subsequently adopted by government. Tam notes that membership declined during this period (personal communication). Jarrod Gilbert's *The Rise and Development of Gangs in New Zealand* (2010) remains a detailed account of gang history and culture in Aotearoa.

Gilbert's doctoral research is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive. Some, however, still viewed it as the work of an "outsider," raising questions about legitimacy and authenticity. Even so, the study has been recognised as influential in shaping government policy related to gangs. Extending this history, Carl Bradley's paper (2020) examines the rise of outlaw bikers and the impact of deportations of New Zealand–born citizens from Australia. He documents the arrival of motorcycle clubs such as the Rebels (2011), Bandidos (2012), and Comanchero (2018); notes Highway 61's Australian chapters by 1995; and observes Mongrel Mob and Black Power presences in Australia. Bradley emphasises the two-way movement of people and chapters across the Tasman and the deep entanglement of the two gang ecologies.

This trans-Tasman circulation remains salient. The presence of "501" deportees and their ties has become a normal feature of Aotearoa's gang scene, while government has introduced—or proposed—laws mirroring Australian approaches to the "gang problem." Allegations of discrimination and human-rights concerns about Australia's policy continue to be raised, alongside questions about the impact of 501s in Aotearoa. Gilbert (2022) reports evidence of police bias in the over-categorisation of "gang members," with 22,251 individuals flagged with gang alerts despite official figures listing 8,175 known members in 2022.

Set against these dynamics, rangatahi in gang-saturated areas face heightened risks and greater exposure to policing. This intersects with one of the most traumatic periods in Aotearoa's social history: the harms produced by state welfare policies. The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, established in 2018 to investigate abuses in State and faith-based care between 1950 and 1999, found direct links between placement in State care and later involvement in gang environments. Survivors described being removed from whānau and culture, feeling forgotten by society, and turning to gangs for belonging and non-judgement.

Testimony to the Inquiry detailed physical and sexual abuse, resulting desensitisation to violence, normalisation of abuse, and deep distrust of government systems. This early-life trauma fostered hostility toward state authority. Many gang members experienced severe mistreatment in State care, and that legacy continues to shape outcomes for their children.

This section has outlined the historical drivers of Aotearoa's patched street-gang landscape. The next section provides an overview of the current gang environment.

3.3.2 Current Landscape

Aotearoa is currently governed by a newly elected three-party coalition (National, ACT, NZ First). The coalition tabled the Gangs Legislation Amendment Bill, comprising four key parts: (1) criminalising the display of gang insignia in public; (2) empowering police to issue dispersal notices to prevent gang members from gathering in public for up to seven days; (3) creating non-association orders prohibiting specified offenders from associating or communicating for up to three years; and (4) amending the Sentencing Act 2002 to treat gang membership as an aggravating factor at sentencing (Gangs Legislation Amendment Bill 23-1, 2024).
The Attorney-General advised that the proposed insignia ban limited the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, and that dispersal notices were inconsistent with the right to peaceful assembly. Despite these concerns, the Government argued the measures

were necessary to address escalating gang-related harm, and the Gangs Act 2024 was passed.

During the bill's first reading, Opposition Police spokesperson Hon Ginny Andersen cautioned against policies that "push away" core issues rather than address underlying drivers, suggesting such approaches provide only temporary relief and risk further harm. She argued that "bills like this just incarcerate the next generation of rangatahi in New Zealand in another cycle of crime and offending" (New Zealand Government, 2024).

My mother and I both work in community service and regularly witness these challenges locally and within our own whānau. Our family has a long history of gang involvement through our late father and his whanaunga. We have endured repeated imprisonments over decades—experiences that have been profoundly traumatic for our whānau and community. Crucially, the difficulties we face require solutions beyond imprisonment. From what we see, the system continues to suppress our people across generations, and we agree with Andersen that this law risks prolonging harmful cycles and creating further barriers to wellbeing. Meanwhile, the gang landscape has been shifting—extensively documented in New Zealand media (Husband, 2017). These shifts have also been evident throughout my doctoral research since 2018.

When I first drafted this chapter, media attention was heavily focused on the Waikato Mongrel Mob Kingdom chapter. Numerous articles profiled community work and whānau-focused initiatives, including support for the Muslim community after the Christchurch mosque attacks and the establishment of a women's branch within the chapter—initiatives that were self-directed and oriented toward improving outcomes for members and their whānau (Kerr, 2019; Harris, 2019; Small, 2020; Wall, 2021).
Similar efforts appeared to be gaining momentum in other gang communities, including rehabilitation programmes facilitated by gangs for members and whānau (Walters, 2021; Peacock, 2022). Harry Tam—a lifelong Notorious Mongrel Mob member and former senior policy analyst—was appointed to a prominent role with the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (Iles, 2019; Wall, 2021;

Scotcher, 2020). Senior Black Power figures such as Denis O'Reilly, Eugene Ryder, and Genesis White also gave extensive interviews (Husband, 2017; Fisher, 2020; Husband, 2021). Media reported on the return of "501" deportees and their impact (Lee-Biddle, 2019; Bradley, 2019; Small, 2022). During COVID-19, despite early concerns that gangs might spread the virus, gang networks were enlisted to help reach whānau on the margins with public-health messaging and vaccination support (Fisher, 2020; Corlett, 2021; McClure, 2021).

Alongside these stories, other coverage remained strongly negative—mass gatherings for tangihanga, serious violence, and large drug and weapons seizures (Keith, 2022; Halpin, 2022; Donaldson, 2024). Following Cyclone Gabrielle (Hendry-Tennent, 2023), there were reports alleging looting by gang members.

A significant gathering in Manukau saw diverse groups assemble in support of the Royal Commission hearings (Hendry-Tennent, 2023; Doyle, 2023; Frykberg, 2023; Brettkelly, 2023). Members of Parliament both supported and criticised gang-led initiatives (Godfery, 2022; Gledhill, 2023; Iasona & Hendry-Tennent, 2023). Throughout, media have scrutinised gang dynamics—as is their role. While most coverage is negative, some reporting offers useful insight into underlying structural issues.

Many articles also note the presence of children in gang spaces (Godfrey, 2022; Parkes, 2022). For clarity, this thesis primarily refers to patched street gangs. As Gilbert and others observe, Aotearoa's gang culture traces back to the bodgies and widgies of the 1950s, influenced by rebellious youth subcultures from the UK and US. This trend evolved into Hells Angels and other "bikie" groups in the 1960s. Early gangs were largely Pākehā; less widely known is that the Mongrel Mob began as predominantly Pākehā youth in Hastings and Wellington (Gilbert, 2010).
The emergence of "patched" gangs in the 1970s—particularly Mongrel Mob and Black Power—saw membership increasingly drawn from Māori and Pacific communities (Gilbert, 2012; Taonui & Newbold, 2016). In their formative phase, these groups were often labelled "Polynesian gangs" or "ethnic/Indigenous gangs" (Polynesian Youth Forum, 1972; Gilbert, 2012; Taonui & Newbold, 2016). As discussed earlier, labels carry significant consequences for Indigenous peoples,

especially when "gang" is laden with negative societal connotations (G. Smith, 1997, 2003; Pihama, 2015).

Those with deep, lived understanding of gang spaces often distance themselves from the label "gang." Harry Tam, for example, uses "hard to reach" to describe people located on the margins rather than "gang members" (Hard2reach, 2018). Yet, after ~60 years of embedded presence in some communities, many—including members—embrace the label "gang" as an identity marker. Whether adopted consciously or unconsciously, positively or negatively, it plays a central role in Aotearoa's current landscape. Because members themselves commonly use the term, this thesis will continue to do so; and by centring the voices of rangatahi and their whānau, the specific spaces under discussion should be clear to readers.

3.3.3 Challenges

When considering children growing up in gang spaces, it is useful to return to *The Gang – Report of Polynesian Youth Forum 1972*. The young people in that forum became the fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers of many rangatahi in this study. Beginning with their accounts helps contextualise what current research reveals about children in similar environments today. A key issue raised by those early members was their negative experience of the New Zealand education system—a theme this thesis picks up later in relation to pathway navigation.

Disrupted schooling was identified as a significant factor drawing Māori youth toward gangs rather than sustaining engagement in education. In a similar vein, the Ministry of Social Development's reports—*What Works: Improving outcomes for children of gang-involved parents* (Superu, 2015) and *Adult gang members and their children's contact with MSD service lines* (2016)—paint a stark picture: elevated risks of abuse and neglect, exposure to violence, and clustering of factors associated with poor life outcomes. The precarity of children's position is tragically illustrated by incidents such as the fatal drive-by shooting of two-year-old Jhia Te Tua in Whanganui (2007) and the East Coast case in which a four-year-old witnessed her father's murder (Gisborne Herald, 2016). Under the then National

Government's Whole-of-Government Action Plan on Gangs, the Ministry of Social Development commissioned an analysis to gauge the scale of the issue.

That action-plan work collated cross-agency statistics and advocated data sharing to "profile" gang families; however, it did not meaningfully account for diverse lived realities or address deeper structural drivers. New Zealand research continues to report grim outcomes for rangatahi—higher risks of violence exposure, offending, unemployment, disengagement from schooling, and alcohol and drug harms (Taonui & Newbold, 2016). The question, then, is whether growing up in gang spaces increases the likelihood of these pathways. While such risks are not exclusive to gang-affiliated whānau, they disproportionately affect rangatahi Māori—consistent with the broader inequities outlined in earlier chapters.

Professors Alexander Gillespie and Claire Breen (2022) argue that gang-related harm in Aotearoa is highly politicised: public debate often lacks historical context and long-term vision, with gangs used as "whipping boys." Denis O'Reilly has echoed this view, and Harry Tam contends that treating gangs primarily as a political problem obscures underlying socio-economic drivers; he calls for depoliticisation so those drivers can be addressed. Gillespie and Breen (2022) propose a co-constructed accountability framework with transparent targets and indicators, and caution that punitive laws should be evaluated within a wider social policy context rather than in isolation.

Within that wider context, impacts on rangatahi pathway navigation become clearer. Media coverage has noted instances where sentencing considered the developmental harm to children and the rehabilitative potential of maintaining parental roles. McIntosh and Curcic (2022) link urban youth gangs to broader whānau and neighbourhood dynamics—intergenerational membership, poverty, unemployment, weak school engagement, overcrowding, and under-resourced communities. Basic needs—food, sleep, clothing, shelter—are foundational; without housing stability, children's chances of sustaining education and wellbeing are severely compromised.

Gang-affiliated whānau make up a notable share of those in emergency housing. Initially conceived to relieve housing scarcity, the system has also been associated in media reporting with episodes of violence, intimidation, drug activity, and exploitation (Desmarais, 2022; Otago Daily Times, 2021; Patterson, 2021). Such coverage has practical consequences, further reducing already limited rental options for these whānau.

Lewis et al (2020) adds an essential lens for wāhine Māori, showing how housing policy has historically functioned as social control over Indigenous peoples. They document the stigma directed at gang-affiliated wāhine—the presumption that they facilitate neighbourhood crime—and notes their concentration in low-income areas with significant social housing and long-standing "gang territory" labels.

Because of such stigmas and imagery, wāhine and their whānau face continual scrutiny and sanctions not only from law enforcement but also landlords, property managers, and opportunistic actors (Lewis et al, 2020). Their analysis also resonates with the challenges ex-prisoners face when seeking accommodation and the way housing precarity intertwines with violence and re-offending risks. Taken together, these threads reinforce a central argument of this thesis: the complexities surrounding gangs in Aotearoa cannot be understood—or addressed—without a holistic view that integrates historical context, socio-economic conditions, and intergenerational realities. This aligns with earlier chapters' emphasis on the enduring effects of colonisation and sets up the need to centre rangatahi voices as we examine how they imagine futures, navigate education and employment, and draw on culture to steady the waka.

3.4 Environmental Impacts

Figure 3.5: *Tyrone 'Awa' Maihi Tangihanga (own photo)*

3.4.1 Whānau

This section asks: what is the role of whānau within gang spaces? Building on earlier discussion of Aotearoa's gang context, three factors strongly shape whānau experience: (1) the constraints of marginalisation documented in local research; (2) the cumulative effects of colonisation that have produced and sustained many gang spaces; and (3) emerging, though uneven, dynamics of whānau-led empowerment within some gang contexts.

Thinking on this third point is still developing and dedicated, whānau-centred studies of gang-affiliated family life in Aotearoa remain limited; with much of the available material coming from administrative or criminology-focused sources (Superu, 2015; Ministry of Social Development, 2016), underscoring the need for the present study. The literature and media ecology indicate that high-risk factors are embedded in many gang spaces and are often amplified by sensational coverage. In dominant public narratives, gang culture is equated with criminality, drug and alcohol harm, and violence against women and children (Small, 2020). When this becomes the master story, whānau are positioned as disempowered and displaced, experiencing disproportionate poverty and stigma.

At the same time, research on Māori wellbeing shows whānau as protective systems that foster love, support, and stability, with measurable benefits for mental health, housing security, sexual health, and substance use. Qualities such as coping, appreciation and affection, and positive communication contribute to stronger health outcomes (NiaNia et al., 2017). Complementing this, Roguski and McBride–Henry (2020) describe how societal labelling and ongoing marginalisation—rooted in colonisation—fuel cycles of social exclusion for gang members and their whānau, underscoring why generic "health promotion" often fails for those on the margins.

Interventions that interrupt these cycles prioritise reconnection to whakapapa and cultural practice, affirm Māori identities and agency, and strengthen positive family and peer relationships. Evidence links high self-esteem and optimism with improved mental health (Rata, 2020; Rolleston et al., 2021; NiaNia et al., 2017). Supporting flourishing whānau requires a holistic approach—hinengaro, wairua, tinana, and whānau—and an ethic of relationship to whenua (Rolleston et al., 2021). Culturally grounded initiatives that build secure Māori identity show promise in reducing ill-health and enhancing psychological wellbeing (Rata, 2020). Read alongside earlier sections on whanaungatanga and Te Whare Tapa Whā, this points to whānau as both a site of risk under colonial conditions and a primary vessel of resilience for rangatahi navigating their pathways.

3.4.2 Rangatahi

Captured in Borrell's (2005) study *Living in the city ain't so bad: cultural diversity of South Auckland rangatahi*, many rangatahi reported either personal involvement in gangs or having whānau in gangs. Borrell noted an interesting correlation: some youth with family ties to the Mongrel Mob or Black Power gravitated toward US-style groups (Bloods/Crips) that used the same colours, even while preferring these American labels over longstanding Aotearoa street gangs (Borrell, 2005). This suggests symbolic affiliation rather than simple imitation and aligns with Chapter Two's global literature showing how international gang symbols are reworked within local histories and identities rather than copied wholesale.

This point helps dispel the view that South Auckland youth gangs merely mirror US gangs. The pattern is consistent with *The Development of Gangs in New Zealand* and with Gilbert's work, which observes a decline in longstanding patched gangs (e.g., Black Power/Mongrel Mob) alongside growth in Bloods/Crips-style groups (Gilbert, 2010). Contemporary fashion and music undoubtedly influence rangatahi identities—visible on our streets, in homes, and on marae—yet these influences intersect with Aotearoa-specific conditions discussed earlier in the thesis, not replace them.

To probe family dynamics more closely, I turn to Young et al. (2014), *A Question of Family? Youth and Gangs*. From a UK perspective, they link gang membership to family instability and dysfunction, citing "poor parental supervision, substance misuse, and abuse," while also emphasising external factors such as "poverty, negative school experience and low academic attainment" (Young et al., 2014, p. 172). These structural drivers echo Chapter One's discussion of education as a site of challenge for rangatahi Māori. A caution follows: the family-dysfunction pathway is often foregrounded without equal attention to rangatahi who grow up in gang spaces yet choose different routes into education and employment. That overlooked cohort is central to this study; by centring their experiences, the thesis addresses a gap in the literature and examines how possibility, cultural identity, and whānau support enable alternative pathways.

Despite its importance, the evidence base on rangatahi in gang spaces is thin in Aotearoa. Existing work and administrative reporting skew toward adults—offending, enforcement, and service use—so children and youth typically appear only as extensions of adult "cases" rather than as narrators of their own lives (Superu, 2015; Ministry of Social Development, 2016). Where youth are visible, data are often problem-oriented (notifications, exclusions, police contacts) and rarely disaggregate by age, gender, iwi/hapū connections, or gang type (patched vs. Bloods/Crips-style), making it difficult to trace diverse pathways or protective factors identified elsewhere in this thesis (e.g., whanaungatanga, cultural identity). International literature notes similar blind spots—male- and adult-centric frames, limited attention to girls/young women, and a dominance of criminology lenses

(Rios, 2011; Moore & Hagedorn, 2001; Miller & Brunson, 2000)—which further underscores the need for youth-led accounts.

There are also structural reasons for the gap. Ethical sensitivities, mistrust of institutions, and stigma can deter participation; definitional ambiguities (who counts as "gang-affiliated" in a whānau context?) complicate sampling; and cross-sectional snapshots miss the longitudinal transitions that matter for education and employment. As a result, whānau dynamics, cultural anchors, everyday schooling experiences, and the aspirations of rangatahi in these spaces are under-documented, while media narratives often stand in for evidence (see also Winton, 2014; Taonui & Newbold, 2016; Gilbert, 2010).

This thesis is an attempt to respond to lack of voice for rangatahi in these spaces. Using a Kaupapa Māori, pūrākau-informed approach, it centres rangatahi voices and whānau perspectives to illuminate how young people imagine their futures, navigate school-to-work pathways, and mobilise culture and support in gang-affected contexts. In doing so, it complements adult-focused reporting (Superu, 2015; Ministry of Social Development, 2016), extends Borrell's (2005) insights on symbolic affiliation, and contributes youth-specific, Aotearoa-grounded evidence to a literature that has historically overlooked these stories.

3.4.3 Development

The work of Dr. Arama Rata (2015), *The Māori Identity Migration Model*, examines threats and opportunities for Māori youth identity development. Rata argues that prevailing theories of Māori youth identity often ignore its fluid nature and overlook the multiple influences rangatahi draw on when adopting particular identity positions (Rata, 2015). In parallel, Mason Durie's markers of Māori cultural identity include whakapapa, marae participation, whānau connections, whenua tupu (ancestral land), contact with Māori people, and te reo Māori (Durie, 1995).
Participant data in Rata's study indicate that these cultural affirmations identified by Durie were not prioritised within participants' schools. Negative stereotyping

and racism were reported as deterrents to engaging in cultural settings. Rata also notes that people of Māori descent may choose whether or not to self-identify as Māori; from this she derives individual and group factors with sub-themes of identity aspirations and identity mobility (Rata, 2015, p. 7).

Identity aspirations concern how positively or negatively participants feel about being Māori. Identity mobility refers to how easily participants shift between identity spaces (Rata, 2015). Read alongside rangatahi who grow up in gang spaces, the model is useful because it centres context—helping to gauge the push–pull between Māori cultural engagement and mainstream engagement across the multiple spaces rangatahi must navigate.

This navigation is demanding, and identity is a key component of healthy development (Ministry of Social Development, 2016). In Aotearoa, Positive Youth Development (PYD) is defined as "an approach that guides communities in the way they organise programs, people and supports so that young people can develop to their full potential" (Jansen et al., 2010, p. 32). PYD resources encourage holistic work with rangatahi using models such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, the 5 Cs, and A Biological Mandate—aligning with earlier sections that emphasised whanaungatanga and kaupapa Māori framings (Durie, 1995; Jansen et al., 2010).

The 5 Cs articulate PYD goals: Competence, Character, Connection, Confidence, and Caring/Compassion (Jansen et al., 2010). A Biological Mandate stresses creating environments and relationships that allow rangatahi to discover and contribute their inherent wisdom—supporting youth to author and share their own stories. A second outcome—developing connected communities—recognises that strong community ties are vital for child and youth wellbeing.

One model especially relevant here is *The Four Worlds of a Young Person – A Socio-Ecological Perspective* (Jansen et al., 2010). It maps four worlds—whānau, community, school/training/work, and peers. Placing rangatahi in gang spaces at the centre makes visible the interdependence of these worlds; like Te Whare Tapa Whā, positive development requires coherence across all four.

From a traditional Māori perspective, youth development is illuminated in the research project *Hei Tikitiki – Māori Rites of Passage & Youth Development* (Caddie & Ross, 2011). Involving more than 100 pakeke, kaumātua and kuia, the project aimed to share knowledge so Māori youth workers, rangatahi and whānau could explore traditional practices grounded in community realities.

Pertinent points relating to rites of passage were also raised, including the point that rites of passage do not exist for the benefit of the individual alone, but for the benefit of the community and culture to which they belongs (Caddie & Ross, 2011). Rites of passage usually entailed a graduation from learning contexts into new stages and phases of a youth's development. Therefore, rites of passage are defined in this study as transition points, or milestones that mark, or signify the journey made by an individual from childhood to adulthood (Caddie & Ross, 2011).

According to the kaumatua and kuia interviewed, rites of passage for them, included some of the following: Whānau responsibilities and events including birth, tangihanga/funeral, and marriage. These include cultural rights and responsibilities, taking on various roles on the marae, whaikōrero, karanga, and manaaki tangata, or the hosting of others. As such rites of passage were very much tied to responsibility, which is reinforced concerning the handing down of whenua tuku iho, and the new responsibilities associated with this process (Caddie & Ross, 2011). Work and service were considered rites of passage, the birth of children as well, highlighting that adulthood was marked by work, not limited to paid work, but extending to contributions to the home, the farm, the marae, or the wider community (Caddie & Ross, 2011). Many rites had religious origins, with churches providing formal examples such as confirmation, first communion, and baptism.

Traditional Māori society also recognised rangatahi as integral to hapū and iwi life; even young children were encouraged to participate in hui and discussions on serious matters (Caddie & Ross, 2011).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter mapped the Aotearoa landscape of gang spaces. First, it identified colonisation as a key driver—disrupting cultural frameworks, eroding whakapapa-based structures, and entrenching violence and historical trauma. In response, it traced Māori resistive strategies and cultural renewal (e.g., marae, hapū, iwi infrastructures), and examined how culture intersects with the lives of Māori gang members, their whānau, and rangatahi within those relational spaces.

The chapter then outlined the emergence and evolution of gang spaces in Aotearoa—from early formations through to the contemporary landscape shaped by media narratives, economic shifts, trans-Tasman dynamics (including 501 deportations), and recent legislative change (e.g., the Gangs Legislation Amendment Act 2024). It noted both punitive trends and community-led initiatives, highlighting the contested terrain in which policy, policing, and whānau realities meet.

Finally, it considered environmental impacts on whānau and on rangatahi growing up in gang-affected contexts—education and housing precarity, stigma, and intergenerational effects—while underscoring a persistent gap: limited research that centres rangatahi who navigate alternative pathways into education and employment. That gap provides the platform for this study.

In the next chapter, I set out the methodological waka that will carry this work: a Kaupapa Māori and Critical Pedagogy foundation, pūrākau as method, and an explicitly whānau-centred approach to participant engagement, ethics, analysis, and voice—so that rangatahi and their whānau remain at the heart of the research journey.

Chapter Four

Gang spaces in Aotearoa

Figure 4.1: *Whānau Day, 2021 (own photo)*

4.1 Introduction

Research is a powerful tool used to interpret, inform, and shape our understanding of the world. It enables observation of phenomena through theory and method to aid articulation and interpretation; it is also a potent means for creatively applying solutions to contemporary issues (Stewart et al., 2011). Through research, new knowledge is generated and ways of living and being can be examined. Research also makes visible diverse realities and perspectives, illuminating the plurality within our societies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002).

However, research has a dark side. It has been used by those in power to rewrite, re-interpret, and construct versions of history that benefit some while erasing others. Research about Indigenous peoples has too often fostered and reinforced racist and ethnocentric assumptions and been highly exploitative. Efforts by Indigenous researchers to steer research toward practices that are respectful, ethical, sympathetic, and beneficial to our communities are well documented (G. Smith, 2003; Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2015).

Māori researchers have reclaimed research to present a more contextual lens through which to understand our history (G. Smith, 2003; Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2015). This situates our histories within frameworks informed by Māori cultural beliefs, practices, values, and tikanga. Attending to context enhances understanding because it recognises the layered nuances of Māori and Indigenous realities. This research explicitly acknowledges those layers and focuses on bringing forward a counter-narrative of gang spaces in Aotearoa—told through the voices of rangatahi and their whānau. It seeks to privilege these voices and illuminate the connective nature of affiliation as expressed by participants themselves.

Theory is an attempt to explain—an interrelated set of ideas about how and why things are as they are (Stewart et al., 2011). The theoretical framework guiding this thesis brings together Kaupapa Māori and Critical Pedagogy. Kaupapa Māori provides the foundational basis for examining what it means to be Māori within gang spaces. Critical Pedagogy enables an exploration of those environments through the awakening of critical consciousness. Together, they create a framework for discussing the experiences and struggles of Māori gang-affiliated rangatahi and their whānau, while analysing how they navigate systems of power related to class, race, and social expectations. In this study, Kaupapa Māori and Critical Pedagogy work in tandem to develop a counter-narrative about gangs in Aotearoa.

4.2 Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is both a philosophy of education and a social movement that adapts insights from critical theory to the spheres of schooling and culture (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Rather than treating knowledge as neutral, it asks how power, ideology, and hegemony shape what counts as truth, whose voices are heard, and whose are silenced. In the context of this thesis—centred on rangatahi Māori growing up in gang spaces—critical pedagogy offers an interpretive lens that situates lived experience within wider structures (colonisation, racial capitalism, criminalisation) already outlined in earlier chapters, and it provides a practice for transforming those conditions through inquiry and action.

At the heart of critical pedagogy are core concepts developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire (1970) contrasts banking education**,** where learners passively receive

information, with problem-posing education, a process in which teachers and learners co-investigate reality. Through themes drawn from everyday life, participants move toward a state of critical consciousness and praxis—the cycle of reflection and action (G. Smith, 2003; Giroux, 2007). For this study, this translates into treating rangatahi and whānau as knowledge-holders, building analysis from their pūrākau and everyday problem-solving, and resisting deficit framings that would perceive gang-affected contexts only as risks.

Freire's later work, *Pedagogy of Hope*, clarifies the kind of hope that underpins the approach to this thesis. Critical hope is not optimism or denial; it is a disciplined capacity to read overwhelmingly challenging situations and contexts accurately and to act collectively to overcome them (Freire, 2021). For rangatahi navigating the intersecting pressures described earlier—colonisation, marginalisation, media stereotyping, and policy settings—hope is method as much as mood. It orients inquiry toward possibility (what could be different) while staying anchored in material realities (what currently constrains). In Aotearoa terms, it aligns with aspirations for mana motuhake and tino rangatiratanga, and with the strengths-based, relational ethics at the heart of Māori approaches to wellbeing.

Freire identified a "culture of silence" among the poor, produced by economic, social, and political domination. He concluded that education is a crucial tool for enabling the oppressed to break that silence (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Within Indigenous rights movements, Freire's work is widely referenced by Kaupapa Māori scholars. At its core, Critical Pedagogy recognises teachers and learners as whole people living, working, and learning within complex systems of power.

Freire shows how colonisation cultivates contempt and division among oppressed peoples, who may ultimately emulate the ambitions and lifestyles of their oppressors (Freire, 1970, p. 45). Applied to gang spaces in Aotearoa, we can see how silencing, stigma, judgment, and isolation—imposed by mainstream society and sometimes reproduced within our own communities—reflect this dynamic (Freire, 1970, p. 48). Similarly, violence in gang spaces can be read as internalised oppression and harm directed towards one's own people (Smith, 2003, p. 3).

In Pedagogy of Hope, Freire emphasises hope as a catalyst for social change and liberation: hopelessness is hope that has lost direction; without hope, the culture of silence persists (Freire,

2021). This thesis contributes to that praxis of hope. It seeks to create a platform where rangatahi and their whānau in gang environments can speak and reflect critically on their experiences—challenging the culture of silence and charting a hopeful direction for a group marginalised by mainstream society.

The power of rangatahi, alongside their whānau, lies in drawing hope from their own actions and dreaming—both for themselves and for others in similar circumstances. Freire (2021) wrote that dreaming is a necessary political act and part of our historico-social becoming. Without dreaming there is no change and no hope (Freire, p. 95). This process of dreaming is visible in the transformations within Aotearoa's gang spaces. This work seeks a fuller picture of what that dreaming means by surfacing intergenerational voices of rangatahi.

Critical pedagogy, then, offers a framework for understanding oppressor–oppressed dynamics and for fostering resistance that creates change within oppressive systems. Central to this is conscious awareness—self-actualisation—of the issues facing whānau in gang spaces. With hope and dreams as guides, rangatahi can turn aspirations into lived realities; despite oppression, those dreams move beyond possibility to practice.

4.4 Kaupapa Māori

Research on Māori has been conducted since the early settlement period of Pākehā in Aotearoa. It involved viewing Māori and Māori cultural practices from a Western perspective and often in a way that dehumanised Māori, a common experience for Indigenous peoples globally (Mahuika, 2008, p. 1). Kaupapa Māori was developed as a counter-narrative to challenge the dominance of Western theories and methods in the research field, while re-centering Māori ways of knowing and being (Mahuika, 2008, p. 4). Kaupapa Māori is important because it focuses on placing Māori knowledge, culture, and perspectives at the forefront. It emphasises understanding and respecting how Māori think, live, and interact with the world (Smith, 2012). In the context of rangatahi (youth) and whānau (families) in gang spaces, Kaupapa Māori is especially valuable because it allows for an exploration of Māori diversity and the connections that exist within these communities, providing a framework that is rooted in Māori values and experiences (Pihama, 2015). Research that incorporates Kaupapa Māori offers a flexible

approach, allowing for the navigation of context in ways that support and uphold Māori autonomy and self-determination (Smith, L., 2000, p. 15). In alignment with critical pedagogy, Kaupapa Māori aims to create change and transformation by recognising the vital role of resistance efforts and the critical thinking Māori use to challenge the dominant narratives that shape their daily experiences (Smith, G. 2003). Rangimarie Mahuika (2008) explains that "Kaupapa Māori theory... provides a platform from which Māori strive to articulate their own reality and experience, their own personal truth as an alternative to the homogenisation and silence expected of them within mainstream New Zealand society" (p. 16). As a result, Kaupapa Māori provides a pathway to critically examine and challenge dominant Western worldviews from a distinctly Māori perspective.

In the context of this study, Kaupapa Māori provides a platform for the voices of rangatahi and whānau living in gang spaces, validating their lived experiences as Māori in the 21st century, in contrast to the dominant mainstream perspective. As Graham Smith and Leonie Pihama have noted, Kaupapa Māori plays a counter-hegemonic role, driven by political motivations that are critical to its expression (Smith, G., 2003; Smith, L., 2012; Pihama, 2015). Any developments examined through a Kaupapa Māori lens must be addressed both at the cultural and agency level, as well as through an analysis of the structures and power relations that influence these dynamics (Mahuika, 2008, p. 6).

This work initially aims to explore the power relations between mainstream, dominant thinking and its impact on defining and labeling those who exist on the margins. It draws on Harry Tam's (2017) idea that these groups exist on the societal margins. Linda Smith (2006) highlights the expansive nature of Kaupapa Māori, emphasizing that it is intended for all Māori. She also stresses the importance of recognizing the diversity within Māori communities, ensuring that Kaupapa Māori does not adopt a limited definition that excludes some groups. Smith outlines the diversity of Māori, including women, men, tamariki, kuia, koroua, rangatahi, whānau, hapū, iwi, and urban Māori, as examples of this broad inclusivity.

This work positions rangatahi along with their whānau in gang spaces as part of the broader Māori diversity. Graham Smith discusses the revolutionary movement that began for Māori in the late 1980s highlighting the paradigm shift from a space of hopelessness and disempowerment to one of progressive thinking and forward momentum. This shift led to the development of language revitalisation strategies (Smith, G., 2003, p. 2). These ideas resonate

with elements of critical pedagogy. The use of Kaupapa Māori theory and critical pedagogy in the study provides a counter-narrative, which gives voice to historically marginalised groups. This dual struggle represents both the long-term efforts of Māori to reclaim their space and worldview and the rights of a specific group within Māori (gang-affiliated whānau) to define themselves. Both struggles align with the principles of Māori sovereignty (Tino Rangatiratanga) and self-determination (Mana Motuhake), challenging the mainstream views that attempt to define and label them from an outside perspective.

Kaupapa Māori Principles

As noted earlier, this thesis recognises the alignment between Kaupapa Māori and critical pedagogy. Kaupapa Māori anchors the work in Māori worldviews and collective responsibilities, while critical pedagogy offers complementary tools—dialogue, problem-posing, and praxis—for enacting those commitments in inquiry and action (Smith, 1999; Smith, G., 2003; Pihama, 2015). Read together, they support a counter-hegemonic stance that privileges Māori voices and analyses power, without sacrificing the tikanga that must guide relationships and decision-making.

Fundamental principles that shape Kaupapa Māori are highlighted by Graham Smith (1997) and are used throughout the thesis as concrete practices:

- Tino Rangatiratanga - the self-determination principle - is upheld by centring participant self-definition and choice in research focus and outputs;
- Whānau and Kaupapa - the extended family structure principle, and the collective philosophy principle - are enacted through whakawhanaungatanga-led wānanga and interviews that build collective purpose;
- Ako Māori – the culturally preferred pedagogy principle - is reflected in problem-posing methods that treat rangatahi and whānau as knowledge-holders;
- Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga - the ‘socio-economic’ mediation principle - provides an analytic lens that attends to constraints produced by colonisation and marginalisation, alongside resistances and possibilities;
- Taonga tuku iho - the principle of cultural aspiration - is honoured by privileging te reo, pūrākau, and mātauranga in data generation and interpretation; and

The nature of Kaupapa Māori allows for the emergence of new spaces (Pihama, 2001), and one of relevance to this study is Āta, the principle of growing respectful relationships. It speaks to careful and respectful engagement, including validation hui with participants consistent with manaakitanga, tika, and pono.

While all principles, both original and additional, are relevant to this study, some are more so. The principle of Tino Rangatiratanga refers to Māori in gang spaces asserting their right to self-definition. The principle of Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga focuses on addressing and resolving the unequal power dynamics that affect Māori in society. The principles of Whānau and Kaupapa emphasise the importance of family connections, responsibilities, and the collective efforts of both immediate and extended whānau to create a shared vision for their future.

The last two principles are Taonga tuku iho, which explains how gang spaces help shape self-identity by nurturing cultural aspirations, and Āta, which concerns respectful engagement between whānau in gang spaces and those outside of them. These principles are emphasised in this study because many whānau from gang spaces have not yet fully developed a strong understanding of their Māori identity (Taonui & Newbold, 2016, p. 9). Armon Tamatea (2018) discusses barriers to gang-specific reintegration and introduces the term "tikanga gang," which was coined by Harry Tam (Tam, 2017).

The idea of tikanga gang recognises that gang-associated rangatahi, wahine, and tāne may not always follow or respect tikanga Māori (Tamatea, 2018). While some tikanga may be practised, they often are not a consistent or core part of a gang member's life. Research indicates that Māori involved in gang contexts are frequently culturally detached, and this disconnection significantly influences the rise and longevity of gang culture in Aotearoa (Taonui & Newbold, 2016, p. 9). This section contends that the roots of gang culture in Aotearoa can be better understood through Kaupapa Māori theory, which includes those Māori whose cultural and tribal connections are not strong (Taonui & Newbold, 2016, p 9). Pihama agrees (2015), noting that our historical and cultural realities, however complex, are critical for developing a strong Kaupapa Māori frame because it "must be located within our experiences" (p. 9).

4.5 Writing Forward

In an academic context, Kaupapa Māori theory operates as a means of writing back against colonial forces. Joeliee Seed-Pihama's thesis, *Ko wai tō ingoa?* (2017), explores the transformative power of Māori names and argues that writing back is essential and must be pursued "on all fronts until the colonial grip loosens" (p. 78). She also advances the idea of writing-forward—a practice of self-determination that enables our pēpi, rangatahi, and whānau to grow the capability needed to restore cultural practices (Seed-Pihama, 2017, p. 78). As noted earlier in the critical-pedagogy discussion, this stance aligns with the ethic of critical hope and collective action.

Seed-Pihama (2017) recognises work already undertaken to empower Māori communities and urges us to build on those successes despite ongoing colonial pressures. Rangimarie Mahuika (2008) similarly applauds the strengths of Kaupapa Māori while calling for its continued development so it can respond to the wide variety of issues Māori face—both those produced by colonisation and those that extend beyond it. In the applied space, Leonie Pihama et al's *He Oranga Ngākau* (2020) project brings Kaupapa Māori principles to trauma-informed care, exploring how to better support Māori who have experienced trauma.

This study therefore treats Kaupapa Māori as a solution-focused approach (Pihama et al., 2020, p. 18). As Smith (2022) writes in *Healing our Trauma*, "Kaupapa Māori is for doing and living and taking action" (para. 16)—a theory of transformation and redress**.** For whānau already connected to tikanga, that work is familiar; for whānau in gang spaces who have yet to strengthen these practices, the question becomes: what might redress look like in their context? Smith (2022) notes the reality that many Māori are struggling to reconnect with language and identity, and that this struggle is often dismissed or minimised (para. 35). My own experience sits within this tension between Māori culture and Māori in gang spaces, heightened by the notion of **"**tikanga gang**"**—a term that names the uneven or interrupted enactment of tikanga in some gang contexts.

In response, this thesis centres rangatahi in gang spaces and their whānau, validating their lived experiences and making room—within a Kaupapa Māori frame—for disconnected whānau. The literature consistently emphasises the importance of sustaining or rebuilding cultural

connection as a pathway to balance and wellbeing (Walker, 2019). Equally, it is vital to allow contemporary Māori identities to emerge on their own terms, defined by Māori, with Māori, and for Māori**,** across a diverse spectrum (Walker, 2019).

