

**Faculty of Health Sciences  
National Drug Research Institute**

**Agency and exchange:  
an ethnography of a heroin marketplace**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
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**Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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# Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the exchange of heroin in localised, street-based marketplaces. Commercial exchange of heroin in such sites has been a characteristic of the Australian heroin scene since the early 1990s. Although some qualitative investigations have been undertaken, the dominant approach to understanding these sites in Australia has been quantitative (primarily epidemiological and criminological). These efforts largely adopt a narrow and under-developed conception of ‘markets’ and much of this work adopts a narrow and circumscribed conception of the subjects who act within these sites. In contrast, this thesis is positioned within a long tradition of ethnographic accounts of drug users as active agents and of drug markets as embedded in particular social, cultural and economic contexts.

In this thesis, I explore two related questions: 1) what are the social relations and processes constituting street-based drug markets, and 2) how do participants in these street-based drug markets express agency, given that, in public and research discourses, they are often understood and depicted either as lacking agency or as expressing agency only through profit-seeking, criminality or both. I explore these questions through an ethnographic examination of the everyday lives of Vietnamese heroin user/dealers who participate in a local heroin marketplace in the Melbourne suburb of Footscray. The key analytical concerns are the social relations through which this particular market is constituted, the social and cultural processes of exchange through which the market is produced and reproduced, and the ways in which participants in the market express agency, including the ways in which their agency might be constrained.

My ethnography of the Footscray drug marketplace reveals that the marketplace is constituted by complex and dynamic social processes and relations. With a focus on drug user/dealers, my analysis condenses to two major themes – those of agency and exchange. Throughout the thesis, I show how, and in what ways, drug marketplace participants act on the world, achieve diverse outcomes (intended or otherwise, constrained or not) and, thus, express their agency. I also demonstrate the complexities of heroin exchange in the marketplace, revealing that heroin is

exchanged in multiple ways (e.g. through trade, barter and gifts) for multiple purposes and according to multiple and fluid classifications of social relationships. My account shows the embeddedness of the Footscray drug marketplace – that it is shaped by its particular historical, social, cultural, political and economic context. I show also how market processes – such as exchange – are shaped by culturally patterned ideas about what is right, wrong and even conceivable. This thesis also problematises dominant constructions of drug user subjectivity. Such conceptions have ethical and political implications with regard to the ways in which drug users are understood, judged, regulated and governed. My analysis suggests that the subjectivity of Footscray dealers is ambiguous, contradictory and multiple, constituted not simply by instrumental rationality but by a complex of motivations and by the cultural and social formations which shape these motivations.

This thesis provides an alternative to the dominant approaches to understanding Australian drug markets and marketplaces. Accounts of drug markets tend to privilege an etic view that is theoretically underpinned by neo-classical economic models of markets. Additionally, the quantitative methodological approaches that predominate in Australian drug market research tend to preclude considerations of process and temporality. In contrast, in this thesis I privilege an emic account of the drug marketplace. Influenced by theoretical frameworks drawn from anthropology, in my examination of the everyday lives of drug user/dealers, I stress the importance of the social, political and cultural dimensions of these people's lives and direct attention to the importance and creativity of personal agency.

Drug users and dealers are widely stigmatised and demonised as 'other', juxtaposed against supposedly 'normal' non-drug users. Dominant representations of drug users are unidimensional and do not capture the complexity of drug user agency and subjectivity. This thesis demonstrates that the people who sell heroin in the Footscray marketplace actively engage in a range of exchanges, for a range of purposes – subsistence, the creation of identity, the pursuit of prestige, reciprocity, sociality, the production and reproduction of social relations, and profit-making. My account, therefore, repositions drug users, challenging their stigmatisation by revealing that, in their everyday lives, they struggle with many of the same challenges that confront us all.

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## Chapter 1

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# Introduction

Commercial exchange of heroin in locality-based outdoor public settings has been a characteristic of the Australian heroin scene since the early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Commonly referred to as ‘street-based heroin markets’ (Jenkinson and Quinn, 2007; Maher, Dixon, Lyskey and Hall, 1998), the Australian city of Sydney, in the state of New South Wales, featured the country’s largest and most well-known of these, situated in the south-western suburb of Cabramatta. In the city of Melbourne, in the state of Victoria, similar street-based heroin markets emerged during the early 1990s in six suburbs throughout the Melbourne area, while in a seventh suburb, a pre-existing heroin scene became more publicly visible. In Cabramatta, and in five of the seven Melbourne street-based heroin markets, drug sales have been dominated by Vietnamese-Australian heroin user/dealers.

Amid concerns about the visibility of the illegal drug exchanges, dramatic increases in drug overdoses around these localities and the potential for growing public ‘disorder’, these sites emerged as central public policy concerns (Maher *et al.*, 1998). As a result, considerable resources have been invested in both research and law enforcement aimed at understanding, controlling and ultimately dissolving street-based heroin markets. I argue, however, that much of this research and law enforcement effort has been limited, for two key reasons. First, these efforts largely adopt a narrow and under-developed conception of ‘markets’ and, second, much of this work adopts a narrow and circumscribed conception of the subjects who act within these sites. Conceptions of drug markets are largely underpinned by a neo-classical economic market model. This model focuses on the conditions (prices, quantities and qualities) under which a market will reach the state (known as equilibrium) in which, as a result of perfect competition, the market will clear – that

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, the street-based exchange of heroin (and other drugs) exists in cities throughout the world: for example, London (Edmunds, Hough and Urquia, 1996); New York (Curtis, Friedman *et al.*, 1995) and San Francisco (Bourgois, 1998); Vancouver (Wood, Tyndall *et al.*, 2003); Frankfurt (Bucerius, 2007); and Moscow (Paoli, 2002). In this thesis, however, I am chiefly concerned with street-based sites of heroin exchange in Australia.

is, where the quantity supplied equals the quantity demanded (Stewart, 1992). The economic market model is not concerned with the social processes by which equilibrium will be reached, nor is it concerned with social relations. The elision of social relations is, in part, a consequence of the human subject inscribed in the economic market model – the individual, autonomous, rational maximiser of utility. This subject is similarly apparent in literature on drug markets, although with two distinct elaborations. Drug-using subjects are conceived as irrational and dependent, having ceded their agency to the drug, while drug-selling subjects are conceived as extreme and amoral utility maximisers. Both conceptions provide a circumscribed understanding of the agency of drug market participants.

Taking these criticisms as my starting point, in this thesis I explore two related questions: 1) what are the social relations and processes constituting street-based drug markets, and 2) how do participants in these street-based drug markets express agency, given that they are understood and depicted either as lacking agency or as expressing agency only through profit-seeking, criminality or both. I explore these questions through an ethnographic examination of the everyday lives of Vietnamese heroin user/dealers who participate in a local heroin marketplace in the Melbourne suburb of Footscray. The thesis is grounded in the understanding that such sites are embedded in particular social, cultural, economic and political contexts, constituted through social relations and produced and reproduced through social processes. As such, I investigate how this set of people enact their everyday lives, construct meanings, and respond to the material conditions and particular sets of social relations in which they are embedded. The key analytical concerns are the social relations through which this particular market is constituted, the social and cultural processes of exchange through which the market is produced and reproduced, and the ways in which participants in the market express agency, including the ways in which their agency might be constrained.

My mode of inquiry is ethnographic which generates richly contextualised accounts of human action and understandings via participant observation. With its emphasis on social relationships and interdependencies between people, it is an appropriate methodology for understanding the social relations of Vietnamese who use and sell

heroin, and for analysing how these people enact agency to produce, and reproduce, the particular social and cultural context of a drug marketplace.

My choice of research subjects – Vietnamese drug marketplace participants in Footscray – was shaped by several considerations. As noted above, Vietnamese user/dealers dominate heroin sales in the majority of Melbourne’s street-based heroin markets. Conducting research among this group allowed for the apprehension of drug market processes from the perspective of drug sellers, a perspective infrequently examined in Australian drugs literature (Moore, Caulkins *et al.*, 2005). Additionally, at a practical level, the proportion of Vietnamese drug marketplace participants relative to non-Vietnamese participants is small. This meant it was easier to access the people of interest and to focus the research, given the relatively bounded character of this social group. Finally, I had pre-existing contacts with researchers in Footscray who could introduce me and serve as brokers as I set about establishing fieldwork relationships.

Throughout my account, I refer to this set of people as ‘Vietnamese’. It is important to note that in my use of this term, I am always referring to a social identity. Ethnic identity, or ethnicity, is a socially produced category arising in relation to specific historical contingencies that are simultaneously cultural and structural. Ethnic identity can serve as a legitimisation of privilege and control over economy and society and a concomitant negation of these entitlements to others. Alternatively, ethnicity may stem from an attribution on the part of others (and perhaps then become embraced, as a way of interpreting shared experiences of exclusion). Ethnic identity is thus simultaneously “a set of social relations and a mode of consciousness” whose meaning and practical relevance varies according to the position of social groups within particular social orders (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992, p.54).

This is not to say, however, that ethnic identity is not experienced as ‘real’ by human agents, with implications for the structuring of everyday life. Indeed, in many societies, ethnic identity has become a dominant medium through which social life is interpreted and enacted (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992). In Footscray, this set of people understood and represented themselves as a distinct ethnic group – “we’re

Viet”,<sup>2</sup> “we’re Asian” – in contrast to the “Aussie” (European-Australian) mainstream. The point to be made, however, is that social (including ethnic) identity is always contested and negotiated, rather than a static and enduring property of persons (Moore, 1995).

Two further assumptions underpin my account. The first is that there is a dialectical relationship between human agents and the social system(s) in which they live. Society is simultaneously constitutive of and constituted by human agents. As Ortner (1984, p.159) wrote, “society is a system, … the system is powerfully constraining, and yet … the system is made and unmade through human action and interaction”. The second assumption is that society should be understood as an historically embedded *process* rather than as a static entity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992). Society – social life – is always in a process of being produced, reproduced, maintained and transformed through social action.

The following field note highlights several of the key analytical concerns to be addressed.

I am sitting at a café in the Footscray mall with Tu,<sup>3</sup> a local Vietnamese heroin user. An older Vietnamese man I’ve not met before, joins our table. He asks me “You want?” [i.e. do I want heroin] and winks. I tell him “No thanks” as does Tu. The man sits with us for about ten minutes, calling out to various people as they walk by, trying to sell them heroin. Eventually, he stands and walks

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<sup>2</sup> This set of people variously refer to themselves as “Asian”, “Vietnamese” or, most commonly, “Viet”.

<sup>3</sup> Names of drug marketplace participants in this thesis are pseudonyms. While Vietnamese drug marketplace participants frequently anglicise the pronunciation of their names (or give themselves Anglo names) when speaking with non-Vietnamese people, they maintain Vietnamese pronunciation among their Vietnamese-speaking friends and, as I came to know them better, I was encouraged to pronounce their Vietnamese names. Consequently, for Vietnamese participants I have used Vietnamese pseudonyms and written them in Vietnamese. Additionally, throughout the thesis, Vietnamese words and phrases are also written in Vietnamese. For the non-Vietnamese speaking reader, words may be read with English pronunciation as they are similar enough for reading purposes. Vietnamese is a tonal language indicated by the use of diacritic tone markers over vowels. For reading purposes these may be ignored.

towards the entrance of the café. As he moves into the café, he calls out loudly “Lo-ong time, no see” to someone inside.

A blonde [Anglo] woman approaches our table, looking at Tu.

“Hello. You got anything?” she asks.

“No”, Tu replies.

The older Vietnamese man has noticed this interaction and quickly comes back to sit at our table, asking her “You want?”

“Two” she tells him. As she speaks, I catch a glimpse of yellow as he shifts the caps [small packages of heroin wrapped in foil and sealed in miniature balloons] around his mouth. He tells her it is \$80 for two caps.

“Seventy?” she negotiates. “I don't have eighty.” He agrees to this price and passes her the two caps he has removed from his mouth. They are sitting next to each other, facing me, with their backs to the mall, and he passes them below the level of the table, thereby providing some cover. She takes the caps, thanks him, lifts her hand and puts them into her own mouth. She remains at the table for a few seconds longer and then stands and leaves. She is back in the mall about two hours later. Tu and the other Vietnamese man speak in Vietnamese for a few minutes and then the man leaves us again. Once he has gone Tu informs me, “He tell me I sell, he give me one free”.

“He wants you to help him sell and then he'll give you a cap for free?” I ask, seeking clarification.

“Yeah.” Tu replies. “I tell him ‘I no want. I no use’ so he say he buy me a coffee.” (Field notes, 2003)

In the initial paragraph, the older Vietnamese man is seen socialising with Tu, another Vietnamese heroin user and occasional heroin seller. While socialising, the older man continues to conduct his business of selling heroin. Here it can be seen that participation in the ‘market’ is not solely confined to the buying and selling of heroin but also serves other human purposes, in this case, sociality. A woman of Anglo-Celtic origins approaches Tu, seeking to purchase heroin. They seemingly have no prior acquaintance. This speaks to a classic assumption of markets – that

buyers and sellers are anonymous. Additionally, this event reveals the bounded nature of this particular market where Vietnamese people are the primary heroin sellers, while people of Anglo-Celtic origins are the primary customers. This taken-for-granted understanding of the Footscray drug market is revealed in the woman's approach to Tu in the absence of any obvious display that he is, in fact, selling heroin. He was approached because he was identified as Vietnamese. Tu declares he is unable to assist but, having observed the encounter, the older man intercedes to sell his wares. He sets his price (\$40 for a *cap*) but the woman successfully negotiates. He agrees to \$35 a *cap*. She departs. Here we see classic market-like exchange – money for goods. This section speaks both to the visibility and public nature of these drug exchanges, and to the agency of people who participate in this marketplace. Price is not a fixed and static factor but one that is open to social negotiation. A brief conversation in Vietnamese recommences between the Vietnamese heroin seller and Tu and then the older man again leaves the table. Tu explains to me that the man had offered him the opportunity to provide service – in the form of helping to sell heroin – in exchange for which Tu would receive a small portion of heroin for himself. This form of exchange, that of offering to accept service, extends community (by creating or affirming a relationship) between the two Vietnamese men. Tu's representation was that he was uninterested in heroin at this time ("I no want. I no use") and so he declined the offer. It is here that we see yet another form of exchange, that of the gift of a cup of coffee, that likewise extends community. Thus, in the final moments of the extract we see other forms of exchange – service for heroin and a gift of a drink – co-existing with market-like exchange and being extended between Vietnamese market participants.

In this thesis, I explore such exchanges and their significance for understanding drug markets. In the remainder of this chapter, I present the theoretical framework supporting my analysis of both the constitution of the Footscray drug market and of the agency of the people who participate in it. I conclude with an outline of the thesis.

## **Markets and marketplaces**

Any analysis of a ‘street-based heroin market’ must begin by asking ‘what is a market?’ This section reviews common definitions of markets derived from economic theorising, and contrasts these with conceptions of markets derived from anthropological theorising, which inform my analysis of the Footscray heroin market.

*The Oxford Dictionary of English Online* provides two key definitions for the noun ‘market’. First, a market is defined as “a regular gathering of people for the purchase and sale of provisions, livestock, and other commodities... an open space or covered building where vendors convene to sell their goods”. Second, a market is “an area or arena in which commercial dealings are conducted” (e.g. the labour market); “a demand for a particular commodity or service” (e.g. “there is a market for high-priced wine”); “the state of trade at a particular time or in a particular context” (e.g. the market is booming) (Soanes and Stevenson, 2005). In these common usages, a market is both a site of face-to-face transactions, and an arena of commercial dealings which may be abstracted from any face-to-face encounter between buyers and sellers. In both senses, a market is seen as a site of commerce.

Within the disciplines of economics and sociology – two areas of scholarly inquiry that concern themselves with markets:

a market is understood to be an area over which any well-defined commodity is exchanged between buyers and sellers. Such commodities are considered to be of two kinds – goods and services. The total amount of a commodity produced and available for purchase is referred to as the supply of the commodity, while the total amount being sought for purchase is termed the demand.... a market need not be a physical location – as in the case of a Stock Exchange. It is any arrangement for bringing buyers and sellers together (Scott and Marshall, 2005).

Again, as with common usage, a market is seen as both a local face-to-face gathering of people for the purposes of buying and selling and as an arena abstracted from any

direct face-to-face interactions between people. Dilley (1992, p.3) argued that the term ‘market’ has undergone progressive elaboration which has “established a variety of referents which today constitute its range of meanings”. In its early usage, it principally referred to a “social gathering at a particular place”. Through the sixteenth century, the term “became progressively more abstract in reference to the processes of buying and selling, doing business and seizing opportunities”. By the seventeenth century, the term came to refer to an “abstract aggregate geographical form” – frequently preceded by the definite article (e.g. ‘the Australian heroin market’) – and a “vector of turnover and exchange rates”. This progressive abstraction from the market as “physical form and locale” (*ibid*) resulted in the construction of ‘market’ as an abstract *principle* of processes of buying and selling. As a principle, the market is a “theoretical abstraction from a set of human activities and practices” (*ibid*, p.12). In order to differentiate these two forms, within this thesis, the particular localised site of heroin exchange with which it is concerned will be referred to as the heroin *marketplace*. Following Plattner (1989, p.171), this locates the exchange interactions “in a customary place and time”.

While social relations are implied by the words ‘arrangement’ and ‘buyers and sellers’, one profound consequence of the progressive abstraction of the term ‘market’ has been the factoring out of considerations of the social relations through which markets are constituted. This neglect has its roots in the earliest analyses of market forms of exchange developed by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). According to Smith, people have a propensity to “truck, barter and exchange one thing for another” (1937, p.13 cited in Wilk, 1996, p.47). He thus proposed a psychological rationale for exchange – that individuals naturally seek market interactions. Further, Smith observed that greed impels market trade. In line with the emerging Enlightenment conceptions of humans as atomised, autonomous, self-interested and rational individuals, classical economics understood the market to be comprised of anonymous buyers and sellers in competition with one another. These actors compete over scarce resources and act rationally to maximise their utility. Smith argued, however, that from this self-interest everyone benefited and the wealth of nations increased. This rationale for exchange – self-interest, profit-seeking and maximising gains – underpins much of contemporary neo-classical economic theory (Wilk, 1996). Rather than the actions of people constituting the market, economics

proposes, and investigates, an ‘invisible hand’ as the driver of markets. The invisible hand emerges in the mechanism of supply and demand, which brings prices and values (labour and production costs) together. In this market model, there is an assumption of stability and order such that, through the mechanism of supply and demand, there is a tendency toward equilibrium. Prices settle to a stable level that satisfies both buyer and seller and the market clears. The model also assumes perfect information, that is, both buyers and sellers have all the required information that will allow them to make the best exchange in order to maximise their utility. Contemporary neo-classical economic models of markets retain these core assumptions (Wilk, 1996).

