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Sunday, 3 November 2013

Is the Queensland government man enough to really get 'tough on crime'?

The Queensland government has launched a new phase in its 'war on bikies' through a raft of new regressive legislative provisions that criminalise association and provide for mandatory additional sentencing and automatic refusal of bail. In its 'unapologetic' 'crackdown' on 'criminal gangs' the government acknowledges that there will be 'some inconvenience' to law abiding citizens, but that if we have 'done nothing wrong, there is nothing to fear'.

In this post I ask why, if the government is really serious about getting 'tough on crime', it is not engaging in open discussion about, and introducing 'tough new measures' to deal with, domestic violence, sexual violence, violence against women. Is the law and order agenda in Queensland a gendered one?

Chest beating

The 'tough on crime' 'blitz', including the winding back of civil liberties, the demonisation of unpopular groups, increases in police powers, attempts to override the judicial system and the lack of attention to effective and transparent legislative process are all reminiscent of the Bjelke-Petersen era. All of this is comprehensively critiqued, of course, in the report of the Fitzgerald Inquiry of 1989.

But what strikes me most about this 'hairy chested' approach to fighting crime is its overt appeal to masculine stereotypes. The crime allegedly involved largely involves men. The associations criminalised are dominated by men. Victims of the public violence displayed by the gangs recently on the Gold Coast were men (although there were bystanders also who witnessed it).

The public is told that we are all at risk from the criminal activities of bkie gangs, and that this justifies the government's extreme measures. In an uncompromising, adversarial show of power, the male Premier, and his male Attorney-General have challenged the judiciary and the legal profession to 'step out of their ivory towers' and do what the people of Queensland want - get 'tough on crime'.

The reality of violence

Violence affects perhaps a third of Australian women. Violence is mostly perpetrated against women, by men. Of those women who have reported sexual violence, most report that the perpetrator was a partner, or was someone known to them. Cases such as the tragic murder of Jill Meagher, cited by the Queensland Premier as an example of a failure of the legal system, are unusual in that the perpetrator is a stranger. Most violence against women occurs in the home.

As Betty Taylor pointed out this week, amongst the chest beating in Queensland about outlaw gang violence, there has been a remarkable silence about domestic violence. The ongoing invisibility of the reality of women's experiences of crime is an indictment on the government and makes a lie of its rhetoric that it is tough on crime. The very public nature of the so-called outlaw gangs makes for a highly visible platform for the government's adversarial law and order rhetoric: a lot more appealing politically than to take on the thousands of individuals who privately destroy the lives of women and children.

If the Queensland government is indeed serious about dealing with crime in this state, it must develop a cohesive policy, based on evidence, that prioritises not just public displays of male on male violence, but that publicly supports justice for women who experience crime in a different context.

That would be a true measure of the manhood of our politicians.

About Me



Kate Galloway

I lecture in land law at James Cook University and I write and think about the nature of property and its representations in the law; about issues affecting women; about justice generally; and about legal education.

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Posted by Kate Galloway at 09:37

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Labels: anti-bikie legislation, bikies, gender, Queensland, tough on crime, violence against women, women

1 comment:



Belle 3 November 2013 13:35

As long the Newman government does not model the domestic violence policy on its bikie laws, because then being male would be a crime because some males are responsible for domestic violence.

Maybe that is why they are not having a "war on domestic violence"; they would have to arrest themselves if the did model them on the bikie laws ...

[It would be funny if it was not sad ...]

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