4.6 The How

4.6.1 Pūrākau as a method

The use of pūrākau to inform the methodological approach for this work was first suggested by a fellow researcher in the early stages of development. It was articulated as a research method by Jenny Lee in her doctoral thesis, *Ako: Pūrākau of Māori Teachers' Work in Secondary Schools as a Transmission of Knowledge* (2008). Her research shows that transmission through pūrākau allows values and principles to surface in ways that are both creative and meaningful (Lee, 2008, p. 46). Although pūrākau is grounded in an oral tradition, it continues to inspire writing, creative practice, and research in culturally responsive ways (Lee, 2008).

Pūrākau is a Māori methodology that embodies and reflects a Māori worldview. Rooted in Te Pū o te Rākau, the image encompasses crown, trunk, roots, branches, and leaves—each element necessary for growth. The base **(**Pū**)** signals foundational knowledge; the branches signal the many legitimate interpretations. In this sense, pūrākau operates as an extension of Kaupapa Māori theory and as a decolonising tool (Lee, 2008, p. 37). Classic narratives such as Ranginui and Papatūānuku offer allegorical wisdom for those reflecting on the ways of our tūpuna. In this study, pūrākau takes a contemporary form—less overtly traditional in style but still anchored in the stories of Māori, this land, and the post-colonial experience. Despite their complexity, such stories remain grounded in experience and knowledge, and are essential for social, political, and cultural development (Lee, 2005, p. 8).

Rawiri Waretini-Karena's interpretation of pūrākau helps navigate layered, intergenerational narratives to surface factors that contribute to Māori deficit statistics (Waretini-Karena, 2013, p. 4). Situated within Māori epistemologies, the interweaving and interconnectedness of pūrākau stands in clear contrast to Western epistemologies (Waretini-Karena, 2013, p. 50).

While Lee-Morgan acknowledges the influence of Western narrative methods, she and Waretini-Karena emphasise a distinctly Māori approach in which pūrākau makes visible the complexities of researcher–participant relationships.

One role of the researcher is to interpret participants' stories. For Māori researchers working with Māori, that often means moving both inside and outside the research—an insider/outsider positionality discussed later in this chapter. Waretini-Karena also shows how pūrākau can span a broader historical timeline, linking tūpuna to their descendants and to imagined futures (Waretini-Karena, 2013, p. 50). While pūrākau can be applied in multiple ways, at its core it is a methodology for sharing knowledge, values, protocols, and worldviews (Lee, 2009, p. 12).

The knowledge, values, protocols, and worldviews in this study are inherently Māori, though interpreted in contemporary terms. Kaupapa Māori theory connects this work to being Māori while accommodating the diversity of Māori identities and contexts from which those identities arise (Smith, G., 2003; Pihama, 2015). Methodologically, pūrākau—as described by Lee (2009)—invites us to speak without constraint, drawing on our own ways of seeing, speaking, and expressing. It animates the issues and complexities of our experience—sometimes culture-specific and local, sometimes broadly shared (Lee, 2009, p. 5). More broadly, pūrākau validates stories as evidence and challenges narrow assumptions about what counts as research, actively participating in the decolonisation of Western research methodologies.

In this thesis pūrākau is already working in two complementary ways. First, as reflective vignettes, woven throughout the thesis grounding the work in lived reality and my positionality as a researcher. The personal accounts of marae connection/disconnection, the intergenerational impacts felt within whānau, and the tensions between hapū/marae and gang-affiliated whānau are all offered as pūrākau that surface context, emotion, and cultural understandings. Read this way, the reflections are not "asides" but situated narratives that carry knowledge, values, and tikanga (Lee, 2008, 2009). They enact the insider/outsider stance discussed later in the chapter and align with Waretini-Karena's use of pūrākau to trace intergenerational storylines and locate deficit/strengths across time (Waretini-Karena, 2013).

Second, pūrākau function as a visioning frame. The use of waka imagery, the moemoeā articulated by rangatahi operate as future-oriented narratives that imagine different conditions for flourishing. This is consistent with *Pedagogy of Hope*: dreaming as a disciplined, collective

action rather than just naïve thoughts (Freire, 2021). Here, pūrākau becomes a vehicle for designing possibilities—education and employment pathways, marae-based reconciliation processes, and whānau-led supports—while staying anchored in realities (Lee, 2009).

Practically, these two uses of pūrākau shape how the study is conducted and written. Reflective pūrākau open and close sections to locate the analysis in whakapapa and place; visioning pūrākau synthesise findings into pathways forward. Prompts for wānanga and interviews are drawn from participants' themes (Lee, 2009), and analysis of those themes consider challenges and opportunities. In this sense, pūrākau sits alongside Kaupapa Māori and critical pedagogy: Kaupapa Māori provides the worldview and collective responsibilities; critical pedagogy offers the problem-posing practice; and pūrākau is the form that carries both.

4.6.2 The Rangatahi Waka

This study explores how rangatahi navigate the various spaces they must inhabit and make sense of, enabling them to step forward with confidence and capability into new pathways. "Navigation" is understood here as determining one's position, planning, and following a route (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). Reflecting on the migration of waka to the shores of Aotearoa, we recognise that Māori were not only skilled navigators but also a diverse people. This diversity is exemplified by the different waka that arrived in Aotearoa, each carrying distinct traditions, social structures, tribes, and dialects (Simmonds & Tanikawa, 2018, p. 3).

One notable adaptation in Māori seafaring was the transition from double-hulled vessels to predominantly single-hulled canoes, such as waka taua, waka tētē, waka tīwai, mōkihi, and the modern-day waka tangata, designed to better navigate inland and coastal waterways (White, 2022, para. 9). Each waka served a distinct purpose: waka taua were war canoes that carried warriors and, at times, the deceased, and therefore held spiritual significance; waka tētē transported goods, produce, and people; waka tīwai were used by hapū and iwi for both transportation and recreation; and waka tangata, typically plain and unadorned, were widely used by the general population (White, 2022, para. 14). Traditionally, waka are depicted with tangata (people) sitting upon them, symbolising the vessel that carries them. In this work, the rangatahi themselves are the vessel—carrying the dreams and hopes of our tūpuna (McDonald,

2022, p. 69). As our ancestors journeyed in pursuit of better futures, rangatahi inherit that legacy and responsibility; the surrounding elements shape their course. The ocean journey undertaken by our ancestors was motivated by the pursuit of more prosperous opportunities for their people. The rangatahi, as inheritors of these hopes, are the guardians of history and the successors of a legacy. Thus, when we speak of rangatahi as the vessel, we view them as central to the journey, with the elements surrounding them playing a crucial role in shaping their path.

In this context, two elements are essential for a waka to move: wai (water) and tangata (people). Without both, the waka remains still (McDonald, 2022, pp. 156–157). The way rangatahi navigate their pathways—both positive and negative—can be likened to the elements present within the wai. In navigation terms, the wai directly influences whether the waka's journey is smooth or turbulent. The elements present with the wai are represented by the policy, institutional, and material conditions that can steady or unsettle the voyage (e.g., schooling, housing, justice contact, media stereotyping, colonisation's ongoing effects). Wai is known for its unpredictability, sometimes calm and steady, at other times rough and unstable, and so its association with factors that often sit outside the control of rangatahi is relevant here (McDonald, 2022, p. 44-45). In Te Ao Māori, wai is also considered a purifying element (Mildon, 2016, p. 16). In this study, wai symbolises the space where we explore both the positive and negative external experiences that shape the rangatahi's pathway navigation and where appropriate enables rangatahi particularly when they are facing challenges, to reset to a more positive direction and try again.

In addition, those present on the rangatahi waka are represented by the tangata element. The role of tangata can vary, but in Te Ao Māori, can mean relational supports*:* whānau, peers, kaumātua/kuia, mentors/teachers, service providers, and gang-affiliated kin understood as kaitiaki—guardians of people, places, and things (McDonald, 2022, p. 63). Our choices and behaviours determine how effectively we fulfil our role as kaitiaki. By viewing tangata in this way, we allow for the full spectrum of people surrounding the rangatahi to emerge. Ultimately, it is the values and the support of the tangata (people) on the rangatahi's waka that will help build their growing competence and confidence, enabling them to navigate and engage with the substantial elements found in the wai (water).

Furthermore, the four waka—waka tētē, waka tīwai, waka taua, and waka hourua—can symbolise the progress of rangatahi as they navigate their pathways. Mastery in navigation

requires key skills such as awareness, competency, confidence, and a strong connection to oneself, the environment, and others (McDonald, 2022, p. 69). Identifying a rangatahi as a waka tētē reflects early skill development; the waka tīwai signals their growing confidence and capability. The waka taua indicates the consolidation of those attributes in challenging waters, while mastery is represented by the waka hourua—embodying a skilled navigator in harmony with themselves, others, and the environment, and illustrating optimal conditions for successful pathway navigation.

Viewed this way, pūrākau can take root as the guiding method. As Lee notes, pūrākau is not prescriptive; it is a culturally responsive guide for thinking and acting (Lee, 2009, pp. 8–9). Its capacity for multiple interpretations enables life-stories and histories to surface so present-day realities can be heard (Lee, 2008, p. 46). The waka framework therefore offers rangatahi an identity-affirming lens: they are descendants of skilled navigators who crossed vast oceans, and they carry that navigational inheritance into contemporary pathways.

4.6.3 The Insider Researcher – Stories of connection

In *Decolonising Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) discusses the insider researcher, showing how Indigenous scholars can develop counter-strategies that reposition our stories in relation to dominant theories. She also reflects on her own practice—interviewing fellow mothers at her children's kōhanga reo—as an example of relational, situated inquiry (Smith, 2012). Robert Alexander Innes (2009) emphasises that insiders challenge the colonial nature of outsider research, which too often disregards, silences, and devalues Indigenous perspectives (p. 441). Similarly, Tiakiwai (2015) notes that Indigenous research seeks to move beyond hierarchical researcher/researched dynamics and to re-centre the interconnected relationships among all who participate.

From this perspective, legitimacy is conferred not primarily by academic institutions but, more importantly for Indigenous and minority communities, by the communities who are an integral part of the research (Smith, 2012). In the introduction I outlined the structure of "gang space" and my affiliation within it through what I called the *connective collective*: connections rooted in gang whakapapa and with kin ties to prominent members who established our spaces. That

positioning matters here: this is insider research and enables me to position or locate myself within the research.

As stated earlier, I whakapapa to a gang-affiliated space, and the motivation in undertaking this study was to explore the pathway experiences of rangatahi in a ‘gang space’ and to provide a platform for their voices in ways that are thoughtful, respectful, and non-judgemental. Insider positioning enables that platform while recognising rangatahi and whānau as experts in their own lives. Insider research, therefore, speaks to my role within this work and aligns seamlessly with Kaupapa Māori theory and the use of pūrākau. As an insider researcher, it also allows my own story to sit alongside participants’, much like the Seed-Pihama’s approach (Seed-Pihama, 2017, p. 78).

At the same time, I must remain mindful of my role as a researcher and avoid taking for granted aspects of the study with which I have intimate knowledge. Insider research, therefore, demands rigorous reflexivity. As a researcher, it is crucial for me to stay reflective, to avoid the risk of assumption and understanding. A common critique of insider research is that proximity may cloud judgements or produce overly favourable accounts (Aguilar, 1981; DeLyser, 2001; Chavez, 2015).

Insider work, however, demands rigorous reflexivity. A critique is that proximity may cloud judgement or produce overly favourable accounts because of their close connection to the community. It also implies that only the outsider researcher can maintain objectivity and emotional distance, allowing for valid research (Aguilar, 1981; DeLyser, 2001; Chavez, 2015). Brayboy and Deyhle—writing from within Native American scholarship—challenge this, countering that distancing oneself from the research can just as easily distort, and that claims to outsider objectivity can mask other biases (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000, p. 165).

Having lived experience myself as a rangatahi growing up in a gang-affiliated space while navigating school and work pathways helps me read the fine-grained nuances of that pursuit—and to notice how outside definitions weigh on rangatahi across multiple systems. It also requires discipline: I need to stay aware that when we speak of gang spaces and self-definition, terms used in this thesis are defined for this work, and, crucially, questions of identity in gang spaces rest with members themselves and warrant further research. Additionally, when I

mention terms in this work, it should be clear that these terms have been created specifically for this work.

I also recognise that once this work is published, control over how it is used or interpreted is limited. To mitigate harm, I emphasise throughout that research in these spaces should be undertaken *with* or *by* the communities themselves, with co-governance over design, interpretation, and dissemination—especially where self-definition and definitions of space are at stake. The collaborative role of Stan Coster alongside McIntosh and Andrae in their research project (2016) illustrates how insider expertise can guide ethical, useful research.

Another example is Mara Davis's master's thesis, *Redefining Gangsterism: Social Change Agents in the Black Power* (2022), which treats members as research collaborators rather than mere participants. This approach redistributes power to those whose lives are under study. It also challenges the pattern in which external researchers—without lived experience—become authoritative voices while communities are reduced to data. Typically, the researcher holds power over their research area, often becoming the authority on it, sometimes at the expense of the communities whose experiences shaped that expertise. Therefore, I argue that gang spaces and their affiliates seek opportunities to define themselves and become self-determining according to their own terms. This challenges outside researchers, who lack lived experience in these spaces, from becoming authorities on areas where they have little genuine investment beyond advancing their academic careers.

My investment in this community is not abstract. Rather it is intimately connected because I have whānau, nieces, and nephews who call these spaces home. The aim is to support whānau involved in gang spaces in line with tino rangatiratanga and to strengthen their mana motuhake by providing research that challenges dominant societal views. I believe that genuine change for our collectives begins within the spaces themselves; supporting this change requires resources, respectful partnership, and a shift in the messages that reach our rangatahi and their whānau.

4.7 The process

4.7.1 Privileging of Rangatahi and Whānau Voice

I use Kaupapa Māori and pūrākau to centre the voices of six rangatahi and 18 whānau. Through pūrākau, insights surface in layered ways—memories, reflections, aspirations—until coherent patterns can be carefully interpreted (Lee, 2009, p. 2). This work presents a counter-narrative drawn from the experiences of Māori who live in gang spaces. Consistent with Tino Rangatiratanga, whānau knowledge is treated as primary. My role, following Lee (2009), is to weave these pūrākau into narratives that uphold rangatahi and invite critical reflection from the reader (pp. 2–3).

When selecting rangatahi, pakeke and whānau for this research, I developed a Level of Engagement (LOE) scale from 1 to 10 to describe proximity to gang space: 1 indicates no engagement; 10 indicates full engagement. The scale was first used with rangatahi directly connected to a gang space through a parent or grandparent who had been a key caregiver.

Two concepts underpin the LOE: engagement and identification. At Level 1, a rangatahi may know there is a family connection but lives apart from it and does not feel drawn toward the space. Levels 2–5 describe different degrees of connection. For example, at Level 2, a rangatahi who has some awareness of their gang affiliation and occasionally interacts with gang-connected whānau yet does not identify as gang-affiliated or actively engage in gang spaces. Level 3 may reflect a two-household arrangement—one affiliated parent, one not—with the non-affiliated parent perhaps being the primary caregiver and has established boundaries to prevent their child from engaging with or identifying with the gang space.

It is important to clarify what is meant by 'identifying with the gang space.' This can be described as a rangatahi feeling a sense of connection or affinity with the gang, whether through alignment with its history or a shared sense of identity with those within the space. This might also manifest in the rangatahi adopting the gang's signs and using its slogans.

At Level 4, these boundaries regarding engagement with the gang space are more flexible. The rangatahi may accompany the gang-affiliated parent to gatherings involving members of the

gang space and begin to show signs of identification—ease with the people, familiarity with slogans or symbols—without adopting the identity. At Level 5, the rangatahi actively chooses to align with the affiliated parent and to spend more time in that world, feeling a greater sense of connection and involvement.

Levels 6-10 indicate clear identification and ongoing engagement with the gang space, often where gang history is deeply embedded in the whānau—and thus in the rangatahi. This means that once a rangatahi begins to see the gang as an extension of their whānau, that gang affiliation becomes a more deeply embedded part of their identity.

Rangatahi participants were 17–25 years old and self-identified as having lived experience of this environment. I shifted from the original 15–24 bracket to 17–25 for two reasons: greater independence to consent to one-to-one interviews and the ability to reflect more thoughtfully on their experiences in education, occupation, and growing up in and being affiliated with Aotearoa gang spaces.

Rangatahi voices are complemented by six adults (pakeke) who were once these same rangatahi and now offer intergenerational perspectives. I also interviewed seven members (mema) recognised as pro-change or agents of change, and five wāhine—mothers or women connected to gang spaces through partners, brothers, cousins, or grandchildren. All rangatahi are connected to Waikato; additional whānau are based across Aotearoa and are introduced in the following chapters.

All rangatahi interviewed showed LOE scores between 4 and 10, a pattern echoed among pakeke, reflecting that whānau commonly view their affiliated gang space as an extension of whānau. Recruitment began with a kōrero with each rangatahi. If they were keen, they chose the time and place to meet. This approach remained consistent across groups, with a few practical exceptions.

For the pakeke cohort, interviews often led to suggestions of further participants—otherwise known as snowballing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This produced a fairly balanced group: some who forged their own independent pathways and others who followed their parent's footsteps (often—but not always—fathers).

Two whānau participants were moved into the "members" category as they were patched members. While themes varied, one constant remained - an unconditional love for whānau in its many forms. The next section focuses on the members, referred to as mema in their interviews. I approached key members identified early in the research; and was grateful that all my invitations were accepted.

These sessions were pivotal in shaping Chapter Six. A second aim was to gather insights on education and employment pathways for rangatahi in gang spaces. The men and women interviewed offered perceptive, protective, and candid reflections, drawing on their deep experiences embedded in gang spaces. The wāhine included respected mothers within their gang chapters—the mothers and aunties to many rangatahi and pakeke.

A wide range of topics arose regarding rangatahi education and work pathways; their insights were insightful and honest. The final interview section involved a discussion with an ex-member of my father's chapter who is now a minister. The proverb *Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi*—often rendered "when the old net is cast aside, the new net goes fishing"—was reframed here: not discarding the old but making space for a voice too often missing in research.

Participants also cautioned that stigma and judgement attached to gang space can drive policies and practices that limit children's access to whānau (Andrae et al., 2016; Taonui & Newbold, 2016). Equally important was the need to view whānau holistically, without separating different parts, and remain alert to the reproduction of labelling cycles (Fine, 1977; Bernburg et al., 2006). These points shaped participant selection and analysis to ensure a fuller and more holistic view of pathway navigation could be developed for rangatahi.

Finally, the ability to secure these interviews was because of my late father, whose name and mana opened doors for me to many of the whānau who engaged in this research and my transparency about offering a perspective that contrasts with much of the existing research. Throughout, the intention is to hold the mana of the rangatahi and their collectives remains at the forefront, so that the knowledge shared here remains meaningful, hopeful and useful.

4.8 Research Process

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, within a qualitative research approach (see Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, pp. 288–289). Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand people's perspectives in their socio-cultural contexts and examines how those contexts shape feelings and behaviour (Marks & Yardley, 2004). It involves analysing texts and interviews to identify significant patterns that describe a phenomenon (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

In keeping with Kaupapa Māori and pūrākau as outlined previously, the emphasis is on the quality and meaning of experience. Semi-structured interviews are particularly valuable when participants can speak freely in a one-to-one, culturally safe space, consistent with pūrākau's commitment to story as knowledge (Lee, 2009). This enables exploration of the intricate meanings participants attribute to events and of how context influences attitudes and beliefs. Such an approach is especially useful with marginalised communities, where "scientifically validated" datasets are limited (Hughes, 2005). However, there are risks associated with this approach. Assumptions can creep in—for example, the idea that the researcher has automatic access to participants' most personal recollections (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The processing of any accounts or analysing of data is conducted within the interpretive framework of the researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The researcher must therefore be honest and reflective in their role when critically assessing the interpretation of the participants' dialogue. These cautions align with the insider stance discussed earlier.

With this in mind, the study addressed three research questions:

1. What are the dreams and aspirations of rangatahi Māori growing up within Aotearoa gang spaces?
2. How can rangatahi in gang-affiliated spaces take advantage of school and work opportunities?
3. What influence do marginalisation and cultural identity have on school and employment pathway navigation for these rangatahi?

Question sets were tailored to each of the four whānau tiers: rangatahi, pakeke (adults who were once rangatahi), mema (members), and wāhine (interview schedules are provided in the appendix).

An element of planning, organising and coordinating was necessary to ensure the 24 semi-structured interviews were undertaken successfully. After each interview, appreciation was shown to the whānau, and a brief korero followed to allow participants to reflect on the interview and how they felt about it. Whānau feedback was positive and whānau were also aware that I would be transcribing the interviews, and that they would receive a copy of the completed work.

Rangatahi interviews typically ran 35–45 minutes; all the other interviews ranged from one to two hours. Once all 24 interviews were complete and transcribed, they were uploaded into the data analysis software NVivo. Five steps were followed throughout the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

1. **Familiarisation with the data.** Transcripts were sorted in NVivo into each of the four whānau levels (rangatahi, pakeke, mema, wāhine) and were read multiple times to deepen familiarity with the data.
2. **Initial coding.** Inductive codes were generated and grouped into container nodes; whānau kōrero were allocated to these nodes.
3. **Theme development.** Codes were refined into initial themes by creating parent/main nodes and then refined further into related child/sub nodes.
4. **Theme definition and naming.** Themes with the richest kōrero were defined as main themes; their child nodes became sub-themes of each associated main theme.
5. **Answering the questions.** The final process involved mapping the main themes directly to the three research questions to help structure the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This process sits alongside the pūrākau method: whānau narratives were treated as taonga, with themes emerging from layered kōrero rather than imposed a priori. It also operationalises the waka framing developed earlier—reading tangata (relational supports) and wai (contextual determinants) across the data to understand how rangatahi navigate pathways.

Each group went through each step resulting in a continual process of narrowing until the most prominent themes were revealed. From here each theme was placed in alignment with the three research questions outlined above which in turn have helped structure the chapters that follow.

4.9 Reflexive Practice

Chapter Five presents the contributions of rangatahi and pakeke (adults who were rangatahi and active in gang spaces). These kōrero are organised under headings aligned to the three research questions, with subsections shaping how each insight is presented. Each section includes a summary of the themes; the cross-cutting analysis of these themes are discussed in Chapter Seven. This structure keeps the stories, understandings, reflections, and suggestions at the centre of the chapter, consistent with the pūrākau approach outlined earlier.

Initially, I considered interweaving the members' and wāhine contributions here. However, during those interviews it became clear that their kōrero carried rich historical detail and deep, reflective commentary on the gang spaces to which they affiliated. To honour the depth of those contributions—and the aim of amplifying voices often silenced by society and, at times, by our own communities—I decided to present those narratives separately in Chapter Six. This allows Chapter Five to present the rangatahi pathways and aspirations, followed by the longer histories and contextual insights from members and wāhine in Chapter Six, and culminating in the integrated discussion in Chapter Seven.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter set out the theories and methods guiding the study. Critical pedagogy and Kaupapa Māori were brought together as the core analytic lens: critical pedagogy offering tools of dialogue, problem-posing, praxis, and critical hope; while Kaupapa Māori centres Māori worldviews, tino rangatiratanga, and collective responsibility within a clearly articulated colonial context and provides the setting within which gang-affiliated Māori have to navigate. Pūrākau was established as the methodological vehicle, with the waka analogy positioning

rangatahi as the vessel—carrying aspirations forward—while tangata (relational supports) and wai (contextual determinants) orient the analysis of pathway navigation. This adaptation, where the rangatahi are personified as the waka, acknowledges their crucial role in the future development and leadership of Te Ao Māori.

The chapter also discussed my positioning as an insider researcher and the reflexive practices I used to safeguard rigour and accountability. The chapter also explained the participant selection and interview process, including the Level of Engagement (LOE) tool to describe connection to gang spaces, the semi-structured interviews across four whānau groupings, and the thematic analysis conducted in NVivo following Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps. Together, these choices were designed to privilege rangatahi and whānau voices and to bring forward counter-narratives often absent from mainstream accounts.

The final section of this chapter outlines the practical aspects related to the research process, including the selection process and the approach to interviewing rangatahi and whānau. The selection criteria, including the introduction of the LOE tool, explain the level of engagement and connection to gang spaces that rangatahi and whānau in this study have. It also discusses the process of interpreting the themes and findings through the data analysis software NVivo. Finally, the chapter previewed how the findings are organised: Chapters Five and Six present kōrero from rangatahi and pākēkē, and from mema and wāhine respectively, each aligned to the three research questions; Chapter Seven then draws the themes together. This sequencing prepares the reader to move from lived experience to a cross-cutting analysis.

Chapter Five

The Rangatahi Platform

Figure 5.1: *Rangatahi Presentation, 2022 (own photo)*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is one of two that will present the voice of the rangatahi alongside the whānau perspective. The term whānau here is used in this section to represent and specifically refer to the research participants. To recap, the questions are as follows: What are the dreams and aspirations of rangatahi Māori growing up within gang environments in Aotearoa; How can we ensure rangatahi Māori growing up in gang-affiliated spaces can access school and work opportunities; and what impact do marginalisation and cultural identity have on pathway navigation for these rangatahi?

Before we move on to the following sections, it is important to clarify and reiterate that the rangatahi voice is given prominence when addressing the research questions. Alongside their contributions, there will also be input from the pakeke, who were once rangatahi themselves, offering an intergenerational perspective, I adopted this approach to ensure the write-up would incorporate insights and shared knowledge from within these groups, with the contributions of

rangatahi contextualised by the perspectives of the additional layers of whānau interviewed. This method was used to create a safe space, considering the often-external judgment and stigma faced by gang members and their families. The context includes challenges across various government sectors, such as education, health, and justice, among others.

Built into this are underlying challenges concerning cultural considerations and connection to a Māori identity. Also, present are issues within a whānau context, with a key difference being the environmental aspect of being connected to a space linked to gangs, along with the added identity component that is inherent for rangatahi in these spaces. From within this setting, the following will be explored after brief profiles of each whānau who share their korero in this chapter.

5.2 Whānau Profiles

This section offers brief details about each of the rangatahi and pakeke to provide context for their insights that follow. The LOE tool introduced in the methodology chapter will be used here to evaluate the level of connection each rangatahi has. Additionally, it is important to note that the nature of gang affiliation across all whānau is diverse; at times, the whānau interviewed could have up to three affiliations with different gang spaces across Aotearoa. Each rangatahi signed an ethics and participation form, ensuring their anonymity during the research write-up.

5.2.1 Rangatahi

Rangatahi K was 17 at the time of this interview and lived with friends. Rangatahi K sits between the LOE levels of 7 and 8, recognising the gang space as an extension of whānau and expressing a desire to become a member. His connection to gang space stems from his late father, who held a senior position. Rangatahi K was immersed in gang space dynamics while growing up. He attended high school until the age of 13, then transitioned into various alternative education settings. During this time Rangatahi K had his first experiences with the justice system. Rangatahi K has had two periods of employment, each lasting between one and two months and he has also experienced time in prison.

Rangatahi T was 25 years old at the time of this interview. He lived with his partner and their toddler son. Rangatahi T sits at the LOE range of 6, recognising the gang space as an extension of his whānau unit. His connection to gang space is due to his father, who is a member, and his mother, who's extended whānau have strong links to gang space dynamics.

> *T: Through…. Through the whole whānau… through my dad…. Through my mum… and her whānau… through my nan and her siblings…*

Rangatahi T's parents separated when he was a toddler, and he was primarily raised in a single-parent household, mostly immersed in gang space dynamics when with his mother's whānau. He completed high school and entered the workforce before returning to tertiary study. At the time of this interview, he was completing an engineering degree.

Rangatahi J was 17 years old when we interviewed her, and she lived between her mother's homes. She is within the LOE range of 6, recognising the gang space she associates with as an extension of her whānau unit. Her connection comes from her mother's side; her grandmother is a respected figure within the gang they are affiliated with. Additionally, Rangatahi J's mother grew up deeply involved in gang life. She has experienced both periods of full immersion in education and times when she was not involved at all. She attended high school until age 16, then moved into employment and completed various courses. At the time of our interview, Rangatahi J was looking for work.

Rangatahi H was 19 at the time of our interview. She lived with her mother and elder siblings; and is the youngest in the whānau. Rangatahi H sits at the LOE range of 6, recognising the gang space she affiliates with as an extension of her whānau unit. Her connection comes through her late father, who was a member, and her half-brothers, who are current members. Rangatahi H has grown up immersed in gang space dynamics. She stayed in high school until she was 14 years old, then moved into alternative education settings. Rangatahi H has tried various employment pathways, lasting between 2 to 5 months. At the time of our interview, she was seeking employment.

Rangatahi T2 was 18 at the time of our interview. He had recently moved to Australia to live with his mother and two half-siblings. Prior to this, he was in Aotearoa living with his father,

his stepmother, and his siblings. Rangatahi T2 sits at the LOE range of 6, recognising the gang space as an extension of his whānau unit. His connection stems from his father, who is a member, along with his uncle and grand uncles. Rangatahi T2 did not grow up immersed in gang activity. He attended high school until the age of 15, where he engaged in a work program and transitioned into an employment pathway with the support of his high school. Once fully employed, he stayed in the job for 2 years before saving enough to move to Australia. At the time of our interview, he was doing casual work but was ultimately seeking full-time employment.

Rangatahi Q was 17 at the time of our interview; he lived with his mother, her partner, and his three half-siblings. Rangatahi Q sits at the LOE range of 6, recognising the gang space as an extension of his whānau unit. His connection is through his mother's late father and his uncles, who are current members. Rangatahi Q grew up immersed in gang dynamics. At the time of our interview, Rangatahi Q was completing his high school education. Currently, he is in full-time employment and has been since finishing high school.

5.2.2 Pakeke

Pakeke H is a father of seven and was living overseas at the time of our interview. Pakeke H falls within the LOE range of 6 because he sees the gang space he affiliates with as an extension of his whānau. His connection to gang space comes from both sides of his whānau, including his father, who used to be a member. Pakeke H grew up immersed in gang space dynamics; however, at age 13, he moved to his grandmother's place and became involved in religion. Pakeke H attended and completed high school. He was a celebrated professional sports person. Currently, Pakeke H has returned to Aotearoa with his whānau.

Pakeke I is a father of two who lives in Aotearoa. He is placed at the LOE range of 10 because he is part of a gang culture and has a strong sense of belonging and involvement with this community. His connection stems from his late father, who was a senior member of the gang. Pakeke I grew up surrounded by gang culture dynamics. He attended boarding school and later a local high school. As a teenager, Pakeke I was an active sportsman, which led to travelling overseas to compete. Pakeke I started working in his early 30s; before that, he served several prison sentences with his first stint at 19.

Pakeke A is a mother of one and lives in Aotearoa. Pakeke A's LOE score is 5, as she is connected through her late father, who was a member, and she is involved in the gang environment that he was part of. Pakeke A grew up disconnected from her father, and it was only during her teenage years that she became involved in the gang space. She faced difficulties in her education, but later on achieved her qualifications. At the time of our interview, she was completing her PhD and was employed as a Kaiako Māori at a local tertiary institution in Aotearoa.

Pakeke G is a father of three children and lives in Aotearoa. He has a LOE rating of 10 because he is part of a gang and strongly identifies with and engages in that space. His connection to gang culture came through his late father, who held a national leadership role within the gang. Pakeke G grew up immersed in both gang and Te Ao Māori influences. He attended high school until the age of 14, then explored various employment options, which led him to engage in Mau Rākau and Waka, taking him around the world. At the time of our interview, Pakeke G was working as a social practitioner and was preparing to start undergraduate studies at university.

Pakeke HK lives in Aotearoa and is within the LOE range of 6. His connection to gang culture was influenced by his late father, who held a national leadership position within his gang. His involvement in gang dynamics did not begin until his teenage years; before that, he mainly lived with his mother and later moved overseas. His upbringing included religious elements. Upon returning, Pakeke HK completed an undergraduate degree in law. At the time of this interview, he has finished this degree and is now studying a second degree in environmental studies.

5.3 Dream and aspirations

Our first point for reflection relates to research question one, which asks: what are the dreams and aspirations of our rangatahi Māori growing up within gang spaces in Aotearoa? To answer the question, I rephrased it for rangatahi and whānau by asking them what success meant to them and what it looked like. This change proved more fitting for the participants, as reflected in their responses. To start, all whānau will remain anonymous and will be identified by the

first letter of their name. This section, along with those that follow, will include insights and shared understandings from rangatahi and other whānau. These will be summarised at the end of each section.

5.3.1 Definitions of success

Rangatahi K provided this definition of what he felt success looked like for him. Rangatahi K is now 19 years of age, 17 when interviewed.

> *K: Success is like… umm, being a happy family, in your own home, you know you can do what the fuck you want… and your bills are paid and like you're happy …*

Success is also defined by his experiences in the justice system as a youth and within the New Zealand prison system.

> *K: …I reckon um… I reckon that, for at the end of the day for being in prison… I reckon we should all have one hour outside… of free time, where there's no devices… no nothing, no beef, no… no nothing, where you can just sit on the grass… and take a deep breath, and let all your mana out…*
> *…because at the end of the day, while you're sitting and doing nothing with your life, you're… building all this yuck in, and that's what I learnt in jail is um… whatever's hurting you… let it go… because in life your gonna be sick… but if you can chuck it away and move forward… your gonna move in life …*

Rangatahi K notes that time spent in a jail cell can create a sense of anxiety that builds up over time, which may harm the individual and any future progress they might make.

> *K: Yeah let things go because people hold in shit too much… and it hurts them, it hurts them to the point that… they either gunna hurt someone else… or they're gunna fuck with the heads…*

Rangatahi K was able to distinguish between his experience of the mainstream youth court setting and that of Te Koti Rangatahi, an initiative created in the early 90s to offer a more

culturally inclusive experience for Māori youth going through the justice system (Taumaunu, 2014).

> *K: Um… I really played on it, I really played on it cause when I was younger, I played on it, cause I really knew for the first ten times… that, when I went to Te Kōhao health… I got a slap on my hands... first time.*
> *K: Yeah, that's where I understand it that… aw yeah, it's a Māori school… like a court, like a Māori court… but when I got up to like 18, 17… 19, then I had to stand in ah um… white, white persons um… doc*

Rangatahi T is interviewed next. He is slightly older than Rangatahi K and is 25 years of age. Rangatahi T shared his definition of success which includes education, employment, and culture, similar to Rangatahi K's perspective. Both highlight the important role of whānau in shaping their understanding of success. For Rangatahi T, having access to culture and te reo was a bonus.

> *T: So when I went there, my reo obviously was at a very high level and so when I had gone through to other… kura um I excelled… in Te Ao Māori and it was because of the very beginning, and so going through out the different kura I was, I excelled in Māori… so I liked that subject cause I looked good in it… so definitely gave me a quick and a good boost up…*

Unlike Rangatahi K, Rangatahi T's engagement with Te Reo Māori and Kapa Haka while at school had a positive impact on his educational experience.

> *T: Umm…I was there for long, and I was involved in a lot of Māori cultural things… that was always… the teachers started recognising and they were starting to reach me, and help me with whatever I needed… you know, sometimes they would take it as far as making me lunch every single day you know… some teachers did that…*

Rangatahi T discusses the support he received through his network developed during his early years of schooling. He explains how finding a niche in that environment motivated him to stay in school and complete high school before moving on to tertiary studies.

T: And you know… at that time I wasn't living at home… I was doing my own thing… tryna do my own thing and figure out how to survive and she was like aw nah cut that out you know… I'll take you in…, her doing that for me was huge… I was blown away I was aye …
… 'you know our plan now is for you to get past and get through school' …and all this and next minute aww… I passed level, one, two and three because of her guidance… You know and she, she, she helped me out and it was just through Māori… well Māori performing arts and Māori…If it wasn't for that I don't think I was gunna stay in school at all…

Later in the interview, Rangatahi T shared his vision of success in his working life and recalled his first work experience when he was young, which involved his mother's boyfriend.

T: …the first actual, actual job… I did was umm… I was in the forest… I was in the forestry cutting trees… with ahh, with one of mum's ex's… and ahh I was getting ten dollars an hour then… and umm… that was hard… that was… tough…But ahh it teaches you… a lot of good things you know cause… you know… I was only young… and I was just new to… having lunch at… ahh one o'clock… It gave me a good foundation aye… cause I learnt how to work hard…

From a young age, Rangatahi T learned the value of hard work and observed a work ethic that demanded perseverance because the work was repetitive. This gave him real-life work experience and a true understanding of dedication.

T: I had broken my leg …So now I've… had to go back to what I was good at… What I've been doing… so what I've found is, well, since I've done a diploma in Māori and performing arts… I warmed my ankle back up and I was like well I obviously can't go back to the same mahi… so now I'm learning the, aw halfway now… halfway of… doing the diploma in engineering… umm… I'm doing level six at the moment.

The final point for Rangatahi T is his plan to return to his whānau and teach them some of the cultural skills he has learned along the way—specifically skills related to aspects of Māori performing arts.

T: Umm… like a goal for me for them… was to go home… and to teach them what I know… if I was to come back and teach… basic weaponry, it would teach them basic protocol… they'll go different paths, they'll have different views on… life and like… yeah, I just think that yeah… aw this was a big plan I wanted to do, like just go in there, go grab the cousins… sit them down have some wānanga with them during the weekends, teach them pretty much… everything I've learnt from everybody cause in the end… I feel like my knowledge should go to them… so cause, that's my family… I'm teaching all these kids, and they're learning a lot of things… and I wanna… go back home and give it to them… for our rangatahi,

This section provides a brief insight into two rangatahi perspectives of success. There are differences between Rangatahi T and K's upbringing; these are reflected through their experiences. It also emphasises that there isn't a 'typical' child associated with gang communities in Aotearoa.