Sociological and anthropological scholars have critiqued the neglect of social relations implicit in economic models. Lie (1997, p.342), for example, asserted that the “[n]eoclassical market is shorn of social relations, institutions, or technology and is devoid of elementary concerns such as power, norms and networks”. He further observed that in economic discourse, despite the market being one of the central categories of the field, it is rarely analysed or theorised. Instead, rather than explaining markets or exchange, the market or exchange is used to explain social and economic life. The market as a structure or institution remains unexamined, yet, according to Lie, even the paradigmatic instance of a market, the Wall Street Stock Exchange, looks nothing like the neo-classical image (autonomous buyers and sellers, perfect information and competition, equilibrium) when its social organisation is considered. Similarly, Preston (1992, p.73) noted the absence of considerations of “what, who, where and why plus the skew given by the particular interests of the enquirer” in analyses of market exchange. He argued that “a scholarly enquiry of exchange would ask, which social individuals and groups, which objects (extant or ideal), which places, which social contexts (moral, political, institutional and representational)”. These are all important elements elided from the ‘ideal’ market of neo-classical economics.

A body of anthropological and sociological literature addresses these critiques by describing and analysing on-the-ground markets and marketplaces and investigating the social organisation and cultural patterning that constitute these concrete phenomena (for example, Alexander, 1987; Bohannan, 1955; Geertz, 1978; Plattner,

1989). Marketplaces are an ancient institutionalised form of human exchange occurring across diverse cultures. Even in contemporary society where, through digital technology and sophisticated transport capacities, markets may be more and more abstracted from localised, face-to-face transactions, marketplaces continue to thrive (for example, farmers or growers markets, craft markets). Anthropologists have generated a diverse literature on markets and marketplaces and insights derived from these investigations serve to frame my investigation of illicit drug marketplaces.

A key finding of ethnographic examinations of real-life markets and marketplaces is the empirical demonstration of long-term social ties between market actors. These have been observed in Indonesian markets (Alexander, 1987; Geertz, 1978), among Mayan handicrafts street vendors in Guatemala (Little, 2002), in marketplaces in post-socialist Bulgaria (Kaneff, 2002), in the Maine lobster market in the USA (Acheson, 1985) and in the arena of industrial purchasing in Western economies (Granovetter, 1985). Far from the atomised and anonymous actors of the neo-classical market model, actors in real-life markets work to establish long-term trading relationships in order to reduce risk and uncertainty. The ongoing nature of these relationships highlights a further limitation of the neo-classical market model. In the ‘ideal’ market, trade is conceived as a spot-transaction (an immediate exchange between transactors who may never meet again), yet in the actual markets referred to above, exchanges are often forward transactions – recurring between the same sets of buyers and sellers. Thus, in order to understand markets and marketplaces, it is necessary to incorporate their temporal dimension.

Ethnographic accounts share a concern with market processes and with the embeddedness of markets in social, cultural and political contexts. For example, Stewart (1992) drew attention to the fact that the neo-classical market model is concerned with the conditions (price, quantities and quality) under which a market will clear (equilibrium) and all actors will be maximally satisfied. The force seen to drive the market toward equilibrium is the law of supply and demand. Neo-classical market models are not concerned with the processes through which this state might be reached, only with the conditions necessary for its achievement. As Stewart argued, neo-classical models assume a principle of action – the law of supply and

demand – as the force animating markets. Ethnographic market accounts, on the other hand, view markets as animated by the behaviour of market actors (processes). These examinations reveal that market conditions, such as price, are produced through social action. For example, the work of Paul Alexander (1992) and Jennifer Alexander (1987) on Javanese marketplaces demonstrated how price-setting was shaped by social relations, power differentials and cultural understandings of fairness – rather than simply supply and demand – and achieved through social negotiation (bargaining). Thus, market processes, such as price setting, are embedded in social, cultural and political contexts (see also Granovetter, 1985, 1992 on the embeddedness of markets).

Ethnographic accounts have also raised challenges to the neo-classical assumption of perfect information that allows people to make rational choices. In his analysis of what he termed the bazaar (marketplace) economy<sup>4</sup> of two Indonesian towns, Geertz (1978) argued that, in the bazaar, information is poor, scarce, maldistributed, inefficiently communicated and intensely valued. He identified processes of “clientelisation”, where purchasers establish continuing relationships with particular vendors rather than search widely through the marketplace on each occasion of purchase, and “intensive bargaining” as another mechanism for the transfer of information. Geertz’s account highlights the importance of social relationships in contexts where there are problems of information and trust. Similarly, Stewart (1992, p.101), in his account of Gypsy horse dealers in Hungary, argued that, rather than equilibrium pertaining in markets, they are, instead, characterised by disequilibrium – “there are information asymmetries, a range of prices for goods of one quality and the market does not clear”.

Furthermore, such analyses highlight the inadequacy of the model of the human subject implicit in neo-classical conceptions of the market. According to Stewart (1992, p.99), the assumption of equilibrium implies that, where there is perfect

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<sup>4</sup> Geertz (1963, p.28) defined a bazaar economy as one in which “the total flow of commerce is fragmented into a very great number of unrelated person-to-person transactions [in] contrast to the firm-centred economy of the West, where trade and industry occur through a set of impersonally defined social institutions which organize a variety of specialized occupations with respect to some particular productive or distributive end”.

competition and perfect information, there is a single optimal course of action where all decisions will dovetail, “a market will clear” and “all buyers and sellers will be maximally satisfied”. The implication of this, is that “rational economic behaviour is effectively responsive – that actors in markets are passive price-takers, not imaginative brokers” (*ibid*, p.100). However, as Stewart illustrated through his analysis of the actions of Gypsy horse dealers, the “market process rests on the existence of actors’ ignorance – [and it is] precisely the uneven distribution of knowledge that allows profits to be made” (*ibid*). Thus, actors in markets are entrepreneurs. They are concerned “with time, with perceptions of possibilities” and they engage in “active intervention”. For the Gypsy horse-dealers,

“the generation of a flow of goods and the determination of their prices does not rest on an impersonal price mechanism, a balance of supply and demand into which Gypsies slot themselves. For Gypsy horse-dealers everything happens as if prices are the result of the game of bargaining” (*ibid*, pp.109-10).

Accounts such as these raise challenges to the conceptions of rationality which underlie the individual, autonomous, maximising subject of neo-classical market models. As Dilley (1992, p.11) argued, “social actors deliberate over various styles of reasoning available to them” and “specialised ways of thinking are employed in different social situations”.

Anthropological investigations of markets and marketplaces have also illuminated the significance of social identity in shaping market exchange processes. For example, Davis (1992) described the case of monopoly control and profit among Zuwaya traders and truckers in Libya. The Zuwaya were risk-averse and acted to avoid uncertainty and speculation. They did this through the establishment of a ‘cartel’ through which they shared information, maintained common prices and offered each other assistance in obtaining supplies and trucks. Being Zuwaya was not a rational choice but a moral identity that established trust with other Zuwaya and excluded outsiders and strangers from these opportunities. As this example suggests, “when exchanges are really free from control people do their best to create monopolies, to do insider trading, to eliminate risk and to exclude outsiders who might bring in competition and something approximating supply and demand” (Davis 1992, p.73). This challenges the assumption that markets are self-regulating

as a function of the law of supply and demand (see also Gudeman, 2008; Hart and Ortiz, 2008 on the global financial crisis that began in 2008).

One final insight generated by ethnographic accounts is that a marketplace is “not merely a place to buy and sell but, just as importantly, [a place] to dance, meet friends, do politics, fix assignations and drink beer” (Davis, 1992, p.66). Thus, these accounts locate market exchange in more generalised “processes of social exchange and situate market behaviour in relation to wider cultural norms and patterns of association” (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001, p.94).

Such accounts of real-life markets and marketplaces demonstrate that these sites of human activity are constituted by social relations and social processes. As Tribe (1981) asserted, “what is usually referred to as ‘the market’ is no more than a blank space occupied by a diversity of changing social relations”. In line with these analyses, while I use the term ‘marketplace’ throughout the thesis, I do this for convenience. Always, the term remains a referent for the abstraction from the practices and social relations of a particular set of people.

### ***Economy as a mode of living***

The production, distribution and trade of illicit drugs is often referred to as the ‘drug economy’. While accepting that this is indeed an economy, I argue that the majority of conceptions of drug economies adopt a narrow definition of economy. This definition is derived from economics where, in Western liberal democracies, the economy is seen as a ‘market economy’ structured by the allocation of resources achieved by the interdependent decisions of individuals self-interestedly supplying and demanding. I choose, instead, to proceed from broader, substantive understandings of economy derived from anthropological theorising. Here, economy refers to the “social relations people establish to control the production, consumption and circulation of food, clothing, shelter” (Gregory and Altman, 1989, p.1) and other “valued objects and services” (Gudeman, 2001, p.1). Economy revolves around “making, holding, using, sharing, exchanging and accumulating” these objects and thus “includes more than standard market theory would suggest” (*ibid*).

Under these understandings, market and marketplace practices are not isolated from other aspects of people's lives, that is, what people do in the marketplace is not separated from their social or cultural lives, from their relationships with others or from their ideas about the world and their place in it. Gudeman (2001), for example, argued that there are two realms to the economy: community and market. He wrote, “[b]oth facets make up economy, for humans are motivated by social fulfilment, curiosity, and the pleasure of mastery, as well as instrumental purposes, competition, and the accumulation of gains” (*ibid*, p.1). For Gudeman, ‘community’ is characterised by real, on-the-ground associations and imagined solidarities and identities that people create and experience. ‘Market’, on the other hand, is characterised by anonymous short-term transactions. In reality, he asserted, these two spheres are not separate realms but part of the whole that constitutes people’s daily lives. Here we have an understanding of economy that reintroduces the people through whom the economy is constituted. Likewise, Gregory and Altman (1989) defined ‘economy’ as the *social relationships* that people establish to control the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services. Wilk (1992) elaborated on this to incorporate culture into the model, arguing that people’s practices and choices are shaped by culturally patterned ideas about what is right, wrong and even conceivable. As he wrote, “[e]conomy is not just a material world. It is the portion of the world where people are tied to each other through their relationships with things they have created” (*ibid*, p.32). These substantive definitions of the economy as “the daily transactions of producing, exchanging, storing and consuming that form so much of human existence” (Wilk, 1996, p.28), serve as a reminder that selling drugs is not all that people are doing when they participate in a heroin marketplace. The notion of the ‘economy as a mode of living’ (Gregory and Altman, 1989) is a useful way to think about the Footscray marketplace in that it recognises the complexity of the social relations and social processes that constitute any given market or marketplace.

### **Exchange**

As a principle, ‘market’ glosses processes and relations of exchange (the way things move between people). Exchange is thus a fundamental process of economy. Processes of exchange have occupied a significant place in social science theorising.

Historically, three key forms of exchange have been identified and differentiated in terms of their assumed underlying characteristics. The three forms are: market exchange, characterised by trade or barter; reciprocal or gift exchange, characterised by generalised helping and sharing based on mutual obligations and identity according to kinship and other social relations (Wilk, 1996); and redistribution, characterised by the distribution of resources to and from a centre (e.g. the taxation system). Theorists of economies have differentiated societies on the basis of whether their economies are seen to proceed according to the principles underlying these three modes of exchange (Granovetter, 1992; Gregory and Altman, 1989).

Modern Western liberal economies are understood as operating through market exchange (therefore ‘market economies’). In these, the focus is on the exchange of material goods and the principle underlying exchange is seen to be the self-interest of persons maximising utility – often designated ‘profit-motivated’. Anthropologists (for example, Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1974; Sahlins, 1972), critiquing what they saw as an ethnocentric view of economy, identified societies that, they argued, circulated resources in markedly different fashions than ‘market economies’: through reciprocity and redistribution. In gift – or reciprocal – economies, the focal point was seen to be the social relationships constituted by and constitutive of the transactions. Counter-critiques of the anthropological analyses of gift exchange pointed out, however, that within societies defined as gift economies members also participated in trade and barter. Additionally, neo-classical economists argued that, despite appearances, reciprocity was actually self-interested and profit-motivated as well (see Wilk, 1996 and Davis, 1992 for overviews of this debate).

In much of this work, modes of exchange – reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange – are often treated as mutually exclusive. Several scholars (see, for example, Davis, 1992; Dilley, 1992; Gudeman, 2001) have argued, however, that, in practice, these exchange modes may actually operate simultaneously. Rather than there being only one kind of exchange, as neo-classical economists hold (i.e. exchange that is profit-motivated), the assignment of a single motive is insufficient to account for all the practices that obtain in any given society.

Davis (1992) suggested that there are *kinds of exchange*. People have a repertoire of types of exchanges at their disposal and this is socially and culturally patterned. Further, according to Davis, the principle underlying exchange is a system of classifications of intended exchange outcomes, of objects and of social relationships. Finally, different kinds of exchange occur between people in different sorts of social relationships. For example, parents and children aim for different results and exchange different things than do shopkeepers and customers. Davis' conceptualisation of the complexity of exchange helps account for why people have differential opportunities in exchange (different classifications of social relationships) and why people move between types of exchanges (different intended exchange outcomes) in ways that a model that assumes all actors to be profit-motivated (or reciprocity-motivated) cannot accommodate. Thus, Davis' model of an exchange repertoire incorporates fluidity and ambiguity as well as creativity.

In a similar vein, but focusing on exchange processes rather than exchange relations, Dilley (1992, p.9) drew on Appadurai's (1986) thesis on the "social life of things" to highlight that market exchange describes but a single moment in the "trajectory or flow of a single item, thing, service ... as it passes from hand to hand, from place to place". Thus, status as a commodity is "just one moment in the intricate flow of items through specifiable social settings" (Dilley, 1992). Applying this to the local heroin marketplace, by equating the economy of heroin only with the market, attention is confined to just one point – a point of sale – in the circulation of heroin through networks of social relations. All other locations of exchange, exchange that may entail reciprocity or redistribution, are neglected. Yet, it is the entire set of exchange processes that constitute an overall heroin economy.

## **Drug user agency**

I turn now to the second of my two questions – how do participants in drug marketplaces express agency. In examining this, I take 'agency' to refer to the human capacity to act intentionally on the world. It is "the ability to act on one's own account ... the capacity to take the initiative" (Sokefield, 1999, p.424). This does not mean that one's actions may not be constrained, or that they always lead to intended outcomes.

Two main representations of the agency of people involved in heroin markets are generally apparent in drugs literature and public discourse. In the first representation, heroin users are conceived as irrational and devoid of will. They are constructed as slaves to the pharmacological properties of the drug they ingest and thus their agency has been ceded to heroin. This representation is particularly prevalent within the medically-oriented literature on illicit drug use (see Keane, 2002; Manderson, 2005 for excellent discussions of constructions of addiction and the addicted). In the second representation, appearing most clearly in discourses around drug market functioning and law enforcement, the marketplace participant is constructed as criminal: a ‘bad’ person who harms society, one who chooses to reject society, one who is selfish, greedy, thoughtless and dangerous. Here, the drug market participant is a person with agency but agency expressed only in specific and negative ways. This representation is most often applied to heroin sellers (see Coomber, 2006 for a broad discussion of dominant constructions of drug dealers). These conceptions of agency are unidimensional and circumscribed: people are seen to act only in relation to obtaining heroin, or only in criminal, deviant ways. In the former, agency is stripped from the subject and transferred instead to the substance; in the latter, the expression of agency is restricted to profit-seeking and, given the illegal status of heroin, to criminality. While more nuanced representations of drug users – representations that do not deny or circumscribe their agency – may certainly be found in drugs literature (and these will be discussed in greater detail in Ch. 2), these two representations still dominate both public discourse and drugs research and practice discourse (Brook and Stringer, 2005; Elliot and Chapman, 2000; Manderson, 2005; Rowe, 2005).

This thesis explores agency as expressed by participants in the Footscray drug marketplace. I examine the ways in which these people act intentionally in the world and the ways in which their actions are constrained and facilitated. Additionally, I consider the implications of the preceding representations – one with no agency and the other where the expression of agency is confined to criminal practices, profit-seeking or both – when the subject of inquiry is both heroin user and seller.

## **Subjectivity**

Agency is a capacity of human subjects. Constructions of drug user and drug dealer agency are, therefore, situated within conceptions of drug user and drug dealer subjectivity. While understandings and conceptions of subjectivity are a matter of ongoing debate, following Ortner (2005, p.31), I take subjectivity to refer to “the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so forth that animate acting subjects … as well [as] the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought and so on”.

Several, sometimes contradictory, constructions of drug using subjects and drug dealing subjects operate simultaneously in the drugs literature, and indeed in broader public discourse around drugs more generally (in the media, for example). However, commonly, these conceptions take the form of binary oppositions (Brook and Stringer, 2005; Coomber, 2006; Elliot and Chapman, 2000; Maher, 1997) and two key oppositions are those of villain or victim. The villain discourse sees drug *users* as criminals who willingly choose deviancy. As such, they are morally culpable and deserving of punishment. The victim discourse sees drug users as ‘sick’ people in ‘need’ of assistance to help them change. The drug *dealing* subject, who is generally seen as a villain, is an extreme and immoral liberal subject, rationally pursuing self-interest but without moral restraint. The drug *using* subject, by contrast, is chaotic, irrational, undisciplined and unproductive, living a meaningless existence enslaved to a drug (Brook and Stringer, 2005). Although rarely remarked, these two constructions must, by definition, be co-resident in the body of the drug-using dealer. This produces a conceptual tension such that the drug-using dealer both has and does not have agency, rationally pursues self-interest yet is irrational, and so forth.

Additionally, discourses of drug user and dealer subjectivity tend to reference a ‘normal’ subject against whom they are posed. These discourses simultaneously establish and reproduce the ideal ‘normal’ subject through the construction of its denigrated abject other – the disordered drug user (Moore and Fraser, 2006). The ‘normal’ subject is autonomous, disciplined, productive, risk-averse and capable of self-regulation and control. This subject is also assumed in the neo-classical market models discussed previously.

Such conceptions of subjectivity have ethical and political implications with regard to the ways in which drug users are understood, judged, regulated and governed. More generally, conceptions of human subjectivity have ethical and political implications for all citizens, as highlighted in a growing body of literature concerned with subjectivity, governance and the production of subjects in modern Western democracies. In the section that follows, I provide a brief review of this broader literature in order to situate contemporary constructions of drug user subjectivity.

Over the last two decades, several social theorists (see, for example, Burchell, 1993; Gordon, 1991; Petersen, 1997; Rose, 1993) have investigated the emergence of the normal subject – what has been termed the neo-liberal subject. Influenced by Foucault, and taking as their departure point an interest in governmentality – that is, an interest in the ways in which Western liberal societies produce and govern their subjects – these theorists have examined the processes by which citizens become recognised by the state as proper social subjects and become accepted by other members of society as normal and legitimate. Governmentality is linked with Foucault’s interest in the ways in which power/knowledge and its practices are linked to ‘subject formation’.

The modern Western subject emerged in the latter part of the eighteenth century through the ‘political rationality’ of liberalism. Liberalism was concerned with the freedoms of individuals and the limits of government interference in those freedoms. Rose and Miller (1992, pp.178-9) argued that political rationalities have a moral form in so far as they delineate appropriate powers and responsibilities of authorities and consider the ideals and principles of government (e.g. “freedom, justice, equality, mutual responsibility, citizenship … economic efficiency, prosperity, growth, fairness, rationality and the like”). Additionally, political rationalities have an epistemological character in that they are underpinned by some conception of the “nature of the objects governed – society, the nation, the population, the economy” and, importantly, “they embody some account of the persons over whom government is to be exercised” (*ibid*, p.179).