5.3.2 Success mechanisms

This section will explore success mechanisms identified by rangatahi. What strategies or techniques have worked for them? What do they see as keys to successfully overcoming challenges and issues they have faced so far? To start with, Rangatahi Q shares his insights into mediating school life, along with kapa haka (Māori performing arts), and work. His connection to gang culture is rooted in his mother, who was the daughter of a Māori gang member, as well as uncles, who are currently members.

Q: Aw, just to like… stay like… don't freak out too much cause you realise you have so much things to do, like you got school and those stuff after school, then you got work… and then you've got to juggle all between three and then… on the weekends, you've gotta work and then you've like gotta do… then you just gotta like set it all out before you do it, cause then you'll be like really frustrated… cause that's what happened last year…

Recognition by Rangatahi Q of a heavy workload led him to find ways to manage his time and plan his commitments, then adjust his schedule accordingly.

Q: I don't know… going to Japan was like a thing I always wanted to do… like ever since I got to Aussie, cause I had heard all about it… and then when I finally heard that I was going there I was like mean as… and I didn't wanna like miss out on it…

The next rangatahi is a young female, currently 18 years old, recognised here as Rangatahi J. As mentioned, her connection to a gang is through one of her two mothers. Her mother comes from a prominent gang-affiliated family, and this rangatahi acknowledges she is affected by this connection.

J: I wanted a job. I wanted a job and experience. So, I'd just have it. I didn't care about the money. Oh, and because then I – my mums didn't let me go out that much. Like would never let me go out the house, so getting – having a job was like, yussss, more free time. [laughs]

Rangatahi J shared her determination to find work in her early teenage years, driven by a desire to explore life outside the home. She recognised that she was very protected while growing up.

J: Um, the people that I met there were like really really, um, supportive, like my group of friends. I hadn't had a group of friends like this before. Um, they were all Islanders girls, but they were all determined with schoolwork. And like for me, like I was like, 'yeah, well I'm determined too,' but I can't really – I couldn't really focus that much by myself. But when I had them, they were there to help me with schooling. Like they even encouraged me like after school to go to, you know, to go to libraries.

The way she discussed this particular experience was interesting because she could compare her involvement with that of her previous school and a group of peers there. Once again, this theme of peer support was also evident in Rangatahi T2's interview, where he recognised the strengths he could bring to his friendships and what each person could gain from their mutual connection.

T2: I had some, I had some pretty cool school mates… and ahh they were a lot more educated than I was… Like smarter… umm... yeah, I had a lot of friends… I was kind of popular… laughs yeah… but ahh, most of my good close friends they would, they

would help me a lot… and yeah that was a good thing, and I would help them a lot too… with like practical stuff as well… so… It was pretty much a win win for both of us… that pretty much helped me ahh… get along with high school and try…

Rangatahi T2 also shared interesting insights around managing multiple commitments and was able to reflect on his growth and maturity once becoming independent and moving out of his father's home.

T2: It kinda, it kinda made it like a little bit easy…. Cause you know um... just from growing up and moving a lot of places… because I did move around a lot when I was little… ahh pretty much I understood all of the outcomes… what were the things I had to prioritise to do… my umm… and understanding what needs to happen with this… and that and power and water… you know… rent and stuff like that so I was… you know I was already thinking of that stuff when I was 14, 15 years old… when I left high school.

From this space, he also reflected on how his upbringing shaped his understanding of independence before leaving home. Recognising transience as a key factor in this learning. The second part of this conversation focused on discussing goals and achievement, identifying the steps necessary to ensure the successful completion of set goals.

T2: Positive, positive… I would, I would just say… just don't… don't be afraid to ask… pretty much… umm... you know there's... ahh everyone... you know… just for all those people out there, there are a lot of people like them… like myself, like ourselves that are struggling… that are frustrated with life… that there is… little steps you can take... it doesn't have to be… big ones, like real big ones…

Within the T2 perspective of achievement, it's about a person's willingness to take the first steps towards a goal and then persist until they succeed. Alongside this, it involves recognising that these initial steps open up endless possibilities and pathways.

T2: but as long as you take that first step of tryna… achieve something for yourself that you know… emotionally, physically that you know that… its gunna work for you, then

yeah… keep going for it and don't stop because… each step after another is something that could achieve into that… you could probably dream of…

For Rangatahi J, goal setting was also viewed as a way to provide direction and motivation towards positive outcomes like T2. It was also highlighted that meeting new people and associates is important to find those with similar minds or who can share common experiences.

J: I think the way that they think about that part is to focus on something else, like so focus on their goals and all that. Like, create some goals. Cause they don't. They know their goal is… I reckon they should just pick it back up. Go to core study, you know. Who knows, you'll meet new people, they wanna… who might be in the same thing, going through the same thing as you.

For rangatahi T, having a diverse knowledge bank was seen as essential for leading oneself and others positively. Recognising the world around us through cultural and practical knowledge helps ground the individual and connects them to pathways of success, whatever that may look like.

T: I think that they definitely need the knowledge… the knowledge of your ancestors… and ahh um, and the Māori… knowledge, they need to know if it works… but at the same time, the Pākehā knowledge... you need to know all that stuff like you know… ahh the paying tax and how, how… how tax works and…And, and… Pākehā things like that you know… and really knowledge is key… umm…

Also emphasised in relation to leading a successful life was feeling secure and recognising the importance of security. Rangatahi T identified key family members who provided this security for him and reflected on the qualities these family members embodied, which made him feel safe and secure.

T: I think security is um… it depends you know, like my dad was always my security… you know, my mum and my dad you know… that was my security, so I always felt like… security was a big thing… you with ahh not wealth… yeah… I think security is a huge thing… cause, umm... yeah that will definitely be my next… just cause you know, when you have people that make you feel… safe and that, you'll wanna follow them…

In addition to this, Rangatahi T shared his insight into personal growth and his motivation to continue developing himself through his study and work endeavours.

> *T: for so long, we did the degree, aw… the diploma last year… so we thought we'd… switch on to the degree this year… so we… just did our first couple of studies on that at the moment… and that's been wicked its…same, its same…. Well not the same, but it's evolving you know… to me, I'm just tryna evolve on both sides you know (motions to a triangle shape) …*

Being able to track his success and the stages through which he has developed himself in his education and work pathways highlights rangatahi T's ability to articulate more clearly than the other rangatahi. This demonstrates his journey, the evolving nature of where he has come from, and where he envisions himself heading.

5.3.3 Success for rangatahi located in gang spaces in Aotearoa

This section will share rangatahi whānau insights regarding their success while being connected to or based in Aotearoa gang space. What does this look like? What are some barriers these rangatahi identify? What are some ways that could help address these barriers? As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the key difference with the rangatahi whānau we interviewed is their added identity of being affiliated with an Aotearoa gang space.

Therefore, as we progress through the following sections, the final part of each will revisit rangatahi insights related to their understanding and lived experience of connection to these spaces. To start the section, we focus on a rangatahi identified as H. She connects to a gang space through her late father, along with her three older brothers who are currently members. She shared the following contribution.

> *H: [pause]…It means it's – I don't know, making sure everyone gets treated equally, maybe… Mm. Yeah. Cause I don't understand – like… I don't know if it's understandable when I say 'they'. I don't know. It's like a different, like, culture*

The above highlights H's understanding of what gang culture and her connection to it mean to her. From the outset, she recognises on some level that it represents a culture, and one she can see as being different. She also provides an interesting insight when she relates gang connection for her in the first instance as a space where everyone is treated equally. Returning to the first point, more reflection could have been provided if a follow-up had explored this rangatahi's perspective on and interpretation of difference. In comparison, Rangatahi J had a more sombre message to share.

> *J: When you look at these kids now, and these kids that actually want to be patched when they're older, they, they have no understanding of why it was created. They don't unders-, they don't understand this. So, what they're thinking, I think they just wanna think about all the crime stuff – not even actual what they're there for – that's to support each other, and all that.*

Rangatahi J's perspective offers a more in-depth analysis of her observation of gang space compared to Rangatahi H, recognising that there is a supportive element within the Aotearoa gang space she associates with. Overall, Rangatahi K closely aligns with the description Rangatahi J describes, as he hopes to become a member when he's of age, and he shares his insights on who can influence rangatahi today.

> *K: Yeah umm… nah ah I said it in a way that… at the end of the day, the kids these days… just gonna learn and observe, they won't listen to a kōrero out of someone's mouth these days… they'll have to sit there and learn from the older ones that… their idols aye… you can't, get someone like in the government… to come and talk to you, and say… you don't want your life to be like that… like CYFs and all that*

In this sense, he speaks on behalf of rangatahi who are in a similar position to him. For Rangatahi Q, his insight into what he saw as a challenge for these rangatahi was their ability to discover who they are on their own.

> *Q: I don't know, people just want you to be, what they want you to be… but you don't know what you want to be… But then like people… want to turn you into what they want… everyone wants different…Yeah, it's just the feeling of confidence that people actually want you to be… and then you get to choose who you want to be…*

Compared to K, Q is on a lesser scale as he does not wish to become a member and instead chooses to pursue an apprenticeship in construction. For Rangatahi T, he recognised a need for rangatahi in these spaces who are struggling to be able to seek and receive support.

> *T: Aww… I reckon umm… cause every individual kid… is different you know, so if you see one… that's really, really struggling, be sure to nurture and guide them… and get like, you know, get someone that's doing the right thing…*

T's comments focus on role modelling and making sure those who can nurture and guide rangatahi are on a positive path themselves. The second part of T's insight relates to his connection with Te Ao Māori and the grounding it could offer these rangatahi.

> *T: like, this is how I see it… like umm… I really think it would be awesome just… to teach all our rangatahi the Māori ways… you know like… just go back to the natural… like, like ahh… the basic history of it… how we roll, you know, how we… roll on a marae… teach them that sort of… stuff you know,*

Rangatahi T then offered his insight into his observation of gang space and the ability of Te Ao Māori to have a positive influence within it, this connection being the only one outlined by any rangatahi interviewed.

> *T: some of the cuzzies, they wanna fall back on the gang path, which I don't think it's a bad thing… you know I don't think it's all bad you know…I think somewhere in there they should teach some… Māori basics you know like… at least they all stay in the right… mind frame.*

Additionally, Rangatahi T2 identified attitude as a barrier, such as these rangatahi being motivated to indulge in unproductive habits that cloud judgement and hinder their ability to see alternative paths. This remains one of their most challenging aspects.

> *T2: It won't be an easy task…it wouldn't be an easy task…umm... there will be times where… it will be a lot of frustration from those kids… they think about … drugs… and alcohol and you know making money through drugs… and stuff, so there pretty much…*

they can, they can start their life like that…and umm... like I said it's not, it's not gonna be easy…

He was also able to share his thoughts on what success for rangatahi in our gang spaces might involve. His observations focused on providing opportunities for them and giving them the space to explore different pathways.

T2: being affiliated with a lot of gangs um… you know they may see a bit of one side, but… we all, there's still gotta be a bit of … but just as long as you keep them going, and keep them active with a lot of things… like sporting, stuff like that… like stuff that… you and maybe the other person may have a good connection with… like maybe… if he likes artwork… or if you know he likes mathematics… learning with numbers you know, there's a lot of different… varieties, you know, you just have to talk with the person…

5.3.4 Summary of themes

As we conclude the first section, we can identify themes that emerged during our exploration of the initial research question. Regarding success (section 5.2.1): family security through happy families; a grounding in Te Ao Māori and cultural aspects; work ethic and starting young. Concerning success mechanisms (section 5.2.2), the following were identified: learning time management skills; passion for experiencing life; setting goals and persevering to achieve them; gaining knowledge about life and important areas; and feeling secure and having security.

Regarding success for rangatahi growing up in Aotearoa gang spaces (section 5.2.3), the following themes emerged: self-awareness of what it means to be in a gang-affiliated whānau; education and learning happening within the whānau themselves; confidence to explore pathways and identity; having positive role models to guide and nurture; and having opportunities along with the confidence to pursue them. These themes will be examined in more depth in Chapter Seven. The following section relates to the second research question.

5.4 Grasping school and work opportunities?

In this section, we will explore the second research question of this work. Rangatahi insights will be shared alongside those of the adults, whom we will refer to as pakeke. Based on their experiences, we will highlight thoughts related to school and work opportunities for rangatahi growing up in these environments. The intergenerational perspective then allows us to examine how they navigated school and work pathways, considering their backgrounds in gang environments and the communities they grew up in.

The first section will cover the nurturing of education pathways, the second will focus on employment and career pathways, and the third will address navigating or travelling along these pathways within a gang-affiliated environment. Once again, like in the previous section, whānau will be identified by the first letter of their name.

5.4.1 Education pathways

As outlined in Chapter Three, education is a site of contention for rangatahi Māori across the entire spectrum. What is recognised is the low rate of Māori youth remaining in educational institutions and successfully completing their courses. They face numerous challenges, yet the following snippets highlight some of the ways in which they manage to navigate these obstacles effectively. As shown in the next snippet, Rangatahi T attributed his early learning in a kura kaupapa Māori as a key factor in nurturing his motivation to succeed in education.

> *T: Umm… it wasn't, it wasn't just reo… cause um cause I think actually… Māori… Māori performing arts…. And Māori… those two things, they really appealed to me cause I could pass them… If you know what I mean… I could get pass and get the, the, you know the ticket…it was easy and I could you know I didn't like… you know for instance English was hard as heck*

For Rangatahi T2, he was able to recognise that assistance received from a teacher could guide him towards a trades course, which was a completely different direction from that of Rangatahi T.

T2: Yeah… pretty much yeah… cause um… that was for one of my teachers in high school… he told me… this would be a good one for you because you know, you're in the training industry… you wanna go that far… here's a course that I think will be good for you… and you know, you can experience different trade areas

A struggle he identified for himself was reaching out and asking for help. He mentioned that it was difficult because he would hesitate when help was offered.

T2: Yeah pretty much the biggest one was asking for help… ahh… I never liked asking… for a lot of things… I never liked you know people helping me a lot of the times… like even family… I never liked asking for things from all of them…

The following highlights the first pakeke insight. Pakeke A shared her perspective on learning challenges and an approach to address them. For this pakeke, her connection to a gang space stems from her late father. She is currently a doctoral candidate. The context of her sharing focused on her journey of reconnecting with her Māori identity, but it also remains relevant to nurturing education pathways and encouraging perseverance.

A: Well you know as much as anyone else the only way… you can grow is getting out of our comfort... like leaning into the discomfort… like there's a mean as whakataukī… 'He mana pukepuke, ka eke nei e te waka'… and I like 'The bigger the waves, the further you go... and I go to people, you can play it safe in the shallows, like you have a nice day, play in the shallows but you don't go anywhere… but beyond there's a possibility your gonna get smashed drowned whatever… but there also a possibility that you'll go further and you'll see things… you might not have seen and experienced things... so, it's kind of leaning into that...

For Rangatahi Q, peer group support was emphasised as influencing his time at high school, and this was also reflected by Rangatahi J and Rangatahi T. Together, these rangatahi spoke about the support they found in their peer groups and the sense of acceptance and confidence they felt when with their friends. The positive impact of their peers was evident in the lively way they spoke about them.

T: cause usually my close bro's would come up and usually have a chat with them… and I'd just wait again, and we would be on school premises and we'd just talk… and there usually the ones that got me through my days… they'd be like you know cuz, you can come over home whenever you want… and you know, those sorts of things got me through…

Another area that Rangatahi T highlighted was his ability to recognise when he needed assistance. He attributed this to his personality, as he is open to asking for help when necessary. This directly contrasts with Rangatahi T2, who often struggled with asking for help.

T: Yeh, yeah, yeah…. I noticed my um abilities to umm… to distract kids and to just oddle off with the fairies… I could understand that, that was me and I could understand that I had heaps of energy…So, I always felt like… I'd go up to my teacher and I'd go hey miss can I get an extra teacher on me… and they'd be like far, nobody asks for an extra teacher… and I'd be going, nah but I need it…

Rangatahi T offered the example of noticing his disruptiveness to his fellow pupils and then taking it upon himself to ask for extra support from teaching staff. For Pakeke L, his sense of belonging stems from his father, who is, and has been for a long time, a member and advocate for gangs in Aotearoa, and is also a lifetime member. His father played a key role in brokering negotiations in the 1980s on behalf of the gangs to establish a work scheme supported by the Muldoon government. L was the youngest child of this member; his current profession is as an accountant.

L: Umm my parents... ahh yeah really good… ummm… so I spent two years in Aussie living with my uncle… And um… my uncle umm spent most of his life in the army… he was a pretty strict disciplinarian… umm so yeah, he was all about… if you're not training, you're doing homework…

For Pakeke G, the concept he values—mirrored by Rangatahi T—is that having a Te Ao Māori element as part of one's foundation is beneficial. For Pakeke G, his connection to a gang stems from his late father, as well as uncles and brothers who are currently members. He himself is also a member, and since his father's passing, he has taken on many of his father's roles while ensuring that his father's vision is carried forward.

> *G: Yea and of course my old man's whakaaro was the same… education and Te Ao Māori… are the way forward for us, is the way forward for us… I think as far as a framework goes, it is in the Indigenous… hīkoi… and um… you know I can… I can speak to that, because that's what happened with us… Yeah... ko te kōrero o taku pāpā, e ai ki taku pāpā… arā, me mau tonu tō ringa, tō manawa ki tō tātou ao Māori, kei roto… rā ā tātou oranga… so in, in Te Ao Māori is our wellbeing…*

Again, this theme is reflected in both the rangatahi and pakeke interviews. For another pakeke (H), his education also had a religious element, as he attended a Mormon college. His connection to a gang was through his father, who is now an ex-member and has been since H was 12 years old. H, however, still has numerous extended family members who are gang members.

> *H: Um, and so that was an eye opener, going from a Mormon Church to an Anglican school…So, um, education, as much as I tried to apply myself with what I was doing, I was never really good at it. I was kind of - I'm more of an interaction type of - that's how I learn and stuff. So, I didn't even get - I didn't even get bursary; that's the equivalent; I didn't get bursary; I just got Sixth Form Certificate, but in a bridging. And I did three years of that at that year.*

H was able to identify his learning style early in his educational journey and used his strengths, which were rugby and rugby league. This seemed to serve him well, and he is now living in France, playing professional rugby there. He has been based here for the past five years.

> *H: Oh, that's the, that's, that's the kind of thing. That was the - that's been a tool; do you know what I mean? It's been the tool that's kind of brought me this far. Obviously, I've come to France; I've made connections with French people and people of all different cultures. Um, and, and I do think while sport's not the only way, it's a - for us as Māori people, um, or maybe just people in general*

H recognises his sporting ability as key to his successful navigation of school and work pathways. He also recognises that this isn't the only pathway and that many others exist. He then discusses his career prospects going forward, which will be explored in the next section.

5.4.2 Employment and career pathways

Pakeke H talks about his success and the importance of staying grounded because his current job is only temporary. He credits his understanding of staying humble to his family environment.

> *H: And then I feel like the shift came along as I started representing, um, rugby. Um, at that same time as I was starting to mature… and, um, I'm not finished my career yet, but I, I always from the beginning try to maintain a sense of - for starters I never made the All Blacks, I never made big teams, but I was always thereabouts. And I, I've been fortunate enough to come away, um, and bring my family out of a type of - you know, I brought our parents, my parents here to France. Like, they've come here and, and, and I maintain today like our family…*

Another element he highlights is confidence and believes it is a vital part of success. H also recognises that, despite his current achievements, he has always felt a sense of confidence which he again attributes to his family connections and environment, as he shared.

> *H: Like I, I really do - um, I've been, um, you know I've been 16,000, a full stadium, um, for all the players that are leaving and I'm the head of that group… but I feel like in myself my confidence is that I, I, I truthfully have not tried to look for people to, to like me, adore me, praise me.*
> *Because I actually feel like it, um, I already feel like I'm, I'm the man enough already. and that confidence has come through my family association of... having people that have enforced or encourages confidence as a value, of just being able to love, to, to be openly loving.*

For the following pakeke, initially I, his work experience was undertaken quite late in life. This pakeke followed in his late father's footsteps and is also a patched member. At a young age, this pakeke was pursuing a path similar to Pakeke H, in that he was headhunted to play rugby in Australia. He shares the following regarding his work pathway.

I: Nah this is what it was, cause I knew I was getting released and I wanted to be in a working environment… well the marae that was across the road from probation… who was helping me directed me to this… umm… steel fixing job, and I started it and um…

Pakeke shared an interesting experience where the work he was given at that time wasn't in the environment he wanted to learn in, so he chose to go another way.

I: when I got there it was an ex-nomad and…his sons, and his mates and…Nah nah it's this, fuck I didn't come to learn on this side…so I sacked myself that same day… and told them nah nah I'm not learning from there… and I pushed to get another job so I went to AA… and they put me through to somewhere and those people were full on, been working all their lives… and that's where I learnt

For rangatahi T, as previously introduced, his work experience began at a young age, and he recognised that this gave him a good position when it was time to find full-time, paid work as a young adult.

T: There the three main things… the main goal… was to cut the tree down… turn it all into little um… circle biscuits… get the biscuits… chuck them into firewood throw em on the truck… and we would unload it and start that again… for twenty times I counted one day… It gave me a good foundation aye… cause I learnt how ta work hard… cause it was like a consistent… But ahh it teaches you… a lot of good things you know cause… you know… I was only young…

For rangatahi Q, his motivation to find work was driven by a kapa haka trip to Japan, where he needed spending money. Talking about this experience, he admitted feeling nervous during the job interview but recognised that peer support helped him feel confident enough to go ahead.

Q: I was on the bus there straight after school…. And I told the boys on the bus and there like aww your gonna do it Q, you got this, you got this, and I go yeah I got it, I got it … smiles… and I finally get there and I saw like… the bro that was at the base saw me and he was like yeah bro… he was like cracking up and stuff I bet you cracked it… and I was like aw sweet… and we were just like cracking up… yeah…

When asked about some of the challenges he faces at work, as he works at a food court in a local mall, he mentioned difficulties with customers and customer service. Regarding what works well for him at work, he offers the following.

> *Q: Yeah like… just keep calm and don't like… like if you're feeling like annoyed… and frustrated you just don't show it… just stay calm… yeah… you meet… a lot of people at [ ] who always come and go… I met like so many people like casual customers and that… and I'm talking to them again when I meet them out in public so it's alright…*

Where Rangatahi Q's incentive was for spending money for this trip, Rangatahi J's motivation derived from a different need.

> *J: I wanted a job. I wanted a job and experience. So, I'd just have it. I didn't actually care about the money… I think it was just being independent, finding my own and things… I've worked at café, Allpress Café, Tiffany Café – oh Tiffany's, and I was out piopio…picking berries for a little bit.*

For Pakeke A, spoken about earlier, her work pathways were never planned. During our interview, I noted she is very articulate and animated, with lots of enthusiasm and a natural ability to inspire.

> *A: Aw I love teaching, it's a buzz man... I get a real, aw like I don't like the marking and things like that but I get a real... I'm not afraid to say it but teaching is my taonga… and I love being able to um… communicate and discuss with tauira about ngā mea Māori and all the stuff and like kind of see… that light bulb moment or see them get excited... I love that stuff... I love it.*

An attribute of her chosen pathway was to follow intuitive guidance, and she feels a close affinity with her tūpuna. In this sense, she is open to receiving signs and signposts she feels are given to her, indicating where to go next.

> *A: Like I've never really had a clear path of what I should do… I've always just had someone say aw you should give this a go and I'd be like aww, I'd resist it... and they go just give it a go... and I'm over here and I enjoy it… I am a big believer kare in…*

um the tūpuna and the universe providing and... like sometimes I freak out about it… but I also know I've always... my history shows me that once I let go and give in… I'm always directed in the right… but some people will be like that's so unorganised … but I've never really had a path or… goals or a five-year plan.

From Pakeke A's insight, we can see that a plan isn't always necessary, and for many of our rangatahi, their pathways reflect what A has experienced, which is encouraging. However, for A, instead of a plan, she relies on cultural values to help her navigate her journey. This approach has ultimately led her to a path where she feels in her element and, in turn, able to inspire others.

5.5.3 Navigating School and Work Pathways from a gang affiliated space

This section will again share the two tiers of rangatahi and pakeke insights and focus on their experiences of navigating work and school pathways while connected to a gang-affiliated space. The previous sections have looked specifically at the insights and experiences regarding school and work pathways in general. However, this section will be more open in exploring these pathways through the lens of this connection.

H: …my dad's not a patched member today, but he's still, in my mind, he's still Mongrel Mob. He still behaves and shares those… when I first arrived at school at [] I was - I just, I just didn't have the, the behaviour. I wasn't the way that they had - I didn't fit into the school in my first years. I was still really on the rough edges, like rough side, kind of, and my mindset, you know, was still red all the way. Um, it was still trying to be gangster at a church school.

For Pakeke H, his experience was marked by a whānau transition when his father chose to stop being a patched member. This caused a shift in the dynamics for H, which he recognises took time to settle.

H: And then eventually, you know, I started maturing a bit and realising that I didn't have to, um, be so outward, outward in, in my, in the way I felt about things. And then I found myself kind of moving away from that whole idea. Um, and so I never, I never

faced - at the time of, like, in my youth, like 18, 16, 17, actually that lifestyle that I had been a part of up till 12, 13 became kind of a badge of honour, because people started to learn about me and learn, 'Wow, you were like that when you were there, and now you're this'.

For Pakeke G, as outlined, his experience reflected similar attributes of H; however, there are slight differences.

G: …and because and cause straight away… the way I was branded… Branded as this type of kid… whereas in reality I was a very very sharp kid… and these teachers… that were teaching me, were boring as…and so they couldn't hold my interest… and here, for me, that's where kura actually failed me… it streamlined me into this group of people that I was… this type of person, but at the end of the day the reality… I had already learnt what these teachers had to offer… and now I was just… wasting time there… and you know, I became bored… really really quick

For Pakeke I, his education was at a private school, where his uncle also led the Māori department. His insights are as follows.

I: Sighs ummm… yeah sometimes they were a bit weary… weary of me in terms of um... like especially in New Plymouth… the teachers were weary of me having uncle there… like they already had their homework done on who we were… Aw you know… sports yeah… fucken that experience there… taught me about respect in its own right… but it fucken um was also a bit of a place where I learnt the system can go against you… Yeah I had no choice… but um you have to make the most of all of um situations aye…

An avid sports player, Pakeke navigated his way through a predominantly European private school. His time at this education institution taught him independence and how to earn respect in his own right.

I: It was always, it was always like I've always felt privileged to come from our family… that I had more than the others, cause they couldn't comp… like they couldn't understand… and that, and I knew there was only a minority of us that come from that

lifestyle and we were well off yano… so I felt kinda ahh privileged, you know… Yeah it added strength…

For Rangatahi K, his support from whānau primarily came from his late father. He shares that his father encouraged him and his older brother to attend school and also helped by giving them money when there was no food for lunch. K understands why he was willing to go to school when he did, noting that there were times he did not attend and often left school quite young.

K: Umm, yeah, yup… yeah, the old man told us to go to school every day… If we didn't have lunch, he would give us money and those were the coolest days… [big smile] … Every school that I went to… lots of friends… umm… just play rugby and all that aye… whole different thing… Get out of the house, a whole different scenery…

For rangatahi T2, his experience of school and work pathways while being connected to and affiliated with a gang space required him to make certain choices about who he allowed to influence him.

T2: …pretty much tryna have your own bubble…only having your own thoughts in that bubble… umm… just so because… your tempted… to expand that bubble to much… you get a lot of thought… of unspoken things around your head… tends to um… make you… change your mind and miss think… and that's when a lot of bad shit starts to happen… cause you'll get frustrated from people talking… having different ideas… I'll try this, my idea, for myself… and if it fucks up for me then I'm okay with it… and that's pretty much how it was, was my bubble… umm…. My own way…

Pakeke L reflects on his affiliation and connection to his gang space. He realises that this link wasn't clearly recognised when he was young, so he's uncertain whether to see it as an existing connection or mere affiliation.

L: yeah yeah, I don't know if it was really connected…. Cause um.. in our whānau we had um… umm.. people… you know proud Māori… proud in their Māoritanga… that didn't like the gangs… And ahhh and others that were proud Māori, proud in their Māoritanga and we were all in with the gangs… it was hard to reconcile.

Further observations from Pakeke L detail his experience navigating this space he discusses, which contained many paradoxes. As far as he could determine, being connected to a gang wasn't particularly significant.

> *L: umm… and umm... some of them were in the gang… and I didn't like them… and others were in the gang… and I liked them... and so I never really… could reconcile that all gang members were bad… or all gang members were good kind of thing… because yeah... cousins I like who were… patched members of the black power and cousins I didn't like… who were wearing the same patch… you know ahh... it was irrelevant…*

For Rangatahi T, his mother and father separated when he was a toddler. His experience was growing up with his mother, and at times this was challenging for him with some issues happening in the home. That aside, his father, a patched member whom he looked up to, provided an environment filled with some of the best memories of his childhood.

> *T: …it's like when I got the first chance… to go and live with my dad I was like yeeehaaa… so I moved over to I think… with him… In Hamilton for a bit and we… stayed there and that was my… that was my best life you know I was living my best life… dad had some raru that he had to go through and sent me back to mum… I would change that for life you know… I would love to live in Hamilton… you know anybody that knows me from around here, they know that I'm Waikato hard.*

For Pakeke A, her experience with her affiliation space, as mentioned, was influenced by her father. Her observations of this space may contain a slightly different perspective since she didn't meet her father until her teenage years.

> *A: …all I noticed was... there were lots of different ones and they all got on… I mean my Dad travelled the world being a Hells Angel... cause they're in every country… I got a real… love for learning and ahh that's my dad... I mean my Mum too but my Dad… my Dad was... ahh he liked to learn stuff… and when you would let him, when you could get a word in… he would listen.*

Sitting within this was the ways in which Pakeke A spoke of her father as having many different talents, which did not always fit the stereotypical gang member profile.

> *A: and I think I already knew um from that, from being around that that people had a real different perception to what I had experienced and to what mum had experienced... and so, if you haven't been around it, there's a real fearful… and rightly so sometimes… But it was funny too cause of… so much a part of who he was but it almost like you can't even separate it… aye so he just was who he was… I don't even know how to articulate it like... um... people loved dad anyway when they found out cause they would always be like… aw I thought they were scary…*

In recognising the unfamiliarity and fear of those who have not grown up around a gang environment, Pakeke A discusses how she navigated different perceptions attached to her father.

5.4.4 Summary of themes

To summarise, in nurturing education pathways for rangatahi connected to a gang space (section 5.3.1), we observe again an emphasis on mātauranga Māori as a way to foster the learning and understanding abilities of rangatahi; the focus on support networks; recognising one's learning style to aid educational pathways; developing the ability to ask for help and accept it; peer support as motivation; exploration through overseas travel; and the use of natural talents.

Regarding the nurturing of employment pathways (section 5.3.2), we identify two levels of rangatahi and pakeke emphasising the need for values related to work ethic when developing such pathways. Also highlighted are the importance of self-confidence; working with experienced individuals in the relevant field; whānau support; positive work environments; and the flexibility to explore pathways without always having a clear plan.

In the final section 'Navigating school and work pathways from a gang affiliated space' (section 5.3.3), we identify the themes of mindset shifts, maturity and development, privilege, understanding one's parent as a member, being independent in one's thinking, gang connection

and affiliation as normal, and families as vibrant and diverse. These themes will be explored in greater detail later in Chapter Seven.

5.5 Identity and marginalization

This section highlights the final sharing of the rangatahi and pakeke insights. The focus here is on understanding the impact of experiences on the interviewed whānau. Has identity and marginalisation affected their ability to navigate school and work pathways? What challenges have they faced, and how have they managed their connection to gang spaces while transitioning into and onto these pathways?

Considering the research question at hand, under the following headings we will give voice to the experiences of these rangatahi, alongside those of the pakeke to firmly establish this research as intergenerational. The final part will explore what our whānau have contributed in shedding light on some of the mechanisms they found helpful.

5.5.1 Impacts of Identity

Much research conducted by Māori researchers indicates that developing a Māori identity is vital for the health and well-being of Māori overall. What then becomes apparent is the impact of gang identities that these rangatahi are ultimately linked to.

> *H: Well, I guess, simply, um, um, I belong to the, well, um, a Mongrel Mob member and, um, son to a sister of Black Power members. Um, and I guess, yeah, that's my, I guess, my claim to fame or my connection is through birth, um, and, um, being on both sides of the coin, I guess….*

The first point of explanation begins with recognising our rangatahi and pakeke, as well as the gang spaces they connect to. When asked how he connects within a gang space, Pakeke H shared the snippet above and spoke about the pride he feels in having ties to two gangs from the same region, which are considered to be in opposition to each other.

H: …when I say 'my claim to fame…it's actually something that I kind of wore and I continue to wear with a bit of pride. Um, not, not so much because of what the two gangs represent, but what it means to - you know, I'm pretty passionate about being from the Waikato. Um, and to be kind of - to see both, both sides and to be represented in the Waikato by both of those two, um, you know, they're the most prominent…in our rohe…

For H, outlines his connection to gang space and his thoughts and feelings on what these connections represent and mean for him. Pakeke G offers his insight into identity as shaped through the learning involved in his upbringing.

G: And, and and it's, like I said… It's like the korero I just dropped now from my papa… our well-being is in our culture, that's the framework for us to move forward… forward into the light, that's the framework, that's his… korero and umm…. Like I was saying up on the maunga… when we were up there with him, that was his sole purpose… was to, in the end, in the last thirty years of his life was to ensure we understood… that we were tangata whenua i te tuatahi

Also present was a religious component, exemplified below, and somewhat challenging for an outsider to grasp, as this mixture of identity in this gang space is quite unique.

G: Aye… once you understand who you are as tangata whenua, no one can take that away from you… no one… And, and that being the foundation for us to stand on… hei tuarā mō tātou… And the norm… for us was well, Black Power as far as we were concerned… was Io Matua Kore, Ranginui… Pāpātuanuku, me ngā Atua katoa… ā tae noa atu, iho mai… ngā matua… ngā tūpuna, ngā mātua tūpuna… ā, ki ō tātou mātua, ā, ki a mātou… that's Black Power Movement Whakatane ki a mātou… [chuckles]

Pakeke, I was born and raised in a whānau with strong ties to their gang community, through the senior role of Pakeke I's late father, his uncles, and first cousins. He highlights the depth of this connection in the following snippets and recognises the strengths he's gained from it.

I: My name's [ ]… ahh patch member of the Blacks… and yeah born and raised in our family… within our family… strengths are definitely… morals and values, not all

families but ours… umm... you know like and usually there's a lot of other families that have been raised around the presidencies and that sort of the thing… and um… so the strength yeah is definitely um the respect, understanding how respect works… cause you see it in action daily through other men… with you know the old man…

When asked about tikanga Māori in gang space Pakeke I offered the following.

I: Well only up to like six months ago I only ever implemented my Māori values... aw my Māori tikanga into it… you know I use to think you don't put… two separate things… but after doing that little bit of study I now see how um… similar a gang is to a hapū… that was ran back then… for real… like it really is the closest thing you can get to... the warriors, your rangatira and that, back then…

In sharing his thoughts, Pakeke I elaborates further and discusses the contrast between traditional and contemporary Māori culture.

I: you can't be wearing a suit and tie, fucken… living off the concept of a white man… and expect to be saying, your living how our tūpuna did… no, our tūpuna wanted their own fucken um structures, their own system and that's what we do… we don't govern, we don't get governed from them… we have to implement what they've got to give us and so we stay free but it's bro we govern ourselves… we got our own rules set, we really do… they just not written down, but they there…

Pakeke G expressed his understanding when asked what he thought of the gang members as representing traditional Māori structures of hapū.

G: The structure and also to the war likeness, our warness tino tata rawa atu… Well the war aspect yes… but the behaviors kāo… ki a mātou and to us…you know, that's what that means to us Tino Rangatiratanga… Mana Motuhake, to us it's not about Gangsterism… or having big flash cars, or all those things… those are just big flash cars and things to us…
…ki a mātou ko te tino… ki a mātou… ko tēnei tō mātou ihi, wehi, wanawana… taku mana Iho Matua… aye, that's what that represents to us… and when I say us, Black Power Movement, to our pāpā… to us as children, as mokopuna… it's not something

we wear on our backs and all of a sudden we're Black Power Movement… we breath it, we see it, we listen to it… we hear it… we speak it, ia rā, ia rā…

Pakeke H shares his view of his gang space as he grew up, including whether that space was connected to a Māori identity.

H: I mean, in itself, it's, it's kind of fits into its own, its own group as well, because when I, you know, I went to school Māori, but what I thought was Mongrel Mob, I genuinely didn't think that was a Māori, Māori mentality…And then when I saw our Black Power side it seemed like whānau, everybody loves. Because, like, our cousins… weren't afraid to kind of love each other… and I feel like that's Māori, like that was what I thought of as Māori... to the Mob, it was about, 'Oh, look at me, I'm the toughest and I'm on my own'…

A contrast point for Pakeke H was the ability to engage with two sides of his family, each representing opposing gangs. Through this experience, he gained the insights mentioned earlier. Another interesting insight from H is his recognition of different life phases and their intersections. As previously noted, H has an additional identity experience linked to the Mormon church, and he identifies three stages in his journey of identity and connection.

H: …I would have saw myself in, in, myself in two parts. But today I, I feel like I'm, I'm - my life is in three parts. And, um, what I mean by that is that from birth right up to, um, when I was about 12 or 13, when the old man dropped out of the Mob officially, that to me kind of was the span of active Mongrel Mob…and then from that time onwards, 12, 13 onwards till about to where I'm, like… a little bit before my thirties…I had moved into a church lifestyle…and then I lived that and then I moved away from that, that group. So, I moved away to come to France…so I've been away for eight years in France…

These three phases H outlines as movements and shifts that reflect changes in priorities and affiliations. For Rangatahi J, she can recognise the connection she has to a gang space through her mother and identifies the point of difference this creates for her.

J…Um, I was born into the gang culture because of my mum's upbringing. She was raised in the gang culture; therefore, it sorts of affects my life pretty much…. I think it also not only makes you different, but you can connect with other kids that are like that as well or have that type of lifestyle.

Recognition by Rangatahi J of an enhanced ability to connect with and among those rangatahi with similar ties is emphasised, confirming the added family element as illustrated in Chapter One in reference to the connective collective. When referring to 'extended whānau', that being our gang-affiliated whānau, where connections are not necessarily through whakapapa, but through a gang whakapapa of a kind. This point about whakapapa is especially important, particularly in the next chapter.

5.5.2 Impacts of Marginalisation

The following insights are shared by a Pakeke HK who has not yet been featured in the research. HK is the son of a late senior Mongrel Mob Notorious member who passed away about 15 years ago. He shares how he navigated being the son of a member and the stereotypes placed upon him.

HK: I was pretty intelligent… and because I was quite sensitive to what the issues already were I was able to just balance that out and keep it out of what you ... out of face value of what you see… I was navigating… all I could ... all they could see was this guy going to class… you know... getting there early... being the teacher's pet... um... being in the sports... doing well in the sports...

Pakeke HK recognises there was a preconceived idea of who he was because of his ties to a gang scene, and his way of dealing with this was simply to ignore it and offer a counter example to what was considered the 'norm'.

HK: I was Mongrel Mob from the moment... I was born... and that was something that… you know... it strengthens you straight away just knowing that right away… I didn't actually want that to be what strengthened me and how people would judge me…

> *because I felt that would owe to my father that was him, for me I felt that how could I make my own ground… after they've paved for me…*

Pakeke HK also recognises that, as the child of a gang member, he felt an immediate sense of belonging to the gang his father was part of. On a related note, HK shared his thoughts on the attempt to eliminate gang space from Aotearoa.

> *HK: if you strip it down and you look at eradicating it um... you have to look at how we grow in philosophies, how we grow in beliefs, how we grow in studies and how we mature within a collective... so eradicating the gangs… you just look at an individual member and straight away he'd probably rather die than lose it and would probably defend it with his life, so, if you're looking to eradicate it... you're pretty ... you're being rebellious and you're not really understanding the whole content...*

For Rangatahi Q, his experience of external stigma involved being labelled by peers at school. He also mentioned incidents where he was targeted because others were aware of his connection to a gang space through his uncles.

> *Q: Aw yeah, aw like I'll just walk and they'll be like aw look there's that Black Power kid and I'm like aw yeah okay… and then they're like, you know stuff like that… and then like going out… like going out to parties, it's like a real other annoying one…*
> *…I remember we were at this party and then this like Mongrel Mob guy was like walking around and then cause he was like… muscly as and he was like I seen you on Facebook, and I was like aw true cool… and he was like yeah your that nigga aye… and I was like… aye… and I was just like getting annoyed… and he just kept following me around… and then all the bro's noticed it… and then they were all like g, if he does something… bro we got you g...*

What can be seen and felt through the sharing of these experiences by whānau is a spectrum. The spectrum illustrates the different levels of engagement or involvement rangatahi and pakeke have within their specific gang space. Rangatahi K shares the following regarding his connection to gang space.

K: yeah, I could see it when I was in primary… always asking me if I was alright… CYPF's and that… judging me when I come, asking me… whose dropping me off and all that… dumb questions in way that, course I'm alright… Ayee, you're looking… at me like a gang member because my… you see me getting dropped off by a V8 noisy car, like those noisy cars where… aw yeah… his father's a gang member…

For Rangatahi J, she shares her observations on the judgement of gang members, which include her understanding that gang members are judged instantly. Her proposal is to keep the home environment safe to enable children to enjoy a good life.

J: well, I feel like whenever someone sees a patched member, they automatically judge, they think, oh this, they do this and do that. It's not all they do. It's not just about that. It's about their brotherhood too, their support systems, eh?... I think that, yeah, gangs are violent, but it should be different from your home to being out with – your home should be different to your gang… As long as your kids have a… they don't get to see that side of things, then they should be…. They should have a good life then.

For Pakeke A, her experience was internal and passed through her whānau. She noticed judgement and stigma from both her mother's and father's sides towards her father's gang involvement. Through these examples, she talks about how these judgements affected her.

A: Aw it used to make me really upset because… they really used to run him down because of the gang… and because of his... and part of me knows because for a long time he was abusive to mum… um despite that he's still my dad and he's part of me… so it's not really cool, it's basically saying... I'm shit… I'm very much like him and so… they didn't really get to see, beyond the gang… he was a fucken amazing chef… like he had all these amazing, and he was just um… all these other things that people didn't really… get to see because they really wouldn't look beyond that... it used to piss me off...

What Pakeke G shares reflects some of what has been highlighted. In his school experiences and the way he presented himself, he was seen as a paradox by those who couldn't quite understand how this rangatahi, growing up in a gang environment, could be so intelligent. He mentions that he still encounters these reactions to this day.

G: And teacher, aw a lot of teachers… just loved me and actually my reports are around here someone… and they couldn't… believe that… that this gang kid…that this gang kid… who was so fucken sharp… who was so sharp… when he was beating all these, well to do, well to do families… well to do children… in all these academic places… they couldn't…. they were like what the fuck…even with the mahi I do today, and people are like… how is it that this fucken gang member is up in front of us… teaching me?... they just don't get it…

For Pakeke I, he holds the view of his fathers' generation as carrying the impacts of suppression due to marginalisation, which resulted in that generation having to carve their own paths.

I: but it's the old man and that's parents… not takahia on any mana but it's… they were weak, saddened, suppressed and all that so they hadn't got their teachings from someone who was in that fucken frame… that energy getting pushed, so they had to not take that on board and find their own way…Yeah so, they became rebellious against that… and then start creating gangs and that…

Pakeke I likens this to each generation building on the learnings of those that came before, then using those lessons from the past to spring into the future.

I: Yeah, and then they, cause it's this… as long as the ones coming through like us… are sharp enough to carry it through to a new level… then were doing our job aye bro… and we, as long as it gets past and see we didn't, where not starting off where the old man and them were, I thought we were… I thought I was like aye make us do… everything exactly... when really um… no matter what generation, if you're in another generation your gunna… be a step ahead of the one that's come before you…

With this in mind, we move into the final part of this section that explores the theme outlined by Pakeke I - the topic of intergenerational transmission. What exactly is being passed down? And how much knowledge is actually being handed on? How does this influence rangatahi, and in turn their whānau who are involved in gang spaces in Aotearoa? And what effect does this have on navigating school and work pathways?

5.5.3 Intergenerational transmission

HK: it was enough… for me to recognize that he was about this movement of his group, that this group was going to be recognized in different situations… that they could have a voice, that they could be represented, of course they were going to be marginalized you know… it was... it was... it was all that a group could be, without being good, without being nice, without being polite it was all of that you know.

HK acknowledges he didn't spend much time with his father, as his mum chose to take him and his siblings to Australia, but he did mention that the time they did spend together had an impact on him.

HK: Aw definitely the whenua… respecting the whenua… that was probably the biggest... the concept of mana and the introduction of Tangaroa… I think those two were the intrinsic together to sort of remove yourself from the plight... not that it was a rebellion... but the whole feeling … and all the energy around it was... that it went a rebellion...

For Rangatahi H, transmission was experienced through her father and was rooted in memories of her whānau travelling. Her late father was a long-standing Black Power member when he passed away and was also a passionate supporter of the Tino Rangatiratanga movement. H recalls that they would often travel to Waitangi and explore natural places and spaces. While growing up, they also lived alongside their marae in a tent and a caravan. She shares some of her memories below.

H: Ah, yeah, sometime – oh, he was just buzzy. Like, just – when we would like, travel and stuff…We always used to have a karakia before we left and stuff on our journeys…. That was pretty cool (going to Waitangi) ... There was a few of us. Like, we, like, had to go up to this hill…I was like, oh do I have to line up, eh. 'Just get in there with all the bloody…' I'm like, oh… We had to, like, write our name on this thing.

For Pakeke A, her experience could be described as unconventional; the message she received from her father was in the form of drug education. Now an older teen, she admits to experimenting with drugs, with her late father's approval.

> *A: you know and we were, and like I'm not embarrassed about this…but my dad um we had access to drugs I mean everything you could ever try… his whakaaro was, this is what's out there… going to a school with rich as white people who now have really bad drug habits… I was around that shit all the time… and I wonder if it was cause I was around it and it wasn't such a taboo ohh naughty play up thing to do…*

The form of this education focused on the effects of certain drugs on an individual, including responsible dosages. Pakeke A recognises this approach as quite unorthodox but felt it was her dad preparing her for a situation she could quite possibly encounter. Growing up in central Auckland, she took this lesson onboard and appreciated it, understanding it was her father's way of offering protection.

> *A: I mean like he wouldn't let me do it all the time… like if that started happening, I would have got a you know whatever… teaching you what is good and what is not… what to touch and what to not... very valuable information as a teenager to me… smart… I think in his own way, it was his way of protecting… us, others may have been like oh my god how terrible… I didn't see it like that…*

For rangatahi T, his experience of seeing his father in the gang scene was seen as separate, since dad did not specifically get involved in that aspect while he was around, due to the strong whānau connection. However, he was aware of his father's position from a young age.

> *T: …my dad… he, he, he fully supported me in every subject, you know I always loved that… like, if, if, it was kapa haka… man he was there…Dad, he always made it… somehow, someway you know… we'd have photo's straight away… he's up there embarrassing me… 'I love you son' while I'm on stage… I moved over to I think… with him… In Hamilton for a bit and we… stayed there and that was my… that was my best life you know I was living my best life…*

For Pakeke G, there is a clear intentional transmission that occurred, where his father outlined to him and his sibling the plan or road map as they called it. In this sphere, the roles were clearly defined, and the foundation was established through lived experience and guided from a Te Ao Māori perspective.

> *G: Ko te kōrero o taku papa, e ai ki taku papa… ara, me mau tonu tō ringa, to manawa ki tō tātou ao Māori, kei roto… rā ā tātou oranga… so in, in Te Ao Māori is our wellbeing… as Black Power, as Mongrel Mob, as…. Indigenous…It's like the kōrero I just dropped now from my papa… our well-being is in our culture, that's the framework for us to move forward…once you understand who you are as tangata whenua, no one can take that away from you… no one.*

Throughout the kōrero with Pakeke G, the above was clear, and many examples were shared. This study can only cover a few. The insight most agreed on is that a strong sense of identity places someone in a firm position.

> *G: He wasn't from here… he was a gang member, yet he was one of the only people who was taught by the tohunga… of this area… everyone else that did mau rākau… learnt somewhere else, all the people from here… learnt from Mita Mohi or Pita Sharples… and there's this Black…. from Taupo… Black Power rangatira gets taught by the two big tohunga of Ngāti Awa.*

Rangatahi T2 can share his story as recognition for the support he received during life's challenges from family and his wider gang whānau. He acknowledges that this support was helpful and shares how he is affiliated. While doing so, it becomes clear that Rangatahi T2 has chosen his own path.

> *T2: And… it took a toll but yeah, I reckon ahh whatever you call that, everyone was supportive… even the people I don't talk to…. Like gang member family, brother and that you know they were always there… even just three mins on the phone… but in those two or three mins it was quite a lot… pretty much everyone, my family… my dad… is one of them… my grand dad was well... my uncles and that as well… and I pretty much… I pretty much grew up with a lot of them… a lot of my uncles…*

His understanding of transmission for rangatahi growing up in these spaces is exemplified as follows.

> *T2: it will be a lot of frustration from those kids cause… ummm all they think about is… drugs… and alcohol and you know making money through drugs… and stuff, so…they can, they can start their life like that… and umm... like I said it's not, it's not gonna be easy…you know, you just keep on track with them and… umm, …give, give your personal… feedback on how you were growing up… but just as long as you keep them going, and keep them active with a lot of things…varieties, you know, you just have to talk with the person…*

The final contribution to this section comes from Pakeke I, who has shared various insights throughout this chapter to contrast with those of other pakeke. In Pakeke I's case, the transmission involves passing down morals and values, with a strong focus on respect, gaining respect, and giving it.

> *I: Just learnt that… you know he was obviously a man that was respected… so that was one thing that was learnt… and then manners, you know, that's why I was saying… it was in our morals and values and um… I wouldn't change them aye… I wouldn't change them because, because they… make, the real values and that which get pushed across… about holding your mana, holding your mana and staying… true to who you are…*

Pakeke I highlights morals and values as important, but then reflects on the significance of purpose and the need to understand the why as equally important.

> *I: just the purpose is a bit lost… the purpose of why we do all that aye…cause we're sitting there, were talking amongst ourselves… what our purpose is for being who we are… if there's no purpose, why the fuck would we wanna be here aye… why would I wanna be in a gang that's gonna get slammed inside all the time… if there's no purpose of coming away… you know?*

Pakeke I ask the question, why? Why are we doing this, what is the incentive and motivation for being a gang member within their gang space? Exploring the why behind a situation can

serve as a powerful catalyst for movement, depending on the way of thinking, towards either a positive or negative outcome. Therefore, it essentially points to an awareness of the self and or gang space, where that awareness may not have existed to this extent before.

5.5.4 Summary of themes

A summary of the themes in this section is as follows: section 5.4.1 discussed the impacts of identity on our rangatahi and pakeke. It clearly highlighted the mediation of multiple spaces. From the examples provided, this included connections to a gang space, Māori identity, a sportsman identity, and various religious aspects. Also presented was a sense of pride linked to connection with a gang space, which related to pride in the gang's location or territory. Cultural frameworks appeared again as a theme that can support positive progress for individuals and their whānau, and in two cases, gang chapters. Openness to change was also emphasised, along with personal growth and extended whānau connections due to gang affiliation for rangatahi.

Regarding section 5.4.2, which examined the impacts of marginalisation on rangatahi and pakeke, the discussion focused on their awareness of underlying assumptions and preconceived notions held by those outside their immediate whānau. It highlighted the need to address these assumptions by offering counterexamples and creating unique pathways. An example was also provided to show the risks of being recognised as having gang-affiliated family members but having low engagement in the community, which can lead to being identified by strangers and sometimes targeted because of this. Additionally, schools were identified as spaces where social welfare agencies and teachers may carry out interrogation.

The final section 5.4.3 discussed intergenerational transmission and what was understood by rangatahi and pakeke—the importance of moving together as a group and land/territory/whenua. The typical traits of parents who are gang members were particularly emphasised in this part. Also shared were the unorthodox teachings of parent members, which included educational elements outside societal norms but still proved to be beneficial. This was followed by the distinction between intentional and unintentional transmission of morals and values. The intentional approach offers clear guidance, even down to role allocation, while the unintentional approach allows for flexible interpretation, highlighting the need to consider and

define purpose. As with other theme summaries, these will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined the initial insights and understandings from the perspective of rangatahi Māori who navigate school and work pathways while being affiliated with and growing up within a gang environment. Each section aligned with the three research questions of this project. The first section highlighted rangatahi experiences with support and learning opportunities that helped them access and pursue education and employment options. It mainly focused on what worked for them and what didn't. Throughout this process, clear support mechanisms used by rangatahi to reach their goals became evident, despite their experiences of marginalisation and related challenges.

The second section enabled the unfolding of rangatahi thoughts on how to better action pathways forward for them. It provided rangatahi the opportunity to speak directly about their experiences and what they felt might support other rangatahi in similar circumstances as they navigate school and work pathways. This section also introduced the second tier of whānau, which is our pakeke. Here, we observe the unfolding of the intergenerational perspective, from those adults who were once these same rangatahi and their journey through school and work pathways while growing up within a gang environment.

The final section focused specifically on identity and marginalisation. It gave voice to both the rangatahi and the pakeke experiences, exploring how these attributes affected their ability to forge their own paths. Additionally, it briefly addressed intergenerational transmission and what whānau felt they gained from their gang spaces in this regard. Highlighted here was a range of responses that offer valuable insights worth noting.

Chapter Six

The Whānau Platform

Figure 6.1: Whānau Day, 2021 (own photo).

6.1 Introduction

This chapter offers insights and understandings as outlined by pakeke, mema (members) interviewed, and a selection of wāhine (women) who have lived in, or who have sons, brothers, and partners residing in Aotearoa gang spaces. Most of their accounts will align with the research outlined in Chapter Three, which relates to the development of New Zealand gangs, providing a lived perspective that considers whānau input as expert.

Also shared will be an intimate experience of gang spaces in Aotearoa to which they affiliate. Why is this important to the research at hand? Whānau are important to rangatahi as referenced in chapters one and three, and with the unfolding of the insights that follow, there is a hope to provide an additional layer of lived context. The reason is to offer an understanding of a space

that the rangatahi of this work inherit simply through birth, and association or affiliation. In this way, what will be captured and showcased is the history within gang spaces, which may not have otherwise been presented in this way.

The importance of doing this lies in highlighting existing dynamics that influence and impact rangatahi growing up in these environments, ultimately shaping how they navigate school and work pathways. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to carve out a space within a space — that being the university, which claims to be society's critic and conscience. The final section then begins with whānau insights on their rangatahi's experiences with school and work pathways, alongside possibilities and solutions that may be available for these young people. What can they see? What can they envision for our youth growing up in these settings?

The terminology used to identify our interviewees in this section is as follows. The group of members interviewed will be called ‘mema’, which is a direct Māori translation of the word 'member'. These individuals will then be identified by the first initial of their name. Additionally, a selection of women and mothers interviewed will be referred to as wahine, which is a Māori translation of the word 'woman', and they will also be identified by the first letter of their name. The category of pakeke will also be included in this chapter. Furthermore, two of the pakeke will be referenced here because they grew up within a gang environment but later became members themselves; their perspectives complement this chapter, which is why they are included.

6.2 Whānau Profiles

Mema M has been a Mongrel Mob affiliate for over 30 years. He views himself as supporting change for members, seeing this change as a positive and catalytic force for the whānau.

Mema H is a lifelong Mongrel Mob member. He presents himself as a political advocate for whānau within gang circles and has created the term ‘hard2reach’. He also emphasises that the social exclusion of hard2reach whānau (including members and their whānau) is deliberately enforced through policy.

Mema D is a lifetime member of Black Power. He positions himself as a political advocate for members and whānau who affiliate with Black Power. His work spans several decades and continues today through his advocacy organisation.

Mema E is a member of the Nomads; he was previously part of Black Power. He has over 40 years of involvement in gang culture. He sees himself as an agent of change and has been involved in several initiatives to support at-risk youth, aiming to give back and offset some of his more negative past actions.

Mema/Pakeke G was born into his affiliated Black Power Chapter, and his connection to gang space stems from his late father, who held a national leadership role within their affiliated group. Mema/Pakeke G's position in this work is that of a progressive leader, aiming to shift perceptions of what constitutes and who belongs in a gang space.

Mema E2 is a member of Black Power and was mentored by prominent pioneering Black Power leaders; he has over 40 years of affiliation. He positions himself as a social practitioner, spokesperson, and advocate for whānau in gang space. He works as an agent of change with a vision of Black Power members thriving and achieving in today's world.

Mema S is a member of Black Power and has a 50-year affiliation. He positions himself as an O.G. who has been on the ground working with gang members and whānau for many years. He advocates for change and more proactive behaviours within Black Power spaces.

Minita J is a former member of a Black Power chapter who was directly involved for 30 years and also engaged for 20 years through ministering at weddings and funerals, preaching the word of Jesus. He presents himself as an advocate for change for members and shares his philosophy and insights gained from his experience within gang environments.

Wahine N has over 50 years of association with Mongrel Mob through former partners and sons who are members. She positions herself in this work as a Researcher, Wahine, and Mother, drawing on her lived experience within gang spaces. She shares her insights and learnings from her time involved with them.

Wahine L has over 30 years of direct involvement with Black Power through her late husband and 20 years through her sons, who are members. She sees herself as a Wahine and Mother with lived experience in gang environments. She shares her insights and lessons learned from her time within them.

Wahine S has over 40 years of involvement with various gang spaces, mainly with the Mongrel Mob. She presents herself in this work as a social advocate alongside a wahine and mother with lived experience within gang environments. She shares her insights, experiences, and learnings from her time spent within them.

Wahine E has over 40 years of association with the Mongrel Mob through her late husband and brothers. She sees herself as a Matriarch of her whānau and holds a position of respect within her Mongrel Mob chapter. She shares her insights and experiences of how gang life has evolved over the years she has been involved.

Wahine T has a more than 40-year association with Mongrel Mob through her ex-husband. She positions herself in this work as a dedicated whānau advocate for her nieces and nephews navigating gang environments. She actively supports whānau to achieve their goals and shares her insights into the evolving nature of the space and her affiliations.

Mema/Pakeke, I was born into his affiliated Black Power Chapter. His connection comes from his late father, who was a senior member within the gang scene. Pakeke I, in this work, is seen as an upcoming leader in his community; he supports education and is committed to creating safe spaces for rangatahi to grow.

6.3 The lived perspective

Gang membership in Aotearoa includes more than just Māori. However, a clear theme in the interviews was an understanding of a distinctly Māori membership. Mema D shares his thoughts on Māori forming the largest ethnicity within gang membership.

D: Well, it's... it doesn't surprise me… In the 1950s there were no gangs… as such gangs except for shearing gangs… the gangs came about… when the Pākehā changed the rules… they knew what they were creating by cities in clusters… like they were saying… they knew that people (Māori) from out in the countries would come in… hence they knew that these people would lose their identity.

What can be appreciated in this work is the generational aspects of the various members interviewed. Three of these members are directly connected to the early formation years of the Aotearoa ethnic street gang; of these three, two were involved in the government sector during a time when engagement in gang spaces was common, from the late 60s to the early 80s. The following are snippets from Mema D.

D: So… I've umm… ahhh, gone through the continuum... from being relatively young myself, and then… growing up almost peer to peer you know, so I'm ahh… going through that period where I was a detached youth worker… then going through… then I joined internal affairs… as recreation, arts and youth officer … then as the chief executive of the group employment liaison service…I'm a life member… I don't belong to any chapter I belong to all chapters…

Mema D offers valuable insights based on experience when evaluating political impacts on gang members and their areas. A key point highlighted by another mema (known as Mema H), who has extensive experience working within government contexts, was the neglect of gang areas by successive governments.

H: … because certainly in public policy in this country we have not had any pro- social interventions focusing on those families since the 1980s … so you're talking about 30 years of neglect… and absolute you know, no go areas …

For members closely involved in the initiatives of the early 70s, this neglect remains a constant reminder of the impacts such oversight has caused. Furthermore, this experience reinforces the opinions held regarding government social action or inaction towards gang members and those living within gang environments.

H: …so, some of the communities I've worked in, in recent years… for example like in Rotorua when I got… there was serious gang violence between Black Power and the Mob… and when we started to engage with those communities it became really clear from those older members that they have not had any pro social intervention since the 1980s…

The outcome of such a move, however, resulted in further isolation of gang territories and those living within them from resources and support. Engagement from this point was broadened, particularly to those disadvantaged in society, including the gang factions as highlighted below by Mema H.

H: pretty much by 1989 was the end of the sort of group employment liaison scheme umm… after that its focus had moved completely away from its original kaupapa and that was gangs into broader sort of disadvantaged communities…New Zealand has adopted a gang policy predominantly from the USA which is basically suppression… so those policies have impacted on our kids as well as their parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties… and their broader whānau…

To further emphasise this point, it's important to recognise the government's shift towards a policy of suppression, which continues to discriminate against gang members. This, in turn, impacts their families and silences their ability to voice their struggles without facing repression. Thirty years of neglect in this area have contributed to the rise of a "gangsters' paradise" for gang members, perpetuating cycles of behaviour that have shaped the current gang environment, which is inherited by the next generation. The following sections will continue to explore these dynamics.

6.3.1 Gang formation

A common theme in the interviews with the older members is the challenging upbringings they experienced. Noted is the removal of children by the state from their parents and their placement in homes. Mema E shared his childhood memories of himself and his siblings.

E: I was taken off my family when I was eight years old… in 1968 and there was fourteen off us…in um country block just out of Matamata, and they came in three cars, and they loaded us all on these three cars and heard us in like animals … and um my sisters were all placed in different homes… and brothers were sent to different towns to live with foster parents...

In contrast, the women I interviewed did not have to face being taken into state care; however, they spoke of friends they met through gang spaces who had experienced this as part of their upbringing.

N: So, um, just before the book was launched, I lodged a claim with the Waitangi Tribunal… yeah. On behalf - um, so, te ingoa Māori… ko te whakatupuranga o te whānau Māori i ngā āhuatanga, whakaroopu tangata - Growth of the Māori Family Unit in Gang Environments… Annette Sykes is our lawyer... So, um, yeah, everything's in place and we're just waiting, um, just wait - I'm just waiting…

The Aroha Trust was the female equivalent to the male work schemes of the 1970s and was established during the same period that government engagement with gang issues was initiated (as outlined in section 3.4.1). Wahine N was able to share insights into the environment surrounding the Trust at that time.

N: a lot of that stuff is written in Aroha Trust, in the book of the Trust about the way that women were treated. Um, you know, gang rape, yeah. It was - it was bad. Even right into the 80s, um…because of Ambury Park …Yeah, so, um, when the law changed that's when they, they began to change that behaviour. Because they were fearful of going to jail for raping women. You know, they were gonna be held accountable.

Whānau interviewed, who grew up during this time period, recall Aotearoa in the early 70s to the 80s as conservative, and as a time when they felt quite comfortable being rebellious, whether through being in a gang or interacting with gang members through partnership. Mema E2 shares his experience about this.

E2: So, this was based in the mid-80s, so they were in the height of… their work schemes… the Blacks were getting… major contacts in Wellington where… Rei had

good relationships with the mayor…and our kind of ethos was… employment for us, is security for you'se… we were making legitimate money and my um… Generally, the younger generation… us being involved in crime, put at risk the work schemes… and the government contracts we were getting and undermined some of the… moemoeā that Denis and Rei had talked about…

Mema E2, a Wellington member, shared his experiences with the work schemes for their club, of which he was one of the youngest members at the time. He recalls the efforts made by senior members to collaborate with government ministries to ensure the continuation of the work schemes.

E2: Denis and Rei had some strong connections with Government and Ministers… and that was based on the relationship that they had built with Muldoon… so there's a lot of that sort of political stuff happening… it was a natural kind of thing for them… ahh, at the same time, there were also relationships that I couldn't understand with the Mob, with the likes of Harry Tam and others that were around at the time…

The positioning of this Wellington club was identified as advantageous due to its proximity to Parliament. However, the impact would also benefit numerous chapters across the country through the work schemes. This is supported by ex-Mema J, who was one of the youngest members of his club at the time.

J: But I think... personally, we didn't have any government assist…. assistance until maybe into the mid-80s you know around there and ahh… our chapter… that we were in with the Waikato… we were sort of like... oh I don't know... we were like the last to get the... assistance with Government, the Auckland chapters and that with Wellington they were right there with Government assistance…

Insight from Mema D, whose role within these initiatives was that of a facilitator, recalled other byproducts of the work schemes, including leadership empowerment programs.

D: And so, I bought in to the polytechnic or the community college it was then… these aspiring... young leaders and we trained them…J B… now head of the Tūwharetoa, Parekura Horomia… B D um who was a Tribesman leader probably the top Māori

public servant in the country now... Gary Moore… two mayors of Christchurch... these are all GELS officers… Martin Cooper… the best bloody training of Māori managers ever…

When asked whether international factors influenced gang formation, older members acknowledged this element. The impact of rock n roll and the influx of popular culture at the time were seen as key factors in how the gang was formed, as outlined by Mema H.

H: Yup, and the growth of pop culture and what went with that and indus... and also industrialisation… and thus, the formation of these youth groups, you know… that were young people… dealing with whatever they were dealing with… and by the way ... sex, drugs, and rock n roll… was a pretty cool thing as well... so these are all part and parcels of it…

Mema D recounts the depiction of the gang member at that time as quite flamboyant, which provoked a reaction from wider New Zealand society, who were often taken aback by this image. Another Mema felt this contributed to the stigma for the gang member at the time. However, as noted, the more widespread Māori gangs, referred to here as ethnic street gangs, also recognised the effects of disruption caused by a move away from Māori culture, which will be examined further in this chapter.

D: ... you know they just looked so different… you know... and of course Māori who were trying ... were wearing shirt and tie… and, and having been… subjugated or having been… banged on the head for being Māori… I mean it was... it was… you had guys in women's fur jacks at it looked so… exotic… ... these guys were basically saying …well fuck you… in your face you know…

After the work schemes were cut, prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies were implemented by the New Zealand Government, and interviewees reflected on the position taken by officials. Mema E2 shared his experiences in government, education, and community settings.

E2: three months into it… again got pulled back into the office and they go, you can't study here, and I go why not?... and they said well we've just looked at your

convictions… and you've got convictions for violence against wāhine… and I said yes, I have and that's the list of convictions I gave youse at the interview… three months ago…

Pre-judgements and assumptions were the norm, yet Mema E2 learnt to navigate and mediate his way through. Another example was provided during a dinner involving a high-profile Member of Parliament, who was unaware that Mema E2 was an active member. E2 shared the following.

E2: I'm Black Power, I'm still a patch member… you know, and he starts… freaking out and goes you're still a patch member and starts looking agitated and looking around…and he goes well um… what about the P… and I go what about the P… Do you want your children to grow up on P… and I go no… well we've already got something in common, my aspirations for my children are that they are healthy…and they got a good job you know… and… he goes, well, well that's mine for my kids… and I go so we've already got something in common you know…

Regarding the New Zealand Government's current prevention strategy, no member agreed with the idea of eradicating gangs as a viable option. Their deep-seated ethos was built on loyalty and commitment to their gangs, which now span a shared history of over 50 years. Instead, recognition was given to the potential for change within the gang structure.

E2: And, and that's just… in terms of the gangs you know for Black Power… I have a selfish, selfish aspiration for Black Power… and that's, I want people to not see Black Power… I want our whānau to be something of a positive influence on our rangatahi not a negative, and seen as a positive… Yeah, and I think our rangatahi are the key to it, and we need to hand them the leadership…

At all times, the gang, whether ethnically defined or not, has been influenced by their surroundings and the territories they occupy. One of the government strategies in the early 2000s was to ban the wearing of patches in public spaces, which provoked a response from gang members themselves.

S: …my leader advocated me to go down there…I went down there to take on Michael Laws and his laws – ah, his bylaws that he was deciding to create because of that went down. You know, he was past… well, he was smoke screening a lot of things. But it wasn't all to do with the baby passing away... it was a– there was a little book that they got people to sign names and all that under… just so they can get gang patches out…

Highlighted here by Mema S was a clear breach of human rights, as well as the discrimination against the gang member whose voice in the debate was once again marginalised, shut down, and silenced. Spanning the history outlined above are instances of gang disputes, with older members reflecting on this earlier period of gang development where conflict remains a central feature of gang mentality.

M: Cause back in the day everyone was down for the cause… everyone was out there getting it on with the opposition… cousins, uncles, nephews… whatever they maybe… whatever organisation they joined… while they were in Department of Welfare institutions… so then it became dying for a cause… the cause being Black Power, Mongrel Mob or whatever your organisation was…

Opposition to rival gangs and authority figures was identified as a key driving force behind gang behaviour in those times. Fast forward to today, these conflicts continue to unfold between rival gangs, with Mema M acknowledging the identification of the territories where disputes occur.

M: We come into existence, Hamilton City was full of Black Power… bout four or five chapters of Black Power… so the Mob came in as the teina… the Black, aw the Outcast were the tuākana… then the Blacks, then the Mob… so the Mob came in fighting an we've had to fight for everything… there were times there where the Mob had killed individuals… from those organisations... over the years we've enabled our families… to co-exist with the Black Power families… and the Outcast families, only through those hard yards through old school…

As discussed earlier, as highlighted by whānau, the gang landscapes are currently shifting and uncertain. 'A spanner in the works' is also evident due to the arrival of deportees from Australia

known as the 501s, along with the rise of drug dealing within gang spaces, which is creating new lines and boundaries while crossing old ones.

> *S: I just know they have control of, of a lot of things that they're - make the, the Black gangs or the Māori gangs react to and the - and it's all about money... Fast Lane stuff... So, yeah, that's where a lot of things are that that breaks my heart. You've got rich bros and, and, and poor bros all in the same club … you've gotta have a clear mind really. Ah, and if you're not healthy and you haven't got a clear mind, well, there's no use entering the fray and being one of those leaders…*

Leadership as a concept is explored further later in this chapter; however, it will be briefly touched upon here. The above snippet, along with all others shared in this section, is merely a snapshot of the thoughts and insights provided by whānau interviewed, including both females and males.

The following section examines the violence inherent in gang environments, which cannot be overlooked. At the start of this work, I discussed addressing these elements according to the member's perspective, and therefore, the following will provide some insight into this dynamic.

6.3.2 Violence in gang spaces

In relation to this, what still needs to be addressed in this section is the acknowledgment by gang members of the presence of violence within gang spaces when asked. It is also noted that the public's resistance to gangs and their members is often linked to the normalisation of violence within these spaces. The following insight by Mema H relates to leadership.

> *H: Their leadership came from their abilities in war, you know, they were warlords you know… their mana was derived… from how many people they could knock over… you know… how vicious they were… you know... they weren't fucken pro-social activists (chuckles)…*

The consequences of which the public at times have witnessed gang disputes, or have experienced being threatened, intimidated, and sometimes losing loved ones to the actions of certain gang members.

> *J: I think it was part of the culture, you know that rangatahi culture you, anti-sociable just didn't wanna... ahh anything to do with authority… anything authority we sort of rebelled against it and to us…we felt that even the police were a gang, they were a different… just that they had a... I suppose a... authority that we just didn't care whether they... were a higher or authority to us or not… to us they were just another gang… and so we treated them like that… so we clashed a lot with them as well…*

A consensus exists regarding the presence of violence in these spaces among both men and women. For the older members, the incidents are linked to abuse and violence experienced during their upbringing in state care, including historic abuse suffered in state homes or boys' borstals and homes, as exemplified by Mema E.

> *E: …but you know, it wasn't only my family, there was the likes of gang leaders that I know, who I rubbed shoulders with, and it happened to them, happened to their families also you know and um, and a lot of them didn't, didn't recover from it…*

Mema E then reflected on the impacts of his behaviour on his children. He acknowledges that he has children of different ages and can see the differences in his parenting styles.

> *E: ... it was umm... not good stuff, was rugged stuff… was some bad shit that I use to do, they took it all on board. I just tried to bring them up the best way I knew how in that scene… but I couldn't hide a lot of the stuff that they saw first-hand. That's how um one of my kids are doing a long time in jail, for some serious offences, and um I own all that stuff, it's all my stuff and um yeah.*

What can be determined is that the older members will shape the character of gangs in the years ahead and instil an ethos characterised by violence, distrust, and an anti-authority attitude that has been adopted by subsequent generations. Recognition at this point by Mema E2 is that the elder members are involved in the current gang dynamics.

E2: you know, once you start it has these repercussions that… will impact on your family… on your mum on your dad, you know… and they're not realising that, and similarly… we didn't realise that when we were doing it as well… but we didn't have the blessing of people who had been through that… And so that's the difference… you know that we see now, although, you know we're talking to our younger selves…

What Mema E2 refers to are the generational aspects; members from the 70s and 80s generally didn't have the guidance available to younger members now. He also recognises the added element of youthfulness, with young people needing to make their own mistakes and find their own paths.

E2: …one of the biggest differences I see now, and back then the leadership they were role models… so the leaders back then were in their 30s, they were leaders when they were 19… and so as they got older, they became the role models… for others… I suppose it's just like parenting, they expected us to learn from their learnings or their mistakes… But us being young and full of energy and knowing it all… we wanted to learn from our own mistakes…

Mema H recognises patterns that persist within gang spaces and their whānau. His organisation works to raise awareness about the need for reflection and change of certain elements that continue cycles within whānau, including violence. He also acknowledges that Aotearoa is at a point where the 'gangster dynamic' can span across four or five generations.

H: …it's an issue that what I see particularly now… is that where into the third and potentially fourth generation of gangsterism if you like to call it that… So that's the norm in your household, in your family, and you've got no other values systems to help you to be aware of… there are actually other ways of living your life um, you will live your life in that same order…

When we compare that to other gang establishments around the world, we see that Aotearoa gangs are relatively young. As such, an interest in the development phases is quite specific to us here as we seek to understand what this has meant for the gang members, their whānau, and the wider community in Aotearoa. The following section will examine insights provided by whānau into the changing landscape of gang spaces in Aotearoa.

6.3.3 Changes in Aotearoa gang landscapes

The previous point is evident when interviewing younger members, as they reflect on their respect and admiration for older members. Mema G clearly identifies that the next generation of gang members, along with the evolving dynamics within gang spaces, has not necessarily led to positive outcomes for the collectives.