As a political rationality, neo-liberalism emerged through the rolling back of the ‘welfare states’ – characteristic of post-WWII Western liberal democracies – and the

ascension of free-market ideologies. Under neo-liberalism, the liberal *laissez-faire* approach to markets, where government intervened only to free markets from constraints, is transformed such that government “actively seeks to put in place arrangements to enable markets to exist and function” (Seddon, 2007, p.338). Additionally, under neo-liberalism, responsibility for risk and social security are increasingly shifted from the State to private citizens. In pursuing this, “all aspects of social behaviour are ... reconceptualised along economic lines – as calculative actions undertaken through the universal human faculty of choice” (Rose, 1999, p.1 cited in Seddon, 2007, p.338). With the extension of economic rationalities to all fields of life, the subject becomes his or her own enterprise, an ‘entrepreneur of the self’. As Kelly (2006) argued, “where the meanings of life are transformed ... into meanings that are structured by the market form, then the subjects of (Neo)Liberal rationalities of government emerge as ‘free’, ‘entrepreneurial’, competitive, and economically rational individuals” (Kelly, 2006, p.24). Thus, the neo-liberal subject reinscribes the rational, atomistic, self-interested subject of liberalism (the subject evident in the economic models of markets discussed earlier), but extends the conception with an emphasis on self-regulation and the ‘care of the self’ (Petersen, 1997). The liberal subject was seen to exist prior to society and to be endowed with rights and freedoms with which government should not interfere. Neo-liberal rule, by contrast, “operates through the ‘making up’ of citizens capable of exercising regulated freedom rather than through imposing constraints upon citizens” (Rose & Miller 1992, p.174).

Scholars across a range of disciplines have identified the mainstreaming of neo-liberal discourses and practices across a range of public sectors throughout the Western world – including in the fields of finance and education (Newman, Bonar *et al.*, 2007), fisheries management (St Martin, 2007), policing and management of urban spaces (Chesluk, 2004; Coleman, 2003), mental health (Henderson, 2005), maternal health (Reiger, 2006) and public health (Petersen and Lupton, 1996), as well as drug policy (Bunton, 2001; Zibbell, 2004).

In their examination of the neo-liberal framework evident in ‘the new public health’, Petersen and Lupton (1996, p.2) highlighted its “moral, political and social implications”. They argued that health, and the means for achieving health, have

become a prime concern of contemporary Western societies. This concern is manifested in the “proliferation of new knowledges and activities” focusing on health: both ‘lifestyle’ issues such as diet and exercise and also, increasingly, concerns around risks such as global warming, pollution and diminishing biodiversity. These developments are seen as constituting ‘the new public health’ and in this sense, the new public health may be seen as “but the most recent of a series of regimes of power and knowledge that are oriented to the regulation and surveillance of individual bodies and the social body as a whole” (*ibid*, p.3). Through the discourses of health promotion and education, social marketing, epidemiology and health economics, the new public health seeks to “transform the awareness of individuals in such a way that they become more self-regulating and productive both in serving their own interests and those of society at large” (*ibid*, p.12).

Instrumental (or utilitarian) rationality and self-control are key to understanding neo-liberal citizenship as they “underpin contemporary assumptions of what it means to be ‘human’ and what the ideal modern ‘self’ should be” (Petersen and Lupton, 1996, p.64). In contemporary Western societies, good health has come to be considered “both an obligation and a right” (*ibid*). As such, health takes on a moral character, with judgements linked to ‘caring for the self’ and the ‘duty to be well’. As Greco (1993, p.361) argued, where a person is unable to regulate their lifestyle and modify their risky behaviour, then “this constitutes, at least in part, *a failure of the self to take care of itself – a form of irrationality*”. To be rational is assumed to be risk-averse. This notion rests on the idea that risks are knowable, calculable and therefore preventable and it therefore becomes the duty of citizens to manage and avoid known risks (Peterson 1997). Pursuing behaviour that compromises one’s utility or health is suggestive of irrationality and irresponsibility. By implication it also becomes a failure to be a good citizen. There is thus an additional moral element to engaging in unhealthy practices, leading to stigmatisation of those who fail to behave in risk-averse ways.

### ***Neo-liberal drug users***

Neo-liberal ideology has also influenced discourse and practice around drug use and harm reduction. For example, Zibbell (2004, p.60) argued that neo-liberal shifts in

the British National Health Service post-Thatcher, led to the creation of a new type of drug user. No longer was the drug user a ‘client’ of services, to be governed by an array of experts who dictated the terms of her management. Rather the drug user had become an expert consumer of health services, capable of making responsible choices with regard to her health and well-being. Through this reformulation, the drug user becomes an “entrepreneur of the self”. This subject is apparent in harm reduction discourses, programs and practices aimed at reducing the harms of drug taking such as the transmission of HIV or other blood-borne viruses. However, in other discourses of drug taking, a tension may be discerned. Where neo-liberalism “is built on the notion that individual freedom now takes the form of consumer freedom in which ‘everybody is defined by his or her consumption’ … [d]rug-taking … becomes a type of disordered consumption in which the addicted drug user is recast as a citizen unable to exercise properly their freedom to consume” (Seddon, 2007, p.338).

In the Australian context, Moore (2004) has also drawn attention to the neo-liberal subject inscribed in drug-related education and health promotion campaigns – specifically those addressing heroin overdose prevention. Heroin users are advised to “sample their heroin first; avoid mixing heroin with other CNS depressants; avoid injecting alone; always call an ambulance in the event of overdose; and monitor their tolerance” (pp.1549-50). As he wrote, such messages inscribe “a self-disciplined, self aware, self-regulating subject [who is] cautious, rational, orderly, stable and self-aware” (*ibid*, p.1550).

In contrast to previous constructions of drug users as disordered and irrational, the ascription of neo-liberal subjectivity may be seen as empowering for drug users, granting them the respect, “recognition, trust and legitimization” (Moore and Fraser, 2006, p.3036) accorded to those accepted as ‘normal’ (neo-liberal) subjects. However, as Moore and Fraser (2006) argued, neo-liberal subjects are seen as individually responsible for their self-care. This has the potential for neglecting the role played by material disadvantage and social, cultural and political contexts in shaping risk and constraining agency. Correspondingly, this may reinforce perceptions of drug users as “failing the test of neo-liberalism” (p.3045) and serve to further their marginalisation. Additionally, perceptions of drug users as failed neo-

liberal subjects ignore the possibility of active resistance to governmental discourses by drug users (and others). As Lupton (1995, p.135) argued, this resistance may be at the conscious or unconscious level – a conscious choice of “alternative practices of the self” but also an expression of “pre- or non-discursive desire” or bodily habits.

Two related questions arise from my review of sociological work on neo-liberalism: how ‘abnormal’ are drug using subjects and just how normal is the ‘normal’ subject – that is, does the neo-liberal subject provide an empirically, politically and ethically adequate account of human subjectivity? These are important considerations as conceptions of subjectivity have implications for how drug users (and others) are governed – for example, how they are policed (Chesluk, 2004), their access to treatment (Bourgois, 2000) or the interpretations of their needs (Moore, 2009). This thesis explores the subjectivities of Vietnamese heroin user/sellers, interrogating these against dominant conceptions of drug user subjectivity.

## **Thesis outline**

Chapter 2 provides an overview of existing Australian ‘drug market’ literature and its strengths and limitations, setting the scene for the analysis of the local drug marketplace that follows. Chapter 3 provides contextual information on the suburb of Footscray, the Vietnamese experience of settlement in Australia and the local heroin marketplace on which I focus. Chapter 4 outlines my research methods and details my incorporation as a researcher into this social world, while Chapter 5 describes the people who participate in the drug marketplace and introduces some of my key research friends. In Chapters 6 and 7, I focus on social relations within the drug marketplace and how, through the social processes of exchange, participants produce and reproduce this particular drug marketplace. Chapter 6 details market-like exchanges – trade and barter – while Chapter 7 presents community exchanges – employment, service, gifts and theft. While market and community exchanges are separated for analytical purposes, in the everyday world of the marketplace the two areas constitute the whole of their daily lives. These chapters show how, and in what ways, drug marketplace participants act on the world, achieve diverse outcomes (intended or otherwise, constrained or not) and, thus, express their agency. In Chapter 8, the focus moves outward from transactions between drug dealers and

drug users to analyse transactions between drug market participants and police. The chapter explores some of the constraints upon agency that obtain in the lives of the Vietnamese heroin dealers “within the context of existing systems of relations” (Dwyer and Minnegal, 2007, p.546). Throughout this chapter, consideration is given to the subject constructed through the discourses and practices of police. Chapter 9 returns the focus to the drug market participants and provides an in-depth exploration of the practice of temazepam injection among the Vietnamese heroin user/dealers. Through this examination, dominant models of the subject and subjectivity in drugs research and health promotion are problematised. The final chapter (Ch. 10) draws together the substantive themes and arguments of the thesis, concluding with reflections on the implications of the analysis for understandings of both drug markets and drug users.

## Chapter 2

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# Drug markets and marketplaces

This chapter reviews literature on illicit drug markets and marketplaces, with a particular focus on its theoretical underpinnings and constructions of the drug market subject. The chapter begins with an overview of literature on Australian drug markets. Two key points emerge from this review. First, drug markets are largely under-theorised, and second, where theoretical underpinnings may be identified, these are largely implicit and framed by neo-classical economic models. In the latter part of the chapter, alternative approaches to analyses of drug markets and marketplaces are described. These focus on social, political and cultural dimensions of these sites of human activity. Insights from these studies, and from anthropological and sociological theorising on economy, markets and subjectivity, inform the presentation of my ethnographic data in Chapters 6 - 9.

### Australian drug markets

A recent review of drug market literature (Ritter, 2006) identified five key disciplinary approaches to the study of drug markets: population-based and survey research (epidemiological approaches); criminological and law enforcement evaluation; ethnographic and qualitative approaches; economic approaches and behavioural and psychological research. The majority of contemporary Australian drug market analyses are conducted using epidemiological, criminological or ethnographic/qualitative approaches, with the former two perspectives predominating.<sup>5</sup> While a substantial body of work on drug markets has been conducted by economists in the United States (see, for example, Caulkins, Johnson, Taylor and Taylor, 1999; Caulkins and Reuter, 1998) and the United Kingdom (see, for example, Wagstaff, 1989), such analyses are less common in Australia (although, for a recent exception, see Moore *et al.*, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Although outside the scope of the present review, I note that epidemiological methods also prevail in the various systems in place for monitoring the prevalence and patterns of drug use in Australia (for example, the three-yearly national drug use surveys conducted among the general population or the regular surveys of secondary school students (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005; White and Hayman, 2004)).

### ***Epidemiological/surveillance approaches***

The primary epidemiological/surveillance methods used to investigate drug markets and marketplaces consist of 1) collation of data from hospital, treatment agency and law enforcement databases, and 2) survey-based, cross-sectional methods. The Illicit Drug Data Report, produced annually by the Australian Crime Commission, is one example of drug market knowledge generated through the collation of existing data. The report develops ‘national drug supply indicators’, which are based on data collated from Customs and state and federal law enforcement agencies. It details drug arrests, seizures and purity levels, border detections and drug prices, with the latter based on information provided by covert police units and police informants. Together, these data are seen to provide a “national picture of the illicit drug market” (Australian Crime Commission, 2007, p.6) through the generation of information on drug availability (supply), purity and price. Although not explicit, it is assumed, by implication, that drug markets may be understood, and indeed are constituted, by these key features of neo-classical economic supply and demand models of market exchange.

A key example of methods based on cross-sectional surveys is the annual Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS).<sup>6</sup> Instituted as a pilot study in New South Wales in 1996 (Hande, Darke, O'Brien, Maher and Hall, 1998) and expanded to all states and territories in 2000, the aim of the IDRS is to “provide strategic early warning of emerging drug trends in the major illicit drug markets” (Darke, Topp, Kaye and Hall, 2002, p.180). It uses survey data from current injecting drug users, structured interview data from health and police professionals who have contact with illicit drug users, and secondary data (e.g. hospital and ambulance records, treatment service data, needle syringe program data and blood-borne virus notification data). The key drug market indicators employed in the IDRS are price, purity and availability of four illicit drug types: heroin, amphetamines, cannabis and cocaine. These indicators are evaluated for the six months preceding the survey, with respondents asked to provide information on the current situation (e.g. how much does heroin cost at the moment) and whether this has changed over the preceding six

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<sup>6</sup> I note that this project also incorporates collated data from existing databases.

months (response options include: decreased, increased, fluctuated or stable). Additionally, the IDRS collects information on characteristics of the injecting drug users recruited for the study, on their patterns of drug use, health and treatment experiences, and their experiences of policing in the previous six months.

People who inject drugs are seen as a ‘sentinel’ population through which to monitor emerging drug use trends as there is considerable evidence that they use a range of illicit drugs as well as licit drugs used illicitly – for example, pharmaceutical preparations such as other opioids or benzodiazepines (Hando *et al.*, 1998). The IDRS provides timely data that may indicate emerging trends in drug use and drug markets among people who use illicit drugs. Comparison of data from several sources is seen to improve confidence in the findings. The same recruitment methods and survey instruments are used in each jurisdiction each year, making data comparable across jurisdictions and over time (Topp, 2001).

The accumulation of comparable data over each successive year allows for identification of gross changes in the market characteristics of price, purity and availability. Writing on heroin trends in 2002, for example, the National IDRS reported that “compared to the 2001 IDRS the availability of heroin increased in most jurisdictions, particularly in those in which heroin has traditionally predominated” (Breen, Degenhardt *et al.*, 2003, p.12). In 2003, “the availability of heroin was reported to be stable in those jurisdictions in which heroin has traditionally predominated” (*ibid*, p.11). In its seventh year (2006) as a national project, the authors reported a “general scaling down of the heroin market in most jurisdictions, with both the prevalence and frequency of heroin use decreasing in most states and territories” (O’Brien, Black *et al.*, 2007, p.xii). They further observed that “data from recent years have highlighted the dynamic nature of drug markets and the need to monitor fluctuations to provide information on the way they impact other drug markets” (*ibid*, p.xxiii). The dynamism to which the authors refer was shifts in the reported price, availability and purity of the drugs in question. The ‘impacts on other drug markets’ refers to the shifts observed among IDRS drug user respondents in the drugs they reported consuming, thereby implying distinct ‘markets’ for each of the drugs of interest.

Although the IDRS provides timely data which can identify emerging trends that may warrant further investigation, it also has several limitations. These include its reliance on self-report from drug users and on the perspectives of professionals working in the illicit drug field. Weaknesses of self-report data are that it is difficult for people to report on distant events (e.g. past six months), and asking them to aggregate their experiences over a six month period is liable to produce considerable error and bias. Additionally, subjective self-reports of, for example, drug availability may be more a reflection of a person's embeddedness in a particular drug network than any 'objective' measure of availability. This is equally true for self-reports of price and purity. Furthermore, with respect to self-reports of purity, it is impossible to disentangle objective measures of purity from personal experiences of drug tolerance. Self-reports also reflect people's representations of their practices, rather than their actual practices. For example, it may not be in drug users' own interests to report their experiences and practices (notable in this regard were tighter regulations placed on morphine prescription in the Northern Territory of Australia, seen by some drug user advocacy groups as a direct outcome of IDRS reports indicating widespread morphine prescribing to drug users) or people may report what they believe they 'ought' to do rather than what they actually do – that is, social desirability concerns may shape drug users' reports.

With regard to reliance on the perspectives of professionals who work with injecting drug users, it seems reasonable to question what they actually 'know' about drug markets. In general, professionals are physically, socially and culturally distant from drug networks and transactions and, therefore, they rely on what they are told by the drug users with whom they are in contact. What they are told depends very much, among other things, on the power dynamics of the relationships they have with these drug users (Bourgois, 2002). Additionally drug market participants themselves often have varying levels of 'knowledge' about the drug exchange systems within which they participate. A clear example of this is provided by Coomber (2004) who argued that even drug dealers – those considered most likely to 'know' about the operations of drug markets – often 'knew' very little. By way of example, he refers to his research on the adulteration and 'cutting' (dilution) of drugs. Tests on seizures of drugs around the world have consistently demonstrated that minimal drug adulteration occurs after exportation, and where drugs are 'cut', this is usually with

benign substances such as glucose. However, in his interviews with drug dealers in the United Kingdom, almost all reported on “‘other’ unscrupulous dealers” who always cut their drugs “with anything they could lay their hands on” (e.g. rat poison or ground glass). Although not one of the dealers interviewed had ever witnessed such adulteration, this was taken-for-granted knowledge and the belief remained that such drug ‘cutting’ was a common practice (Coomber, 2004, pp.501-2). As Coomber points out, drug dealers encounter the same media and public discourses as the rest of the population. Professional informants provide representations of drug markets based on their own occupational and individual assumptions and biases. Thus the data they provide should be interpreted as products of their cultural milieu rather than being treated as measures of an objective reality.

Additionally, within each state, the IDRS aggregates data across geographical (different suburbs) and social (e.g. street-based or home-based drug exchange) locations. This aggregation of data does not permit comprehension of differences among drug market participants or between locations (other than at the broadest jurisdictional level). In this way, “phenomenological diversity” (Lie, 1997, p.342) – that is, diversity in form, practices and social relations – is glossed over, rendering the IDRS a totalising project in that all locations of drug exchange are merged into a single homogenous, abstracted drug market. In conflating different levels and locations of drug markets, the IDRS conflates different social processes, for example, the vast differences in kind between transactions enacted between anonymous actors (say, in an internet-based drug exchange system) and those between people who see each other every day and who are part of the same community (a social network-based exchange system).

A further limitation to the IDRS is that the data are static. They provide a snapshot of drug markets. This means they can only provide information on differences at particular points in time over the years and the system does not capture fluctuations that might occur on a weekly or even daily basis. The identified shifts in price, purity and availability noted in the 2006 IDRS report thus appear to be the product of the ‘invisible hand of the market’ rather than, perhaps, the product of complex social processes. Static conceptualisations preclude recognition of human agency and preclude understanding of how people’s social actions and social relations produce

particular markets and marketplaces. The market appears driven by the drugs themselves: it is these that are either available or scarce, pure or adulterated, expensive or cheap. The absence of market actors in these approaches is a point to which I will return later in this chapter.

### ***Criminological/law enforcement approaches***

Criminological/law enforcement approaches to drug market analyses similarly adopt an economic framework. Within these perspectives, Weatherburn and colleagues have made a substantial contribution to the Australian literature on illicit drug markets. In a comprehensive literature review on drug crime prevention (Weatherburn, Topp, Midford and Allsop, 2000), the authors detailed the theoretical underpinnings of law enforcement efforts to disrupt illegal drug markets. Such efforts, they asserted, are bi-directional, that is, law enforcement activities are directed towards both supply-side enforcement (targeted at the sellers of illegal drugs) and demand-side enforcement (targeted at the buyers of these drugs).