> *G: the root won't stand anyway cause there's no walls or foundation to hold it up… and in the past, and even in the present… on a national level, you have all these bodies and structures tryna… create this ao… and I'm just… sorta looking at it… going but that doesn't work… it hasn't worked for the last 50 fucken years…*

When asked what major changes members could identify within their gang spaces, they highlighted drugs as the most significant shift. Mema S recognised this transition clearly, recalling earlier times when alcohol and marijuana were the main substances.

> *S: the wheeling and the dealing. You know, we're, we're like, ah, we're, we're anti-that and it doesn't happen and, ah, but we know. You know, we're not in denial. We know that there's members out there who smoke and they try and tell us they manage it, but we know once you've smoked it you can't manage it cos, you know, over time it'll take ya…*

To further add to the discussion, Mema S shares his insights into these dynamics and how they generate instability within gang environments. He recognises the presence of addiction and how these issues affect the wider gang community in terms of health and wellbeing.

> *S: But if they were making money and everything like that, you know, where do they - where does their pūtea go? It doesn't go to the club; it goes to them again… so they've got thirteen cars there and one of the bro's got none…it's things like that. I mean it sounds crazy but yeah, why give our, why give our people the addiction?*

Not too dissimilar, Wahine N shares her experience with the dynamics in her gang space among women, recognising there is a clear distinction between women who are on drugs and those who aren't.

> *N: Yeah, it's a lot different… so you'll have…Mob-related women who... but there's a, a, a division there if you, um, put methamphetamine in the mix, eh? [in reference to a woman in the mob scene] who is nearly 60 has a group of her and her friends and they're all addicts…so, I don't hang with them… if I go to a Mob do…I'll sit with my mates… women who… they've kept their families together, they've raised their children really well…there's the - a, a distinction between the types of women regardless of generation…*

Mema E2 recognises the harmful effects methamphetamine has had in gang environments, including declining mental health and wellbeing among members using the drug and those influenced by or influencing them.

> *E2: In a negative sense… methamphetamine have changed the environment for gangs… But also, on a positive um note is the refocus, or the… need, that our members have identified to connect with, with a need to be Māori… identified… and to own, and their starting to realise that this thing that we are, there's a lot more than this reality for us, you know…*

This theme will be examined in the next section. For now, what we can determine is a significant shift in the landscape of gang spaces here in Aotearoa due to the emergence of more potent drugs, specifically methamphetamine. An interesting perspective provided by Mema D is also discussed.

> *D: …everything is seen as being structural and they talk about organised crime and all this sort of stuff… umm where this is… disorganised, you need to separate out poor behaviour… the behaviour associated with poverty… and I don't just mean money poverty… I mean… poverty of spirit and poverty of culture…. And you need to separate that out from organised crime, they're two quite different things...*

Mema D also recognises that gang spaces are currently at their most unpredictable. Aware that shifts are occurring on many levels, he criticises the Government's approach through police work as counterproductive and not fostering positive outcomes.

> *D: well, well it's just… it's so bloody… so, so… here we are… now we have… this is the most volatile time… I have seen since the 1980s..., we got… anything could happen… it's very, very fluid… there's huge recruitment going on… there's gangs bloody everywhere… and no one in Government wants to own it… and they think they can police their way through it... and that's why I said… you gotta treat it as almost like a public health issue...*

Another significant change in the landscape is linked to the influx of deportees from Australia, or 501s as they are called, who are members of Australian gangs. These deportees are New Zealanders sent back here. As expressed by Mema D, who shares his thoughts on the 501s.

> *D: ...so, so the corrupting thing, the force majeure if you like... of what's happen is with the expulsion of these guys from Australia… And with a whole... who are not connected to their communities… whakawhanaungatanga is the answer… that's the medicine… that's the salve… you know...*

For Mema M, the return of individuals from Australia is viewed as bringing back invaluable knowledge, while also shedding light on the injustice they experience through the deportation process.

> *M: A lot of them… have never had a criminal record however they were branded an organisation, so they got their jobs and their houses taken off them in Australia and sent back over here… so now they're back over here, its invaluable what they know…*

In wrapping up this section, I would like to draw attention to an insight provided by Mema E2, where he discusses succession as generating the change required in his affiliated gang space.

> *E2: …cause the younger ones are fighting it… and some of them are fighting it so much that there not liking the space no more… and… some gone over to the Mad's and some have gone over to the Rebels you know… they've given up that whole… we can do*

something good, let's just be gangster… but not for these cunts who don't want us… you know…

In that regard, we can see that succession in leadership is a crucial part of creating change. Leadership is discussed in section 6.4.3 of this chapter. The next section will examine perspectives on the Māori gang member, his journey within his community, and society as a whole.

6.3.4 The gang member of Māori descent

Who is the gang member of Māori descent? What is clear throughout all interviews is the caution about labelling, with whānau being deeply aware of the impacts labelling has had on them and their collectives.

H: I don't think it's as simple… as rangatahi and adults… it's actually the whole shebang… because you can't change the norms without the messaging you know… and that's why… you know, the hui that you have attended and all the rest of it… those national huis tend to focus more on the parent… but when we do local hui… we have found that we are able to get three generations in the room… So that's the nannies, the grannies… the parents, the kids… the grandkids…

Mema H shares his experience regarding intergenerational impacts on gang members and their whānau. Mema H continues with the following.

H: The signals are still there; I was raised like this you know… how do you unpack that… because somewhere along the lines… there needs to be an acknowledgement from the grannies even… actually moko we need to do this because… you don't want to be here like me right now…yeah…

Further outlined by Mema H was an understanding that at the heart of this struggle is the power and control of, and for, resources — from environmental to economic.

H: because for a lot of people… we talk about colonisation… within the sort of Māori context… we're talking about the loss of land, the loss of economic base right… whereas colonisation… in its form… it didn't just happen here in Aotearoa it happened across the world globally and the… and basically in very simple terms… colonisation is about economic exploitation of natural resources and people…

An offshoot of this struggle, then, is managing resources and the challenges posed by two opposing worldviews. Mema M shares his observations.

M: …a lot of gangs as you would be aware, started with urbanisations, leaving the hau kāinga, coming into town being disenfranchised… from what they knew, what they got bought up, whakapapa, tūrangawaewae… they got bought into towns, a lot of them, a lot of individuals, young men... and ladies, they… were cast into DW I think they called it back then Department of Social Welfare… where they became state wards and they got split up and thrown around the country to boys' homes…

Throughout the interviews, there was recognition of social reforms among the members. Many could trace the urbanisation of Māori from rural areas into the cities, which served as a catalyst for gang formation in Aotearoa initially and as exemplified above. Others linked gang formation here in Aotearoa to international influences, as demonstrated by mema H.

H: Because the gangs problem isn't just here in New Zealand, it happened across the developed world, post-second world war in the gangs that we know of today… but the gangs as we know of it today is direct link from post war in the, the western world… which is, after the second world war… it was the baby boomers coming on…and the growth of pop culture... and also, industrialisation… and thus, the formation of these youth groups, you know… that were young people… dealing with whatever they were dealing with… and by the way … sex drugs and rock n roll…was a pretty cool thing as well

All members interviewed were able to recognise the impact of urbanisation on them either directly, or through their parents and grandparents. Mema E2 shares some insight into these dynamics.

E2: You know… a while ago when we declared to be defined as an iwi we… looked at Reitu' creation of the hapū that he built… and belonged to, so basically there was a few iwi … in the whānau, and one whānau broke away… created the hapū…and we saw that… as what Harris did with Māoridom… He broke away from Māoridom and created this hapū named Black Power… and so we have, and, and I tried… it's difficult…it difficult because we're, we're not a traditional iwi…

Gangs created a safe space for whānau to connect, where they felt they could express what was happening for them. The stance was against the authority of Pākehā and, depending on various factors, also against Māori authority. Mema D provides interesting insight below.

D: Well… of course and there were two... so, so we were… the sort of I, I use to say… you know I use to say… why people got freaked out over gangs… is they saw the Māori warrior coming for the rent [chuckles]… you know…

Mema D can speak directly about his observations of this period, witnessing the early years of gang formation here in Aotearoa.

D: …Although… to be, to be fair… in um... in... I can remember the first sort of shards... the Māori renaissance you know… and then, and then, in the Blacks anyway… um, there was that thing of supporting the marae you know, there was… relative to other crews a much more whānau focus… an almost affirmative, almost political focus…

Recounted by the same member was an event that occurred in the late 1980s in Ruatōria, situated within the Waiapu Valley of the Gisborne region. He recalled the local Māori community being resistant to the event.

D: …just about every Sunday… for a meeting with the marae committee and we'd have you know Ngāti Porou ki Akarana, and Ngāti Porou ki Pōneke coming… and argue against our having a thing…and anyway there was this great debate… and on the eve of the thing… the marae trustees put chains around the ahh the gates of the marae… and the two old Ngārimu nannies… umm ahh... Ngārimu VC sisters came and got bolt cutters… and cut the locks… and they said, these are ours…

The following sections will further explore the schism described above, along with additional attributes that are relevant to the story of the Māori gang member and his connection or disconnection from Te Ao Māori.

6.3.5 Being Māori and a gang member

Throughout some of the interviews, there were acknowledgements of the gang's early days that overshadowed any connection to being Māori. Mema H recounted an incident involving the funeral of a gang member.

> *H: …because of the behaviour… that if you go through that period of the 70s and 80s… how we disrespected the kawa at marae… like the drinking the drugs… pouring fucken alcohol down the, the, the dead persons mouth in the wharenui and all those things… you know… any rightminded people… will say, hang on, that's just not on right… so, there's that side of the issue…*

Mema H continues to speak to this in some depth.

> *H: …so if you take a look, for example the last government… the National Government's gang strategy, was all about dividing and separating… the fathers are the organised criminals so… you know... law and enforcement was for them… mothers were victims of family violence… so you keep them away from the dads… the kids were vulnerable children right… so in the very simplistic way you can say… it was a policy of division…*

Mema H discusses systemic systems created through policy that affect whānau. On this topic, Mema D shares the following.

> *D: …and Muldoon said that to the New Zealand Māori council… and he said you gotta own these fullaz… they're yours… and it was only Sir Graham Latimer and that who actually bought into that… and the rest of them… a lot of them… wanted to reject… you know… then I think they got embarrassed over our behaviour… and, and… wanted to, not to own us…*

Mema D highlights how prominent Māori political leaders reject gang space. Mema H continues with the following.

> *H: and if you take a look at the New Zealand context… colonisation came whatever happened, happened yeah… but it's lingering… and for example when we start looking at policies of assimilation yup where we'll say… we'll take nice brown folk and put them in with the white folk cause that's a perfect way to live… they'll be just like us and it will be fine… the disparities, in fact if anything it has grown…*

Mema H discusses the ongoing impacts of colonisation and shares the following observations below.

> *H: …but through that period of higher um... that period of full employment which is post-war right till sort of mid to late 70s that masked a whole lot of social issues that were happening with Māori… particularly urban Māori… and the Māori commentators, the Ranginui Walkers... and all those would have commented chapter and verse … the beginnings of the Māori Women's Welfare League… and all those things were Māori responses to try and attend to those sorts of issues… right!*

Mema H also offers some background on the dynamics in Aotearoa during the early years of gang formation. Mema M discusses the cultural journey of the gang member in the following.

> *M: You know the anti-establishment, terrorism… aye, yano fuck the world… get fucked, I don't care about the marae system… I don't care about tikanga Māori, I don't care about fa'a Samoa, they can all get fucked! But you have to incorporate all that kind of stuff into your lifestyle because… whether you like it or not, half of us ae Māori… half of us are Samoan…so when they try and say I don't care about all that, they're leaving a big chunk of themselves out there in left field…*

Mema H shares his experience with the dynamics between marae and gang space, and he continues with the following.

H: ...but they wouldn't allow it… because he was a gangster and they knew if they allowed the tangi there the gangsters would come… they won't take their patches off… this is how I see it right... there's a korowai that I know… that most marae would let on, on any given day of the week… anytime, and it's the korowai… of the New Zealand Police, what's their whakapapa… aww that's right, they were known as the arms constabulary... they're the ones who came in and fucken killed people…you know…

Also, alongside stories of disrespect towards the marae space, there were others that included more positive experiences. Mema M identified shifts towards recognising their cultural backgrounds.

M: you've gotta incorporate all that into the gangster lifestyle and the way you live, because if you don't then you'll be hollow…

Mema M again speaks to these aspects from his experience.

M: ...but the two biggest iwi were the Mob and the Blacks… back then… the 1970s and 80s rolled around and then those individuals were looking for their own tūrangawaewe, their own sense of where I'm from… a lot of them come from the city and so all of a sudden, the cities become a feeding point for them…. This is where I'm from… This is where I'm gonna make my stand right here…

The questions, Who am I? Where do I belong? reflect the struggle many members faced during this time, as they tried to find their place and sense of self within a history of colonisation and cultural suppression.

6.3.6 Stigma and gang culture

Numerous examples of judgement and stigma were provided. This led me to ask, what about the judgement and stigma directed at the member and their families? From the outset, what was presented were two categories: those who were troubled by the judgements, and those who weren't. Wahine L offered the following insight.

L: Yeah, like getting pulled up from the police and getting identified as a gang member… they had actually… it was in their system… and they checked me out I had come up as a known gang member… I was like ahhh I've never worn a patch in my life… never have… yeah… that was what they had, you know youse get pulled up all the time…

Mema S shared that in the early days of gang formation, being anti-social was common, and being outcasted was a goal of the gang.

S: So, what we try and do is don't discredit what we've done… we know we're doing positive, constructive and productive things in our society in our system that we work within, we know that… our people of our city can come up to us and talk to us… not that they all do…. But we know that…. every time they can come up…

Wahine S2 shared she had spent the best part of ten years trying to work alongside Oranga Tamariki to have her children remain in her care.

S2: I still get, ah, judged by Government, you know, the Police, Oranga Tamariki. Oranga Tamariki is the worst. You know, like, ah, there was a notification about me and my children. Okay, within about a week, they were making me move back into the home with the children, but in another breath saying that because of this, this and this, my home's not a good home. Um, and, and they always come back to… either, um, to the point that, 'she's gang-related, she's related to the Mongrel Mob'.

Wahine N shared her experience working with a Māori organisation running a smoking cessation program.

N: Yeah. Um, I, I worked in Māori Health, Hauora Māori for 20 years. And that followed me everywhere I went, you know. I, I lived in Whanganui. I lived in - lived there for nearly 40 years and you know, always as, 'Oh, there's that gang bitch.' You know, that's what I used to hear my work colleagues, you know…

To add to this, was the experience of Mema E2 constantly having to deal with the judgement and stigma attached to him throughout his educational pursuit of becoming a social worker, and again in the court spaces with the youth he worked with.

> *E2: so at my graduation I rang them earlier and I said there's 12 of us coming, and they go well we're gonna have to stop ten at the door and I said well you're gonna have to get some more security… and so they did, and so we got there… and instead of wearing a patch I wore the traditional gown… with the hat and I had twelve tamariki and mokopuna with me and they all did a haka… you know…*

Another point of contention for him was within his affiliated kapa haka group due to his role as vice president.

> *E2: You know and I've managed to get our, our club [name]… from a deficit to you know 50-grand in the red… You know and they've never experienced that… in the 85 years they've existed… But they still think there's something up… And all I'm doing is, I negotiate with the cruise ships and I negotiate with Government agencies… about using [name] for all their stuff… and they say but we were never able to do that… and I'm like it's not my problem… why don't we just celebrate the fact that we can.*

Mema E discusses the deep stigma, judgement, and contempt currently present in the government sector towards gangs, as well as those emerging from within Māori communities.

6.4 Marginalisation

This section considers the impacts of marginalisation. Mema D shares his observations of success mechanisms when working with gang space.

> *D: you know... I notice that our... a lot of our people… umm… they'll do anything… as long as they can do it together… and there is this whole, highly affiliative… sort of thing… you know and as long as it's the crew, they'll do anything… you know... and it*

doesn't matter how hard or whatever, as long as someone… in a sense of believing in them… and enabling them to do that, you know…

Mema D provides straightforward insights for those looking to work with rangatahi. Mema H shares his perspectives on these matters below.

H: And so as long as our people here in Aotearoa… still believe in this…there's us and them… and the best way to save ourselves… is to be anti them… alright… we still continue to live out what that process of assimilation sought to do… to eradicate Māori… right… eradicate their culture… eradicate… it was an act of genocide… and here as gangsters… we continue to do that act of genocide on behalf of the system… yeah… so unless we actually… grow our awareness and say actually…

Wahine N shares her thoughts pertaining to stigma and judgement.

N: But when it comes to low, the low socioeconomic communities, you know, and the gang member, man, they just make - you know, they… um - that's how people portray gang members: as drug addicts, abusers, drunks, unemployed, you know. They've been doing that for years. Um, yeah, I don't think it's any different from any other violence, um, any other peoples or ethnicities - I really don't… So… - yeah, there's always gonna be that stigma that, um, anyone involved in a gang…

Wahine L can draw on her insights by observing and comparing across generations.

L: Yeah, that's different and then you just become institutionalised… Argh you just have to, there is no mechanism, that's just what whānau are there for…. But you just gotta keep banging on about, stay outta...jail… geez, and listening to the same old promises… it's ridiculous, but some of it though if you look at the jail… you know it's that racism... it's the fact that one, they're gang members…
… second, they're Māori and then the crimes they did… You can look at others who don't get jail time… I mean they've been doing it since they were 18… [name] was 21 before he got locked up… they were surprised, they were expecting him to have a big, long rap sheet, he didn't have one… same with [name] when he got picked up… they

were expecting the same thing, he didn't have one… They were surprised that these [he] hadn't been… from the word go been in the system…

Wahine L highlighted the assumptions made by the courts regarding her sons, both of whom were educated in private school settings and were not in the court systems until their late teens, early 20s. Another interesting insight shared by Mema S was the ability to speak on the dilemma of patches on marae and conflicts that can arise between Māori and Māori in gangs.

S: I still know what I said to that guy cos that guy that I said it too ended up betraying me in the end. Cos in the morning I, I explained to them that night that, 'I, I can take my patch off for you guys here, but I can't control what's gonna come the next day. Cos when they come, they're gonna overwhelm you. And I, I wanna see who of you's is gonna go and tell them to take it off, cos that's not my duty.

With that in mind, Mema E2 shares his thoughts on members, and the inclination of affiliates towards joining a gang space.

E2: I suppose the question has to be asked why?... you know and why, what's out there, that means a gang is something you want to be a part of and what's missing in those environments that are making people wanna be in gangs…

The insights shared in this chapter help provide a unique perspective on important developments that occurred, and what these developments mean moving forward for not only the members but also their collective whānau. Mema S shares his thoughts.

S: Well, it'd have to be - it has to be one of the major pluses with the gangs really. Ah, ah, if you wanna be in tune with what's going on in the future, then you've gotta re-think, you know. And the, the values will all change but the - it's gotta be for the better for, for whoever you're representing, you know. And yeah, it's how you look at your own group and where you're at now. And, ah, if you go that way, you'll see better improvements. If you stay where you are, you can either go up or you can go down.

Again, the themes of leadership and education are evident. There is recognition of different leadership approaches—those that promote positive outcomes and those that lead to negative ones.

> *S: I mean it, it's all about educating the leaders again, you know. If the leaders are not versed on - you know, if they're not flexible or anything like that well then, they get to their whānau really. But, you know, but then you get some that have been there for years and, ah, well, the only way of educating is by supporting him and, ah, awhi him and, you know.*

Mema S highlights the need for member support and opportunities for leadership development.

6.4.1 Empowerment

Stigma, judgement, and pre-conceived notions aside, the final section of this chapter aims to explore examples of empowerment from within the identified gang spaces of those members and women interviewed for this work.

> *H: ...so again, if you take a look... at the work that we've been doing through E Tū Whānau and all the rest of it... it's very much a political act of conscientisation ... what I've been tryna do is raise the consciousness... of our people... of why we're in this predicament... why are we behaving this way... living our lives like this... why does it cost us so dearly...*

Mema H shares an example of his organisation's approach to supporting whānau in gang environments. Wahine L believes education is crucial for rangatahi growing up in these spaces.

> *Wahine L: I think education is a big part of it... like being educated in all aspects of life... not just... yeah just being educated... they grow up healthy yeah... and they have good lives... and then it's more around the time ... it's more the umm important stuff... like creating the memories... like going out on trips and stuff...*

Wahine L sees education as requiring a balance with togetherness, creating memories as a whānau and highlighting this as a vital part of wellbeing. For Wahine N, she shares her observations with her own children, and some of the traits she believes she and her partners, both past and present, have instilled in their children.

> *Wahine N: My children saw me studying. My children saw me working. Even though their fathers weren't, eh? So, um, I think I've instilled work ethic or learning into them cos they've seen me do it. You know?... My children learnt a lot from their fathers… Like, my children are very strong- minded and I'm glad they are. Yeah, they - so they weren't sheltered… Well, my girls were sheltered…they couldn't go anywhere…without - uncle knowing or dad knowing or your brothers knowing. So, they were safe, yeah.*

Wahine N also speaks to the safety factor that was present for her daughters. With Wahine N, there was recognition of drugs permeating throughout gang spaces, that this was a cause of concern for her, and the impacts for rangatahi.

> *Wahine N: Ah, yeah, there probably is. If, um, from a rangatahi's perspective, it, you know, just knowing that you're - whether you're, you know, if your whānau are gang-related, whether it be your parents, your aunties, your uncles, your cousins, you know, that's a whole different, um - it's like a, it's just a different, ah, what would you call it? It's a - just a different world, eh, to be privy to that. You know, there's - there, there, there are good things you can take from gang culture, eh, within your whānau?*

Wahine N was able to see some positive aspects to growing up within gang spaces, which related back to whanaungatanga/family togetherness. She also highlighted the element of being privy to another world. The next insight is shared from Mema E.

> *E: Since I've been working with these kids, I've seen a lot of positive stuff, you know and it's just getting these kids before they end up in our judicial system…and um, but what inspired me to do this, I took a look at my lifestyle over the years… and what's happened it's gone through my children, my grandchildren, and its gotta stop… in no way am I rubbishing my past, lot of good stuff and lot of bad stuff as well… a lot of people would say why did you join the gang, it was family orientated…*

Mema E recognises the importance of engaging our rangatahi before they come into the court or judicial system and finding ways to involve them in positive activities.

> *E: Yeah, I suppose it's tryna get alongside of them and make the change, work with our rangatahi, there should be more programs like that for our kids, available to them… more wrap around support aye, they gotta remember too that our kids are gang kids, they gotta tread carefully…cause of how my kids have been bought up, it's hard and fast, and then they go to school and listen to a teacher … do it all polite… you know, so that's what I say ahh, they wanna teach our kids, they gotta be, ahh, they gotta have some experience with dealing with our kids….*

Mema E emphasises that resources are vital for our rangatahi, calling for comprehensive support and increased investment in more programmes. The following excerpt from Mema J highlights that trust is essential for engaging with gang-affiliated whānau initially, supporting the point made earlier by Mema E.

> *J: I think that ahh I think it's a cliché I hate to say it but I think it's true... you know ahh a lot of our poverty… not having that…um right support systems put in place for... for families that are in gangs and that… will always determines the outcome… it's in the home... that's where the real ahh um… test begin because in that home life… so if you really want make a impact you really gotta hit the home… get into the homes and ahh…like what I said it comes back to that trust... like if they don't trust you that door will always be closed*

Mema J here shares his personal understanding of gang spaces and the families living within them, based on his lived experience as a support person working in an alternative education setting and his time spent with children from these environments. The following is a memory shared by Mema J, in which he recalls seeing what he believes is the next generation of gang members.

> *J: I can remember one time going up to Auckland and we were ahh in the Mount Wellington I think it was … but there was like almost… 100 or maybe less or more of us in the pub and outside we're all... their children..14, 15 , 12 year old's they were in*

the car park… talking to each other's children… and I remember looking out into the car park going… man that's the prototypes there... you know ... there's the next generation of gang members…and I don't know why that thought always stayed in the back of my mind…

The importance of this memory is that it relates to a key theme highlighted in this research, the intergenerational aspect of gang spaces. In this case, the insights of Mema D prove helpful.

D: Yeah so, so… just, don't make a thing of it… don't get excited… you know what I mean... support the positives, starve the negatives... get out of the bloody road… when they wanna go do their thing... you know… go for the least bad outcome… an try to keep them out of prison…, cause prison is the big recruitment place… again stop labelling… so it is that prejudicial... and intergenerational prejudicial thing... particularly where some of the cops get a view of yano… a family name and you know it's like you got the mark of bloody Cain you know…

Mema D also discusses the harmful labels that children from these spaces face and provides an insightful understanding of their impact. Similarly, Pakeke I (from Chapter Five) emphasised the importance of discovering what interests your child/children.

I: Yeah, well first and foremost it's… um definitely while they're growing up you should be finding out what they want to be doing…. Like looking at it, it might be sports or whatever… so that, that's where you push them… you know ... all that vision, purpose and goals… ... well then, it's up… I'll just naturally assume… that if we're doing those things that's supposed to be naturally done... then that those kids will be well taken care of anyway…

Another point that Mema I expressed was his understanding that if the gang space itself is functioning correctly, it will automatically ensure the children are looked after.

I: So, we said okay we started a Ministry of Education school… we gave them accreditation and all that kind of stuff… so we took a bunch of young kids and we made them accomplish the goals, that any other child or kid would go through… at a primary and intermediate level… and they accomplished all of it… only because you let them

feel comfortable in their environment… and when a person feels comfortable where they are… they'll achieve a hell of a lot more than when they're getting pressured…

Mema M speaks about the pressure faced by these rangatahi in the education system. He described an initiative his organisation created for their youth. Wahine S was also involved in this same initiative and took some of the lessons Mema M shared, and her message was clear.

S2: I struggle with this because, um, our kids, eh, our Māori kids, well, eh, not just gang member but Māori kids brought up in the gang whatever, eh, they - they don't fit the system, eh. And I've seen that, um, eh, our kids are not, ah, visual or thing – eh, they're kinaesthetic, hands on… you go to any one of my kids and you go, 'Bro, here, look, I'll show you how to nail this on, eh', hammer it, show him and he'd go, 'Yeah' 'Put all those nails in this thing' and they'll do it, eh? But, um, yeah, our kids don't fit the mainstream. I - I don't believe the mainstream is, um, written for our kids.

For those rangatahi who do remain in mainstream education, Wahine S shared she felt that parents needed to get involved in education spaces to help their children.

S2: Nobody wants to touch them. You know, as soon as they go, um, 'Oh, my father is Mongrel Mob', eh… I find… in the mainstream system that a teacher will teach those that are willing to teach - be taught, eh. And if you've got this kid going, 'Oh, fuck you, fuck you', you know, and they go, 'Oh, well, off to the office. Away you go'. You know, um, so I - I find that, um, unless the parents are prepared to engage with them and say, 'Oh, boy, come on, just, you know, put your head down' you know… And that's another change that I've had to do with my kids, is - because I felt that my kids were getting picked on because they were gang kids.

In recognising her children's behaviour, Wahine S also realised she needed to be present to encourage and support them to at least try within their educational environments. The final insights shared in this section are from Mema M, who expresses his understanding, echoing Wahine S's view, that the learning styles of Māori and Pacifica children require a different approach.

M: I think what it comes down to, is the style of learning, now not everyone can grasp verbally… not everyone can grasp hands on… or visually or by listening to things… you gotta tap into what they're good at… if your tryna tell someone… something and you're talking, he might not comprehend it... he may hear it… he may listen to you, but he may not be able to comprehend a god damn word you're saying… Māori and Pacific Islanders… learn differently, they don't learn the same… as the Pākehā system…

The examples in this section show empowerment, or *mana motuhake* (self-determination), arising from within gang spaces through action. These individuals are finding solutions from their own viewpoints, in line with *tino rangatiratanga*—the right to self-determination. It highlights their efforts to take control and act based on their own values and understanding, informed by their associations with and affiliations to gang spaces.

6.4.2 Agents of Change

What has become apparent during the interviews with the members is the various levels at which they work. What I am referring to is encapsulated in Mema H's ethos, which his organisation is built upon.

H: ... So that sort of penetration, engagement, mobilisation yeah, and design, development and deliver… is pretty much in a nutshell of what I believe works for our people so… if you're serious about how to make those changes with the kids, the education and all the rest… well this is the journey you know…

The above process outlines the steps he considers best practice for creating change in gang spaces, or as he calls them, 'hard to reach' spaces. Mema E2 shares his experience observing these levels of movement.

E2: Umm, you know Denis was working in Gels… with the likes of Parekura, Martin Cooper was in there… um, and they were influencing another level… that ahh wasn't street level but we didn't realize that the influence that they had was impacting positively on us…But what they were doing was changing attitudes in an area where

we seldom had a voice and so that they allowed people to have a voice that allowed us to be in better spaces…

What Mema E2 has identified are two settings we can discuss here. One is at street level, and the other is as described in the snippet above. In terms of Mema H, he recognises that there is no change in gang spaces without first being able to penetrate them.

H: …Well we believe before you can engage you've got to penetrate… you've got to have some, those… that come from that whakapapa that people know… Okay will talk to you bro but don't tell anybody else right… well do, but you know… that's the relationship that we try to build right and then once we built that relationship where, actually where… now allowed into the room… into the house, let alone… standing at the… door way… you know…

Relationship building is emphasised as key, and he stresses that trust is paramount when working with whānau.

H: And that policy of division was their response to our issues and our response to problems we face on a daily basis… created by them in the first place… alright… So, I think that as long as that's the predominant view, that then makes it… extremely hard for change… to take place… On a scale that's a relativity small number of people… Yeah… And that's part one of the things we continue to fight… and… again its actually gonna have to be… a political solution…

Mema H emphasises the need for political action to secure support for whānau to engage in meaningful change. Mema E2 discusses nurturing leadership and offering support for emerging leaders.

E2: Yeah so… and the conversation I do have with our emerging leaders… Is to raise their gaze to the horizon… And, and if… if the end of the road, look at the end of the road your on… that's where you wanna be, so continue that path… But if you honestly… dig out what's at the end of that road…. And you know that's not where you wanna be… then change lanes [laughs]…

Mema M highlighted key concerns in his organisation/gang space, which are addressed through education via workshops and events featuring keynote speakers sharing knowledge on topics relevant to the member and his family.

> *M: You know... So, what we do is we try, and we have Black Power come into our seminars, we have the odd occasional Nomad… the Huks we have the King Cobra's… and we have Tribesman sometimes come there… so the doors open to anyone… every year we run Hearty Hauora… which is about giving the individuals their warrant of fitness check… And we continuously do it…*

Mema M addresses his organisation's invitation to other gang spaces to come together on a collective level, and he also outlined some initiatives undertaken by his group.

> *M: …so it's up to us to change the turning of the tide… we gotta show our people out there yano... this is how… we will benefit, not only you as an individual, not only you, but your friends, your family, your circle of influences, by following the red print… we put down, we believe it will help…*

Mema M articulates the philosophy behind his gang space, which focuses on enhancing the wellbeing of both members and their whānau. There have been examples of these shifts noted earlier, from Roy Dunn's movement within the Notorious chapter of the Mongrel Mob nearly a decade ago, to one of the early initiatives of Reitu Harris and Black Power during their initial stages of gang formation here in Aotearoa.

What can then be seen is how the gangs have taken up the challenge over the years to address issues within their communities. What then becomes important is the impact of these efforts and the sustainability of the change and transformation for their members, their families, and in turn, their rangatahi.

6.4.3 The transformative leader

Leadership has been discussed throughout this chapter; in this section, we will specifically reflect on some of the feedback provided by members interviewed regarding their views on gang leadership. Mema D offered the following.

> *D: so… the leaders, the leaders that I've seen are actually servants… it's the, it's the tū mōkai… ahh you know my joke about the league club… if you wanna find the president… going look for the guy that's bringing in the pads after the game... *chuckles… thats the president or the chairman you know what I mean… um… and the same thing.,.. you go and have a look at those prezzys who… all you know their primary thing was the wellbeing of their members and their whanau… you know.*

Others commented on the leader's ability to inspire and organise its chapter to be fruitful and productive. Mema S speaks to the following.

> *S: it's what you offer them, you know. If you keep them on the gangster side of thing I think that that's where it'll fall to pieces, because that's where the drug dealing and all that stuff comes in on it… But if you can get them into whanaungatanga and all that, as of today and, you know, showing that we're capturing te reo and everything like that in our way and, and, yeah, that'll be a bonus. And treating our women good and letting them have, have a bit more say in the - in the - in the - in our movement, you know.*

Mema S, as an O.G, recognises that a shift in thinking is necessary for ongoing growth. Mema M shares his insights on both old and new members.

> *M: where the gangster of old, they were around to see what they could get from the cause, not what they could give to the cause, and don't get me wrong there was lot of people… giving to the cause, but they were giving negative energy, bad energy… only because that's what was called for at the time… So, the energy that you put out there… was all, what we class as now, as negative energy…*

So, we now return to the division outlined earlier. What does this reveal about gang leadership today? Mema H shares his thoughts on these matters.

> *H: …yup, and so those are some challenges that we have to deal with, which is why we then have to go into the health area right… but alongside that… the, the thing that I often run next is the leadership wānanga, because without good leadership… you know… because all this tells you this is really poor leadership… and some of them are really quite selfish…*

The younger members' thoughts on leadership offered further food for thought. For Mema G, who was identified as a rangatahi raised in a gang environment, his insights are as follows.

> *G: The Rangatira is the person under the ground doing all the donkey work, like the roots for a tree… goes out and seeks the sustenance to sustain the trunk…to sustain the trunk that feeds the branches that produces the fruit… and that's our framework, that's how we view this (does a fist) … our rangatiratanga, that's how we view that word… Rangatira.*

As a recap, Mema G, also known as whānau Pakeke G in Chapter Five, is now the Rangatira of their club, a club that has integrated a Te Ao Māori perspective into its values. Therefore, his insights into the term rangatira reflect this, as he recognises that the role of rangatira is to unite the people.

> *G: So, when people come into our space… and they show interest and they want to be a part of us… there's a rākau at the back, and I take them to that rākau…I go brother I want you to look up to that tree… this tree where do you think the rangatira sits… and first thing they do, what do you think they do? Look to the top…so true, I didn't realise tree's go from the sky to the ground…and I said…. If that's where you think the rangatira sits well then, you're in the wrong space… look down… and they look down… that's where the rangatira sits, below the ground… the roots…the rangatira isn't the people who sit at the top, that's where the people sit…*

Mema G refers to a style of leadership rooted in a Te Ao Māori perspective, continuing with the following thoughts.

G: To look after and bind the people as opposed to this (makes a triangle) … kingpin, that whole kingpin old school whakaaro… the uncle comes out and everyone just does it, well not over here… our, for us it's this way (spins the triangle downwards) … the rangatira's at the bottom – [chuckles]…

Similarly, Mema E2 shares his experience with young leaders who have approached him for support with leading them.

E2: You know and I've had rangatahi from three chapters down here… come, come to my house saying bro… can you lead us and I go no that's your role… you know and they're like nah, nah, nah, nah we need you brother… and I say ahhh your already leading bro…you need to be able to… umm, model what you expect of others…And not necessarily leading from the front… and I know that leadership can be um… passed around…

The final insights to share rest with Mema M and the way in which he articulates leadership within his collective.

M: That's right, and you can't tell them… until you make sense… and that's why the Boss talks in a certain way… I talk in a certain way… and the power point speakers that we get talk in a certain way… so we try and cover all realms, so we try and cover all levels…So, people aint sitting there in the pō in the darkness going … I have no understanding what this mother fuckers talking about… shit what did he just fucken say I can't even pronounce that word let alone… understand what it means, and so a person has to get up and speak on their level… and once you understand the levels … then everything becomes easier, so you bounce off each other…

The member stated that this was achieved through considerable work and effort, contributed over time and guided by wise leadership. This approach was also described by Mema G as he referenced his late father's efforts to ensure his chapter could operate within a Te Ao Māori framework woven into its philosophy.

6.4.4 Working together

The final section of this chapter includes examples discussed in interviews with whānau about instances where they have worked together, both in the past and present. These examples may involve their collectives, with iwi, hapū, marae, or alternatively with government agencies and local organisations within their area. Mema S speaks about his experiences in the following.

> *S: Well, down, down there - up here it was, ah, not as, um, mixed culture like I had down there. I had a lot of whites running with me and it was limited up here on this side because they - because the category was Black Power so they believed that you were brown or whatever. But then that sort of changed when people like Denis O'Reilly fell in love with the kaupapa and, ah, they stayed with it and, ah, - they became Black Power just like me…*

Mema S highlights the diversity within his gang space. The timeframe he refers to is the early 1980s, and the location is Christchurch. The following snippet provided by Mema D contains his outline of the quote, which offers thoughts on working together through acceptance of different viewpoints.

> *D: The first speech made in New Zealand Parliament by a Māori was Tareha Te Moananui ... and he said, the power of good is stronger than the power of evil… when evil arises… all we need to do together, you know, we'll stand… we'll sort this out, let me look at it, let you look at it also… in other words, you know… let the Pākehā look at it… let Māori and let's talk about it from… our different perspectives…*

When considering the gang spaces, Mema D is a clear example of this collaborative approach, as he is not Māori but still acts as a mediator and advocate for predominantly Māori members within the gang spaces he is part of. The next example shared by Mema M highlights the relationship built through collaboration between their gang space and the local District Health Board. This partnership led to the creation of an annual event called 'Hearty Hauora'.

> *M: If there gonna pick up good habits… why not pick up the good habits that you wanna feed them… so we're in the process of tryna open the early childhood centre with Te*

> *Kōhao health… the CEO of Te Kōhao health, very good lady, so where always... every year we run Hearty Hauora… which is about giving the individuals their warrant of fitness check…*

The second example Mema M discusses is the unfortunate experiences their organisation (as they like to call their gang space) has had when dealing with Māori in prominent positions, and the challenges that have arisen when trying to build relationships with them.