Supply-side initiatives are designed to make it more costly to manufacture, cultivate or sell illegal drugs. These measures include crop eradication programs in producer countries, interdiction at customs barriers, controls over drug precursor chemicals, imprisonment of convicted drug sellers and confiscation of assets. In these initiatives, it is assumed that such measures will reduce the availability of illegal drugs and/or increase the costs and risks associated with drug trafficking/selling. Even if law enforcement fails to significantly reduce supply, it is argued that the increased costs and risks associated with drug selling will be passed on to the buyer, as drug sellers will require financial compensation for the risks they are taking.

Demand-side law enforcement aims to increase the costs and risks for the buyer of illegal drugs. Here, it is argued that even if police cannot increase the price of illegal drugs or affect their supply, they can increase the non-monetary costs associated with their use. Demand-side activities include police using ‘stop and search’ powers to check potential drug buyers for possession of illegal drugs or outstanding warrants; the arrest and prosecution of buyers for illegal drug use, possession and other drug related offences; or moving suspected drug users away from areas where

it is known illegal drugs are available (Weatherburn *et al.*, 2000). Demand-side initiatives assume that the increased inconvenience, time, risk or cost of trying to find illegal drugs should encourage drug users to reduce their consumption either by switching to other licit or illicit drugs, moving into treatment or decreasing their intake. This ideally has the same effect of reducing demand as is achieved by an increase in price or decrease in purity of the drug. An aggregate drop in demand, it is argued, should reduce both crime<sup>7</sup> and revenue to drug sellers. Although rarely addressed by demand-side initiatives, it has been noted that switching to other illicit drugs may have the effect of increasing the overall costs of drug use as other drugs may be more harmful (Weatherburn, Jones, Freeman and Makkai, 2003).

Thus, this “risks and prices” model of illicit drug markets holds that increasing costs to drug traffickers/sellers by making it more risky and expensive, will lead to increased prices for consumers as drug sellers “will seek to compensate themselves for these risks and costs by demanding a higher return on their investment” (Weatherburn *et al.*, 2003, p.83). In a “competitive market”, this demand for higher profits will be passed on to consumers through increased prices. The model suggests therefore that an increase in price will suppress demand for the drug (*ibid*). This statement rests on a further assumption of economics, that of elasticity. This theory arises from the observation that demand for some goods is flexible and responds to changes in price while demand for other goods remains stable despite fluctuations in price. If demand changes in relation to changes in price, the good is said to be price-elastic with the converse being true of price-inelastic goods. Given conceptualisations around the ‘addictiveness’ or dependence-producing qualities of heroin, some scholars have argued that demand for heroin will be price-inelastic (Koch and Grupp, 1971; Wagstaff, 1989; Weatherburn and Lind, 1997). Thus, if law enforcement reduces supply and increases prices, consumers will simply increase their revenue raising activities to meet the increased price thereby increasing profits to drug suppliers. This suggests that initiatives to disrupt demand in markets would

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<sup>7</sup> A drop in drug use will literally produce a drop in crime as drug use is, in itself, a crime. However, drug use and drug markets are frequently conflated with ‘crime’ where drug use is seen as producing other crime. The types of crime are not always specified – although generally they are of the petty income-generating kind – thus increasing the sense of threat and danger around drug markets and drug users.

have little efficacy. An alternate view is that commodities may be price-elastic at some prices and price-inelastic at others. If prices are low relative to the incomes of consumers then those consumers may be prepared to pay increased prices (price-inelastic). However, if prices rise beyond the capacity of consumers to generate the necessary revenue then the commodity may become price-elastic.

In an analysis of the 2000-2001 Australian heroin shortage, Weatherburn and colleagues (2003) argued that demand for heroin was price-elastic, that is, consumers responded to increased prices by reducing their weekly expenditure on heroin. This finding raises questions about the notion of heroin ‘dependence’, suggesting that it may vary, and it may be actively varied, according to circumstance. However, an alternative explanation could be that weekly expenditure decreased as it would have been difficult to spend money on heroin when it was unavailable. Additionally, Weatherburn and colleagues detailed the marked decrease in heroin purity at the time of their study. Consequently, people may have decreased spending because they determined that it was of little worth to spend money on a substance that contained little heroin. The authors did not factor the decrease in heroin purity into their elasticity calculations.

Drug market analyses from law enforcement research also adopt an explicitly economic ‘market’ framework for conceptualising drug trade.<sup>8</sup> A discussion paper by the Australasian Centre for Policing Research (ACPR) noted that, in addition to supply-side initiatives, law enforcement seeks to reduce the demand for illicit drugs through: increasing monetary and other (including legal) costs associated with illicit drug use; increasing the likelihood that “problem illicit drug users” will seek out treatment; and investigating and prosecuting crimes conducted in order to finance drug purchases (Australasian Centre for Policing Research (ACPR), 2003, p.1). In a statement similar to that made by Weatherburn and colleagues (2003), the ACPR authors wrote that monetary costs are increased by either “making the drugs scarce relative to the demand … or by enhancing the risk associated with importation, which in turn increases the amount taken by criminals to offset that risk” (*ibid*, p.2).

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed Maher and colleagues (Maher *et al.*, 1998, pp.125-6) noted that “policing practice is overdetermined by policies based on economic models”.

The Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission (2004) also provided a ‘market-based analysis’ to assess the risks posed by particular illicit drug markets. Data describing the Queensland heroin market were derived from national and Queensland IDRS reports and Australian Federal Police, Australian Crime Commission and Queensland police data, and were confined to price, purity and availability measures. The Queensland heroin market was conceived as dependent upon reliable links with Sydney and Melbourne. Overseas and interstate market dynamics, rather than local trends, were seen as shaping the market and as such the Queensland heroin market was understood as influenced more by supply than demand. The authors argued that by “examining aspects such as demand and supply, price and purity, and drug-related criminal activities, key trends in the respective markets are identified” (Crime and Misconduct Commission Queensland, 2004, p.1). The authors interchanged the terms “commodity-based” and “market-based” to describe a mode of analysis that assumed that the core activity forming the basis of the organised criminal enterprise was an illicit market for the particular good or service. They contrasted this with a “traditional ethnic/ethos approach” that analysed criminal activities in relation to the perceived dominant ethnicity or ethos of the criminal network.<sup>9</sup> This is an explicit rejection of a social relations approach to analysis in favour of an approach that privileges market exchange as a way of explaining social and economic life. This shift reflects the broader trend of applying market exchange models to analysis of all areas of social life (e.g. education, marriage, family) as identified in Chapter 1.

### ***Critique of the dominant approaches***

In addition to the general limitations of epidemiological and criminological approaches to drug market analyses detailed so far, there are several further limitations that relate specifically to my empirical and analytical concerns.

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<sup>9</sup> In the report, ‘ethos’ is used in reference to those groups that are not distinguished on ethnic lines but who share a distinct culture, lifestyle or belief system. Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs are given as an example.

### *Abstraction from locally produced contexts*

Within these approaches, considerable conceptual slippage is apparent between on-the-ground, specific locations of drug exchanges, and abstract conceptions of a market. Weatherburn and colleagues (2003, p.83), for example, referred to the “dynamics of the Australian heroin market” based on data collected from a street-based heroin marketplace in Cabramatta, a suburb of Sydney. Perhaps as a consequence of their visibility, street-based heroin marketplaces (i.e. specific geographical and social locations in which heroin is exchanged) appear to have become equated with heroin distribution *per se*. This was also apparent in a report by Degenhardt, Day and Hall (2004) where, in an overview of “Australia’s heroin markets”, the authors detailed the New South Wales heroin market by providing descriptions of three street-based heroin marketplaces (Cabramatta, Kings Cross and Redfern), with an implication that these were the only distribution sites.

In so far as drug using participants in the IDRS are recruited in the major street-level drug marketplace areas, at least in Victoria and New South Wales, then IDRS data does reveal something about these particular drug marketplaces. However, in the 2004 Victorian IDRS report, for example, only 20% of participants reported purchasing heroin from a “street dealer” with 38% purchasing from “mobile dealers” (i.e. dealers who are called on the phone to negotiate a meeting place), 24% purchasing from a “dealer’s home”, 13% purchasing through “friends” (social networks more usually associated with amphetamine or cannabis distribution systems) and 4% receiving “home delivery” (Jenkinson and O’Keeffe, 2005, p.13). Even in these data then, there is evidence of a number of different ‘markets’ that presumably operate through varying social processes. The danger of these conceptual slippages is that by abstracting ‘the drug market’, much of the information pertaining to its constituent social processes is lost because these are likely to be localised to the particular social contexts and relations in which a given market/marketplace is embedded.

### *Neglect of social relations and processes*

While Weatherburn and colleagues provide the most explicit statements regarding how the ‘market’ is conceptualised in their research, other research on illicit drug markets focuses instead on describing ‘market-like’ characteristics – primarily price,

purity and availability – with little to no discussion of why these particular measures should be seen as key indicators of the social processes through which drug markets are constituted. The net affect of this work is that it conceals the complex social, cultural and economic processes that underlie the continual production and reproduction of drug markets and marketplaces. What both the epidemiological and the criminological approaches share is a failure to recognise that markets are socially produced, that they are constituted by networks of social relations and transactions.

#### *Neglect of non-commercial exchange*

Illicit drug markets and marketplaces, as noted, are commonly analysed in terms of a market model of commercial transactions or exchanges. In this literature, the utility that people are seen to maximise is generally measured in terms of price. Thus, the drug user wants to purchase at the cheapest price and the drug seller wants to sell at the highest price possible. As a consequence of reliance on implicit or explicit economic models, drug exchanges tend to be measured in monetary terms and other forms of exchange are not investigated. One exception is the survey-based Drug Use Careers of Offenders Study (Makkai and Payne, 2003) which examined the lifetime offending and drug use careers of adult males incarcerated in prisons in four Australian jurisdictions: Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Concerned primarily with the relationship between drug use and crime, the study also collected information on “market activity” prior to incarceration. In examining drug markets, the authors broadened the focus of drug exchanges beyond monetary concerns. While cash payments were the most common way of obtaining drugs, respondents also reported trading stolen goods, swapping drugs, being paid in drugs for work or re-cutting the drug.

#### *Narrow theoretical engagement*

In prioritising economic explanations, epidemiological and criminological approaches are reductionist and the ‘market’ itself remains under-theorised. Although epidemiological analyses make no claims to explaining market processes, nonetheless, there are implicit theoretical assumptions about markets embedded within their methodologies. These assumptions are economic in nature, privileging supply and demand models of markets, and thereby accounting for the focus on price, purity and availability. In these approaches, the abstract market is reified as an

object to be measured rather than as a process to be understood. Data such as those of the IDRS, for example, can describe market-like characteristics but they do not help explain markets, nor account for people's actions within them. The market is seen to exist prior to the social relations and processes by which it is constituted. Questions that remain unanswered by these epidemiological approaches include, for example, how prices are determined at a local level and why they might change, or why rises and falls in modes of drug distribution – for example, street-based sales versus private or other modes – may occur, that is, questions about changes in market processes. Such questions may be answered only through examination of the social processes that obtain in these markets and marketplaces.

These approaches also overlook subjective experiences and meanings of drug market participants and ignore the social relations and contexts of actual markets and marketplaces. They are not alone in this. Dilley (1992) and Lie (1997) have both argued that the 'market' is similarly under-theorised in economic literature. As Lie (1997, pp.342-3) wrote:

[a]ccording to the economic approach, the phenomenological diversity of markets – from medieval marketplace to the modern placeless market – in fact reveals deep isomorphism, or market essentialism. For explanatory purposes, diverse relations and institutions of economic exchange can be analyzed as the singular market. Rather than analyzing markets, the market is used to explain different instances of market exchange.

Thus, within markets, exchanges and transactions may take diverse forms and serve a diverse range of purposes over and above commercial exchange.

### *Drug market subjects*

Within epidemiological and criminological analyses of drug markets, the subjects of these markets – the persons who enact the social processes through which these markets are constituted – are typically either absent, represented through undifferentiated categorical descriptions, or merely implicit and under-theorised. For example, with regard to research from an epidemiological perspective, in the heroin market section of the Illicit Drug Data Report produced by the Australian Crime Commission (2007, pp.41-50), the subjects of the report are variously: 'criminal syndicates'; 'detections [of drugs]'; 'air passengers'; 'Asian and West African

criminals'; 'criminals'; 'Australian-Vietnamese'; 'Australian-Cambodians'; 'arrests'; 'detainees'; 'price'; or 'purity'. These categories are either market-like characteristics (price, purity), events (arrests, detections), or homogenised, and notably ethnic, categories of people (criminal syndicates, criminals, air passengers, Australian-Vietnamese).

Similarly, in the IDRS, the subjects are either the homogenised, reductionist category of 'drug users', or market characteristics of price, purity and availability. Positioned as it is within a harm reduction framework, the IDRS seeks to avoid moralistic terms. Harm reduction, as Keane (2003, p.228) points out, is underpinned by a philosophy that is "generally assumed to promote rationality, pragmatism and utilitarianism in the development of drug interventions". Because the aim is the reduction of harm it entails the value-neutral "objective calculation of consequences, both costs and benefits". The IDRS thus largely avoids constructions of drug users as criminals or victims (although participation in crime and mental health and treatment experiences are presented) but the net result is a largely absent subject.

In the criminological/law enforcement perspectives, an explicit subject is also frequently absent. Here, though, there is an implicit subject. Consistent with the predominant theoretical approach, the subject of these perspectives is commonly the liberal subject of neo-classical economics – *homo economicus*. Weatherburn and colleagues' (2000) description of both supply-side and demand-side law enforcement initiatives provides an example. Here, it is assumed, a rational, risk-averse subject will respond to increasing risks and costs by acting to avoid them; he or she will determine that their utility is no longer being served by remaining in an increasingly costly and risky environment.

In these perspectives, a further nuancing of the liberal subject is discernible. On the supply side (the dealers), the subject is constructed as an extreme example of the rational-calculator pursuing self-interest. Liberal subjects are understood as pursuing self-interest but only within limits set by morality. These limits maintain social order – that is, adherence to society's laws and moral values. The liberal subject is expected to be disciplined and exhibit self-control along socially acceptable lines (Dilley, 1992). The drug-supplying subject of criminological approaches, however,

is one who pursues self-interest without moral restraint, pursuing profit regardless of the social order. This can be seen in the report from the Australasian Centre for Policing Research (2003, p.4) where the authors argued that “most serious and organised criminals, such as those that are involved in the importation and production of illicit drugs, are simply motivated by money”. Thus law enforcement is directed toward making “criminality less profitable” thereby influencing “the choices that criminal groups make about entering the drug trade in Australia”. On the demand side (the drug users), the subject is again one who pursues self-interest, but here, in contrast, their self-interest is seen to be either a disordered pursuit of inauthentic pleasure or a compulsion (Derrida, 1993; Seddon, 2007). Through their assumed ‘addiction’ to drugs, buyers in the market also fail to make socially appropriate choices about self-interest. The notion of a disordered self-interest is also apparent in the argument around the possible price-inelasticity of heroin which holds that people will continue to purchase regardless of price. This is represented as a seemingly irrational response in a market model where demand is expected to drop when price increases. Ultimately, in criminological and law enforcement models, the subject (buyer or seller) is seen as capable of being dissuaded from his or her pursuit as long as the costs and risk are made sufficiently high.

Criminological drug market literature (and, indeed, much drug policy and policing literature) discusses increasing transaction costs and penalties to deter drug dealers and users from marketplaces. Because such research does not examine social relations, it fails to reveal that drug dealers and users are members of communities, that they commonly live in the areas from which interventions try to displace them, and that they are connected to the ‘general public’, to local licit traders, and to the social institutions of the neighbourhood through kin and friendship networks. Thus they have alternative interests and utilities that may support their remaining in a market/marketplace. Again there is an assumed lack of agency where people simply respond in the ways law enforcement expects – that is, by leaving the market. There is no sense of any adaptations or innovations they may make to the market or its evolution.

How participation in a market shapes everyday lives is assumed in these approaches. The dominant frameworks and discourses around drug use in people’s lives are

evident in the questions asked in epidemiological/criminological studies: physical and mental health problems, participation in aggressive behaviours, participation in crime, blood-borne virus experiences, and drug treatment. The assumptions underlying these questions preclude investigation of social relations. The kinds of people who participate in markets, their motivations, subjective meanings and their social and cultural practices, are not part of the inquiry. It is acknowledged that these dimensions fall outside the scope of epidemiological approaches. However, these approaches inform the dominant ways of understanding drug markets. As such, they contribute to a particular way of thinking about and responding to drug markets that precludes alternative understandings and responses. Given that street-based drug marketplaces have emerged as central public policy concerns, it is important to question whether current approaches provide adequate understandings of these sites.

### **Theorising drug markets: social, political and cultural approaches**

I have critiqued the two dominant Australian approaches to drug market analyses in terms of: their reliance on economic models of supply and demand; abstraction from locally produced contexts; the oversight of social relations and processes; the focus on commercial transactions to the exclusion of other exchanges; reductionism; the under-theorising of the market; and the limitations of the models of subjects and agency in these markets. I turn now to theoretical approaches and insights that suggest alternative constructions of markets and market actors, and that may provide a more nuanced theoretical framework capable of accounting for the complex social relations and processes through which markets and marketplaces are constituted.

#### ***Social relations***

Fundamental to the neo-classical economic models of markets is the assumption of anonymity between buyers and sellers, that is, that there are no relationships between market actors. This assumption of anonymity is implicit in the analyses of street-based drug markets developed through the epidemiological and criminological perspectives, demonstrated by the absence of examination of social relations. This notion of anonymous buyers and sellers in drug markets is challenged, however, by

several studies that focus on the social contexts and cultural practices of people who participate in drug markets.

In a comprehensive investigation of the “structure and organisation” of the heroin market in Canberra, the Australian capital, Bammer and Sengoz (1994, p.21) identified the importance of trust – a key characteristic of close social relations – to the functioning of the market. The authors drew on various sources including reports from members of the Drug Squad and from interviews with seven people who had been involved in heroin selling. Respondents asserted that, in Canberra, there was a single heroin market and that most drug users knew each other, at least by sight. The authors identified few reports of participants being “ripped off” (e.g. sold fake or poor quality drugs) – despite frequent reports from research participants of the market being characterised by a “dog-eat-dog” attitude – and credit arrangements between sellers and buyers were also common. At higher levels, drug dealers were described as acting co-operatively rather than competitively.

Similarly, in a combined ethnographic and survey-based study of heroin user lifestyles and economic behaviour, Maher and colleagues (Maher *et al.*, 1998, p.1) focused on the “street-level drug market” in Cabramatta, New South Wales. The study aimed to quantify the cost of drug use and associated crime as well as detail the various ways heroin users generated income. The heroin drug marketplace in Cabramatta was dominated by Indochinese user/sellers. The authors found that the quantity and price of heroin varied depending on people’s relations with a dealer:

Fieldwork and interviews suggest that there were at least two types of half-weights available for purchase ... “Asian halves”, which were reserved for Asian customers (usually dealers), typically consisted of a weighed half-gram .... “Aussie” or “junkie halves” were closer to what was known as a “streetie” and typically weighed between 0.3 and 0.4 gm.... There was also a version of the half-weight which was reserved for rank outsiders (i.e. non-Asian, non-regulars and non-locals). These “trippers’ halves” were the most expensive and some weighed less than 0.2 gm (Maher *et al*, p.9).