> *M: ... so we… accomplished a lot of things through the 'Hearty Hauora'… and we continuously do it… the only thing that we as gangs and Māori people come against is the hegemonic discourse that we're always faced with…. you know… and unfortunate is… it's our own people that are doing it to us… they've been bought up in a system, where they believe they have the sole right… to choose who can do this, this and this….*

The main point Mema M highlights here is 'differences in approach', and what works and what doesn't, revisiting the idea of what, and who, is Māori, and who and what defines this. Another example given by E2 discusses the challenges of oppositional conflict that he had to mediate to finish his studies peacefully.

> *E2: um, and so, so, so, the wānanga in Wellington is based in Porirua… ... mobsters here ... and when we were passing each other…. Tension… everything changes… and… I gotta sort this shit out… I go bro can I talk to you outside, he goes aw whys that bro (protective stance) ... I go aw that's why bro... I go aw I'm here for two more years and I'm here to study bro so… so if we're gonna do something?? Do it now… and he goes aw nah, nah I don't need that… And I go aw, mean, mean bro.*

In this instance, Mema E2 approached the issue directly, in a manner consistent with the usual strategy when dealing with conflicts in opposing gang territories. Mema E2 then shared what transpired after this incident within the education institute itself, leading to attempted repercussions for this member.

> *E2: And then I go back… to class and the tutor goes aw the manager wants you… and I go aw what's that about… and I go in there and she goes aw I think where gonna have to ask you to leave and I go ahh why?... they go well we just got a report that you*

instigated a gang confrontation in the cafeteria… I went aww…you're welcome… and they were like what!!… and I said so, cause of that conversation that I had with that bro, that gang confrontation isn't gonna happen in this space and we're all good now…

Again, using an example provided by Mema E2, he discusses the barriers he faced when obtaining his educational qualifications.

E2: three months into it… again got pulled back into the office and they go, you can't study here, and I go why not?... and they said well we've just looked at your convictions… and I said yes, I have and that's the list of convictions I gave you're at the interview… three months ago… I sez okay so, can I appeal…so they organised this hui and they said aw you can bring a support person…in the end… I had to sign a contract and the contract had read… umm, while I'm studying… I cannot be convicted of a crime, if I am… I'm to leave…

Mema E2 collaborated with the institute to reach a resolution, despite facing some challenges. Mema H provides some insight into the division mentioned.

H: And so as long as our people here in Aotearoa… still believe in this… there's us and them… and the best way to save ourselves… is to be anti them... alright… we still continue to live out what that whole process of assimilation set out to do… to eradicate Māori… right… eradicate their culture… eradicate… it was an act of genocide… and here as gangsters… we continue to do that act of genocide on behalf of the system…

Mema H also highlights some of the challenges he perceives within gang spaces in the above snippet. This insight is powerful and underscores the interconnected impact of assimilation policies enacted on Māori, as well as the role of gangs and their members. Despite that Mema S talks to the potentiality when collaboration is the goal.

S: The marae at Ngā Hau e Whā was for the people. But what happened is that the, um, the collaboration there was with the, um - to build that there was with the three gangs. Us and - so we worked it out. And because I was older than those leaders then, I was negotiating with the kaumātua because I, I sort of knew them generally and the other

leaders were sort of there, you know. So, sort of the monopoly of getting them on board and we can work in harmony. And it worked. Course we could work in harmony.

Mema S recognised the collaboration happening in this project, noting that it could work, and with support from the other parties, a successful outcome was achieved. Another example is an insight provided by Mema J, who is a former member now serving as a minister.

J: I think back then… we were naive you know... we loved our Māoritanga but because we didn't really know much about it... we sort of ahh... were actually quite defiant in a lot of areas... we didn't respect tikanga... kawa... and all of that… I think now, there can be ahh merging together of umm, if. you know there has to be a bit of lee way on both sides... I think we can move forward…

In this way, Mema J identifies that there is potential at this time for both sides to come together and move forward. This remains an ideal across wider Aotearoa to be recognised, yet it still offers hope. The final example reflects the idea of Mema E2, which, based on the interviews conducted, underpins the various other discussions I had with other members.

E2: So, when gang is seen as something negative and that's where I think a shift can change… cause if governments and agencies took advantage of the fact these rangatahi are part of us, or magnetised to us instead and said whatever, okay you provide them with the education they need, and it's not that we can educate them but we can have relations with education facilities who allow that to happen… but then… we need to put in some effort as well…

Mema E2 recognises that this idea involves effort from both sides, and that there is still work to be done to realise such relationships. However, as Mema E2 has outlined, this work will come from both within and without.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides an insider perspective on gang spaces in Aotearoa. It offers a platform to give voice to the members and mothers of these rangatahi. This, in turn, helps establish the context needed to understand the insights from the previous chapter. Questions in the first sections explore how gang spaces in Aotearoa have developed, the violence within these spaces, and recent shifts in the gang scene. Having this insider view allows for a much richer and sometimes raw or unfiltered portrayal of the realities faced by rangatahi and their whānau in gang environments.

The next part of this chapter gave interviewees a chance to share their thoughts on various issues relevant to them. Questions focused on their experiences with stigma and marginalisation. Also discussed were their experiences as Māori and engaging with Te Ao Māori. Whānau also provided a 50-year history within our gang spaces in New Zealand. Emphasised too is the silencing of Māori gang members on many levels.

To conclude, the final discussions focused on examples provided by our whānau related to nurturing their rangatahi, creating change within their gang spaces, their thoughts on transformational leadership, and their ability to bring about that change. The remaining section, which discussed their experiences working with others towards mutual gains, included examples that illustrated what this has been and could be. Additionally, members acknowledged that there is still work to be done to turn their visions of change into reality.

Chapter Seven
Rangatahi Navigation

Figure 7.1: *Whānau Day, 2021 (own photo).*

7.1 Research Findings – Introduction

This chapter outlines the key findings and analysis of the study, drawing on the insights of rangatahi, pakeke, wāhine, and mema. Central to this are two tables that capture the main themes emerging from the data: the first highlights the mechanisms that contribute to success, while the second sets out the key challenges identified. Together, these tables provide a clear way of understanding the findings, showing how participant voices connect to the research questions and contexts explored.

In both tables, the first column identifies relevant attributes, while the first row links these to specific research questions and contexts. The tables also feature suggestions from rangatahi and whānau, with particular attention given to whānau and home life, and they provide examples of how the gang environment shapes everyday experiences.

Table 7.1: Pathways navigation – Success Mechanisms

Pathways Navigation – Success Mechanisms				
Research Questions & Success mechanisms	*School*	*Work*	*Home*	*Gang Space*
Dreams & Aspirations Te Ao Māori connection	Confidence to complete education. Big support from Kaiako/teachers.	Created confidence and initiative to find employment.	Te Ao Māori values, instilled in the home-guided actions and behaviours.	Te Ao Māori approaches (wānanga) utilised to address issues.
Grasping School & Work Opportunities Goal setting	Found high school career mentors helpful	Learnt to prioritise and manage time.	Goal setting to improve motivation.	Long-term planning – foresight and visions.
Influence of Marginalization & Cultural Identity. Whānau and home	Support from immediate and wider whānau networks	Support from immediate and wider whānau networks.	Happy family and owning own home.	Keeping home and family separate from violence, drugs, and alcohol.

7.2 Key Findings – Success Mechanisms

7.2.1 Te Ao Māori

The research questions guiding this study are as follows: What are the dreams and aspirations of rangatahi Māori growing up within gang spaces in Aotearoa? How can we ensure that these

rangatahi have access to educational and employment opportunities? And what influence do marginalisation and cultural identity have on their pathway navigation? The findings presented in Chapter Five provide the foundation for addressing these questions, including consideration of which mechanisms rangatahi identified or utilised to support their movement into education and employment pathways.

Across the sections connected to these questions, one theme stood out strongly: the role of whānau in maintaining an ongoing connection to Te Ao Māori. This connection consistently emerged as a fundamental element, enabling rangatahi to confront and overcome the challenges associated with navigating educational and employment pathways.

> *T: So when I went there, my reo obviously was at a very high level and so when I had gone through to other… kura um I excelled… in Te Ao Māori and it was because of the very beginning, and so going through out the different kura I was, I excelled in Māori… so I liked that subject cause I looked good in it… so definitely gave me a quick and a good boost up…*

Regarding pathway navigation, Rangatahi T (level 7) spoke with pride about how his confidence to move through education and work came from knowing himself as Māori, emphasising the importance of ancestral knowledge and Māori ways of being.

> *T: I think that they definitely need the knowledge… the knowledge of your ancestors… and ahh um, and the Māori… knowledge, they need to know if it works… I really think it would be awesome just… to teach all our rangatahi the Māori ways… you know like… just go back to the natural… like, like ahh… the basic history of it… how we roll, you know, how we… roll on a marae… teach them that sort of… stuff you know,*

Additionally, wahine Pakeke A shared her journey along pathways guided by her tupuna, expressing her passion for Te Ao Māori and everything it encompasses.

> *A: I am a big believer kare in… um the tūpuna and the universe providing and... … I'm always directed in the right… and I love being able to um… communicate and discuss*

with tauira about ngā mea Māori and all the stuff and like kind of see… that light bulb moment or see them get excited... I love that stuff... I love it

For Pakeke Mema G, he had a strong understanding of himself as Tangata Whenua, which was instilled in him from a young age by his father.

G: And, and and it's, like I said… It's like the korero I just dropped now from my papa… our well-being is in our culture, that's the framework for us to move forward… forward into the light, that's the framework, that's his… korero and umm…. Like I was saying up on the maunga… when we were up there with him, that was his sole purpose… was to, in the end, in the last thirty years of his life was to ensure we understood… that we were tangata whenua i te tuatahi

For Pakeke I, engaging with Te Ao Māori and applying its values to guide his pathways was a recent development at the time of our interview. He shares how his perspective shifted.

I: Well only up to like six months ago I only ever implemented my Māori values... aw my Māori tikanga into it… you know I use to think you don't put… two separate things… but after doing that little bit of study I now see how um… similar a gang is to a hapū… that was ran back then… for real… like it really is the closest thing you can get to... the warriors, your rangatira and that, back then…

Rangatahi H shares her experience of karakia and her journeys to Waitangi with her whānau, recalling the significance of these moments.

H - Rangatahi: when we would like, travel and stuff…We always used to have a karakia before we left and stuff on our journeys…. That was pretty cool (going to Waitangi) ... There was a few of us. Like, we, like, had to go up to this hill…I was like, oh do I have to line up, eh. 'Just get in there with all the bloody…' I'm like, oh… We had to, like, write our name on this thing.

For Mema M, there is an understanding that a connection to Te Ao Māori is necessary for members who are Māori, as he recognises this wasn't always the case and that members are gradually coming to see its importance.

M: … get fucked, I don't care about the marae system… I don't care about tikanga Māori, I don't care about fa'a Samoa, they can all get fucked! But you have to incorporate all that kind of stuff into your lifestyle because… whether you like it or not, half of us are Māori… half of us are Samoan…so when they try and say I don't care about all that, they're leaving a big chunk of themselves out there in left field…

This was also supported by Mema J as he reflected on his early pathway navigation from within gang space in his earlier years, highlighting some of the challenges at the time but also seeing the possibility of moving forward.

J: I think back then… we were naive you know... we loved our Māoritanga but because we didn't really know much about it... we sort of ahh... were actually quite defiant in a lot of areas... we didn't respect tikanga... kawa... and all of that… I think now, there can be ahh merging together of umm, if. you know there has to be a bit of lee way on both sides... I think we can move forward…

For Pakeke Mema G, reflecting as an adult who grew up in a gang space, described how Te Ao Māori values guide his view of development.

G: The Rangatira is the person under the ground doing all the donkey work, like the roots for a tree… goes out and seeks the sustenance to sustain the trunk…to sustain the trunk that feeds the branches that produces the fruit… and that's our framework, that's how we view this (does a fist) … our rangatiratanga, that's how we view that word… Rangatira.

Mema D's insights echo those of Pakeke G. Although he does not explicitly relate them to Te Ao Māori, he frames leadership in the same way – as someone who serves.

*D: so… the leaders, the leaders that I've seen are actually servants… it's the, it's the tū mōkai… ahh you know my joke about the league club… if you wanna find the president… going look for the guy that's bringing in the pads after the game... *chuckles*

Wahine N shares her experience with a Treaty Claim she was organising on behalf of gang whānau. In this, we see the connection to Te Ao Māori being nurtured within gang spaces.

> *N: So, um, just before the book was launched, I lodged a claim with the Waitangi Tribunal… yeah. On behalf - um, so, te ingoa Māori… ko te whakatupuranga o te whānau Māori i ngā āhuatanga, whakaroopu tangata - Growth of the Māori Family Unit in Gang Environments… Annette Sykes is our lawyer... So, um, yeah, everything's in place and we're just waiting, um, just wait - I'm just waiting.*

For Rangatahi T, his choices were shaped by his strength in subjects connected to Te Ao Māori, which opened pathways into new areas of study and work.

> *T: I had broken my leg …So now I've… had to go back to what I was good at… What I've been doing… so what I've found is, well, since I've done a diploma in Māori and performing arts… I warmed my ankle back up and I was like well I obviously can't go back to the same mahi… so now I'm learning the, aw halfway now… halfway of… doing the diploma in engineering… umm… I'm doing level six at the moment.*

He also acknowledged that without the support he received, particularly through Māori performing arts, his outcomes could have been very different.

> *T: And you know… at that time I wasn't living at home… I was doing my own thing… tryna do my own thing and figure out how to survive and she was like aw nah cut that out you know… I'll take you in…, her doing that for me was huge… I was blown away I was aye …*
> *… 'you know our plan now is for you to get past and get through school' …and all this and next minuet aww… I passed level, one, two and three because of her guidance… You know and she, she, she helped me out and it was just through Māori… well Māori performing arts and Māori…If it wasn't for that I don't think I was gunna stay in school at all…*

When rangatahi were asked whether they identified as Māori, all affirmed their identity. However, the deeper insight lies with those who not only identified as Māori but also actively engaged with Te Ao Māori. These rangatahi, grounded in cultural connection and practice,

demonstrated an openness to new opportunities while maintaining a strong sense of autonomy. Their success appeared to be closely linked to a confident belief in their own capability.

Taken together, the theme of connection to Te Ao Māori emerges as a central mechanism of success — even though it was not evident across all whānau interviewed in Chapter Five. Alongside this, other important markers included the setting of goals and the support to achieve them, both of which were key to successful outcomes in education and employment pathways.

7.2.2 Setting Goals

Goals were outlined by Rangatahi Q as key to pursuing pathways, with an understanding that goal planning and the ability to envision future outcomes are necessary to achieve these goals. Support related to these goals came from both internal and external sources. Internally, this involved the ability of the whānau to help their rangatahi with setting goals. Externally, support was demonstrated through school networks or peer groups.

> *Q: I don't know… going to Japan was like a thing I always wanted to do… like ever since I got to Aussie, cause I had heard all about it… and then when I finally heard that I was going there I was like mean as… and I didn't wanna like miss out on it*

Rangatahi J shares her thoughts on why goal setting is an important aspect of pursuing pathways, highlighting how it provides motivation and inspiration.

> *J: I think the way that they think about that part is to focus on something else, like so focus on their goals and all that. Like, create some goals. Cause they don't. They know their goal is… I reckon they should just pick it back up. Go to core study, you know. Who knows, you'll meet new people, they wanna… who might be in the same thing, going through the same thing as you.*

In support of this, Pakeke Mema I's insight helps to understand what role pakeke can take in relation to supporting rangatahi to achieve their goals.

Pakeke Mema I: Yeah, well first and foremost it's… um while they're growing up you should be finding out what they want to be doing…. Like looking at it, it might be sports or whatever… so that, that's where you push them… you know … all that vision, purpose, and goals.

For Rangatahi T, his first job at a young age taught him the value of goal setting and following a process. He credits this experience with laying the foundation for his employment journey and building a strong work ethic.

T: There the three main things… the main goal… was to cut the tree down… turn it all into little um… circle biscuits… get the biscuits… chuck them into firewood throw em on the truck… and we would unload it and start that again… for twenty times I counted one day… It gave me a good foundation aye… cause I learnt how ta work hard… cause it was like a consistent… But ahh it teaches you… a lot of good things you know cause… you know… I was only young…

As seen here, rangatahi were able to set goals and achieve them, which built confidence in their ability to take up opportunities. This was echoed by Rangatahi Q, who spoke about learning to manage his time and balance school, work, and other commitments.

Q: Aw, just to like… stay like… don't freak out too much cause you realize you have so much things to do, like you got school and those stuff after school, then you got work… and then you've got to juggle all between three and then… on the weekends, you've gotta work and then you've like gotta do… then you just gotta like set it all out before you do it, cause then you'll be like really frustrated… cause that's what happened last year…

Rangatahi T2 discusses the motivation required to achieve goals and highlights that goals start with one step in the right direction, emphasising the importance of keeping momentum going.

T2: but as long as you take that first step of tryna… achieve something for yourself that you know… emotionally, physically that you know that… its gunna work for you, then yeah… keep going for it and don't stop because… each step after another is something that could achieve into that… you could probably dream of…

This driving force that Rangatahi T2 mentions is clearly evident in Rangatahi J as she talks about her motivation to find employment.

> *J: I wanted a job. I wanted a job and experience. So, I'd just have it. I didn't actually care about the money… I think it was just being independent, finding my own and things… I've worked at café, Allpress Café, Tiffany Café – oh Tiffany's, and I was out piopio…picking berries for a little bit.*

For wahine Pakeke A, she highlights the importance of loving what you want to do as a key motivating factor for her, emphasising that engaging in activities she loves gives her a sense of fulfilment.

> *A: Aw I love teaching, it's a buzz man... I get a real, aw like I don't like the marking and things like that, but I get a real... I'm not afraid to say it but teaching is my taonga….*

At the same time, she explained that her pathways were not shaped by formal goal planning, but rather by guidance from others and a willingness to follow her intuition.

> *A: Like I've never really had a clear path of what I should do… I've always just had someone say aw you should give this a go and I'd be like aww, I'd resist it... and they go just give it a go... and I'm over here and I enjoy it…*

Like Pakeke A, Rangatahi T2 found his pathway through the guidance of those around him, particularly one of his high school teachers.

> *T2: Yeah… pretty much yeah… cause um… that was for one of my teachers in high school… he told me… this would be a good one for you because you know, you're in the training industry… you wanna go that far… here's a course that I think will be good for you… and you know, you can experience different trade areas*

For Rangatahi J, her peer group helped her focus and introduced her to new experiences that she valued.

J: Um, the people that I met there were like really really, um, supportive, like my group of friends. I hadn't had a group of friends like this before. Um, they were all Islanders girls, but they were all determined with schoolwork. And like for me, like I was like, 'yeah, well I'm determined too,' but I can't really – I couldn't really focus that much by myself. But when I had them, they were there to help me with schooling. Like they even encouraged me like after school to go to, you know, to go to libraries.

Along similar lines, Rangatahi T2 recognised he could exchange skills with his peers, where they were able to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in a way that helped him get through school.

T2: Contemplates… aw nah I ahh, I had some, I had some pretty cool school mates… and ahh they were a lot more educated than I was… Like smarter…most of my good close friends they would, they would help me a lot… and yeah that was a good thing, and I would help them a lot too… with like practical stuff as well… so… It was pretty much a win win for both of us… that pretty much helped me ahh… get along with high school and try…

Mema D shares his thoughts on how best to assist rangatahi with pathway navigation and goal setting, recognising that a laid-back approach works well when offering support.

D: Yeah so, so… just, don't make a thing of it… don't get excited… you know what I mean... support the positives, starve the negatives... get out of the bloody road… when they wanna go do their thing... you know…

Wahine N shares that leading by example helped her children understand work ethics and believes this is a good way to support rangatahi.

Wahine N: My children saw me studying. My children saw me working. Even though their fathers weren't, eh? So, um, I think I've instilled work ethic or learning into them cos they've seen me do it. You know?...

For Rangatahi T2, he shares the frustrations and struggles rangatahi face, but emphasised the importance of staying positive and continuing to take small steps forward.

> *T2: Positive, positive… I would, I would just say… just don't… don't be afraid to ask… pretty much… umm... you know there's... ahh everyone... you know… just for all those people out there, there are a lot of people like them… like myself, like ourselves that are struggling… that are frustrated with life… that there is… little steps you can take... it doesn't have to be… big ones, like real big ones…*

For Rangatahi Q he shares his navigation of the workspace and the success mechanisms he used to manage the issues that arose for him.

> *Q: Yeah like… just keep calm and don't like… like if you're feeling like annoyed… and frustrated you just don't show it… just stay calm… yeah… you meet… a lot of people at [ ] who always come and go… I met like so many people like casual customers and that… and I'm talking to them again when I meet them out in public so it's alright…*

Overall, rangatahi, pakeke, wāhine, and mema highlighted goal setting as a key mechanism for pathway navigation. For rangatahi, goals created motivation, structure, and confidence, while support from whānau, peers, and teachers helped sustain them. Pakeke reinforced the importance of working alongside rangatahi to identify aspirations and leading by example. Together, these insights show that successful pathway navigation is not driven by goals alone but by the collective support systems that give them meaning and momentum.

7.2.3 Whānau and Home

Whānau and home were expressed by rangatahi as a success mechanism for navigating their school and work pathways. Home, however, was not always tied to blood relations but could take different forms. Rangatahi often reflected in what they believed a secure and supportive home should look like. These insights also included perspectives from pakeke, wahine, and mema. For Rangatahi T he explained this through his own sense of security drawn from his parents.

Rangatahi T: I think security is um… it depends you know, like my dad was always my security… you know, my mum and my dad you know… that was my security, so I always felt like… security was a big thing… you with ahh not wealth… yeah… I think security is a huge thing… cause, umm... yeah that will definitely be my next… just cause you know, when you have people that make you feel… safe and that, you'll wanna follow them…

Feeling safe and feeling secure are emphasised as very important by Rangatahi T. He recognised that having people around him who made him feel safe was essential. For Pakeke H, his experience was different. He identified changes in his home life and the impact these have had on him over time, and over different stages of his growth and identity.

Pakeke H: I would have saw myself in, in, myself in two parts. But today I, I feel like I'm, I'm - my life is in three parts. And, um, what I mean by that is that from birth right up to, um, when I was about 12 or 13, when the old man dropped out of the Mob officially, that to me kind of was the span of active Mongrel Mob…and then from that time onwards, 12, 13 onwards …I had moved into a church lifestyle…and then I lived that and then I moved away from that, that group. So, I moved away to come to France…so I've been away for eight years in France…

For Pakeke Mema I, he recognises his home life as a cornerstone of his morals and values and is proud of this. However, he acknowledges that this isn't the reality for everyone in similar situations.

Pakeke Mema I: My name's [ ]… ahh patch member of the Blacks… and yeah born and raised in our family… within our family… strengths are definitely… morals and values, not all families but ours… umm... you know like and usually there's a lot of other families that have been raised around the presidencies and that sort of the thing… and um… so the strength yeah is definitely um the respect, understanding how respect works… cause you see it in action daily through other men… with you know the old man…

Rangatahi J shares her observation of whānau, homelife, and her sense of connection through shared experiences with those who have grown up in similar situations.

Rangatahi J: My name is [ ] . Oh, my parents are [ ] and [ ]. Um, I was born into the gang culture because of my mum's upbringing. She was raised in the gang culture; therefore, it sorts of affects my life pretty much…. I think it also not only makes you different, but you can connect with other kids that are like that as well or have that type of lifestyle.

Pakeke HK saw his whānau base as a strength right from the time he was born; however, he also recognised that it instilled in him the need to make his own way in the world.

HK: I was Mongrel Mob from the moment... I was born... and that was something that… you know... it strengthens you straight away just knowing that right away… I didn't actually want that to be what strengthened me and how people would judge me… because I felt that would owe to my father that was him, for me I felt that how could I make my own ground… after they've paved for me…

Rangatahi T2 shares his experiences of whānau and home life, and the support found within it was an extension of the whānau, not just confined to the individual unit.

T2: And… it took a toll but yeah, I reckon ahh whatever you call that, everyone was supportive… even the people I don't talk to…. Like gang member family, brother and that you know they were always there… even just three mins on the phone… but in those two or three mins it was quite a lot… pretty much everyone, my family… my dad… is one of them… my grand dad was well... my uncles and that as well… and I pretty much… I pretty much grew up with a lot of them… a lot of my uncles…

For Wahine N, she suggests there can be some positive aspects for rangatahi because of their affiliation, and she connects this to having a different perspective.

Wahine N: Ah, yeah, there probably is. If, um, from a rangatahi's perspective, it, you know, just knowing that you're - whether you're, you know, if your whānau are gang-related, whether it be your parents, your aunties, your uncles, your cousins, you know, that's a whole different, um - it's like a, it's just a different, ah, what would you call it?

It's a - just a different world, eh, to be privy to that. You know, there's - there, there, there are good things you can take from gang culture, eh, within your whānau?

Returning to school and work pathways for Mema M, where he discussed an initiative his organisation had established for their youth, and highlighted that comfort and familiarity were key factors that helped these rangatahi achieve their goals.

M: So, we said okay we started a Ministry of Education school… we gave them accreditation and all that kind of stuff… so we took a bunch of young kids and we made them accomplish the goals, that any other child or kid would go through… at a primary and intermediate level… and they accomplished all of it… only because you let them feel comfortable in their environment… and when a person feels comfortable where they are… they'll achieve a hell of a lot more than when they're getting pressured…

Mema D also highlights the importance of whānau, observing the positive effects of people coming together.

Mema D: you know... I notice that our... a lot of our people… umm… they'll do anything… as long as they can do it together… and there is this whole, highly affiliative… sort of thing… you know and as long as it's the crew, they'll do anything… you know... and it doesn't matter how hard or whatever, as long as someone… in a sense of believing in them… and enabling them to do that, you know…

For Wahine L, she shares that education should be encouraged, but it must also be well-rounded and encompass all areas of life.

Wahine L: I think education is a big part of it… like being educated in all aspects of life… not just… yeah just being educated… they grow up healthy yeah… and they have good lives… and then it's more around the time … it's more the umm important stuff… like creating the memories… like going out on trips and stuff…

For Mema E, he recognises the importance of whānau working alongside their rangatahi to help them achieve their goals, but he also identifies some need for external support as well.

Mema E: Yeah, I suppose it's tryna get alongside of them and make the change, work with our rangatahi, there should be more programs like that for our kids, available to them… more wrap around support aye…

Wahine S2 also recognises the importance of working alongside rangatahi and actively engaging in their education. She feels strongly that this was essential with her children because of their gang ties. This finding will be explored further in the next section.

Wahine S2: You know, um, so I - I find that, um, unless the parents are prepared to engage with them and say, 'Oh, boy, come on, just, you know, put your head down' you know… And that's another change that I've had to do with my kids, is - because I felt that my kids were getting picked on because they were gang kids.

For Mema M, he discusses the pressure facing these rangatahi in the education system and the importance of identifying what type of learner each rangatahi may be to tailor their learning accordingly.

Mema M: I think what it comes down to, is the style of learning, now not everyone can grasp verbally… not everyone can grasp hands on… or visually or by listening to things… you gotta tap into what they're good at… if your tryna tell someone… something and you're talking, he might not comprehend it... he may hear it… he may listen to you, but he may not be able to comprehend a god damn word you're saying… Māori and Pacific Islanders… learn differently, they don't learn the same… as the Pākehā system…

Rangatahi K discusses success as having a happy home and a whānau owning their own place.

Rangatahi K: Success is like… umm, being a happy family, in your own home, you know you can do what the fuck you want… and your bills are paid and like you're happy …

To conclude this section, we consider the insights provided by Rangatahi J, which again support the views of Rangatahi T by emphasising that security and safety are important. More so in Rangatahi J's case, highlighting that some aspects of the environment need to be kept separate.

Rangatahi J: …but it should be different from your home to being out with – your home should be different to your gang… As long as your kids have a… they don't get to see that side of things, then they should be…. They should have a good life them.

For Rangatahi T, he expresses a wish to give back to his whānau by using the skills he's gained. He recognises that his skills are currently utilised by others and hopes this will change eventually.

T: Umm… like a goal for me for them… was to go home… and to teach them what I know… if I was to come back and teach… basic weaponry, it would teach them basic protocol… they'll go different paths, they'll have different views on… life and like… yeah, I just think that yeah… aw this was a big plan I wanted to do, like just go in there, go grab the cousins…
…sit them down have some wānanga with them during the weekends, teach them pretty much… everything I've learnt from everybody cause in the end… I feel like my knowledge should go to them… so cause, that's my family… I'm teaching all these kids, and they're learning a lot of things… and I wanna… go back home and give it to them… for our rangatahi,

In a similar vein, Mema E2 shares his hopes for how the Black Power space can be seen as a more positive space moving forward.

E2: And, and that's just… in terms of the gangs you know for Black Power… I have a selfish, selfish aspiration for Black Power… and that's, I want people to not see Black Power… I want our whānau to be something of a positive influence on our rangatahi not a negative, and seen as a positive… Yeah, and I think our rangatahi are the key to it, and we need to hand them the leadership…

This section showed that whānau and home play a pivotal role in rangatahi success, providing security, guidance, and a sense of belonging, though home was not always tied to blood relations. Participants described how values, respect, and role modelling helped shape positive pathways, while also noting that some rangatahi required external support when these foundations were lacking. Overall, whānau emerged as a key mechanism of success, setting

the stage for the next section, which turns to the challenges faced by rangatahi, pakeke, wāhine, and mema in navigating pathways within gang spaces in Aotearoa.

7.3 Key Findings – Challenges

This next section highlights the main challenges rangatahi faced when trying to navigate school and employment pathways while being within a gang space. Acknowledging the judgment and stigma often associated with these environments, the discussion is deliberately framed through a strengths-based lens, emphasising resilience and potential rather than deficit or negativity.

Table 7.2: Pathways navigation – Challenges

Pathways Navigation – Challenges				
Research Questions & Area where challenge can be found	*School*	*Work*	*Home*	*Gang Space*
Dreams & Aspirations Te Ao Māori connection	Disconnection to Te Ao Māori.	Stigmatized for being Māori and gang affiliated.	Disconnected to Te Ao Māori.	Lack of connectivity Te Ao Māori space.
Grasping School & Work Opportunities Goal setting	Struggled with asking for help. Being stigmatized.	Delays and obstacles to achieving goals.	Instability in home life, Drugs, alcohol, and violence.	Drugs, alcohol, and violence.
Influence of Marginalization & Cultural Identity. Whānau and home	Distracted, learning difficulties.	Struggling to gain employment. Accident.	Judged and stigmatized for gang affiliation.	Drugs, alcohol, and violence. Imprisonment.

7.3.1 Te Ao Māori

An important observation from this initial stage of the interviews is that, with the exception of two rangatahi, the other four did not mention Te Ao Māori in relation to their school or work pathways or their affiliation. This absence suggests a possible disconnection from Te Ao Māori in shaping their educational and employment pathways. Some pakeke, in sharing their experiences, recognise and speak to this disconnection between Te Ao Māori and being in gang spaces.

> *H: I mean, in itself, it's, it's kind of fits into its own, its own group as well, because when I, you know, I went to school Māori, but what I thought was Mongrel Mob, I genuinely didn't think that was a Māori, Māori mentality…And then when I saw our Black Power side it seemed like whānau, everybody loves. Because, like, our cousins… weren't afraid to kind of love each other… and I feel like that's Māori, like that was what I thought of as Māori... to the Mob, it was really about, 'Oh, look at me, I'm the toughest and I'm on my own'…*

Pakeke H reflected on his experiences growing up and observing both spaces he was involved in. He notes how he associated love with being a key part of what being Māori meant, and where he recognised this wasn't the case. This links to the next insight shared by Rangatahi T.

> *T: some of the cuzzies, they wanna fall back on the gang path, which I don't think it's a bad thing… you know I don't think it's all bad you know…I think somewhere in there they should teach some… Māori basics you know like… at least they all stay in the right… mind frame.*

Given Pakeke H's insight, we notice that Rangatahi T also points out a lack of Te Ao Māori in his observations of whānau on a gang path, while suggesting it could be a valuable trait for some. Pakeke I provides another perspective on his views of cultural dynamics between Te Ao Māori, gang environments, and mainstream society.

> *I: you can't be wearing a suit and tie, fucken… living off the concept of a white man… and expect to be saying, your living how our tūpuna did… no, our tūpuna wanted their*

own fucken um structures, their own system and that's what we do… we don't govern, we don't get governed from them… we have to implement what they've got to give us and so we stay free but it's bro we govern ourselves… we got our own rules set, we really do… they just not written down, but they there…

Pakeke I observed that the structure of gang space is similar to the hapū structure of our tupuna. In this context, Pakeke G acknowledges some of these similarities but also disputes others.

G: The structure and also to the war likeness, our warness tino tata rawa atu… Well, the war aspect, yes… but the behaviours kāo… ki a mātou and to us…you know, that's what that means to us Tino Rangatiratanga… Mana Motuhake, to us it's not about Gangsterism… or having big flash cars, or all those things… those are just big flash cars and things to us…

In this respect, we begin to see how Te Ao Māori is negotiated in complex and sometimes contrasting ways for the members - who were themselves these rangatahi. Mema D offers insight into this through his reflections on the early stages of gang formation and the interactions between Māori identity and gang culture during that period.

D: ... you know they just looked so different… you know... and of course Māori who were trying ... were wearing shirt and tie… and, and having been… subjugated or having been… banged on the head for being Māori… I mean it was... it was… you had guys in women's fur jackets and it looked so… exotic… ... these guys were basically saying …well fuck you… in your face you know…

For Pakeke E2, his experience included filing a Waitangi Tribunal claim on behalf of his gang space; however, the challenge arose because, although they operated in some respects like an iwi, the gang space was not recognised as a traditional iwi.

E2: You know… a while ago when we declared to be defined as an iwi we… looked at Reitu' creation of the hapū that he built… and belonged to, so basically there was a few iwi ... in the whānau, and one whānau broke away… created the hapū…and we saw that… as what Harris did with Māoridom… He broke away from Māoridom and

created this hapū named Black Power… and so we have, and, and I tried… It's difficult… it's difficult because we're, we're not a traditional iwi…

These dynamics may help explain why four of the six rangatahi did not mention Te Ao Māori in their interviews. Instead, their stories focused more on being the children of members, indicating that their sense of identity was shaped more directly by their whānau circumstances and affiliations than by wider cultural frameworks. This shows how, within gang spaces, whānau positioning can take priority over connections to Te Ao Māori when rangatahi consider their schooling and employment pathways.

K: yeah, I could see it when I was in primary… always asking me if I was alright… CYPF's and that… judging me when I come, asking me… whose dropping me off and all that… dumb questions in way that, coarse I'm alright… Ayee, you're looking… at me like a gang member because my… you see me getting dropped off by a V8 noisy car, like those noisy cars where… aw yeah… his father's a gang member…

Rangatahi K discusses feeling judged at school because of his father's gang affiliation. An interesting point here is that at primary school age, Rangatahi K was aware that his gang affiliation was being noticed and that he was being treated differently because of it. Rangatahi Q shares his experience.

Q: Aw yeah, aw like I'll just walk, and they'll be like aw look there's that Black Power kid and I'm like aw yeah okay… and then they're like, you know stuff like that…

In high school Rangatahi Q is mindful that he is being identified as a gang affiliated rangatahi, for Pakeke G his was an experience of feeling undermined due to his gang affiliation.

G: And teacher, aw a lot of teachers… just loved me and actually my reports are around here someone… and they couldn't… believe that… that this gang kid…that this gang kid… who was so fucken sharp… who was so sharp… when he was beating all these, well to do, well to do families… well to do children… in all these academic places… they couldn't…. they were like what the fuck…even with the mahi I do today, and people are like… how is it that this fucken gang member is up in front of us… teaching me?... they just don't get it…

Pakeke G notes that, even though he now runs workshops, he is still seen the same way he was in his youth, showing he still experiences the same judgments and stigma. Rangatahi T has some ideas on how to mediate these issues.

> *T2: being affiliated with a lot of gangs um… you know they may see a bit of one side, but… we all, there's still gotta be a bit of … but just as long as you keep them going, and keep them active with a lot of things… like sporting, stuff like that… like stuff that… you and maybe the other person may have a good connection with… like maybe… if he likes artwork… or if you know he likes mathematics… learning with numbers you know, there's a lot of different… varieties, you know, you just have to talk with the person…*

For the whānau whānui, there were also instances of judgment due to gang affiliation, and these examples were found within government systems primarily; however, they were also found in workplace situations, and within the home space. The latter will be discussed further on in this chapter.

> *Wahine: N: Yeah. Um, I, I worked in Māori Health, Hauora Māori for 20 years. And that followed me everywhere I went, you know. I lived in Whanganui. I lived in - lived there for nearly 40 years and you know, always as, 'Oh, there's that gang bitch.' You know, that's what I used to hear my work colleagues, you know…*

Wahine N is upfront in speaking about the judgment and stigma she experienced in her workplace. Notably, the workplace itself was Māori-focused. For the following Mema he speaks to his experiences within his kapa haka rōpū.

> *E2: You know and I've managed to get our, our club [name]… from a deficit to you know 50-grand in the red… You know and they've never experienced that… in the 85 years they've existed… But they still think there's something up… And all I'm doing is, I negotiate with the cruise ships, and I negotiate with Government agencies… about using [name] for all their stuff… and they say but we were never able to do that… and I'm like it's not my problem… why don't we just celebrate the fact that we can.*

Mema E2 played a key role in securing funds for his kapa haka group; however, the whānau were wary that the money might have come from suspicious sources. He also shares the experience of graduating from a Māori institution and some of the dynamics that took place.

> *E2: So at my graduation I rang them earlier and I said there's 12 of us coming, and they go well we're gonna have to stop ten at the door and I said well you're gonna have to get some more security… and so they did, and so we got there… and instead of wearing a patch I wore the traditional gown… with the hat and I had twelve tamariki and mokopuna with me and they all did a haka… you know…*

Mema D recalls a key moment when the debate between gang spaces and Te Ao Māori came to a head.

> *D: …and Muldoon said that to the New Zealand Māori council… and he said you gotta own these fullaz… they're yours… and it was only Sir Graham Latimer and that who actually bought into that… and the rest of them… a lot of them… wanted to reject… you know… then I think they got embarrassed over our behaviour… and, and… wanted to, not to own us…*

In her final sharing, Wahine S2 speaks to the positioning of rangatahi Māori within the education system and the challenges this creates for Māori children.

> *S2: I struggle with this because, um, our kids, eh, our Māori kids, well, eh, not just gang member but Māori kids brought up in the gang whatever, eh, they - they don't fit the system, eh. And I've seen that, um, eh, our kids are not, ah, visual or thing – eh, they're kinaesthetic, hands on… you go to any one of my kids and you go, 'Bro, here, look, I'll show you how to nail this on, eh', hammer it, show him and he'd go, 'Yeah' 'Put all those nails in this thing' and they'll do it, eh? But, um, yeah, our kids don't fit the mainstream. I - I don't believe the mainstream is, um, written for our kids.*

Supporting Wahine S2's observations, Pakeke H shares his own experiences within the school system and the pathway he chose to navigate for himself.

> *H: Um, and so that was an eye opener, going from a Mormon Church to an Anglican school…So, um, education, as much as I tried to apply myself with what I was doing, I was never really good at it. I was kind of - I'm more of an interaction type of - that's how I learn and stuff. So, I didn't even get - I didn't even get bursary; that's the equivalent; I didn't get bursary; I just got Sixth Form Certificate, but in a bridging. And I did three years of that at that year.*

In summary, this section shows that most rangatahi did not explicitly connect Te Ao Māori to their schooling or employment pathways, with their identities shaped more immediately by whānau and gang affiliation. The reflections of pakeke and whānau help explain this gap, pointing to both tensions and overlaps between gang life and Māori cultural values. At the same time, experiences of stigma and judgment in schools and workplaces reinforced feelings of disconnection. These dynamics highlight the complexity of cultural positioning for Māori in gang spaces and will be explored further in the discussion chapter and in the whānau and home section.

7.3.2 Setting Goals

Rangatahi did not speak directly about challenges in relation to goal setting. They did, however, speak to challenges within the areas outlined in the table. These included difficulties encountered in school and workplace settings, as well as those connected to their gang affiliation. For Rangatahi T, his challenge was expressed in the following way.

> *T2: Yeah, pretty much the biggest one was asking for help… ahh… I never liked asking… for a lot of things… I never liked you know people helping me a lot of the times… like even family… I never liked asking for things from all of them…*

For Rangatahi Q, he recognises that at times the challenge may stem from external pressure and a lack of self-awareness about which pathways to follow.

> *Q: I don't know, people just want you to be, what they want you to be… but you don't know what you want to be… But then like people… want to turn you into what they*

want… everyone wants different…Yeah, it's just the feeling of confidence that people actually want you to be… and then you get to choose who you want to be…

Pakeke G recalls feeling bored at school, attributing this to being a quick learner with a strong understanding of what was being taught.

G: …and because and cause straight away… the way I was branded… Branded as this type of kid… whereas in reality I was a very very sharp kid… and these teachers… that were teaching me, were boring as…and so they couldn't hold my interest… and here, for me, that's where kura actually failed me… it streamlined me into this group of people that I was… this type of person…

For Rangatahi T, he recognises that his ability to focus in class was an issue not only for his own learning but for others as well.

T: Yeah, yeah, yeah…. I noticed my um abilities to umm… to distract kids and to just oddle off with the fairies… I could understand that, that was me and I could understand that I had heaps of energy…

Pakeke I experienced his challenges within the workspace and in finding the right environment where he could learn.

I: when I got there it was an ex-nomad and…his sons, and his mates and…Nah nah it's this, fuck I didn't come to learn on this side…so I sacked myself that same day… and told them nah nah I'm not learning from there… and I pushed to get another job so I went to AA… and they put me through to somewhere and those people were full on, been working all their lives… and that's where I learnt.

Pakeke also shares his experiences at school and discusses the challenges he faced within its changing dynamics.

I: Sighs ummm… yeah sometimes they were a bit wary… wary of me in terms of um... like especially in New Plymouth… the teachers were wary of me having uncle there… like they already had their homework done on who we were… Aw you know… sports

yeah… fucken that experience there… taught me about respect in its own right… but it fucken um was also a bit of a place where I learnt the system can go against you… Yeah I had no choice… but um you have to make the most of all of um situations aye.

Rangatahi T2 emphasises the importance of understanding your own mind and highlights the challenge of external influences and pressure, similar to Rangatahi Q earlier in this section.

> *T2: …pretty much tryna have your own bubble…only having your own thoughts in that bubble… umm… just so because… your tempted… to expand that bubble to much… you get a lot of thought… of unspoken things around your head… tends to um… make you… change your mind and miss think… and that's when a lot of bad shit starts to happen… cause you'll get frustrated from people talking… having different ideas… I'll try this, my idea, for myself… and if it fucks up for me then I'm okay with it… and that's pretty much how it was, was my bubble… umm…. My own way…*

Rangatahi K shares his view on the challenges within the prison system.

> *K: …I reckon um… I reckon that, for at the end of the day for being in prison… I reckon we should all have one hour outside… of free time, where there's no devices… no nothing, no beef, no… no nothing, where you can just sit on the grass… and take a deep breath, and let all your mana out……because at the end of the day, while you're sitting and doing nothing with your life, you're… building all this yuck in, and that's what I learnt in jail is um… whatever's hurting you… let it go… because in life your gonna be sick… but if you can chuck it away and move forward… your gonna move in life …*

Rangatahi K also identified challenges that rangatahi may face with messages and messaging, particularly regarding who is delivering the message.

> *K: Yeah umm… nah ah I said it in a way that… at the end of the day, the kids these days… just gonna learn and observe, they won't listen to a kōrero out of someone's mouth these days… they'll have to sit there and learn from the older ones that… their idols aye… you can't, get someone like in the government… to come and talk to you, and say… you don't want your life to be like that… like CYFs and all that*

The point raised by Rangatahi K is reinforced by Mema H, who emphasises that being heard requires more than just speaking — it involves following a particular approach and process.

> *H: …Well we believe before you can engage you've got to penetrate… you've got to have some, those… that come from that whakapapa that people know… Okay will talk to you bro but don't tell anybody else right… well do, but you know… that's the relationship that we try to build right and then once we built that relationship where, actually where… now allowed into the room… into the house, let alone… standing at the… door way… you know…*

Mema E2 acknowledges the challenges arising from his criminal history and how these have created obstacles to pursuing further education.

> *E2: three months into it… again got pulled back into the office and they go, you can't study here, and I go why not?... and they said well we've just looked at your convictions… and you've got convictions for violence against wāhine… and I said yes, I have and that's the list of convictions I gave use at the interview… three months ago…*

Mema E2 also reflects on the challenges he faced as a rangatahi while affiliated, recognising that some of the behaviours he displayed at that age are still evident among rangatahi today.

> *E2: you know, once you start it has these repercussions that… will impact on your family… on your mum on your dad, you know… and they're not realising that, and similarly… we didn't realise that when we were doing it as well… but we didn't have the blessing of people who had been through that… And so that's the difference… you know that we see now, although, you know we're talking to our younger selves…*

Mema H suggests that unless there's more awareness and understanding from others as to how and why we are in the position we are today, the same structural challenges will just keep happening.

> *H: And so as long as our people here in Aotearoa… still believe in this…there's us and them… and the best way to save ourselves… is to be anti them… alright… we still continue to live out what that process of assimilation sought to do… to eradicate*

Māori… right… eradicate their culture… eradicate… it was an act of genocide… and here as gangsters… we continue to do that act of genocide on behalf of the system… yeah… so unless we actually… grow our awareness and say actually…

Mema J shares his reflections on his experiences as a rangatahi in a gang space, recalling the attitudes and thoughts that were present at that time.

Mema J: I think it was part of the culture, you know that rangatahi culture you, anti-sociable just didn't wanna... ahh anything to do with authority… anything authority we sort of rebelled against it and to us…we felt that even the police were a gang, they were a different… just that they had a... I suppose a... authority that we just didn't care whether they... were a higher or authority to us or not… to us they were just another gang… and so we treated them like that… so we clashed a lot with them as well…

Mema E shares his insight into the need for a cautious approach when supporting rangatahi in these spaces, noting that it can sometimes create challenges for engagement.

E2: they gotta remember too that our kids are gang kids, they gotta tread carefully…cause of how my kids have been bought up, it's hard and fast, and then they go to school and listen to a teacher … do it all polite… you know, so that's what I say ahh, they wanna teach our kids, they gotta be, ahh, they gotta have some experience with dealing with our kids….

While rangatahi did not speak directly to goal setting, their kōrero revealed a range of barriers across schooling, work, and everyday life shaped by both personal and structural factors. The reflections of pakeke and mema added further context, illustrating how stigma, labelling, and systemic obstacles continue to impact Māori in gang spaces. Together, these insights point to the resilience of participants in seeking alternative pathways, while also highlighting the need for greater understanding and culturally grounded approaches to engagement. These themes flow naturally into the following section, which considers the role of whānau and home in shaping both the challenges and opportunities experienced by rangatahi.

7.3.3 Whānau and Home

Earlier sections have touched on rangatahi experiences within their whānau and home lives, and the ways these dynamics have shaped their pathway navigation in challenging ways. This final section brings these challenges on the home front into sharper focus, supported by the reflections of pakeke, wāhine, and mema to provide further context for analysis.

Rangatahi T2 shares his perspective on the challenges faced by rangatahi at the centre of this study.

> *T2: It won't be an easy task…it wouldn't be an easy task…umm... there will be times where… it will be a lot of frustration from those kids… they think about ... drugs… and alcohol and you know making money through drugs… and stuff, so there pretty much… they can, they can start their life like that…*

Rangatahi T shares how his friends support him to face challenges while navigating school life, especially when things at home weren't going too well.

> *T: cause usually my close bro's would come up and usually have a chat with them… and I'd just wait again, and we would be on school premises and we'd just talk… and there usually the ones that got me through my days… they'd be like you know cuz, you can come over home whenever you want… and you know, those sorts of things got me through…*

Pakeke H describes how the dynamics of home life and his father's gang identity made it difficult for him to settle into school.

> *Pakeke H: …my dad's not a patched member today, but he's still, in my mind, he's still Mongrel Mob. He still behaves and shares those… when I first arrived at school at [] I was - I just, I just didn't have the, the behaviour. I wasn't the way that they had - I didn't fit into the school in my first years. I was still really on the rough edges, like rough side, kind of, and my mindset, you know, was still red all the way. Um, it was still trying to be gangster at a church school.*

Pakeke A reflects on how others perceived her father, noting that her own experiences of him differed greatly from the fear and assumptions held by those outside the gang space.

> *A: and I think I already knew um from that, from being around that that people had a real different perception to what I had experienced and to what mum had experienced... and so, if you haven't been around it, there's a real fearful… and rightly so sometimes… But it was funny too cause of… so much a part of who he was but it almost like you can't even separate it… aye so he just was who he was… I don't even know how to articulate it like... um... people loved dad anyway when they found out cause they would always be like… aw I thought they were scary…*

As noted earlier in this section, Wahine S2 explains how her children's school experiences were quite isolating because of the stigma attached once their whānau gang affiliation became known.

> *S2: Nobody wants to touch them. You know, as soon as they go, um, 'Oh, my father is Mongrel Mob', eh… I find… in the mainstream system that a teacher will teach those that are willing to teach - be taught, eh. And if you've got this kid going, 'Oh, fuck you, …, well, off to the office. Away you go'. You know, um, so I - I find that, um, unless the parents are prepared to engage… And that's another change that I've had to do with my kids, is - because I felt that my kids were getting picked on because they were gang kids.*

Because of her suspicions that her children were being overlooked due to whānau gang affiliation, Wahine S2 became fully involved in their schooling. In contrast, Mema H highlights the intergenerational nature of these challenges, observing how gang life can become normalised within families when alternative value systems are absent.

> *Mema H… it's an issue that what I see particularly now… is that where into the third and potentially fourth generation of gangsterism if you like to call it that… So that's the norm in your household, in your family, and you've got no other values systems to help you to be aware of… there are actually other ways of living your life um, you will live your life in that same order…*

For Wahine L, she felt the wrath of the police force as she was labelled and harassed because she was married to a gang member.

> *L: Yeah, like getting pulled up from the police and getting identified as a gang member… they had actually… it was in their system… and they checked me out I had come up as a known gang member… I was like ahhh I've never worn a patch in my life… never have… yeah… that was what they had; you know youse to get pulled up all the time…*

Wahine L reflects on her children's experiences, noting the role of whānau support alongside the impacts of institutionalisation and racism.

> *Wahine L: Yeah, that's different, and then you just become institutionalised… Argh you just have to, there is no mechanism, that's just what whānau are there for…. But you just gotta keep banging on about, stay outta...jail… but some of it though if you look at the jail… you know it's that racism... it's the fact that one, they're gang members…… second, they're Māori and then the crimes they did… You can look at others who don't get jail time…*

For Rangatahi J, she shares her observations of her gang whānau, she recognising that in some regard the gang space also functions as a support network.

> *J: well, I feel like whenever someone sees a patched member, they automatically judge, they think, oh this, they do this and do that. It's not all they do. It's not just about that. It's about their brotherhood too, their support systems, eh?...*

Mema E2 reflects on his homelife, recalling the challenges that arose when, as a child, he and his siblings were taken into state care and separated from one another.

> *E: I was taken off my family when I was eight years old… in 1968 and there was fourteen off us…in um a country block just out of Matamata, and they came in three cars, and they loaded us all on these three cars and herd us in like animals … and um my sisters were all placed in different homes… and brothers were sent to different towns to live with foster parents...*

For Pakeke A, she shares her disappointment at hearing her maternal whānau judge her father solely through the lens of his gang affiliation, overlooking his other qualities and skills.

> *A: Aw it used to make me really upset because… they really use to run him down because of the gang… and because of his... and part of me knows because for a long time he was abusive to mum… um despite that he's still my dad and he's part of me… so it's not really cool, it's basically saying... I'm shit… I'm very much like him and so… they didn't really get to see, beyond the gang… he was a fucken amazing chef… like he had all these amazing, and he was just um… all these other things that people didn't really… get to see because they really wouldn't look beyond that... it used to piss me off...*

Rangatahi touched on the presence of drugs and alcohol, a theme that was also raised by pakeke, wāhine, and mema.

> *N: Yeah, it's a lot different… so you'll have…Mob-related women who... but there's a, a, a division there if you, um, put methamphetamine in the mix, eh? [in reference to a woman in the mob scene] who is nearly 60 has a group of her and her friends and they're all addicts…so, I don't hang with them… if I go to a Mob do…I'll sit with my mates… women who… they've kept their families together, they've raised their children really well…there's the - a, a distinction between the types of women regardless of generation…*

Mema E2 reflects on the impact of methamphetamine within gang spaces, acknowledging their harmful influence while also noting an increasing need to reconnect with Māori identity.

> *E2: In a negative sense… methamphetamine has changed the environment for gangs… But also, on a positive um note is the refocus, or the… need, that our members have identified to connect with, with a need to be Māori… identified… and to own, and their starting to realise that this thing that we are, there's a lot more than this reality for us, you know…*

Similarly, Mema S reflects on how drug dealing can negatively impact gang spaces, but also points to a possible pathway forward through connection to culture.

S: it's what you offer them, you know. If you keep them on the gangster side of thing I think that that's where it'll fall to pieces, because that's where the drug dealing and all that stuff comes in on it… But if you can get them into whanaungatanga and all that, as of today and, you know, showing that we're capturing te reo and everything like that in our way and, and, yeah, that'll be a bonus. And treating our women good and letting them have, have a bit more say in the - in the - in the - in our movement, you know.

When discussing organised crime, Mema D emphasises the importance of distinguishing it from other issues, such as behaviours shaped by poverty of resources and culture.

D: …everything is seen as being structural and they talk about organised crime and all this sort of stuff… umm, where this is… disorganised, you need to separate out poor behaviour… the behaviour associated with poverty… and I don't just mean money poverty… I mean… poverty of spirit and poverty of culture…. And you need to separate that out from organised crime, they're two quite different things...

Mema H points to the absence of pro-social interventions for gang whānau, noting this neglect stretches back to the 1980s.

H: … because certainly in public policy in this country we have not had any pro- social interventions focusing on those families since the 1980s … so you're talking about 30 years of neglect… and absolute you know, no go areas …

Mema E reflects on his parenting, recognising his knowledge gaps when raising his children and the lasting impacts these gaps have had on his older children.

E: … it was umm... not good stuff, was rugged stuff… was some bad shit that I used to do, they took it all on board. I just tried to bring them up the best way I knew how in that scene… but I couldn't hide a lot of the stuff that they saw first-hand. That's how um one of my kids are doing a long time in jail, for some serious offences, and um I own all that stuff, it's all my stuff and um yeah.

Mema J emphasises the home environment as central to rangatahi pathway navigation, noting that external support is necessary. However, he acknowledges that external support won't be

welcomed or effective without trust — reinforcing the process outlined by Mema H earlier in this chapter (7.2.2).

> *J: I think that ahh I think it's a cliché I hate to say it but I think it's true... you know ahh a lot of our poverty… not having that…um right support systems put in place for... for families that are in gangs and that… will always determines the outcome… it's in the home... that's where the real ahh um… test begin because in that home life… so if you really want make a impact you really gotta hit the home… get into the homes and ahh…like what I said it comes back to that trust... like if they don't trust you that door will always be closed*

Mema J recalls a vivid memory of seeing the children of members gathered outside a pub, recognising them as the next generation of gang members.

> *J: I can remember one time going up to Auckland and we were ahh in the Mount Wellington I think it was … but there was like almost… 100 or maybe less or more of us in the pub and outside we're all... their children..14, 15 , 12 year old's they were in the car park… talking to each other's children… and I remember looking out into the car park going… man that's the prototypes there... you know ... there's the next generation of gang members…and I don't know why that thought always stayed in the back of my mind…*

This section has shown how whānau and home life play a central role in shaping rangatahi pathways, with many challenges tied to stigma, judgment, and intergenerational involvement in gang spaces. Experiences of isolation in schools, targeting by teachers and police, and the impacts of state intervention were common, and there was an acknowledgement of the influence of drugs and alcohol, particularly methamphetamine. At the same time, the perspectives shared emphasised the importance of whānau support, trust, and cultural grounding, with some pointing to reconnection with Māori values as a pathway forward.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the key findings of the study and shared insights from rangatahi, pakeke, wāhine, and mema. Their voices provided perspectives that have helped shape the understanding of the findings. To make the themes clear, two tables were used: the first showed the main mechanisms that support success, while the second highlighted the main challenges raised. Both tables linked these findings back to the research questions and included suggestions from rangatahi and whānau.

One of the strongest findings was the value of ongoing connection to Te Ao Māori, which gave rangatahi a firm base to navigate school and work pathways. Goal setting was also identified as a strength, and whānau support was shown to play a big part in encouraging positive movement. At the same time, challenges were clear — including stigma, judgment, and systemic barriers — showing why the second table was important. The perspectives of pakeke and whānau gave further depth, reminding us that many of these challenges have intergenerational and structural roots.

These insights show both the barriers and the resilience present within whānau contexts. They remind us that the stories shared are not just findings, but lived realities that shape how rangatahi and their whānau navigate their worlds. With this grounding, the next chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research, beginning with pathway navigation through the Waka framework outlined in Chapter Three, drawing further on rangatahi and pakeke insights.

Chapter Eight
Ka Hao te Rangatahi

Figure 8.1: *Rangatahi Day, 2025 (own photo).*

8.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together the threads of this doctoral journey and sets them out across four sections. The first section traces the pathways of our rangatahi and pakeke through the Waka framework introduced in Chapter Three. In doing so, it follows their journeys of navigation and struggle, showing how the currents of school, work, whānau, and gang spaces have carried them. These stories are considered alongside Kaupapa Māori and Critical Pedagogy, which help us see not only the challenges but also the strength and determination that sit within rangatahi and whānau experiences.

The second section turns to the layers that compound these struggles. Drawing on the kōrero shared in Chapter Six, it looks at the added weight of marginalisation and the external forces that shape the pathways available to rangatahi. Here, we see how relationships - whether supportive or obstructive - become crucial in determining how pathways are formed and followed.

The third section looks to the ways rangatahi and their whānau create spaces of resilience. These spaces become counter-narratives - places where acceptance and belonging can flourish despite the marginalisation they face. In listening to these stories, we see how the act of making

space is itself a powerful form of resistance and an anchor for strengthening pathways. Throughout this section, and those before it, the voices of whānau are held alongside the wider literature explored in Chapters One through Four, grounding their lived realities within a broader context.

The final section gathers these insights together. It summarises the understandings that have emerged, and then turns towards limitations and recommendations. At its heart, this section reaffirms a commitment: that the knowledge carried in this research belongs with whānau and rangatahi, and its purpose is singular - to support the navigation of stronger, safer, and more hopeful pathways. The intention is that this work will continue to live, to be questioned, and to be carried forward by whānau themselves.

8.2 Pathway Navigation

Chapter Three introduced the waka as an analogy to understand how rangatahi navigate school and work pathways. This use of the waka as an analogy emphasises the importance of supportive relationships and the influence of external factors in shaping the direction of their educational and career journeys. Within this interpretation, the rangatahi themselves are seen as the waka. Their progress is traced through a succession of stages - waka tētē, waka tīwai, mōkihi, modern-day waka tangata and waka taua - each representing different levels of development and experience, until ultimately, mastery is reached at the level of the waka haurua.

The elements that influenced rangatahi journeys - whether positively or negatively - were described as the tangata (people and relationships), those who sit upon the waka. The forces that either mobilised or destabilised their progress were represented as the wai, the waters through which the waka travels. Across all sections of this research, a consistent theme emerged: connection to Te Ao Māori. This connection provided the stability and strength likened to the mastery of the waka haurua, enabling rangatahi to overcome challenges in their navigation of school and work pathways.

This finding aligns closely with the literature introduced in Chapter One, which identifies cultural connectedness as a key component of Māori success (Durie, 1995). Among the participants, this connection was perhaps most strongly voiced by Rangatahi T (level 7). He described the wai that mobilised his waka as confidence drawn from understanding himself as Māori, sustained through continual engagement in activities that were grounded in being Māori, like Māori performing arts.

Through these networks he also found encouragement and practical support from his tangata, especially when facing significant challenges. On this foundation, he was able to articulate a clear aspiration: to return home and share the skills he had developed through Māori performing arts, teaching his whānau in wānanga settings. His dream speaks directly to the ideas in *Hei Tikitiki – Māori Rites of Passage & Youth Development*, which emphasises that rites of passage are not for the benefit of the individual alone, but for the whānau, community and wider culture to which they belong (Caddie & Ross, 2011).

Another rangatahi, Q (level 7), described how kapa haka opened the doorway for him to travel to China. To realise this opportunity, he sought employment to offset the costs. In doing so, he not only achieved his goal but also developed crucial skills in time management and responsibility. This example illustrates how cultural engagement can provide both pathways to opportunity and the practical skills required to navigate them.

Taken together, these experiences highlight the variety of learning opportunities available to rangatahi when they are supported through wai and tangata. More importantly, they show the confidence and agency rangatahi gained when seizing such opportunities. A significant overall finding was that all rangatahi interviewed identified as Māori. Yet the defining factor was not identity alone, but ongoing involvement in Te Ao Māori, resonating with Durie's markers of Māori identity: whakapapa, marae participation, whānau associations, connection with ancestral land, interaction with Māori individuals, and fluency in the Māori language (Durie, 1995). Those rangatahi who actively engaged in cultural practices embodied the wai elements that enabled them to embrace opportunities while maintaining autonomy and self-awareness.

The importance of ongoing engagement with Te Ao Māori was further affirmed by Pakeke G (level 10). He spoke about how his father instilled these practices throughout his upbringing, making them an inseparable part of daily life. His reflections personify the mastery of the waka

haurua, demonstrating how deeply grounded cultural practice can sustain one's navigation through education and work.

This also resonates with *Hei Tikitiki – Māori Rites of Passage & Youth Development*, where Māori kaumātua identify key markers of traditional youth development: responsibilities within whānau, participation in rites of passage such as birth, tangihanga, and marriage, as well as cultural roles on the marae. These include speaking te reo, whaikōrero, hosting responsibilities, and maintaining relationships to whenua tuku iho (Caddie & Ross, 2011, p.9). In embodying these roles, Pakeke G reflects a holistic development pathway that exemplifies mastery.

For the remaining rangatahi, the ability to articulate self-awareness and map their aspirations was less prominent. Their positioning sat between waka tētē, waka tīwai, mōkihi, and waka tangata - representing earlier or intermediate stages of development. Yet their contributions remain significant, offering valuable strategies for how goals might be pursued despite adversity. What unites these rangatahi is that they represent a marginalised group whose lived experiences are rarely visible in existing research.

Their kōrero also highlighted what worked for them and what did not. Importantly, three of the five rangatahi noted that this interview was the first time they had been asked to reflect so deeply on their own pathways. One rangatahi, initially shy and uncertain, struggled to see value in her story. With gentle prompting - asking her to imagine the kind of whānau environment she wished to create for her children - her vision began to take shape. She described wanting a safe and nurturing home, signalling how aspirations are often rooted in the desire to provide better futures for the next generation.

Other rangatahi emphasised the role of the home environment as a decisive wai element. One spoke about the importance of a "happy home" and the aspiration to one day own their own house. Another highlighted the need to eliminate violence and drugs from the home altogether. Such reflections underscore how rangatahi see the stability of the home as central to their capacity to pursue education and employment pathways.

When asked about their connections to gang spaces, two rangatahi spoke freely while the remaining three required more time to reflect. Their responses revealed mixed emotions. On one hand, gang affiliation was often normalised - so embedded in daily life that it was rarely

questioned. On the other hand, as they reflected more deeply, they began to acknowledge the negative elements they had observed, including substance abuse and violence. Yet even within this acknowledgement, they also spoke of whānau, showing the dual, sometimes conflicting nature of these affiliations as both a source of harm and a source of belonging.

Using the LOE tool as a reference point, the insights of pakeke ranged across levels 4 to 10, mirroring the diversity seen in rangatahi. Three pakeke were able to provide in-depth self-awareness of their gang connections, while the remaining two offered more limited reflections. It is likely that these differences relate to time and distance—both physical and relational—spent away from their gang-affiliated parents or spaces. For example, one pakeke had no knowledge of her father until the age of 13, while another was sent to Australia to live with extended whānau, creating geographical separation from the gang environment.

These variations illustrate the complexity of pathways within whānau. Each pakeke brought distinct life experiences which shaped their views on how rangatahi might better navigate into school and work. Yet across this diversity, a resounding theme emerged: the home as a crucial wai element. A stable home environment was repeatedly described as instrumental in enabling rangatahi to move forward in their educational and occupational journeys.

Equally important were the tangata—the attitudes and behaviours of people surrounding rangatahi. Pakeke insights revealed how these influences, both positive and negative, shaped their own trajectories. Their reflections on education and work pathways offered not only personal narratives but also guidance for supporting rangatahi today.

The third research question sought to explore the impact of marginalisation and identity on rangatahi within gang spaces, and how these forces influenced their navigation of school and work pathways. When asked directly about experiences of judgement, all participants—both rangatahi and pakeke—acknowledged moments of being judged due to their gang affiliation. While rangatahi often struggled to articulate these experiences in depth, pakeke spoke about them with greater clarity, many at LOE levels 6 to 10.

For some pakeke, judgement was explicitly tied to their gang affiliations. For others, it was inseparable from their identity as Māori. One pakeke, for instance, felt that being Māori was the greater source of discrimination, overshadowing the impact of gang ties. Another described

how attending a predominantly Pākehā boarding school exposed him to intensified judgement. Although his uncle led the Māori department at that school, the combined influence of negative tangata and wai elements diminished his desire to remain in that institution.

The only female pakeke interviewed shared how judgement was experienced indirectly, through the attitudes and assumptions her wider whānau held about her father's gang involvement. These views, though not directed at her personally, were still internalised and shaped her sense of self. Her experience resonates with research noted in Chapter Three, which identifies whānau as both a source of strength and a potential source of anxiety (Ministry of Youth Development, 2010).

For other pakeke, experiences of judgement were felt most sharply within the education system. One recalled being continually undermined by teachers who saw him only as a "gang-affiliated youth." Categorised in this way, he began to act out, fulfilling the very assumptions placed upon him. In later years, however, he recognised that this negative experience also fostered resilience, teaching him to confront judgement as a daily reality. He spoke of how people often expected him to fit a stereotype - "drug dealer, violent offender, alcoholic" - and were unsettled when his skills and achievements exceeded their expectations.

In contrast, another pakeke described how awareness of stereotypes motivated him to excel. He felt a responsibility to counter the low expectations placed on him as both Māori and gang-affiliated. By succeeding in education, he aimed to challenge assumptions and provide a positive example. In this way, negative tangata influences were instead transformed into fuel for achievement.

For one pakeke, pride in his gang affiliation was central to his identity. With close whānau ties to two opposing gangs, he saw this as a unique strength. However, when his family later moved away from gang spaces and into a more religious setting, he encountered those same types of judgement and stereotypes from this new environment. Initially, he continued to carry and represent his gang identity, which shaped how others perceived him. Over time, however, his attitude shifted and he found that he was more accepted by his new environment.

These accounts show the layered and sometimes conflicting ways in which gang affiliation is experienced. In three cases - one rangatahi and two pakeke - there was not only resilience but

also a sense of pride and privilege in being connected to their gang whānau. Such reflections complicate simplistic narratives of gang involvement by highlighting the dual realities of belonging and marginalisation.

Taken together, these experiences emphasise the intricate influence of gang spaces on self-perception, social identity, and well-being. They also illustrate how both wai and tangata can either support or hinder pathway navigation. Across rangatahi and pakeke voices, it is clear that mastery of the waka - reaching the level of waka haurua - requires both stability and strength. Connection to Te Ao Māori emerges as a decisive factor, providing a foundation from which to face challenges, claim aspirations, and continue navigating towards futures defined not by stigma, but by resilience, identity, and whānau strength.

8.2.1 Spectrum of Connection

Rangatahi identified numerous experiences of judgement and stigma due to being both Māori and gang-affiliated, and it became a consistent theme throughout the interviews. At this point, the insights of male members and wāhine connected to gang spaces became especially valuable. Their reflections provided the historical depth and lived context missing from the rangatahi kōrero, drawing on more than fifty years of collective experience. It was this richness that led to the development of Chapter Six, where their voices are centred.

From these insider perspectives, issues such as social isolation, violence, drugs, judgement, and stigma came into sharp focus. As noted in the Global Gang Research reviewed in Chapter Two, Winton (2014) argued that gangs are not necessarily rooted in poverty alone, but arise in contexts of significant marginalisation, often triggered by economic and political shifts that disrupt employment and livelihoods. Chapter Three affirmed these dynamics within the history of gang spaces in Aotearoa.

These findings also align with Valdez (2003), who highlighted how disconnection from community and whānau networks, combined with high rates of unemployment, poverty, welfare dependency, and single-headed households, contributed to the creation of gang spaces (p.16). Similarly, Thrasher's claim—emphasised by Dimitriadis (2006)—that gangs must be

understood in connection to broader social and political structures is directly affirmed in the lived experiences of rangatahi and whānau in this study.

The relevance of these insights becomes even clearer when viewed through Kaupapa Māori theory and Critical Pedagogy. As outlined in Chapter Four, Māori have long been subjected to subjugation and assimilationist pressures from the settler state, which sought to erase te ao Māori and replace it with a European worldview (Smith, G., 2003; Smith, 1999; Pihama, 2015). When rangatahi and pakeke described wai elements of judgement and stigma, these experiences become connected to the broader legacy of colonisation and systemic inequities that Māori must continually navigate.

Chapter Three documented how these patterns manifest not only in the justice system but across social institutions, reinforcing disadvantage across generations. The Level of Engagement (LOE) tool, developed through this synthesis, offers one way of mapping rangatahi identity, engagement, and positioning in relation to their gang affiliation. It provides a lens to understand their degree of involvement, motivations, and potential pathways for growth and support. When rangatahi spoke about negative wai elements such as violence and substance use, their kōrero echoed the findings of Kruger et al. (2004), which described violence in Māori whānau as learned behaviour transmitted across generations (p.13). Similarly, Cooper and Wharewera-Mika (2009) identified how the breakdown of traditional cultural practices weakened protective factors for whānau, contributing to cycles of abuse affecting Māori women, children, and men (p. 6).

Observations of rangatahi and pakeke at the waka haurua level further reinforce that re-establishing cultural practices creates supportive environments for resilience and restoration (Seed-Pihama, 2017, p. 78). As Seed-Pihama notes, Māori self-determination must continue to persist despite the ongoing pressures of the settler state. Reconnecting with cultural practices and prioritising tino rangatiratanga can contribute to healing, addressing abuse, and restoring collective wellbeing. Within this study, a Kaupapa Māori framework has been vital to position rangatahi alongside their whānau, validating their insights while grounding them within the wider historical and political context of Māori injustice and resilience.

At the same time, elements of critical pedagogy are evident in the ways rangatahi demonstrated self-awareness and, at times, self-actualisation. As Freire (2021) argued, the ability to critically

reflect on one's lived experience opens pathways for transformation. For rangatahi, articulating their dreams, aspirations, and reflections on gang affiliation exemplifies this process. For pakeke, critical pedagogy is most visible in their recognition that cultural practices - where absent - require deliberate re-establishment.

Mema H spoke directly to this tension, noting how colonial agendas are perpetuated when Māori gang members adopt an "us versus them" worldview. This dynamic, he argued, is also present more broadly within Te Ao Māori, where gang whānau are often dismissed or marginalised within marae, hapū, and iwi contexts. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (as outlined in Chapter Four) underscores this point: Māori who struggle with identity or language are frequently ignored, reduced, or excluded. The case of a Māori gang member and his whānau illustrates this vividly, showing how disconnection from cultural identity compounds marginalisation not only from the dominant Pākehā society, but sometimes from within Māori communities themselves.

8.2.2 Direction for Reflection

Freire (1970) reminds us that colonisation breeds contempt and division among the oppressed, to the point where they begin to imitate the aspirations and lifestyles of their oppressors. It is within this lens that the following section explores marginalisation, examining the spaces rangatahi must navigate as they move through school and work pathways.

The kōrero shared in Chapter Six showed the depth of marginalisation rangatahi encounter, and how its compounding effects shape their lives. These experiences sit in sharp contrast to markers of positive youth development, where belonging and cultural identity are recognised as central to success. For rangatahi within gang spaces, however, achieving these markers is fraught with challenge.

Consequently, our gang connected and affiliated rangatahi negotiate these spaces while constantly being impacted by contexts of marginalisation. Studies that do exist on whānau in gang spaces remain scarce, and those available often reinforce deficit views - like *Adult gang members and their children's contact with the ministry* or articles with sensationalist headlines such as *Gang members on benefits, children abused*.

These reports and articles reinforce narratives that are deliberately negative in focus, further entrenching stigma and marginalisation. It is here that Kaupapa Māori as a transformative praxis becomes vital. One of the most striking insights from this research was the significant role ongoing engagement with Te Ao Māori ha in enabling rangatahi to navigate challenges across education and employment pathways.

Initially, I did not expect cultural engagement to hold such weight for rangatahi in gang spaces, partly due to my own lived experiences, together with some of those I had interviewed. Yet the data showed the opposite - connection to Te Ao Māori was key and so I shifted my analysis toward identifying how these elements could be integrated more deliberately to support rangatahi resilience. A Kaupapa Māori framework provides the foundation for this work.

Within this framework, the principle of tino rangatiratanga/self-determination plays a crucial role in shaping the transformation of lived experiences within gang space, as presented in this study. Insights from both Aotearoa and Indigenous gang research affirm that Te Ao Māori is not peripheral, but functional - it actively guides rangatahi as they chart pathways through school and work from within their unique position in gang spaces.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that gang whānau themselves may have alternative ways of guiding their rangatahi. Even so, tino rangatiratanga as a principle offers a framework for fostering agency, autonomy, and empowerment, enabling rangatahi to reclaim control over their futures while remaining grounded in their culture.

By embracing the principle of tino rangatiratanga, rangatahi can begin to move beyond cycles of violence and criminality, and strive instead for growth, education, and meaningful and positive engagement with their communities. In doing so, they are empowered to make choices that reflect their cultural values and aspirations, not the stereotypes imposed upon them.

Ultimately, the tino rangatiratanga principle provides a transformative approach to support rangatahi in gang spaces. It validates their cultural identity, affirms their autonomy, and opens pathways toward futures shaped by resilience, belonging, and whānau strength rather than deficit and stigma.