In another study, Dalton and Rowe (2004) addressed the heroin “drug trade” (rather than drug ‘market’) in an analysis of an inner Melbourne public housing estate. They

were interested in the relationship between the illicit drug trade and public housing, and in understanding the resilience of the illicit drug trade. In contrast to many scholars, Dalton and Rowe were interested in the networks that develop around the dealers and were concerned to identify the “complex social relations that are part of the economic exchange process” (p.235). Like Bammer and Sengoz (1994), they noted the essential role of trust between buyer and seller, the absence, or undermining, of which could result in market collapse. Dalton and Rowe argued that following the reduction in the Australian heroin supply that occurred in 2000-2001, established drug users were able to reconnect with reliable dealers as they were recognised from previous repeated contacts. Such arrangements excluded unknown potential buyers, however, and it was here that a second exchange process developed, that of the ‘middleman’ or ‘runner’:

In this way trust relations are built between dealer and middleman, on one hand, and middleman and user on the other. Both relationships are mutually beneficial.... [T]hree groups of actors shape and gain from the social economy of drug dealing ... the user gains access to a reliable source of good quality heroin. The middleman benefits by taxing a small amount of heroin from each transaction that he or she facilitates. The dealer... profits from drug sales and the protection provided by the middleman (Dalton and Rowe, 2004, p.235-6).

The complexity of social relations within drug distribution systems has also been described by Denton (2001) in her ethnography of the lives of women drug dealers in Melbourne. She noted that:

[w]hile [drug] workers and customers are the least trusted and least valued ... [s]ome workers, particularly those who demonstrated loyalty, were treated as part of a family, and many customers – particularly regular customers – were the subject of an ethical business style (Denton, 2001, p.110).

This “ethical business style” of dealing incorporated commonly understood ‘good’ business practices – for example, providing quality drugs and value-for-money; being honest, punctual and reliable. As with Maher and colleagues’ (1998) research, Denton’s research highlighted the differential opportunities available to people as a function of their social relationships with dealers.

Incorporating an international perspective, Coomber (2006, p.51) explored the provision by dealers of free drugs and credit in an analysis covering London and Sydney drug markets (Kings Cross and Cabramatta). He found that “freebies and credit” did occur but only under certain conditions: to trusted contacts, regular customers (those seen as good and respected customers) or friends. As some respondents suggested, “once a dealer has built up a relationship of relative trust with his/her client they may be willing, for good (reliable) customers, to give ‘a little extra’, supplemental to what is being bought”. Further international examples are provided in the work of Curtis and Wendel (2000) in the United States and May and Hough (2004) in England. These authors described the existence of both ‘closed’ and ‘open’ drug markets. Closed markets were those where participants would only transact if they knew and trusted each other. Open markets, on the other hand, were depicted as being open to any buyer, with no requirements for prior introduction. The work by Coomber (2006) and Maher and colleagues (1998) suggests, however, that even within so-called ‘open’ markets, establishing relationships with dealers provides added benefit. Together, these studies of diverse drug markets/marketplaces demonstrate that buyers and sellers are not always anonymous and that, indeed, relationships between buyers and sellers are crucial to the success of drug markets, from the perspective of both customers and dealers.

### ***Political economy***

Drug market analyses from a political economy perspective also challenge the neo-classical economic framework apparent in epidemiological and criminological analyses. Political economy is concerned with connections between economic systems (systems of production, distribution and consumption of material resources) and with political systems (local, national and global systems of power). A political economy of drug use concerns itself with the larger socio-economic and political factors that shape the conditions within which drug use is enacted and culturally constructed. It is a perspective that links the local, everyday lived experience of drug users with the broader political and economic structures and relations (whether related to economic development, housing, labour, migration, health, education and welfare) in which they are embedded.

For example, Dixon and Maher (2002) have drawn attention to the ways in which social inequalities and social structures shaped the practices of the young Indochinese heroin sellers in Cabramatta. They argued that “participation in the drug market provides these young people with benefits from which they are otherwise socially excluded – employment, economic opportunities, access to goods and services, friendship and fun” (p.107). Further, Dixon and Maher described how:

encounters with police were conducted in a climate of fear, racism and hostility [with many of the young people] subject to routine harassment, intimidation and mistreatment. [They] were detained and searched unlawfully and in a manner interpreted as denigrating and offensive by the wider Indo-Chinese community (2002, p.93).

Resentment of these practices was widespread. However, the authors argued that this resentment arose mainly because police practices were not in accord with understandings of Australian hegemonic cultural values of equality, justice and multiculturalism that young Indochinese people had internalised. Thus exclusionary policing practices went hand in hand with “cultural or normative inclusion”. Dixon and Maher argued that “the gap between socio-economic reality and cultural/normative promise” (2002, p.107) structured the lives of these young Indochinese Australians and created the conditions for crime and drug use.

International examples of the application of an explicit political economy approach to analysis of drug markets include: Waterston’s (1993) analysis of “street addicts”; Bourgois’ (1995) ethnography of crack-cocaine sellers in East Harlem in the United States; and Singer and Toledo’s (1994) analysis of what they termed “oppression illness”. These investigations examine the social and political forces (such as economic activities and class conflict) that undergird behavioural patterns, while simultaneously paying analytical attention to drug user agency.

For Waterston, drug use, rather than being viewed as a “bounded and self-perpetuating design for living”, should instead be seen as a set of social “responses to adversity as it is structured within a particular social system” (1993, p.34). She argued that “street addicts” are in fact an integral component of the late-capitalist political and economic system. Street addicts fulfil particular roles and functions in that they both provide a pool of cheap, expendable labour and at the same time serve

as “scapegoats”. As such, they are a group that can be blamed for many social ills (e.g. crime, urban decay) and, as well, become a negative reference group, exemplifying the consequences of the failure to embrace conventional roles and behaviour.

In his ethnographic analysis of Puerto Rican crack-cocaine dealers, Bourgois (1995) examined drug use and dealing in relation to class, race and gender inequalities. He positioned his analysis within the context of the restructuring of the global economy during the 1990s and the erosion of traditional working-class employment. These broad structural transformations had produced increasing social and economic marginalisation and exclusion of the working class, ethnic minorities and women. In this context, involvement in drug selling provided people with economic opportunities unavailable to them in the legal economy. Bourgois concluded that the violent and, ultimately, self-destructive styles of drug use and dealing that he observed, were the “epiphenomenal expression of deeper, structural dilemmas” (1995, p.319).

Finally, Singer, who has worked for several years with a Puerto Rican community in Connecticut in the United States, has also argued for the importance of understanding how social and economic oppression can shape drug using patterns (Singer, 1994). At a conference in 1994, Singer and Toledo (cited in Baer, Singer and Susser, 1997) coined the term ‘oppression illness’ to describe what they considered typified Puerto Rican drug users. ‘Oppression illness’ refers to the:

chronic traumatic effects of experiencing racism, classism (i.e. disdain and mistreatment of the poor and working class) and related oppression over long periods of time ... combined with the negative emotional effects of intense self-disparagement associated with being the enduring target of social bigotry. Individuals who suffer oppression illness.... have internalised their oppression and blame themselves for being poor and socially ostracized.  
(Baer *et al.*, 1997, p.146)

Other social science researchers have also sought to embed their accounts of drug-using scenes in the broader social and economic systems of which they are a part (see, for example, Agar and Schact Reisinger, 2002; Curtis, 1998; Friedman, 1998;

MacDonald and Marsh, 2002; Maher, 1997; Ruggiero, 2000; Ruggiero and South, 1997). These studies highlight the ways in which broader structural forces (social, economic, political and cultural) may constrain individual agency and render people (and social groups) vulnerable to social (including health) inequalities.

Simultaneously, by virtue of their grounded nature, the ethnographic studies point to the personal creativity displayed by drug users as they negotiate, and even resist, these structural constraints. For example, the criminological and law enforcement studies discussed earlier imply that if enforcement increases costs and risk sufficiently then people will leave the market. Findings from research by Maher and colleagues (Maher and Dixon, 2001; Maher *et al.*, 1998) in Cabramatta suggest, alternatively, that people often respond to these interventions with flexibility and innovation. They provide the example of the introduction of oral and nasal storage and transfer of heroin in response to increased law enforcement which provided dealers with the opportunity of swallowing drugs if approached by police. A second example was the dispersal of the marketplace to other geographical locations to avoid detection. The insensitive measures of price, purity and availability used in epidemiological and criminological approaches reveal little about the ongoing innovation and adaptation that may occur in a drug marketplace. Police crackdowns, or the ‘heroin drought’ studies that interpret the ‘disruption of the heroin market’ as evidence of the efficacy of supply reduction interventions, are underpinned by assumptions of passive marketplace participants. However, people react to changes. At all levels of the heroin supply chain, disruptions occur and people respond.

### ***Cultural dimensions***

‘Culture’ refers to the ideas, beliefs, meanings, values and practices that are shared by social groups. Culture provides the frame by which people interpret, make sense of, enact, and thereby construct, the world (Keesing, 1981). It is manifest in the capacity with which it enables people to perceive meaning in, or attach meaning to, social behaviour. Furthermore, culture is local, negotiated and contested and, thus, it is continually in process. As such, it has neither objective reality (although it may appear that way) nor deterministic power (Cohen, 1985). Consequently, cultural

analyses investigate the ways in which people's shared ideas and beliefs about the world shape (and explain) their practices.

An example of a drug market analysis from a cultural perspective is provided by Fitzgerald and colleagues in their study of a local street-based heroin market in Collingwood, Melbourne (Fitzgerald, Broad and Dare, 1999). The authors focused on the buyers/consumers of heroin rather than the sellers. Using a mix of archival data, surveys with local business operators, interviews with police and drug users, and documentary photographs, they identified the emergence of a "take-away ethic" that, they argued, had shaped the development of street-based heroin marketplaces in Melbourne. Young heroin consumers, went their argument, want fast, convenient, anonymous service, of the kind provided through, for example, fast-food chains. According to Fitzgerald and colleagues, the emergence of this style of heroin trade was demand-driven, with the shift to street heroin trade reflecting broader consumer changes occurring in society. They interpreted the heroin street trade as dovetailing with other trading that occurs in places such as Smith Street, Collingwood, a shopping strip where the focus is consumption and many takeaway goods are available. They characterised these emerging zones of street heroin trade as "street drug marketplaces" (p.113), suggesting we might "think of the street, not only the shops bordering it, as a kind of public marketplace in which vendors offer their goods for trade ... the dealers can be seen as vendors just like those vendors conducting their trade from inside their shops" (Fitzgerald, 1999, p.70).

One limitation of the analysis from Fitzgerald and colleagues is that it does not detail the relations, nor the interactions, between buyers and sellers. The sellers' practices are seen as shaped by the buyers' wants (demand) and there is no sense in which the sellers' agency has contributed to the ways in which heroin is exchanged. It is also a homogenising analysis in that all buyers in the market are presented as 'young heroin consumers' – no discussion occurs regarding older heroin users, although they are included in the study. Any work by buyers to establish relationships with specific sellers to foster better transactions is proscribed by the analysis. However, other literature suggests that this is a key element in drug, and indeed, many commodity transactions (Coomber, 2006; Geertz, 1978).

While Bourgois' (1995) research among crack dealers in East Harlem was underpinned by political-economic considerations, he simultaneously incorporated an analysis of the cultural dimensions of people's lives. Bourgois argued that the "inner-city street culture" he observed developed an "explosive cultural creativity that is in defiance of racism and economic marginalization" (p.8). In addition, involvement in substance use and sale provided the material base for this oppositional style. While Bourgois argued that street culture emerged out of a "personal search for dignity and a rejection of racism and subjugation" (*ibid*, p.9), in his view, this street culture ultimately became the vector for "personal degradation and community ruin" (*ibid*). Of particular interest in Bourgois' analysis is his discussion of how these drug users were not operating through some alternative cultural logic distinct from the mainstream but were, in fact, pursuing their version of the hegemonic "American Dream" of rugged individualism, rapid upward economic mobility and conspicuous consumption. Conflict, and ultimately hegemonic categorisation as 'deviant', arose as a consequence of their limited capacity to achieve their desires through legitimate means.

### ***Rethinking drug market subjects***

A useful framework for thinking about drug market subjects is provided by Wilk (1996). He argued that underlying many accounts of economy and economic behaviour are three models of human nature, or subjectivity. These are the self-interested model, the social model, and the moral, or cultural, model.

The self-interested model, the model of neo-classical economics (starting with Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776), has at its foundation humans as rational decision-makers, acting out of self-interest, always seeking to maximise their utility. It is this motive for exchange – 'self-interest, profit-seeking, and maximising gains' – that underpins much neo-classical economic theory. It implies that economists see human beings as innately immoral, hedonistic pleasure seekers single-mindedly calculating their own advantage in every situation (Wilk, 1996) and is the model of human nature implicit in epidemiological and criminological perspectives on drugs. Given that drug users are frequently portrayed as selfish hedonists (Brook and

Stringer, 2005), economic subject models may be seen as easily meshing with analyses of drug markets.

The ‘social model of human nature’ focuses on the ways in which people form groups, co-operate and exercise power, as well as on social inequalities and how social structure shapes practices. This model implies that understanding people’s actions requires study of such things as solidarity processes and shared group beliefs, rather than individual self-interest. Social models of human nature form the basis for political economy perspectives on economies and economic behaviour.

In the last of Wilk’s three models of human nature – the moral, or cultural, model – the focus is how people’s ideas and beliefs about the world explain their actions. Here, cosmology – the culturally patterned view of the universe and people’s place within it – shapes practice such that actions are guided by ideas about right and wrong, and “symbolic systems and cognitive categories define the realm of the possible and shape choice” (1996, p.38).

Social and cultural frameworks challenge the utilitarian assumption that human beings are rational maximisers of their own utility. For example, research has demonstrated that people are often imperfect decision makers. Further, people do not always seek the optimum solution; instead they set a minimum goal and adopt the first strategy that meets this goal. This has led to the notion of people as *satisficers* rather than maximisers. People also express bounded rationality, that is their decisions are limited by their perceptions, by imperfect knowledge and by their subjective feelings (Wilk, 1996).

Social and cultural frameworks also challenge the tendency – apparent in drug market literature where the focus is a specific drug – of fetishising the commodity. In much drugs literature, value is assumed to be an intrinsic property of the substance rather than arising from cultural definitions, and the social and cultural values that obtain in the marketplace (of relevance to the economic idea of elasticity/inelasticity of demand) are ignored. Economic models also assume that people have a stable set of preferences that can be ranked. However, there is no reason to expect that people’s preferences would remain stable for more than a few moments at a time

(Wilk, 1996). In drugs literature, this assumption marries well with biomedical and psychological discourses around drug use which also assume that drug users have a stable ‘drug of choice’.

Wilk argued that rather than seeing these models of human nature as mutually exclusive, at various times all three motives operate. As such, the three models may be seen as “merely the extreme positions on several linear scales” with people generally operating in the “messy gray areas between, trying to balance self-interest, group interest, and moral precepts drawn from our cultural beliefs” (1996, p.40). To fully account for people’s actions in drug marketplaces, consideration needs to be given to the complexities of human subjectivity.

## **Conclusion**

Most Australian literature on drug markets and marketplaces is framed by economic models that assume anonymous buyers and sellers, the market driven by the law of supply and demand, and an individual, rational, maximiser of utility as the market actor. Some literature reaches further, with implicit or explicit critiques of the former, by stressing the importance of social, political and cultural dimensions of drug users’ lives and directing attention to the importance and creativity of personal agency. The research presented in this thesis is located within the latter frame. In the next chapter I introduce the focus of my analysis, the Footscray drug marketplace.

## **Chapter 3**

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# **Locating the marketplace**

In order to locate the drug marketplace, some detail on its broader geographical, historical, political, and socio-economic context is necessary. This chapter provides a description of the suburb of Footscray in which the drug marketplace sits, as well as presenting an overview of the arrival, and experiences, of Vietnamese people in Australia. This detail serves to situate the experiences of the Vietnamese dealers who are the focus of the thesis. Further to this, I also include a brief discussion of Vietnamese people and drug use in Australia. The chapter concludes with some historical detail on the local drug marketplace.

### **Footscray → Footscray → Foot-ray**

The suburb of Footscray is situated alongside the Maribyrnong River, some six kilometres west of the Melbourne Central Business District (CBD). It is one of nine suburbs which constitute the local government area (LGA) of the City of Maribyrnong. The Maribyrnong LGA covers an area of approximately 31 square kilometres and has a population of 63,355 (as at the 2006 Australian Census). It is the smallest and most densely populated municipality in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Although, historically, almost the entire population of Footscray had been Australian-born, by the 1950s almost one-fifth of the population had been born overseas and by 1966 it was almost one-third (Lack, 1991). In the 2006 Census, just under half (49%) the population was born overseas, the majority from non-English speaking countries (46% of the total population). The five major countries of birth outside Australia were Viet Nam,<sup>10</sup> China, India, Bangladesh and the United Kingdom, with 51% of the total population speaking a language other than English. Of the total Footscray population of 11,775, 11% (1,279) were born in Viet Nam.

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<sup>10</sup> In the Vietnamese language, the country name is given by two words. In recent times, Australia has recognised this and the country is now officially written as ‘Viet Nam’. Where I use quotations from earlier scholars, these employ the previous English name, ‘Vietnam’.

The next largest group, those born in China, made up 5% of the Footscray population. For the Maribyrnong LGA, in the 2006 Census, the population came from 135 different countries and spoke more than 85 languages (City of Maribyrnong, 2008). A key contributor to the ethnic diversity of Footscray was the migrant hostel, in the adjoining suburb of Maribyrnong (also part of the Maribyrnong LGA). The Maribyrnong Migrant Hostel was one of several migrant hostels established in Melbourne to resettle post-World War II refugees. Since that time, the hostel has accommodated migrants from virtually every national group arriving in Australia. Additionally, until recently, inexpensive housing (both private and public) was available in the area and, until the 1970s, there were jobs available in unskilled industries – the traditional employment option for newly arrived migrants, particularly those from non-English speaking countries. These conditions further supported the settlement of newly-arrived immigrants in Footscray and the surrounding suburbs.

Footscray was named after a small English town. In the mid-1980s, it came to be known as ‘Footiscray’, following its pronunciation by Italian furniture-businessman Franco Cozzo, in his series of television advertisements. Footscray historian John Lack (1991, p.408) noted that, “ironically”, Cozzo’s “lilting ‘Footiscray!’... gave to Footscray a unique identifier at the very time when the Italian numbers and cultural influence were in eclipse.... Indeed by 1986 Footscray’s Vietnamese were rivalling her Yugoslavs in numbers”. This burgeoning Vietnamese presence meant that, increasingly, the name of the suburb was pronounced ‘Foot-ray’<sup>11</sup> by a significant proportion of her population.

Vietnamese people have been present in Footscray for close to thirty years and, as Lack (1991, p.407) wrote, their “impact on the Footscray business centre has been profound”. In the 1980s, “Chinese-Vietnamese traders, catering for the large South-east Asian population” transformed two of the main streets into “market-style precincts”. The Footscray CBD is now replete with Vietnamese restaurants and

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<sup>11</sup> Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language and, thus, Vietnamese renditions of polysyllabic English words frequently break them into multiple single syllables. I indicate this with the use of hyphens.

cafés, markets and grocery stores that stock goods and fresh produce, either imported from Viet Nam, or, in recent times, grown or manufactured locally. In addition to fresh produce and grocery stores, a range of Vietnamese-run services – medical, dental, legal, housing and financial – are also available. Even mainstream Australian businesses, such as banks, have made accommodation to the Vietnamese population, providing signage in Vietnamese language and frequently employing Vietnamese staff. Thus, transactions may be conducted entirely in Vietnamese, making the area popular with both local Vietnamese and those living in the surrounding suburbs. While the Census reveals movement of the Vietnamese population out of the areas of residential concentration, the Footscray CBD remains an important site for Vietnamese people throughout Melbourne's western suburbs.

From its initial beginnings as a river-crossing to shorten the journey between Melbourne and Geelong (an historically significant seaport 75 kilometres south-west of Melbourne), Footscray expanded into a major manufacturing and industrial suburb. Consequently, throughout much of its history, the suburb has been strongly working-class in composition. In the period 1860-1890, Footscray experienced its first economic boom, mainly through the growth of brick-making, quarrying, fat-boiling, meat-canning and candle-making industries. These industries had shifted away from the Melbourne CBD as a result of pressure from the city's expanding residential population who sought to rid their area of noxious industry.

The concentration of industry and manufacturing in Footscray continued up until the 1970s. However, between 1974 and 1976, the number of factories in Footscray declined from 180 to 143 and local employment fell by 20%. This was primarily in “food processing, chemicals, textiles and metal fabrications” (Lack, 1991, p.383). These declines were the result of economic recession in Australia and a major restructuring of the economy where “tariff reduction … exposed Australian industry to intense overseas competition, fuelled intensive capital investment in labour-saving machinery and pushed many manufacturers ‘off-shore’” (*ibid*). By 1979, unemployment was above 7% in Melbourne's western suburbs (including Footscray) and especially high among school leavers, other youth and women. While this period saw employment growth in the areas of entertainment and community services, the people of the western suburbs – “overwhelmingly blue-collar in occupation and of

primary and junior secondary school education background” – were disadvantaged when competing for jobs in these newer employment growth areas (*ibid*, p.484).

In recent times, while still retaining much of its working-class character, Footscray has been undergoing gentrification. This is reflected in shifts in the occupations of its residents, revealed in the five-yearly Census. In the 1986 Census, 20% of the Footscray population worked as labourers, 21.5% were employed in intermediate production roles and 15.9% were trades people. Managers/administrators made up just 1.7% of the Footscray population with professionals adding a further 8.6%. By 2006, 12.3% of the workforce were labourers, 10.4% technicians/trades people while managers/administrators had increased to 8.8% and professionals to 24%.

Despite growing gentrification, unemployment in Footscray remains high relative to metropolitan Melbourne as a whole. In the 2006 Census, unemployment was 11.8% in Footscray and 8.6% for the entire Maribyrnong LGA. This compares to an unemployment rate of 5.4% for metropolitan Melbourne as a whole. Indeed, on several socio-economic measures, the Maribyrnong LGA and the suburb of Footscray rank low. For example, the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD), compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is a measure of socio-economic status which allows areas to be ranked in terms of their relative disadvantage, with lower scores indicating relatively greater disadvantage.<sup>12</sup> In the 2006 Census, for Maribyrnong as a whole, the IRSD was 948.5, placing it as the third most disadvantaged LGA in metropolitan Melbourne, after Greater Dandenong (893.9) and Brimbank (930.5). The IRSD for Footscray was 902.6.

In keeping with the relative disadvantage of the suburb, a range of social services are located within the Footscray CBD. These include health, employment, housing,

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<sup>12</sup> The IRSD is a general socio-economic index which summarises 17 different measures such as “low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment” and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations. The score is an average of people and households within a given area. High scores on the IRSD (indicating a relative lack of disadvantage) occur when an area has “few households with low incomes, few people with no qualifications or in low skilled occupations”. Low scores on the index occur when an area has “many households with low income, many people with no qualifications, or many people in low skilled occupations” (Pink, 2008, p.11).

material aid, youth- and religious-based charity services, as well as a Centrelink office (the government agency responsible for administration of welfare payments). Several migrant-specific services and organisations are also situated in Footscray (e.g. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre; Inner Western Region Migrant Resource Centre; Vietnamese Women's Welfare Service).

### **Vietnamese settlement in Australia**

According to Coughlan (1998, p.177), the first Vietnamese people arrived in Australia in August 1920. They were “38 indentured coolie labourers” who were part of “a larger group being transported between the French possessions of Vietnam and New Caledonia”. Their ship was blown off-course, compelling them to seek refuge in Townsville, in north Queensland. The next group to arrive in Australia were Vietnamese students who came in the 1950s to study at Australian universities under the Colombo Plan, an aid program aimed at providing a university education to people from developing countries. By 1975, there were approximately 1,300 Viet Nam-born people in Australia. They consisted of orphans adopted into Australian families (about 450), students at tertiary institutions (approximately 470), and members of diplomatic families (41) as well as “former students who had decided to remain in Australia, Vietnamese women who had married Australian men, Vietnamese visitors (including professionals and business people) … and a small number who had migrated to Australia by other means” (*ibid*, p.178).

However, it was the fall of Saigon to Ho Chi Minh’s army in April 1975, which was to be the key determinant shaping the Vietnamese presence and experience in Australia. It is estimated that between 1975 and 1998, “more than 2 million Vietnamese permanently emigrated from Vietnam, about 100,000 more unsuccessfully sought refugee status in the Asian region, and possibly 1 million other Vietnamese perished in their flight from Vietnam”. By 1998, although the refugee exodus had virtually ceased, “about 40,000 Vietnamese asylum seekers” remained in refugee camps throughout Asia (e.g. Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Hong Kong) and “a further 100,000 Vietnamese nationals” legally emigrated from Viet Nam each year under the Vietnamese government’s Orderly Departure Program (ODP) (Coughlan, 1998, p.175).

The first Vietnamese refugees arrived in Australia on June 20, 1975. By 1981, 49,616 Vietnamese people had been resettled in Australia. In 2006, the Census recorded 159,846 Viet Nam-born people in Australia (0.8% of Australia's total population). After the Chinese and Italians, the Vietnamese are now Australia's third largest immigrant group originating from a non-English speaking country (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008b). The majority reside in the states of New South Wales (63,790) and Victoria (58,873), with the Victorian Vietnamese population representing 36.8% of Australia's total Viet Nam-born population (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008a). In contrast to other immigrant groups, Vietnamese settlement has been characterised by a high degree of residential spatial concentration which is evident at the state, city and LGA level. In NSW, the majority of Vietnamese people have settled in the Fairfield LGA (which contains the suburb of Cabramatta). In Victoria, the Viet Nam-born population is distinctly concentrated in the LGAs of Brimbank (25.7%), Greater Dandenong (18.0%), and Maribyrnong (10.4%) (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2008).<sup>13</sup>

A comprehensive account of recent Vietnamese migration to Australia is provided by Viviani (1996, p.102). She reported that between 1975 and 1995, there were a series of "waves of migration" which corresponded with political events in Viet Nam as well as being shaped by international and national policies. The initial wave was comprised of refugees who left Viet Nam at the fall of Saigon in April 1975. This group consisted mainly of people with political, bureaucratic and military connections to the South Vietnamese government and to the Americans. They were primarily well-educated ethnic Vietnamese Catholics and some ethnic Chinese.

The second wave of refugees arrived in Australia during the period 1976 to 1978. This group, predominantly ethnic Vietnamese, was composed of people caught in refugee camps from the first wave as well as people experiencing difficulties from political and economic change introduced by the new Vietnamese government. The third wave of Vietnamese migration consisted of a mass exodus of ethnic Chinese as a result of the "closure of private business in Viet Nam in March 1978" and moves

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<sup>13</sup> As noted previously, these LGAs are also the three most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in metropolitan Melbourne.

by “government officials to expel ethnic Chinese” (*ibid*, p.103). The majority of this group were ethnic Chinese traders, who, “unskilled by Australian standards, formed the trading nucleus that is now such an obvious feature of the areas of residential concentration” (*ibid*), such as Cabramatta in Sydney’s west and Footscray in Melbourne.

Following the third wave, Viet Nam once more “constrained departures” and Australia and other resettlement countries “concentrated on clearing the backlog of people from camps and on family reunion under the ODP program from Vietnam” (*ibid*). The fourth wave followed the adoption by western countries of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) in 1989. The CPA was an international initiative developed to resettle people who remained detained in Asian refugee camps and, at the same time, discourage further departures from Viet Nam. The plan would have the effect of reducing acceptance rates by countries of resettlement and increasing delays in the processing of applications (Jakubowicz, 2004). The response to the adoption of the CPA was an increase in departures from Viet Nam in 1989 which then brought a further “peak of arrivals” to Australia in 1990 and 1991 (Viviani, 1996, p.103). These arrivals were primarily people who had spent long periods in refugee camps in Indonesia and Hong Kong. They “were generally working-class or lower middle-class Vietnamese seeking to improve their situations by leaving Vietnam. There were all types among them – small traders, rural workers, urban workers and the unemployed” (*ibid*). Coincident with these four waves of Vietnamese refugee arrivals were “almost constant arrivals of family reunion migrants, settled in Australia either directly from Vietnam or from camps” (*ibid*, pp.103-4). By the mid-1990s, refugee arrivals had declined and people arriving under the CPA or people arriving under the family reunion program (Vietnamese Family Migration Program) constituted the majority of Vietnamese people in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008a).

Vietnamese refugees faced considerable hardships. Most left Viet Nam in small, frequently unsafe, boats. Many were caught by Vietnamese authorities and returned to Viet Nam to face imprisonment, before they again attempted to leave. The boat journeys were “extremely dangerous and some lost their lives at sea, by drowning, starvation or murder by pirates” (Thomas, 1999, p.9). Those who survived the boat

journeys then faced months, or even years, in overcrowded refugee camps across Asia. For early Vietnamese refugees accepted for resettlement in Australia, the hardships did not necessarily end once they had arrived: there was no previously settled group they could call on for support, they faced difficulties in learning English and completing schooling, as well as experiencing the added financial burden of “obligations to support relatives” who remained in Viet Nam by sending money, presents or medicines (Ho, 2006, p.102).

Compounding these difficulties, the early Vietnamese refugees arrived during a time of economic recession and high unemployment making finding work even more difficult. In Footscray, for example, as noted previously, Vietnamese people arrived at the time when traditional, unskilled or semi-skilled factory jobs were in decline. Available jobs were increasingly in “low-skilled, unregulated and non-unionised areas of the workforce” – particularly in the “clothing, textile, footwear, catering and retail trades” (Lack and Templeton, 1995, p.159) – as the restructuring of industry in the 1980s reduced demand for unskilled labour. Migrants, including the Vietnamese, were particularly drawn to these low-paid, unregulated areas. Migrant women were over-represented in outwork in the garment trade (see, for example, Pardy, 2005 for an account of the experiences of Vietnamese women garment-outworkers) while the growth of sub-contracting in the areas of construction and transport saw migrant men also increasingly “engaged in exploitative and marginalising outwork” (*ibid*). Vietnamese people in Australia continue to have higher rates of unemployment than other Australians. In 2006, the unemployment rate among Viet Nam-born was 11%. The corresponding rate among the Australian-born population was 5.2%. This continuing high unemployment rate among the Viet Nam-born population has been attributed to lower rates of English proficiency. In the 2006 Census, for example, 43% of the Viet Nam-born in Australia reported speaking English not well or not at all (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008a). It is important to note, however, that these figures have occurred in the context of extensive cuts to government programs – in particular migrant employment support, English language classes and community support programs – during the 1990s (Jakubowicz, 2004).

While the above suggests considerable disadvantage and marginalisation faced by Vietnamese people in Australia, it must be kept in mind that official statistics are

incomplete. Some Vietnamese people find work in businesses run by other Vietnamese migrants such as restaurants, cafes and shops. Such businesses may be part of the underground economy (untaxed, cash-in-hand work) that does not register in official statistics. Other Vietnamese people may provide unpaid labour to family businesses, thus being sustained by the income of the family although officially unemployed. As Bourgois (1995, p.3) has noted in regard to residents of East Harlem in New York, despite large numbers of people having official incomes below the poverty line, most residents managed to subsist because of their participation in the “enormous, uncensused, untaxed underground economy”. While, to my knowledge, comparable information is not available for the Vietnamese in Australia, research on the size of the Australian underground economy overall – estimated to be 14% of GDP (Bajada, 2005, p.179)<sup>14</sup> – suggests that, perhaps, at least some Vietnamese people (along with other Australians) may be participating in such unreported, untaxed activities as a means to meet basic subsistence needs.

Furthermore, several analyses have highlighted that, while there is evidence of considerable socio-economic disadvantage within the Vietnamese community, there is also evidence of increasing polarisation such that some Vietnamese people have achieved considerable success in terms of economic (income, occupation) and educational status (Carroll, 2003; Viviani, 1996). This is particularly reflected in the higher proportional representation of Australians from Vietnamese backgrounds who are enrolled at Australian universities (Viviani, 1997), and in the relatively high rate of home-ownership among the Viet Nam-born. In the 2006 Census, for example, 73.8% of Viet Nam-born people either owned or were purchasing homes in comparison to 69.9% of the population of Victoria as a whole (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2007).

In 1997, Thomas warned that the “low levels of English proficiency, together with extremely high levels of unemployment … indicate that, if this pattern continues, it is highly probable that an underclass of unskilled and unemployed Vietnamese will

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<sup>14</sup> While there are various definitions of the underground economy, Bajada (2005) confines his definition to unreported income from legitimate activities, thereby explicitly excluding income from illegal activities.

develop” (Thomas, 1997, p.293). Despite there being evidence of substantial social differentiation within the Vietnamese-Australian population in terms of social mobility, levels of education and occupations (Carroll, 2003; Viviani, 1996, 1997), broad Census data suggest that Thomas’ concern has been borne out. Further, while Census data in Victoria suggest some movement out of the areas of spatial concentration, the Vietnamese still remain concentrated in relatively few areas of Victoria (and New South Wales). As Thomas (1997, p.293) noted, while spatial concentration enables “cultural ties of language and shared interests”, there is a risk that English proficiency is reduced, thereby perpetuating disadvantage.

In conjunction with these socio-economic difficulties, Vietnamese refugees arrived in Australia at a time of liberalisation of Australia’s ‘White Australia’ immigration policy and fears of an influx of people from Asia. Thomas (1999, p.18) noted that, of all the Asian-born in Australia, the Viet Nam-born have been particularly subject to a “high level of attention in the media and public discourse”, especially in regard to debates over immigration. She attributed this to limited possibilities of “social interaction between Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese” (*ibid*, p.26) due to the spatial concentration of Vietnamese people, as well as their relatively recent arrival. As she wrote:

[t]he images of the Vietnam War as well as the earliest media stereotypes of Vietnamese people arriving in Australia assisted in constructing Vietnamese people in homogenous and static formations that marked their otherness and their transgressive possibilities. These representations, as well as the absence of much personal contact with the majority culture, have led to contemporary images of Vietnamese migrants as dangerous and corrupting.... The media representations of Vietnamese have almost all promulgated the stereotype of Vietnamese as violent, as victims, or as acceptable only when appropriating Australian mainstream values which deny their ethnicity” (Thomas, 1999, p.26).

Australian perceptions and responses to Vietnamese migrants have also been shaped by the arrival by boat of some Vietnamese refugees. Although only approximately 2,000 people arrived by these means, these landings “had a far-reaching and complex

impact on many Australians' deeply held perceptions of the vulnerability of their country to Asian penetration" (Viviani, 1996, p.235).

For many Vietnamese people in Australia, the consequences of such stereotypes and representations have been ongoing experiences of discrimination, marginalisation and everyday racism (Dunn, 2004; Jakubowicz, 2004; Mellor, 2004; Teo, 2000). Indeed, Thomas (1998, p.74) has argued that Vietnamese exclusion is not only felt at the "abstract ideational level" of consciousness, but is also experienced through bodies as the "body becomes the root of marginality because of the ready stigmatisation of corporeal difference". Australians of Asian background are continually reminded of their bodily difference from the European-Australian mainstream through questions such as 'Where are you from?' Through such questions their outsider status is reinforced; they are told they do not belong.

### ***Vietnamese involvement in drug use and drug markets***

A particularly pervasive representation of Vietnamese people in Australia, especially Vietnamese youth, has been their association in the media and public discourse with images of 'gangs', crime and drugs, particularly heroin (Beyer and Reid, 2000; Jakubowicz, 2004; Teo, 2000). During the early 1990s, there was growing concern about heroin use in Australia. Through the media, the problem was portrayed as predominantly one associated with people of 'Asian' background. This led to a focus by police on young people of 'Asian' appearance, resulting in higher arrests of this group of young people, in turn furthering the construction of the problem as primarily associated with 'Asian' youth (Beyer, Reid and Crofts, 2001).

Co-existing with representations of Vietnamese youth as dangerous and violent is an increasing recognition of the vulnerability of young Vietnamese people to drug use and to associated harms such as blood-borne viruses and overdose (Hellard, Nguyen, Higgs, Guy and Mijch, 2005; Higgs, Maher, Jordens, Dunlop and Sargent, 2001; Ho and Maher, 2008; Maher *et al.*, 1998; Maher, Sargent *et al.*, 2001; Reid, Higgs, Beyer and Crofts, 2002; Swift, Maher and Sunjic, 1999; Webber, 2002). Explanations for the high levels of risk and harm among Vietnamese youth are diverse. In some studies, explanations centre on either lack of knowledge among

individuals or on static and deterministic conceptualisations of socio-economic factors. For example, Reid and colleagues (2002, p.127) argued that, “due to high unemployment, poor English proficiency, experience of racism, social and economic difficulties, inter-generational conflicts, acculturation and peer pressure”, the Vietnamese community “has become vulnerable to illicit drug use and distribution”. Similar explanations were proposed by Webber (2002) in her investigation into illicit drug use among Melbourne-based Vietnamese youth. Limitations of such studies are that the conceptualisations of Vietnamese people’s socio-economic conditions are ahistorical and static, cultural differences are often conflated with social inequality (Maher, 2002) and the causes of young Vietnamese people’s vulnerability are located in characteristics of the Vietnamese population (e.g. poor English skills, high unemployment) rather than in the responses of Australian social and economic systems (e.g. racism, lack of English classes or employment programs). Such constructions run the danger of essentialising Vietnamese drug users as a risk-category, rather than examining environments which are themselves productive of risk or focusing on “removing structural impediments to risk reduction” (Maher, 2002, p.319).<sup>15</sup>

Exceptions to these sorts of accounts are seen in studies from Maher, Dixon and colleagues. These researchers have concerned themselves with the complex interplay of cultural and environmental/structural factors in shaping Vietnamese youth’s engagement with drug use and vulnerability to harm. In their body of work in Cabramatta, Maher, Dixon and colleagues (Dixon and Maher, 2002; Ho, 2006; Ho and Maher, 2008; Maher and Dixon, 1999; Maher *et al.*, 1998) have consistently drawn attention to the ways in which social inequalities and social structures shaped the practices of the young Indochinese heroin sellers in Cabramatta. For example, Ho (2006, p.104) found in her study of young Indochinese in Cabramatta, that these people asserted that their “lack of English and professional skills made it difficult to earn money legally” so they resorted to dealing as a means of making money. While

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<sup>15</sup> See also Rhodes (2002) on the necessity of considering the ways in which environments produce harm and, in the context of injecting drug use and hepatitis C transmission, Fraser (2004) on how a focus on individual responsibility for reducing risk elides discussion of the social and political responsibilities of “relevant organisations, governments and society as a whole” (p.217).