8.3 Compounding Factors

This section focuses on two areas that are specific to Aotearoa. The first concerns the marginalisation of Māori and Indigenous peoples within mainstream society. The second highlights the additional marginalisation experienced by Māori who are gang-affiliated. For rangatahi within gang spaces, this is compounded further through the judgement they often face from other Māori toward those connected to gangs.

While there is not enough evidence to suggest that this happens across all gang spaces, the whānau interviews shared numerous examples of this dynamic at play. Their lived experiences demonstrate how colonial infiltration has impacted gang spaces, with assimilation tactics from the Crown contributing to mixed and often conflicting messaging that has deeply impacted and influenced gang mentality.

One stark example is captured in the statement: *I am Māori, yet I do not speak the language, engage in cultural practices, or have any desire to learn.* This reflects the trauma and fragmentation caused by colonisation - through land loss, language loss, and displacement - which continues to shape Māori experiences today. Vigil's (2003) work reinforces this, outlining how marginalisation and exclusion occur across multiple layers of oppression, each significantly affecting marginalised communities.

David Sze adds to this discussion in his article *The Modern Fragmentation of Lives & Identities*, where he speculates that fragmentation has become a prerequisite for living in modern times. In such contexts, the construction of identity and how individuals narrate their sense of self and belonging becomes crucial (Sze, 2017). When we look at the history of Māori in Aotearoa, in particular the history of Māori protest and struggle for self-autonomy and recognition by the Crown, we see a narrative of resistance unfold.

This is a narrative of cultural revival, of asserting Māori rights as a Treaty partner, and of advancing a *for Māori, by Māori, with Māori* approach to the regeneration of Māori as a people. My stance here is that we, as Māori, have actively constructed our narrative or what some might say, developed our own counter-narrative, and, in doing so, sought to define what it means to

be Māori. Included in this narrative is the formation of gangs - many with a high percentage of Māori membership - as part of our contemporary history and lived reality.

Yet the question remains: is the inclusion of gangs accepted within the broader Māori narrative? The answer, by and large, appears to be no. This rejection operates in two directions - the gang member may resist or feel unable to fit within Māori cultural spaces. At the same time, the wider Māori collective may also be unwilling to accept the gang member. This mutual rejection represents a deep fracture for Māori. But it also prompts reflection - how powerful might it be if we could accept ourselves more fully, through mutual recognition of our shared struggle and whakapapa?

Change, then, can only begin with acceptance. Nothing shifts without first acknowledging what is. Moving forward requires unity - Māori standing together as one, continuing to pursue sustainable outcomes for our people and future generations. It is in this spirit that this work suggests relationship building as a viable and necessary pathway forward.

8.3.1 Relationship Building

Throughout Chapter Six, two themes become clear. The first is the consistent call for change, voiced by both older and younger members. These calls for change are driven by divisions within gangs, the effects of poverty on whānau, the increased presence of drugs and associated behaviours, and the shifting gang landscape shaped by the return of increasing numbers of Australian deportees. Alongside these calls for change is a growing awareness of the deeper underlying factors that are beginning to surface.

On one hand, the historic abuse in care inquiry has opened a space for gang members to voice and heal from their experiences of trauma. On the other hand, the continued recognition of Māori frameworks - programmes designed for Māori, by Māori, and with Māori - along with the growth of the Māori economy through iwi initiatives (as outlined in Chapter Three) demonstrates the value of culturally grounded responses. As noted in Chapter Six, members themselves identified positive leadership within gangs and the influence such leadership has on reshaping these spaces.

Members also provided examples of what both positive and negative leadership looks like in gang spaces. What emerged is that the very issues mainstream society associates with gangs are the same issues members themselves grapple with within their collectives. Members expressed frustration at the dealing of methamphetamine within their own ranks, and the devastating impact this has on fellow members and their whānau.

We heard members speak out about violence toward women and describe initiatives they had introduced to address this within their spaces. We also heard younger members speak about the abuse of children, and their zero tolerance towards this behaviour. What emerges, then, are voices from within gang spaces that are pro-change and advocating for transformation. Many of these members once perpetrated the very behaviours they now oppose, and the question does arise as to the validity of their stance. However, their lived experience is seen as giving their stance credibility and weight. Their journeys embody the change they wish to see for their communities.

The ripple effect lies in the example they set for other gang spaces - whether appreciated or wanted or not. Richard Buckminster Fuller's quote resonates here: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete" (Goodreads, 2021). These voices advocate for relationship-building with individuals in gang spaces who are pro-change and demonstrate the integrity necessary for genuine partnership. Integrity, defined as honesty, honour, sincerity, fairness, and trustworthiness (Oxford, 2021), is the cornerstone of this work.

It is those members who embody integrity who will be central to relationship-building. As noted in Chapter Six, there is no room for mixed messaging - such contradictions undermine progress, especially in gang spaces. One member remarked that "there is still work to do," a statement which reflects the ongoing need for honesty and clarity. The defining feature of members who created change within themselves, who became the change they wanted to see, was the act of self-reflection, fostering self-awareness - an element central to Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (as discussed in Chapter Four).

This process often emerged as members aged and developed the capacity to reflect on their past actions. Younger members described observing this self-reflection in their parents, recognising it as the sowing of the seeds of change. The challenge lies in ensuring that the

"soil" in which these seeds grow - gang whānau environments - has the nourishment required to help rangatahi not just survive, but thrive. One obstacle to providing this nourishment drawn also from my own experiences in these gang spaces connects to Hagedorn's (2008) view of gangs as cultures of aggressive male dominance, a reality that even pro-change members continue to wrestle with.

This dominance makes genuine partnership difficult, as respect and trust must first be established. Without this foundation, mixed messaging is inevitable, as members operate from different perspectives and value systems: *"How I see the world is different from how you see it. My norms are not your norms, so I will act in the way that makes sense to me."* Such dynamics often undermine partnership efforts, to the detriment of rangatahi who are left without consistent support.

The key lies in finding common ground and engaging in dialogue that embodies integrity. One member described this as being able to look in the mirror and be at peace with the person reflected back. When we look in the mirror and present ourselves as something we're not, the disconnect is deeply disappointing. For some members such a disconnect is not just unsettling – it can be profoundly tragic. As C.S. Lewis once said, "Integrity is who you are when no one is looking" (Goalcast, 2018). Without this alignment, partnership risks becoming superficial and counterproductive.

It is also important to acknowledge the paradox - asking members to enter partnerships with institutions that have historically privileged some while suppressing others, as outlined in Chapter Two's discussion on research about Indigenous gangs. Members are acutely aware of these imbalances, as they continue to live at the margins of society.

For this reason, a more viable approach may be to prioritise relationship-building closer to home before seeking larger-scale engagement with government. Where government has engaged, it has often been in ways that silence gang members rather than hear them. While such strategies may have once been tolerated, the ongoing impact of silencing is now most visible in the experiences of their children and rangatahi—a recurring theme throughout this research.

Wisdom and critical insight are required to understand the realities of those in gang spaces. Often these realities are shaped by forces beyond their control, as noted in Winton's (2014) theory of identity politics as central to gang formation (Chapter Two). Kidman (2015) and Rata (2020) likewise emphasise identity as a driver of gang formation (Chapters Two and Three). Added to this are the roles of media in shaping public perceptions of gangs, often sensationalising issues without addressing underlying causes (Chapter Two and Three).

This study brings forward these dynamics to provide a platform for the missing narrative of whānau in gang spaces. Awareness of these marginalisation contexts and compounding factors helps explain, for example, why statistics report high numbers of gang members on benefits or why their children are overrepresented in abuse and neglect.

This awareness is also critical for those working in education and social services, aligning with Kaupapa Māori theory by offering context and tools to support rather than stigmatise. What is needed is deeper critical and creative thinking to discern the realities our rangatahi face as they attempt to grasp education and employment opportunities. As Freire's Pedagogy of Hope reminds us, the focus must remain on placing rangatahi at the centre; affirm their potential despite the societal stigma they often encounter, create educational opportunities that are empowering and safe, and support them to critically understand their environment and envision different futures. This calls for those around them to act with courage and dedication to a plan of transformation.

If we consider possibilities for relationship-building between educational institutions and gang-affiliated rangatahi, questions emerge: Are we confident in our ability to engage effectively with these rangatahi? What does capability in this space actually look like? The Mana Tangata Framework introduced in Chapter One challenges the education sector to reshape systems to fit the needs of tamariki, rather than forcing tamariki to fit existing systems. The Mana Tangata Framework and Freire's Pedagogy of Hope both emphasise empowerment, dignity, and transformation through relationships, contribution, and self-belief. They align in their shared commitment to uplifting individuals—especially those in marginalised contexts—by fostering agency, affirming identity, and creating equitable spaces for growth and change.

Practical strategies such as Hui Whakatika, which was discussed in Chapter Three, offer useful guidance: identifying key individuals, securing their participation, holding one-on-one

discussions to explain processes, and creating safe environments for kōrero. Such steps are vital to foster open and respectful dialogue that supports sustainable outcomes for rangatahi. This must also be coupled with an awareness of the wider marginalisation contexts at play.

Support may come from both internal and external advocates. Internally, this could be a staff member a rangatahi trusts and respects. Externally, it could be a kaumātua, kuia, Māori community leader, or even a gang member known to be pro-change. These individuals carry the trust of whānau and are therefore well placed to help guide constructive outcomes for both rangatahi and institutions. The Hui Whakatika process can also be utilised in other settings involving gang-related whanau.

Although such processes may appear resource-intensive, the research makes clear that they are justified. Negative media portrayals may highlight issues in gang spaces, but they rarely offer solutions. By acknowledging marginalisation contexts and compounding factors, we can begin to develop responses that not only assist rangatahi in navigating their education and work pathways, but also support whānau and communities in building sustainable futures.

The importance of the Mana Tangata framework, Freire's Pedagogy of Hope and Hui Whakatika become even more relevant here because of their focus on restoring dignity, fostering agency, and building identity through contribution and connection. Together, these approaches create a culturally grounded pathway for systemic change - one that empowers rangatahi to navigate complex spaces with confidence, voice, and hope.

8.4 Making Space

When mapping pathways for rangatahi, we must also reflect on how our own understandings of gang spaces shape that process. Deeply held beliefs, often influenced by media portrayals, can obscure the complex realities of these spaces. For those viewing gangs primarily through this lens, the responsibility lies in critically educating ourselves—distinguishing between what is genuinely known and what is assumed. Here, recognising marginalisation contexts and compounding factors provides a more accurate starting point.

This is not always straightforward. As I have noted earlier, it is difficult to find Māori who do not have immediate or extended whānau connected to gangs. These lived experiences often shape strong views, whether sympathetic or critical. At one extreme is Shane Jones, whose outright rejection of gang spaces disregards the reality that many members are Māori—the very people he once advocated for in fisheries settlements (Satherley, 2017). At the other end of the spectrum is the example of a Māori schoolteacher with whānau in gangs. Their perspective is shaped by observing both gang life and whānau pathways. When faced with gang-affiliated students, their lived context may help them recognise these students in more nuanced ways. However, whether this translates into positive or negative engagement depends largely on personal experience.

In this section, projection refers to "the psychological process of projecting one's own hidden desires and impulses" or "the unconscious act of ascribing to others one's own ideas, impulses, or emotions" (Collins, 2021). When decisions about rangatahi are based on what we *think* we know, rather than lived realities, we risk causing more harm than support.

As an insider researcher, I place myself within this reflection. My role requires me to continually interrogate how I interpret and present findings. This means critically engaging with the kōrero shared in whānau interviews, ensuring that insights and recommendations are grounded in their voices, not clouded by my assumptions. This calls for a deeper awareness that sits alongside an understanding of marginalisation contexts.

Such awareness requires us to reflect on the assumptions we carry when engaging with gang-affiliated rangatahi and their whānau. It means questioning the beliefs we hold and re-examining them against the realities of marginalisation and compounding factors. Only then can we create spaces that empower rangatahi to engage in education and feel genuinely seen and heard. This includes drawing on a network of people - within both institutions and whānau - who can provide tailored support.

In this way, we begin to balance the weight of marginalisation by creating spaces where rangatahi can map their education and work pathways in partnership with both institutions and whānau. A recurring theme in Chapter Six was the capacity of whānau to nurture and guide

rangatahi, sometimes from within gang spaces themselves. Several examples show that this is already happening.

One example is the Black Power Movement in Whakatāne, which has run wānanga for over 30 years, teaching Te Ao Māori practices such as mau rākau, karanga, waiata, haka, and histories of both Māori and gangs. Other examples include Waikato Mongrel Mob initiatives with the Ministry of Education, providing accredited learning for whānau at primary and intermediate levels.

Further initiatives include health and wellbeing workshops that bring members and their whānau together. Across Aotearoa, many similar programmes are already in place, even if beyond the scope of this study. These reflect Kaupapa Māori theory, demonstrating that transformation within gang spaces is not speculative - it is happening in real, tangible ways. Through mana-enhancing practices, critical reflection, and relational support, rangatahi are actively reclaiming their agency, building positive identities, and engaging in education and community life. This transformation is driven by culturally grounded frameworks like Mana Tangata and Hui Whakatika, which honour lived experience and foster hope, resilience, and collective responsibility. It is a shift not imposed from outside, but grown from within. These initiatives represent seeds of hope, nurtured by those within the spaces themselves. Whether local or national in scope, they show that gang spaces are already fostering change.

Yet gaps remain. For example, Rangatahi J observed that her peers often mimic the negative aspects of gang life - crime, drugs, and alcohol - rather than recognising the positive aspects of belonging and connection. This observation reflects Kidman's (2015) point from Chapter Two that rangatahi are active historical agents, shaping their identities through the meanings they attribute to lived experience. In this case, those meanings are drawn from negative observations, rather than positive knowledge transmission or role modelling. Rangatahi J's reflection underscores a critical gap in leadership -highlighting the need for visible, mana-enhancing role models who can guide rangatahi toward more affirming understandings of identity and belonging.

Negative leadership often led gang spaces into decline, marked by cycles of violence, drug use, prison, and poor wellbeing. In contrast, positive leadership places emphasis on the wellbeing of members and their whānau, actively seeking sustainable solutions to the challenges of gang

life. The pūrākau of the waka (Chapter Four) offers a powerful cultural metaphor: rangatahi are the waka, navigating through turbulent wai shaped by complex social, emotional, and systemic currents. Their journey is influenced by the tangata aboard—leaders, mentors, and whānau—whose role is not to steer for them, but to guide with wisdom, stability, and care. Leadership that embodies self-mastery, represented by the level of the waka haurua, reflects a deeper commitment to relational responsibility, cultural grounding, and emotional intelligence. Members also emphasised the need for leadership education and resources that are co-designed. As Mema E2 shared, initiatives shaped with input from gang members themselves—acknowledging their lived experience and the importance of tailored, culturally relevant approaches—are vital, particularly for rangatahi who are disconnected from mainstream education. This kind of leadership development not only supports individual growth but strengthens the collective navigation of gang spaces toward wellbeing and transformation.

What these reflections make clear is that pathway navigation for rangatahi in gang spaces cannot be understood through deficit or stereotype but must instead be seen in relation to the contexts of marginalisation, the compounding factors they face, and the strategies of resilience already being enacted within their whānau and communities. From wānanga grounded in Te Ao Māori, to whānau-led initiatives in education and wellbeing, to the calls for integrity and positive leadership, we see that rangatahi are not navigating in isolation. They are carried within collective efforts that embody tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake, asserting sovereignty even from the margins. In this sense, the navigation of school and work pathways is inseparable from wider movements of decolonisation, where reclaiming space and creating new models of leadership and support become central to ensuring that rangatahi are not only surviving these environments but are given the chance to thrive.

8.4.1 Bridging the Gaps

This research has offered deeper insight into gang spaces and the navigation of school and work pathways from two perspectives: first, that of rangatahi living within them, and second, that of the wider whānau surrounding them. My focus has remained primarily on the voices of rangatahi, without delving too deeply into the darker aspects of gang life. This choice reflects the reality that, regardless of outside perceptions, these spaces are what children call home -

for better or for worse. Where darker elements have been acknowledged, they have been done so through the literature and, most importantly, through the words of members themselves, as highlighted in Chapter Six.

From its conception, this study has been about exploration, not definition. The aim was never to provide final answers, but to invite reflection. The findings highlighted an ongoing connection to Te Ao Māori as a protective factor for rangatahi in gang spaces. This in turn prompted an examination of the barriers they face in accessing this knowledge. Insights from the whānau chapters showed that such access often requires negotiation between Māori and Māori - particularly around contested ideas of who is considered Māori, and why.

Who has the courage to undertake this mahi is already becoming evident, as work of this nature is happening in some spaces. Yet barriers remain. Much of gang research has been dominated by criminology, which positions gangs only through a deficit lens, as evidenced in the global literature. Added to this is the weight of state systems, particularly the justice system, which has long sought to silence and control marginalised peoples. For this reason, I argue that research in gang spaces must be self-directed, or at the very least, done in partnership with those from within.

This also requires whānau in gang spaces to direct their own stories, rather than allowing outsiders to define them. Findings suggest that the most effective investment for rangatahi is collaboration and relationship-building at multiple levels. Alongside this collaborative approach must be greater clarity and education about the dynamics that shape their lives—particularly the impacts of marginalisation and compounding factors. However, as I have stressed throughout, this journey must begin within ourselves first.

One aspect not fully explored in this work is gender. The balance of male and female participants interviewed made this difficult to pursue in depth. Yet this remains an important area for future research. What the interviews did reveal, however, is that trauma and harm within gang spaces can be mediated from within. Initiatives described by rangatahi, pakeke, mema, and wāhine all provide valuable suggestions and strategies for addressing these challenges.

Some whānau went further, describing in detail the initiatives they were already leading. Across diverse gang spaces, those living within them are actively finding solutions to their own needs. The challenge is to enable this work to flourish in collaboration with those who can provide the necessary resources and support. Indigenous research reminds us that this should be a natural pathway. The finding of an ongoing connection to Te Ao Māori strengthens the hope that collaboration grounded in this knowledge can bridge gaps for rangatahi and their whānau.

What becomes clear is that rangatahi navigating education and work from within gang spaces carry with them a resilience that cannot be overlooked. This research acknowledges that resilience, and the importance of providing the time and support needed for them to reach their potential. Their lived experiences, when ordered and reflected upon, offer powerful insights into resilience in the face of intergenerational trauma and systemic violence. Often these insights emerge from grassroots perspectives, grounded in realism and diverse viewpoints. Rangatahi may influence change directly, or indirectly by the example they set—the latter often having the greatest impact.

By way of analogy, one can think of a lighthouse, shining so that boats can find their way through dangerous waters. The sea represents life, with its twists, turns, ebbs, and flows. Pakeke H reflected on his upbringing in this way, describing it as a badge of honour. Even as he went on to play professional football in France, it was his upbringing that kept him grounded and humble. He now creates opportunities for his nieces and nephews by inviting them to join him in France—provided they raise the fare themselves. Once there, they are supported, but the decision to pursue the opportunity rests with them. This illustrates the importance of choice, and of creating spaces where rangatahi must decide for themselves the direction they wish to take. This notion is closely tied to tino rangatiratanga, the authority and independence to make decisions without external approval (Durie, 1998). It reflects the ability of individuals to determine their own course, and to have those choices respected.

This connects back to the importance of understanding marginalisation and compounding factors - not only for those working with rangatahi, but also for the rangatahi themselves. There remains a need to deepen awareness of these contexts, enabling rangatahi to better understand their positioning and that of their whānau. The key question is how we can best assist this process.

The answer lies first within whānau and gang spaces themselves, but also in the support of external messaging. Rangatahi must hear and believe that they matter, that they belong, and that they can create change. This may be easier for those in 'pro-change' gang spaces, particularly those with reflective and progressive parents. It may be harder for others, but it remains equally important. For this reason, supporting whānau to nurture rangatahi, and building genuine relationships with gang spaces, are critical. In this research I have suggested pathways for how this might happen—not as definitive answers, but to open discussion. What matters most is recognising the urgent need for change, and the importance of acting sooner rather than later.

There is also potential for rangatahi themselves to emerge as catalysts for change. This must be recognised. In this research, I frame this through the lens of pakeke—those who inherited the gang space rather than creating it. Pakeke may be particularly well-placed to partner with founding members to drive change, given their vested interest and recognition of gang spaces as part of their identity.

Thus, what may have begun as spaces of social, educational, and health failures have also become sites of growth and reflection. Observations from within have revealed repeating patterns and cycles of harm, but they have also spurred efforts toward enlightenment and transformation. Instead of seeking to eradicate gangs, we must focus on understanding marginalisation and compounding factors, creating conditions for rangatahi to benefit from change. By recognising the intersections of marginalisation, we gain a clearer view of the circumstances that shape rangatahi lives. From this informed position, we can advocate for their empowerment, regardless of external judgement.

The ultimate outcome is the empowerment of rangatahi as active agents of change. With greater awareness of themselves, they can begin to affect transformation at the whānau, hapū, iwi, national, and even international levels. The possibilities for change are boundless, linking back to the vision set at the outset of this study—that rangatahi must be able to dream and to create visions for themselves.

For this to happen, spaces must be created that are free from judgement and projection. These must be informed spaces that bring together individuals and collectives with the skills to uplift

those whose dreams have too often been shattered. Sometimes this will mean motivating and inspiring through example alone. This is also why the silencing of gang members must be mediated and balanced through recognition of their children. By supporting rangatahi, we acknowledge not the gang affiliation itself, but the resilience that life within these spaces has forged. It is this resilience that allows them to continue navigating their school and work pathways with strength and determination.

8.5 Research Outcomes

8.5.1 Limitations

One of the key limitations of this study lies in its methodology, particularly the sample size. In total, 24 participants were interviewed. Initially, the study aimed to include a survey component; however, this was hindered by my inexperience in survey design and a lack of strategy for engaging rangatahi. As a result, participation was low, and selection bias became evident – I had no way of being able to check that only rangatahi aged 17–25 were responding. This further highlighted the challenges of engaging this demographic through conventional research methods.

Looking back, there are several aspects I could have approached differently. One would have been to invite all whānau to participate—a suggestion made early in the project that, in hindsight, could have provided a richer and broader set of perspectives. At the time, I was navigating the complexities of access, trust, and scope, and chose to focus on individuals who were already engaged or known to me. It was also important to prioritise the voices of rangatahi. As an insider researcher, I was mindful of maintaining trust and relational integrity with participants, many of whom I knew personally. This influenced the scope of engagement and the selection of participants, prioritising those already connected and willing to share their experiences.

From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, research is guided by principles of whanaungatanga (relationships), manaakitanga (care and respect), and tino rangatiratanga (self-determination). It would not have been safe or culturally appropriate for me to interview rangatahi who did not

know me, nor to attempt to enter closed gang spaces without established relationships. Within this framework, access must be guided by tikanga and trust—it is not mine to open. I also observed that larger-scale studies involving gang-affiliated rangatahi often sat within broader subject areas and did not directly engage with gang spaces themselves. So while broader inclusion of whānau could have strengthened the collective narrative and deepened the kaupapa, this needed to be balanced with care to avoid potential harm or loss of trust with the very communities I was embedded in. I made a conscious decision early on that maintaining focus on the rangatahi was the best approach, as building and maintaining trust was essential to having meaningful and safe conversations with rangatahi.

Another limitation of this research lies in the broad gaps within existing literature on insider research in gang spaces, particularly in relation to rangatahi. While this gap has been addressed throughout the thesis, I acknowledge the absence of voices from marae, hapū, and iwi perspectives. This omission was not intentional. I had considered interviewing kaumātua, but as the interviews progressed, the content and direction of the kōrero naturally centred the focus of this mahi on the lived realities within gang spaces. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, prioritising the voices of rangatahi was essential to uphold the principles of whanaungatanga and tino rangatiratanga. However, this focus also meant that other important perspectives - especially those of kaumātua and wider whānau - were not included, and this remains a limitation in terms of capturing the full collective narrative.

Compounding this was the fact that the main finding of this study was unexpected. I did not see the need to expand beyond gang spaces until time constraints made it impractical. Ultimately, I came to see that the methodological limitations I have outlined were also deliberate boundaries. As discussed in Chapter Four, research has historically been used as a colonising tool, leaving communities suspicious of researchers and wary of engagement. This suspicion is understandable, given the common experience of communities receiving little or nothing in return for their participation. The closed nature of gang spaces adds further complexity. I have also argued that conversations about the darker aspects of gang life should be had with members themselves and remain beyond the scope of this study.

For these reasons, this research has deliberately focused on the navigation of school and work pathways for rangatahi. When viewed in this light, concerns about sample size become less relevant. What matters is that this study provides direction where little has existed before. Any

research that seeks to understand rangatahi growing up in gang spaces—and especially research aimed at strengthening their pathways rather than reinforcing deficit narratives—is valuable.

8.5.2 Recommendations

This research highlights the need for further exploration of gang spaces in Aotearoa, while also making clear that such work must be undertaken in close association with, or led from within, these spaces themselves. Genuine transformation will only occur when research mirrors the autonomy found in the wider Māori pursuit of tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake. Although existing literature provides useful insights, much of it has been written from external perspectives that can only observe, not fully experience, the dynamics at play. Building meaningful strategies requires knowledge and solutions that emerge from within gang communities before seeking external support. To this end, the following areas of research are recommended:

1. **Gang Spaces and Tino Rangatiratanga**
   Future studies should explore the place of gang spaces—where large numbers of Māori reside—within the wider collective pursuit of tino rangatiratanga. This would provide clarity on how autonomy, sovereignty, and cultural authority are expressed, challenged, and negotiated within these communities.

2. **Intergenerational Impacts of Silencing**
   Research is needed on how the silencing of Māori gang members affects their tamariki and rangatahi, particularly in terms of identity, resilience, and their ability to navigate education and employment pathways. Understanding this intergenerational transmission is critical to creating spaces of healing and opportunity.

3. **Models of Relationship-Building**
   Developing models for relationship-building between gang spaces, whānau, and wider society is a key area for future work. Such models should be informed by gang communities themselves, focusing on integrity, trust, and collaboration as foundations for sustainable change.

4. **Building a Māori Evidential Base**
   There is a pressing need to create a robust Māori-led evidential base that captures the diversity and spectrum of Māori identity in the 21st century, including those identities lived within gang spaces. Such evidence would challenge deficit-based narratives and ensure rangatahi are recognised as part of the broader Māori collective.

Together, these recommendations provide pathways to deepen our understanding of Aotearoa gang spaces and strengthen whānau within them. They are offered in the hope of equipping rangatahi to grasp opportunities better, while also fostering broader societal awareness to dispel the judgement and stigma they so often inherit.

8.6 Conclusion

This thesis has been a journey of returning to the voices of rangatahi Māori who grow up within gang spaces in Aotearoa and tracing the ways they navigate their education and work pathways. The purpose was never to reduce their lives to numbers, headlines, or categories. Instead, it was to provide space for their kōrero to stand on its own terms—stories that reveal resilience, insight, and hope in places often portrayed only through stigma and fear. By taking this stance, the research sought to disrupt deficit-based portrayals that have long dominated the study of gangs, offering a counter-narrative grounded in lived reality and guided by the principles of Kaupapa Māori, Critical Pedagogy, and the waka navigation framework.

The early chapters (1–4) laid down the historical and theoretical ground from which this study emerged. They revealed how the formation of gangs in Aotearoa was not random, but deeply tied to economic upheavals, colonisation, and the shifting relationship between Māori and the Crown. These dynamics embedded layers of structural and symbolic violence into the lives of Māori communities and created conditions where gang spaces became both a refuge and a marker of marginalisation. Within this context, rangatahi carry the dual weight of being Māori and being gang affiliated. Their experiences of judgement and exclusion are not only imposed from outside but sometimes, painfully, reinforced from within Māori communities themselves. These patterns of suppression, identity politics, and systemic silencing became the backdrop against which the voices of rangatahi and their whānau were heard in this study.

Chapters Five and Six gave prominence to those voices. Through the kōrero of rangatahi, pakeke, mema, and wāhine, the research revealed both barriers and strategies of success in navigating school and work pathways. The findings confirmed that pathways for rangatahi in gang spaces are never simple or linear. On the surface, they often appear dominated by violence, drugs, incarceration, and disconnection. Yet, embedded in these accounts were also powerful counter-examples—stories of rangatahi who found strength in kapa haka, who pursued opportunities overseas, who learned resilience from their whānau, and who sought to return knowledge to their communities through teaching and mentoring.

Several themes stood out as consistent across the interviews. Engagement with Te Ao Māori—through whakapapa, marae, te reo, and cultural practice—was described as central to building confidence and identity. Support from whānau, teachers, mentors, and peers was critical in opening doors and sustaining momentum, though the absence of such support often deepened marginalisation. Stigma was a constant thread, as rangatahi spoke of being judged for being Māori and judged again for being Māori with gang connections. Some carried this judgement as a daily reality that shaped how they viewed themselves in classrooms, workplaces, and wider society. Others, however, used the weight of this judgement as motivation to succeed, choosing to turn assumptions into fuel for achievement.

Chapter Seven drew these threads together and highlighted the compounding effects of marginalisation alongside the strategies of resilience developed within gang spaces. It became clear that leadership is pivotal. Where positive leadership existed, it fostered wellbeing, accountability, and long-term outcomes for whānau. Where negative leadership dominated, cycles of violence, addiction, and incarceration were normalised and repeated. The voices of pakeke were especially valuable in showing how leadership shifts over time, shaped by lived experience, self-reflection, and sometimes by the mistakes of the past. These insights revealed the seeds of change already planted in gang spaces - seeds nurtured by members who, having once perpetuated harm, now speak against it and model different pathways for the next generation.

Chapter Eight located these findings within broader Indigenous and international perspectives, showing that the experiences of rangatahi in Aotearoa are not isolated. Across the world, Indigenous youth in marginalised communities face similar challenges of structural exclusion, poverty, and systemic violence, alongside the same resilience strategies of cultural

reconnection and self-determination. In this sense, the struggles and strengths of rangatahi Māori are part of a wider global story. Yet, they are also unique, shaped by Aotearoa's particular histories of colonisation, economic change, and Māori-Crown relations. This chapter reaffirmed that meaningful change cannot simply be imposed from outside. It must come from within gang spaces themselves, built on the integrity, leadership, and resilience of those who live within them, and supported by external messages of acceptance, recognition, and hope.

The implications of this study are both practical and theoretical. Practically, the research points to the need for relationship-building models that rest on trust, integrity, and collaboration. Partnerships with gang whānau cannot succeed if they are based on mixed messages or deficit assumptions. They must be grounded in honesty and respect, recognising the mana that exists within these communities. Māori-led initiatives already demonstrate what is possible: wānanga held within clubs, cultural education programmes, and whānau-driven learning opportunities that weave together Te Ao Māori and everyday survival. These initiatives show that resilience is not hypothetical; it is already being enacted in localised, grassroots ways. The task is not to replace these efforts but to support, resource, and walk alongside them.

Theoretically, this thesis contributes to the development of an insider research approach. By positioning myself as both researcher and insider, I have sought to privilege lived experience while remaining critically reflective. This positioning challenged the traditional deficit framings that treat gang spaces only as sites of danger and crime. Instead, it situates them within the wider spectrum of Māori identity and tino rangatiratanga, recognising them as complex spaces of belonging, struggle, and survival. It also underscores the urgent need for Māori-led, community-embedded approaches to research, as external framings alone cannot capture the intricacies of life within gang whānau.

An important point that emerged throughout is the neglect of gang spaces in pro-social interventions. Too often, government and institutional approaches have either ignored or silenced these communities. The result has been a perpetuation of marginalisation and the continuation of harmful cycles. This thesis argues that gang spaces cannot be excluded from strategies for Māori development. To do so is to deny the reality that large numbers of Māori live within these spaces, and that rangatahi raised here deserve the same opportunities for education, employment, and identity affirmation as any other young person in Aotearoa.

The marae, as a central site of Māori identity, tikanga, and whakapapa, holds immense cultural significance. However, its role in acknowledging or engaging with gang-affiliated whānau is often fraught with tension, raising deeper questions about belonging and exclusion: who is recognised as Māori, who is dismissed, and why? The whānau interviews added crucial depth to this inquiry, showing how histories of suppression and identity politics shape beliefs and attitudes. They also revealed the critical role of leadership—whether through whānau members, gang leaders, or reflective pakeke—in shaping the opportunities available to rangatahi.

From these insights, several recommendations arise. Future research should further explore the connections between tino rangatiratanga, intergenerational silencing, and models of relationship-building with gang spaces. There is a pressing need to develop a robust Māori evidential base that reflects the full diversity of Māori identity in the 21st century, including those identities lived within gang whānau. Such work will expand understanding, dispel stigma, and provide pathways of possibility for rangatahi who continue to grow up within these environments.

At its heart, this research has been driven by a simple reminder: the importance of being heard, being seen, and being acknowledged. Too often, rangatahi Māori in gang spaces are spoken about rather than spoken with, defined by their circumstances rather than their aspirations. This thesis argues that they must be seen not as problems to be managed, but as agents of change - capable of resilience, leadership, and contribution. Their experiences, when recognised and supported, have the potential to shape not only their futures but also the wellbeing of their whānau, hapū, iwi, and communities.

In addition, this thesis has shown that rangatahi Māori in gang spaces are not problems to be managed but potential to be nurtured. They are agents of resilience, leadership, and contribution, grounded in whakapapa and Te Ao Māori. As one rangatahi reminded us, *"It's from knowing who I am as Māori that I find the strength to keep moving. It's what keeps my waka going."* His words capture the essence of this research: that the future of our rangatahi lies not in being defined by deficit, but in reclaiming their tino rangatiratanga and shaping futures of hope, strength, and belonging.

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Appendix 1

Faculty of Maori & Indigenous Studies
Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
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Associate Professor Maui Hudson
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maui.hudson@waikato.ac.nz

Te Manu Taiko: Human Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Māori & Indigenous Studies
Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao

22/08/18

Ethics Approval

Tēnā koe e te manu hakahaka e whai atu ana i te whānuitanga me te rētōtanga o ngā kaupapa rangahau o te wā.

This letter is to confirm that Bonnie Maihi has received ethical approval for the study '**Whanau Strength in Māori Gang Culture'**. The ethics application was reviewed by members of Te Manu Taiko and was signed off by the chair of the committee on 22/08/18. Good luck as you embark on your research.

Kimihia, rangahaua!

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Associate Professor Maui Hudson
Convener, Te Manu Taiko
Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao
Faculty of Māori & Indigenous Studies

Appendix 2

Ka Hao Te Rangatahi
Spoken – Hope for a Generation
Doctoral Study

Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form

The Principal Researcher: Bonnie Maihi
Doctoral Candidate, Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato
Ph: 0212031455
Email: bmaihi2016@gmail.com

E te whānau, tēnei te mihi

You are receiving this letter today as a formal invitation, should you wish to be involved in a Doctoral study currently underway which relates to 'Exploring Occupation and Educational Pathways for Rangatahi Māori growing up in New Zealand Gang Culture'.

This information sheet is designed to help you decide whether you would like to take part, please take your time to read the Doctoral Proposal and the information on this sheet and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

It is with a deep appreciation and passion for the work at hand, that this invitation is extended. As way of introduction, this study will be exploring 'Occupation and Education Pathways' for Rangatahi Māori growing up in New Zealand Gang Culture.

Currently in year two this study is now in the second phase, that of data collection. There has yet to be a study commenced on this subject, and a scope of the present literature shows a dearth of information relating to this area on a national and international level.

This makes for a unique study, that is geared towards ensuring the collective of whom this work is intended for can articulate and reflect on a subject matter which is relevant and bears an impact on them.

It comes at a time when changes are underway and key initiatives on multiple levels are being created. It allows for reflection on how our rangatahi Māori growing up within gang culture here in Aotearoa, are exploring education and occupational pathways for themselves.

Ka Pu Te Ruha Ka Hao Te Rangatahi Spoken – Hope for a Generation Doctoral Study

Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form

Am I eligible to Participate?

Receiving this pack means you have already been identified as an ideal participant. The proposal provided outlines in more clarity the various categories of participants and what their roles are. You will be able to identify of which category you fit.

Whether you would like to take part or not is entirely your choice, and that choice in its entirety will be respected. If you do agree to take part, you can change your mind at any time and have your information removed.

What do I have to do?

If you agree to participate, you will need to sign the consent form and return it to the principal researcher/myself before the interview begins.

As part of the regulations stipulated by The Ethics committee based at Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, this is necessary to ensure the collection of data is done in a safe and ethical way that ensures respect for participants is paramount.

You will need to liaise with myself to decide on a suitable time and place to meet where the interview will take place. All interviews will be audio and visually recorded.

At the end of this form you will be able to stipulate whether you will allow the use of your information in this study, and the use of your image in a small but informative visual documentary to be created alongside this doctoral thesis. You will also be asked to stipulate whether you wish to remain anonymous or whether you permit to your identity being disclosed.

What happens to the information I provide?

The information you provide will be stored securely and confidentially on the principal researchers personal, and professional computers. All computers are secured by password of which only the principal researcher can access. No unauthorised people will be able to gain access to any information about you.

Ka Pu Te Ruha Ka Hao Te Rangatahi
Spoken – Hope for a Generation
Doctoral Study

Participant Consent Form

Please tick to indicate you consent to the following

I have read, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet.

I have been given enough time to consider whether to participate in this study.

I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to the research staff collecting and storing and sharing my information, in the manner described above.

Where relevant I specifically give permission to collection regarding the use of my image and information in the visual documentary which will sit alongside this Doctoral thesis.

I understand that my participation in this study in an anonymous or non-anonymous capacity is my choice, and that this choice will be respected.

If I choose to permit the use of my personal information and image I understand consultation will take place between myself and the principal researcher regarding final edits.

I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.

I understand my responsibilities as a study participant.