Ho's research was concerned with the cultural characteristics of Vietnamese drug users in Cabramatta and how these shape their vulnerability to drug-related harm, she argued that it is the "potent interaction between cultural characteristics and environment/structural factors [which] exerts a powerful influence on Vietnamese [injecting drug users'] risk-taking and help-seeking behaviours" (Ho and Maher, 2008, p.426).

In Melbourne, street-based heroin marketplaces, dominated by Vietnamese dealers, emerged through the 1990s in the inner-city suburbs of Fitzroy/Collingwood, Richmond, Footscray, in the Melbourne city centre, and in the peri-urban suburb of Springvale some 25kms from the Melbourne CBD. Prior to the mid-1990s, heroin supply in Melbourne was generally characterised as residentially based. Over the period 1980-95 heroin distribution occurred in a variety of settings including dealers' houses, squats or public hotels. Describing the particular inner-city area of Fitzroy/Collingwood, Dietze and Fitzgerald (2002) detailed the shift from public hotels, to the emergence of amusement parlours and pool rooms as sites for heroin transactions. The authors argued that the main streets in areas such as Fitzroy/Collingwood were rapidly becoming entertainment zones, dealing in many pleasurable commodities (e.g. live music, video games) and attracting a flow of recreational consumers. This changing pattern of recreational culture in the inner-city created opportunities for changes in heroin distribution. Heroin became available through the same sites that distributed these legal commodities (*ibid*, p.297).

From mid-1995 to 2001, a further cultural shift in the distribution and use of heroin occurred with the emergence of street-based heroin marketplaces. These were characterised by ready access to heroin, visible dealing, market mobility in response to law enforcement activities, public disorder, high levels of associated crime and public consumption of drugs. Young Indochinese people were involved in selling heroin in many of these amusement parlours and street marketplaces (Fitzgerald, 1999). Reference to the role played by Indochinese heroin sellers is also found in Denton (2001, p.87) from her research among Anglo-women drug dealers in Melbourne in the early 1990s. She reported a "recent influx of young Vietnamese dealers trading in high quality rock heroin" at substantially lower prices. Similarly,

Mercer (1999, p.107) argued that, prior to the 1990s, people generally required “an introduction to a contact in order to purchase heroin”. However, in the early 1990s, a “sector of the Indochinese community made a grab for a higher proportion of the market share; achieving this by making distribution methods more consumer-service orientated”, that is, “providing the purest ‘dope’ at the cheapest prices and improving access” via street selling.<sup>16</sup> The shift to public heroin distribution, combined with the different physical appearance of Indochinese dealers in relation to the European-Australian mainstream rendered these street drug marketplaces particularly visible, generating considerable fear and outrage from the community (Fitzgerald and Threadgold, 2004).<sup>17</sup>

With respect to Footscray, the spatial concentration of Vietnamese people in the area has had both positive and negative consequences. The area supports cultural ties through shared language and interests (and access to Vietnamese goods and services) but at the same time, the concentration of Vietnamese people in the area, with the attendant linking of Vietnamese young people with drugs and gangs, has generated negative media representations of Footscray as a dangerous ghetto (Thomas, 1999). In the public’s imagination, the image of Footscray has long been a negative one. This is, in part, a consequence of its strongly working-class character. Lack (1991, p.241), for example, wrote of the efforts of the local papers in the 1920s to “correct” the suburb’s “undeserved reputation for mud, smells and ugliness, for ruffianism and larrikinism, and for social evils such as sly grog shops and disorderly houses”. During this period there were frequent calls for action to be taken to stem local ‘push’ (i.e. youth gang) violence. In public discourse in the 1990s and on into the present century, gang images are still routinely associated with Footscray but are more likely to be focused on ‘Asian gangs’ and to be concerned with violence and

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<sup>16</sup> While Vietnamese dealers are implicated in the shifts to street-based heroin distribution in Melbourne, this is not to say that they are the only groups involved. People of Romanian and Turkish descent have previously dominated heroin distribution in Melbourne and dealers from Indigenous, Anglo-Celtic and Greek backgrounds have also been identified as selling heroin in these marketplaces (Fitzgerald, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Fitzgerald and Threadgold (2004, p.408) suggested that the fear generated by street drug marketplace can be seen not just as a fear of drugs but also as a fear of the “dissolution of the sensible world” where “signs of the street drug market illustrate a breaking down of the familiar boundaries of the world”.

the modern ‘social evil’ of illicit drugs (see, for example, Berry, Gough and Smith, 2004; Beyer and Reid, 2000; Buttler, 2006; Douez, 2000; Leiber and Rodd, 1997).

## **The Footscray drug marketplace**

Embedded within the thriving and dynamic Footscray commercial district is the equally thriving drug marketplace. It has a substantial history, operating in its current form since the early 1990s and seemingly resistant to all law enforcement efforts to suppress it. At a 1992 crime prevention conference, a Victoria Police Chief Inspector reported that, in Footscray, during “the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been an ... increase in the incidence of drug dealing and its associated problems” (Byrne, 1992, pp.149-50). Similarly, at a criminal justice conference in 1993, an Acting Chief Inspector from the Footscray Police Station, reported:

During 1990, the Footscray CIB [Criminal Investigation Branch] became increasingly aware that crime in the [Footscray] CBD involving Asian offenders and victims was escalating. Concerns were also raised by Vietnamese traders in a letter ... [which] expressed strong concerns about criminal activity ... [and] nominated general illegal practices of dealing drugs and stolen property and extortion of shopkeepers (Tuck, 1995, p.2).

By 1995, street-based heroin selling in Footscray was so well-established as to rate mention in an interstate parliamentary record, where the then New South Wales Minister of Police noted:

Recent reports from Melbourne indicate that Victorian police are recording increased heroin arrests and overdoses. Chief Superintendent Brian Ritchie of the Melbourne police was quoted as saying he believed the Cabramatta experience was being duplicated in Melbourne, with young dealers making sales at railway stations and shopping centres around Footscray (NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard, 1995).

The drug marketplace in Footscray remained active and highly visible when I commenced fieldwork in 2003. Heroin was the primary drug sold and, in general,

heroin sellers were of Vietnamese ethnicity while their customers were non-Vietnamese. The exchange of benzodiazepines and other sleeping aids was also commonplace – the most desired of these being gel capsule temazepam preparations – and other drugs (e.g. cannabis, amphetamines, prescription pharmaceuticals) were also sold intermittently. The intensively-policed marketplace operated seven days a week, mainly during daylight hours,<sup>18</sup> with weekends less busy than weekdays. While drug transactions did occur anywhere across the Footscray CBD, during fieldwork the busy retail zone of the open-air pedestrian mall (approximately 100m in length) was a key site for these exchanges. Pardy (2008, p.2) has described the Footscray mall as a space of “intersection, departure and arrival, and of rest, consumption, engagement … [a] place [that] remains alive”. It is a space dominated by ‘bargain’ shops stocking everything from crockery, video cassettes and gardening tools to children’s toys and underwear – all at remarkably low prices. In addition, there are banks, a large department store and several cafés/food outlets. When the weather is fine, the mall is filled with up to a hundred people at any one time, passing through on their way to and from shopping, work, school or university, or remaining in the mall to eat at the cafés, catch up with friends or simply sit and enjoy the bustling atmosphere. Drug exchanges occurred within this vibrant and dynamic space.

At first glance, the Footscray drug marketplace could be characterised as composed of two separate and distinct social networks, the *Asians* (predominantly Vietnamese) and the *Aussies* (largely a mix of people from Anglo-Celtic or Southern/Eastern European backgrounds). Within the *Aussie*<sup>19</sup> network were heroin users who regularly purchased their heroin from the Vietnamese dealers and heroin users who generally purchased their heroin from other non-Vietnamese heroin dealers outside

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<sup>18</sup> By 6pm, the majority of shops in the Footscray CBD have closed for the day and, although several restaurants remain open until 9pm or 10pm, pedestrian traffic diminishes significantly at night-time. If dealers remained selling on the streets after dark, they would be even more visible and therefore more likely to attract the attention of police. Given this, most dealers ceased their dealing activities once the streets began to clear of people. Most returned home, although a small proportion travelled into the city to continue selling.

<sup>19</sup> Generally, emic terms are italicised in text unless they are direct quotations. However, where emic terms are used frequently – for example, *Aussie*, *Viet*, *caps* – italics are used only for the first appearance.

the Footscray drug marketplace. Many people in this latter group had commenced heroin use prior to the emergence of street-based selling dominated by Vietnamese, and had retained their connections to these pre-existing (and ongoing) systems of heroin distribution. While they were not usually customers of the Vietnamese dealers, members of this group of Aussies were, nevertheless, active participants in the drug marketplace. They were often locals who had grown up in the area and they came to Footscray to socialise, gossip, share the latest drug marketplace news (e.g. quality of heroin, size of caps, incidence of standovers, current intensity and style of policing), explore and organise opportunities for making money, and attend to other concerns of everyday life (e.g. shopping, service appointments and so forth).

The Asian and Aussie networks were separated socially, spatially and economically. The Vietnamese dealers largely spent their time interacting with other Vietnamese people, mostly at one end of the mall, while the Aussie regulars spent their time with other Aussies in a different area of the mall. For the most part, interactions between Vietnamese dealers and Aussies were brief and confined to drug transactions. However, these boundaries were not entirely fixed. In particular, there were eight non-Vietnamese women who were in relationships with, had children with or were ex-partners of Vietnamese men. These women would regularly spend time sitting and interacting with the Vietnamese dealers.

When selling, dealers would generally walk up and down the mall and its surrounding streets (expressed in Vietnamese as *dị vông vông*, meaning to go around), but at various times throughout the day they would congregate in the vicinity of a café in the mall, sometimes to sell heroin, but more often to drink coffee, eat, catch up on gossip or socialise. Drug exchanges were negotiated in several ways. Sometimes sustained eye-contact was sufficient to indicate interest in making an exchange. At other times, exchanges relied on appropriately worded queries on the part of either dealer or customer. Some transactions were conducted entirely at the point of initial contact – dealers passing drugs as customers passed money. At other times, the dealer and the customer walked away to a more private location to conclude the transaction.

It is the intricacies and significance of actions and interactions such as these that will provide the basis for the chapters to follow. First, however, in the next chapter, I describe how I came to observe and understand these transactions.

## Chapter 4

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### Locating the field

I conducted fieldwork in Footscray between January 2003 and December 2004. Ethical clearance for the research was granted in the first instance by Deakin University's Human Research Ethics Committee, and then by the Curtin University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee after I transferred my enrolment to that university.

In preparing myself to commence fieldwork, I familiarised myself with texts on both ethnographic methods (for example, Agar, 1996; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Moore, 1992) and illicit drug scenes (for example, Bourgois, 1995; Maher, 1997; Maher *et al.*, 1998; Taylor, 1993). I read that ethnography is both method and text; that ethnography, with its long-term immersion in people's everyday worlds, allows for the apprehension of social processes as these are negotiated and renegotiated through social action; and I read that, with its continuous and intimate engagement, ethnography makes us learn the same procedures that the people we study have themselves learned, thereby allowing for the apprehension of everyday *practical* culture (Bloch, 1998).

The methodological texts and illicit drug ethnographies made similar points in elucidating the ethnographic research process: gain entry; make contact; establish a research presence; develop rapport, acceptance and trust; and lastly, negotiate an identity for oneself. A simple task, perhaps, to reduce such challenging and complex processes of social action to words on a page, but this begged the question of how one actually does these things. Despite lingering anxieties, however, my doctoral candidature had been confirmed and it was time to embark upon fieldwork.

I began, as one should, by trying to gain entry to the setting and make contact. As my field site was a street-based drug marketplace, gaining entry was relatively easy. I simply needed to go there. The public nature of this marketplace meant that it was entirely possible for me to observe this group of people as they went about their

daily lives. In order to participate in these lives, however, it was necessary that I engaged with them and began to build relationships.

As the Footscray marketplace operated mainly during daylight hours, I visited the marketplace during these hours, on average between four and six days per week for the majority of the two-year period. Footscray was an ideal site in which to conduct fieldwork because of its pedestrian mall. This provided me with a legitimate place to sit, in the midst of the drug exchange activities, without looking too out-of-place. Not only were there cafés with outside tables, but additionally there was public seating scattered throughout. Here, I could sit comfortably all day long and make contact with drug market participants. My method of working was to spend my days in the mall, observing and conversing with the people of interest, and then return home to write extensive field notes on everything I had observed, and been part of, throughout the day. As the social activities that were the focus of my research were illegal, I never recorded field notes while in the field because of concerns that these might then be accessible to other people.

In the first fourteen months, I spent most of my time in the mall with occasional visits to relevant local services. In the latter stages of fieldwork, after I had established closer relationships with some of the dealers, my time was divided between visiting the mall, and spending time taking people to appointments (health, legal, court) or visiting them in their homes or the homes of their families.

Establishing and maintaining a research presence among street-based illicit drug users is challenging because many of their activities are illegal and they are, understandably, suspicious of outsiders. I gained access to the network of marketplace participants through the support of two people in particular, Peter Higgs, a public health researcher with extensive experience in Footscray, and Hoàn Nguyễn, a youth worker with a local welfare service. Both men were well-known and respected among this set of people, and as such, they served as brokers who could introduce me and, in a sense, vouch for my good intentions and trustworthiness.

While they were invaluable as brokers, my introduction through them did shape people's understanding of me in ways that I had hoped to avoid. I was seen as a "worker" (social/youth/health) by many people. I had hoped to avoid being seen in this light as I was concerned that it would shape the ways in which people talked to me about their drug use. Indeed, many of my early conversations with people were confined to negative aspects of their drug use and it was some time before people began to acknowledge any pleasure they took in their drug use. The stigma associated with injecting drug use often generates considerable shame for people who inject (Maher, 2002). In Footscray, this shame manifested in several ways. Initially it was apparent in that most of our conversations about drug use were about people wanting to cease drug use, or about whether they had been "bad" (i.e. used drugs) or "good" (i.e. not used drugs). On one occasion, this sense of shame was evident when two of my research friends soundly reprimanded a young man who had just lowered his trousers in front of me in order to inject in his femoral vein (accessed via his groin). As I was rarely provided the opportunity to witness this particular injecting practice, I was disappointed when they sent him out of the room. Once he departed, they complained at the lack of "respect" he had shown me. In their assessment, it was not proper that I should be subject to the sight of such shameful injecting practices. Indeed, despite my repeated protests, throughout fieldwork, these two dealers continued to carefully manage the boundaries of decency in relation to what they considered appropriate for me to observe.

As noted in Chapter 3, the drug marketplace was intensively policed. These policing activities both constrained and enhanced my relationships with dealers. In the early stages of fieldwork, if I was not mistaken for a worker, the other interpretation of my presence was that I was an "undercover" (covert police officer).<sup>20</sup> One day on the train as I was travelling to the marketplace, someone called out "You going to Footscray?" I turned to see an unfamiliar Aussie male, aged in his late 20s, who repeated his question. I told him I was and he replied that he saw me there a lot. I explained I was a student and he said, he knew that, but that other people in

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<sup>20</sup> Initially being seen as connected with the police is a common experience for ethnographers conducting research among injecting drug users (see, for example, Bourgois, 1989; Levitt and Venkatesh, 2000; Maher, 1997; Taylor, 1993).

Footscray “say you’re a jack [police officer]”. Additionally, in these early stages while I was still establishing relations, periods of intensive policing would mean that, sometimes, there would be no drug market participants in the mall when I arrived. I might spend an entire day speaking to very few people – even, on occasion, none – and observing very few heroin exchanges.

During the latter stages of fieldwork, intensive policing had less impact on my engagement with dealers as, by that time, they would contact me by telephone and I would visit them away from the marketplace. In several ways, policing also aided my development of rapport with dealers. My clear commiseration when told of their encounters with police and my passing of information regarding police presence cast me as sympathetic to dealers’ concerns. Additionally, once I knew people better, I also began accompanying some of them to police stations when they were arrested, as well as supporting them through the court process. These acts of reciprocity on my part further cemented our developing relationships.

My ethnographic account describes and analyses “the lived experience, social processes and broader structural parameters” (Moore, 2002, p.272) of drug user/dealer lives. It prioritises an emic perspective to reveal how people interpret and respond to their environments. The data on which I primarily draw consist of approximately 1,200 A4-pages of typed field notes from participant observation. I had also intended to conduct in-depth interviews. However, negotiating interviews proved to be problematic. Although many dealers declared their willingness to be interviewed, it was difficult to arrange a suitable time as they needed to sell in order to cover their own heroin use. The small reimbursement (\$30) I offered did not compensate for the financial loss of an hour away from selling. Additionally, because of the fluid nature of the marketplace, some of the dealers I would have liked to interview were not attending the marketplace at the time I began conducting interviews.

I did conduct seven interviews with regular dealers and a further three interviews with people connected to the drug marketplace (a Vietnamese ex-heroin user, an Aussie heroin user and a group of young Vietnamese people, half of whom were just beginning to smoke heroin). However, these proved to be of limited value for

various reasons: poor quality recordings or language difficulties, for example. One interview, in particular, highlighted a limitation likely to be common to interviews in general – one about which an interviewer may be often unaware. In this instance, while the person I was interviewing was generally prepared to share considerable information with me in the context of conversations, he was reluctant to answer some questions once we commenced the formal recorded interview. To illustrate: some hours prior to our interview, I was with him soon after he purchased from his heroin supplier’s assistant. He remarked that, some years earlier, he had stabbed this particular assistant in a drug-related disagreement. A lengthy and revealing conversation ensued regarding violence associated with the drug scene. During our formal interview, however, when I asked whether he had ever been involved in drug-related violence, he denied any such involvement. His denial suggested a desire to present a favourable image, particularly in the context of a permanent recording, but also, perhaps, in the context of wider representations of Vietnamese drug users/dealers as violent and dangerous. In this particular case, I had knowledge of two alternate representations of his practices. It is likely that similar acts of impression management (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) occurred in other interviews, of which I was unaware.

This experience highlighted that *my* project was not *their* project. During natural conversations or in the course of providing transport to and support at appointments, our interests could be seen to merge. However, when I acted more formally as a researcher – that is, in ways they comprehended as research (e.g. interviewing) – this altered the dynamics of our interactions and shifted the meaning and significance of the information they revealed and shared. It reframed the information as data – therefore, open for “dissection and analysis” (Maher, 2002, p.317) – rather than the sharing of lived experience. In ethnographic research, in contrast to one-off interviews, these sorts of processes may be mediated by an “ongoing and significant relationship between the ethnographer and her informants” (Maher, 1997, p.224). Given issues such as these, and the limited number of interviews, these data serve primarily as a supplement to the field notes.

Data analysis was inductive and iterative, in that interpretations were developed through observation, incorporated back into the research process to assess their

explanatory power and used to guide the collection of further data (Moore, 1993). Between March and June 2004, I reduced the time I spent in the field to one day a week (although I maintained regular contact with key participants). The purpose of this withdrawal from the field was to review data collected to that date and begin to formalise some of the concrete themes and issues identified through the ongoing inductive process of recording and reflecting on field observations and interactions. The withdrawal afforded some distance from the immediacy of people's lives, providing opportunity for more analytical reflection on the broader processes occurring in the marketplace. This period of reflection and preliminary analysis guided subsequent data collection from June until December 2004.

Field notes were examined thoroughly and coded for themes, concepts and categories expressed in key words and phrases, events and practices. Categories and concepts emerged from the data but were, at the same time, shaped by my initial research interests regarding exchange processes and the social relations and processes constituting the marketplace. Interpretations were discussed with informants to assess whether they recognised themselves in my accounts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). This exercise generated further refinements and, on occasion, provided new data which allowed for the development of more concise definitions of categories and concepts.

Ethnographic knowledge is "produced in human interaction" (Schepers-Hughes, 1992, p.25) and "involves the active construction of an (ongoing) story" (Maher, 1997, p.207) – a dialogue produced through the "developing and shifting relations" (*ibid*) between the ethnographer and her informants. As the researcher, I am a "positioned subject" (Rosaldo, 1989 cited in Moore, 1995, p.2). My age, gender, ethnicity and class background, all combine to make me 'other' to my informants, who 'make sense' of me just as I 'make sense' of them (Maher, 1997). Thus, my account is not independent of the "interactional processes" (*ibid*, p.207) involved in its creation. The sorts of conversations I had, the accounts I was given, the practices that occurred in my presence and that I was invited to be party to, were all shaped by my perceived and ascribed role in the field, that is, by people's understanding of who I was, by the degree to which I was trusted and by the social status which I was accorded. Of course, these perceptions of me were fluid, changing as circumstances

and our relationships developed through the years of fieldwork. In the section that follows, I describe some of these interactional processes, highlighting the dynamic character of continually negotiated relationships between the ethnographer and those she researches.

## **The social life of smokes**

Many months after the completion of my fieldwork, two powerful images remain. The first is from an early evening, a few months in. I had been sitting at my regular café table, in the winter cold, on my own, for hours. It was growing dark and the subjects of my research, Vietnamese heroin user/dealers, were, for the first time, not conveniently gathered around the café where I could at least observe them. Instead, they were congregating far away in the centre of the mall, barely discernible in the descending gloom. Just as I was deciding to finish for the day, one of the young men approached. Declaring that I looked lonely and that he felt sorry for me, he announced he had come to talk to me. With much sharing of my offered cigarettes, there ensued an extraordinary conversation about his experiences since arriving in Australia at the age of eight, including his heroin using and selling history. The intimate discussion between myself and this particular young man was an engagement that was never repeated.

My second image is of a glorious summer's day, towards the end of twelve months of fieldwork. At the same café, on this day, I was in the centre of the gathered Vietnamese dealers. Many were conducting drug transactions where we sat. Others approached to show me various documents and to ask me to explain them – bail conditions from the police<sup>21</sup> or letters from Centrelink. People brought Vietnamese food for me to taste, or sought to engage me in conversation, calling “*Chi hai, Chi hai*”,<sup>22</sup> as they vied for my attention. My fieldwork-acquired ‘sister’ dozed against

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<sup>21</sup> When people are arrested, they may either be remanded in custody to await their court appearance or released on bail to later appear at court under their own recognisance. Bail was often granted subject to a range of conditions, the most common being that the person agreed not to attend the Footscray Central Business District.

<sup>22</sup> *Chi hai* is the Vietnamese term for the eldest sister in a family (likewise, ‘anh hai’ is the eldest brother). The eldest siblings have considerable authority and, reciprocally, are obliged to look after their younger siblings.

me in heroin-induced comfort, and one young man walked up and, wordlessly, but with exquisite delicacy, extracted my cigarette packet from my breast pocket in order to help himself to a smoke.

How did I travel thus, from stranger to eldest sister? I argue that cigarette exchanges were one of the vehicles by which I traversed this path. Using the example of cigarette exchanges, in this section I detail and reflect upon the processes of incorporating myself, as an ethnographer, into the social world of Vietnamese dealers in Footscray.

Despite my appropriation of Arjun Appadurai's title, this section is informed less by his book, *The Social Life of Things*, than by John Davis' book, *Exchange*. Davis wrote:

Exchange is interesting, because it is the chief means by which useful things move from one person to another; because it is an important way in which people create and maintain social hierarchy; because it is a richly symbolic activity – all exchanges have got social meaning... (Davis, 1992, p.1)

Processes of exchange were always going to be conceptually significant for my research, located as it was in an illicit drug marketplace where hundreds of drug-related exchanges occurred every day. What I had not initially considered was the ways in which I would also participate in these exchanges, and the ways in which I, and the people among whom I was conducting research, would employ such exchanges to establish and affirm the social relationships that are essential to any ethnographic endeavour.

### ***“Would you like a smoke?”***

I began by visiting the marketplace on days when Peter and Hoàng were in the area. They were not there every day, however, so many of my early visits entailed long hours of sitting alone, watching the comings and goings of the locals, nursing a series of cà phê sữa đá (Vietnamese iced coffee), smoking cigarette after cigarette, and smiling or saying hello to people who I might have met previously. If I was lucky I might receive a smile, a nod in greeting or even a “Hello, how are you?”, as

someone walked past about their business. If I was luckier still, I might receive a request for a cigarette or an opportunity to offer one. In these early efforts at engagement, cigarettes when offered helped create a space for an encounter. The exchange formed a link that allowed for the possibility of a relationship. Further, among smokers, cigarettes are consensually understood as positive gifts, with such gifts creating a favourable impression, however fleeting, and helping to foster goodwill.

Participants in this drug marketplace managed to meet their material needs, and obtain heroin on a reasonably consistent basis, through the employment of a broad repertoire of creative stratagems. Maintaining a supply of tobacco, however, was low on their list of priorities. My repeated offerings of cigarettes disposed people toward me and it became in their interests to remember me. A person who is present every day, and apparently willing to provide cigarettes unasked, is someone worth cultivating. This might be achieved by them articulating a relationship between us – for example, by employing conversational gambits such as, “I saw you yesterday” or “You’re here a lot” to draw the connection. At first, this articulation seemed to be for opportunistic reasons alone but over time, with repeated encounters, most of these relationships expanded to offer broader satisfactions or to be based on mutual liking.

As smoking is prohibited inside public buildings under Australian law, cigarettes, when offered inside, must be taken outdoors, and this also created a space for companionable consumption and conversation. Sharing a smoking episode helped establish mutuality. It was an immediate signal of similarity, despite any and all real and perceived differences between us. This capacity of smoke/smoking to *dissolve* “social and conversational boundaries” between people has also been drawn out by Dennis (2003, p.17) in her phenomenological exploration of cigarette smoking. Using the example of the work-based smoking break (i.e. the ‘smoko’), Dennis noted that “becoming part of ‘the smokers’ brings a person into alignment, into space, into shared activity with people who may well have otherwise remained unknown”.

***“Would you have a smoke Robyn?”***

Gradually, I did begin to establish at least a presence, if not yet a research presence. The process of gaining acceptance was achieved in part through cigarette exchanges, and it was also read by me through temporal changes in the form of these exchanges. My repeated offerings indicated my willingness to provide and, eventually, our developing relatedness enabled people to make requests for cigarettes. The meaning of these requests varied, however, depending on the particular relationship between myself and the demander. It was a mark of acceptance when my friend Thanh, who had always been shy of speaking to me, asked me directly for a cigarette. Prior to this he had made such requests infrequently, and always through his partner, Kelly. Among people I knew less well, a request for a cigarette would be often immediately followed by an apology for asking. With those I was closer to, however, requests for cigarettes could be read as ‘demand sharing’, more in the nature of ‘give me a cigarette’.

An encounter involving Linh and her partner Hiêp, two people who at this time I had just begun to speak with more regularly, was expressive of the shift our relationship had recently undergone. Previously, these two would take a cigarette when offered but would rarely ask directly. This day, I had pulled my cigarette packet out when Linh came to stand next to me and, looking at me pleadingly, held out her hand to indicate she wanted one. I passed the packet up to her and then to her boyfriend Hiêp. Without asking, another young man, Đoan, who I knew well, also grabbed for the packet to help himself.

Peterson (1993) has argued that demand-sharing signifies the relatedness between the donor and the demander, through the presumption of a right to ask, and the expectation that the demand will be met. Demand-sharing was a common occurrence in this marketplace, with the Vietnamese helping themselves to drinks, cigarettes or food, if these appeared to belong to another Vietnamese person. The shift by Linh and Hiêp to demand-sharing of cigarettes from me was a signal of my increasing incorporation into their social world.

Although I had become a familiar sight and was accepted as a friendly face and provider of cigarettes, the process of negotiating access and trust (in the sense of

people accepting my presence and not obviously modifying their behaviour) took more time. In many of my early encounters, people were reluctant to admit their involvement in heroin selling. If they were sitting with me, for example, and were approached by a prospective customer, they might deny they were dealers and send the customer away. Growing acceptance of my presence among them, as they went about the business of heroin selling, was expressed through practices of inclusion, also achieved and articulated within cigarette exchanges. My new friends were aware of my interest and efforts to learn their language. Their recognition and encouragement of this was signified by requests for cigarettes in Vietnamese and, indeed, the question, ‘Chị, cho xin em một điếu thuốc?’ which translates as ‘Older sister, can I have a cigarette?’ was the second full Vietnamese sentence I understood (the first, and most frequently expressed, sentence being, ‘Anh hai nhiều quá’ which translates as ‘Too many police’). In this marketplace, these heroin sellers are well aware of the advantages of communicating in a language that is not understood by either their customers or the police. It was a marker of my acceptance and inclusion that some were supportive of my efforts to learn their language.

Having begun to establish relationships with at least a few of the core Vietnamese dealers, cigarette exchange was also a means by which we affirmed these relationships. One way of affirming a relationship is through practices of boundary marking. Cigarette exchange was employed in this way when I observed Van approach in the company of a young Aussie man who I had not seen before. Van asked me for a cigarette and the young Aussie man followed his lead. Hearing this, Van screwed up his nose and subtly shook his head to indicate that I should refuse the Aussie’s request.

Van signified our relatedness – and his consequent right to make, and have met, demands upon me for cigarettes – through his attempt to deny the Aussie man this same opportunity. In so doing, Van was marking a boundary in his relationship with me; a boundary that excluded the Aussie. Van’s act also reproduced the, albeit fuzzy, boundedness of this particular marketplace where Vietnamese and Aussies occupied separate areas of the mall and patronised different cafés. When I first began visiting this marketplace on my own, I found it easiest to engage with the Aussie marketplace participants. This began to shift when I met Kelly, the Aussie partner of

Thanh, one of the Vietnamese dealers. She would sit in the space occupied by the Vietnamese dealers and I would sit with her. As I became more accepted by the dealers, I spent more time with them, and less time with the Aussies, and eventually came to reproduce in my own practice the same socially-segregated pattern that I had been struck by at the outset of fieldwork.

***"I buy a packet. I pay you back."***

The increasing intimacy of our relationships was articulated through cigarette exchanges. Although initially these exchanges were unbalanced (primarily from me to them), our developing relationships were reflected in a shift to more balanced exchanges, with people making a point of offering to repay me, or giving me cigarettes when they had them. In addition to these commensurate returns of cigarettes, reciprocity was also enacted through sharing of food, drinks or services, such as information or translation of Vietnamese conversations. On one occasion, for example, Quàng and Đam, asked me for a “smoke” and took four from the packet. They did, however, leave me two nectarines in their place.

Reciprocity could also be read as a form of stored credit which allowed people to make claims based on previous giving. One day a young man, called Lam, came up to the table where I was sitting and passed me four cigarettes, with the words “You’re always giving them out to me when I ask”. He then departed, but returned to the table an hour or so later. As I was taking a cigarette out of my packet, Lam reached over for one as well, saying he knew it was a good idea to give me some earlier, as his were now all gone.

Over time, with a few people, exchange became generalised such that everyone’s tobacco became communal property. During long evenings socialising with my friends Kiều and her partner Lộc, our cigarette packets would be placed out in the open and we would all help ourselves. Kiều and Lộc also shifted to smoking my brand of cigarettes so that our tobacco sharing was indeed commensurate.

This commensurate sharing ultimately entailed other kinds of relational responsibilities. Standing with Kiều outside a local health service, she suddenly

asked: “Have you got ten dollars, chi?” I replied that I did, and she held out a \$20 note, telling me to take it and give her \$10 in return. “For smokes” she stated. I was confused that she seemed to want to give me \$10, but Kiêu explained she was “too lazy to buy them”. Still unclear about the point of this arrangement, I did as I usually did with Kiêu and complied, taking her \$20 and giving her \$10. At this point, Kiêu then asked for the remainder of my cigarette packet (about a quarter full). I realised this had been about buying my remaining cigarettes for the \$10, to save her having to go to the shop herself. She added that now she could also ask me for cigarettes another time and feel that she had paid for them: “You hold for me. An inves–ment”. This episode was both warm and coercive. Our transaction was established as one without a foreseeable end. It was truly reciprocal.

Gudeman (2001, pp.80-1) argued that providing gifts and enacting reciprocity are tactical acts that extend a shared community “base” to people outside a community:

Not a rule but a process, reciprocity is one way of groping with uncertainty at the limits of a community: offering a gift probes, defends, secures and expands the borders of community.... Reciprocity involves the exchange of base – or things, people and their parts – between persons of different communities. Falling in the sphere of communal transactions, it is never about objects alone but relationships forged through them.<sup>23</sup>

### ***“You always give your cigarettes out to everyone here.”***

Part of the process of establishing a research presence is the negotiation of a position. My gifting of cigarettes emerged as a key characteristic through which people identified and positioned me. Even those people who generally declined my

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<sup>23</sup> Reciprocity, in addition to being part of what creates and affirms social relationships, should also be considered an essential component of ethical research practice. Similarly concerned with reflections on the initiation and maintenance of relationships with research participants, Higgs and colleagues (2006), reporting on research conducted in the same drug marketplace some years earlier, noted the importance of reciprocity, particularly among ethnic Vietnamese participants, in contributing to ethical harm reduction research practice. Likewise, Maher (2002, p.315) discussed how her involvement in the illegal distribution of sterile injecting equipment in the United States provided a “measure of reciprocity” that brought her closer to the women she studied, and helped her move beyond cultural explanations towards an understanding of the structures that helped sustain vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

offers of cigarettes still noted and remarked upon my propensity for cigarette distribution. As people came to know and accept me, many took a view of me as ‘nice but naïve’. This was articulated through advice to hide my cigarettes so that others would not make demands upon them. This same construction of me was articulated by Thanh’s public affirmation of my generosity when he loudly remarked, “What are you? The Salvation Army or something?”, after he witnessed me handing over cigarettes, my mobile phone and a small sum of money in response to a request from Kiêu. His comment also served to transmit the respect I had achieved with him, with its implicit warning to me not to allow myself to be exploited, and to Kiêu not to exploit me.

As Davis (1992) argued, exchange is an important way in which people create and maintain social hierarchy. In Vietnamese culture, age-related status, with its conventional representation of ‘respect for elders’, is a core feature of this social hierarchy. This is reflected at the most basic level in the age- and kinship-based pronouns for ‘I’ and ‘You’. For example, ‘em’ – meaning younger sibling – is used for, and to, people younger than yourself irrespective of gender, while ‘chị’ and ‘anh’ – meaning older sister and brother respectively – are used for those older than yourself, but who are not elderly. The majority of Vietnamese dealers were aged between 25 and 30 years. At the time I began fieldwork, I was 38 years old. Being some ten to fifteen years older than the dealers, I was accorded the status of *chị*.<sup>24</sup> As a consequence, I was due respect. Cigarette exchange was one of the vehicles by which this ascribed status was expressed and transmitted to other members of the group. One afternoon, Tu approached me expectantly and, as I realised he wanted a

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Chị’ is the polite term of address for those older than yourself. As I noted earlier, I was also accorded the status of ‘chị hai’ by some dealers. This was expressive of their incorporation of me into a more intimate fictive kin relationship. Rather than expressing a fixed identity, Vietnamese pronouns express a relation. Thus, while I was ‘chị’ to most dealers, I was simultaneously ‘em’ to their parents. As well as expressing age relations, Vietnamese pronouns express social position. A key example is the male-female intimate partner relationship where, regardless of whether the man is older or younger than the woman, he assumes the status of ‘anh’ (older brother) and she assumes the status of ‘em’. When referring to oneself, the relational pronoun is also used – what, in English, would be considered speaking in the third person. For example, to say ‘I want’, I would say ‘chị want’. While my Vietnamese friends moved seamlessly between pronouns according to their relative age- and social-positions, I frequently ‘forgot my place’ as it were, inappropriately calling myself ‘chị’ when speaking with older people.

cigarette, I passed one across to him. Kiều, who was sitting with me, suddenly demanded “Did you ask her?” Tú acknowledged my status and the respect I was due by lying and crankily retorting that he had asked.

In negotiating a field position, I was always explicit about my role as a researcher. However, this seemed to be of less salience to the marketplace participants than whether I was a decent person, whether I could be trusted or what I was able to offer in terms of acquaintance or friendship.

Returning to the two fieldwork images with which I began this section: from my position as stranger to the Vietnamese heroin sellers in this marketplace, together we used cigarette exchanges (among other things) to incorporate me into their social world, such that, among those I was closest to, although I did not become a heroin user or dealer, I did eventually become *Viet*. As a woman of Anglo-Celtic origins, this identity was admittedly not readily apparent. Indeed, it afforded some bewilderment to a Vietnamese restaurant owner when Kiều, responding to his query regarding whether I could use chopsticks and eat chilli, dismissively asserted that I could because, “She’s Viet”.

Cigarette exchanges were one of several ways in which I negotiated the processes of gaining entry, establishing and maintaining a research presence, and establishing a position – processes held to be key in conducting ethnographic research. I both enacted and read these processes through temporal changes in the social meanings of our cigarette exchange. For me as a smoker, cigarette exchange is so taken-for-granted that I engaged in it unreflexively throughout my fieldwork. It was only later that its enduring and recurring qualities became apparent.

Ethnographic research knowledge is practical knowledge. It is only by doing it that one can come to fully understand *how* to do it. Exchange of cigarettes was simultaneously, one of the ways I *did* ethnography and one of the ways I came to a practical understanding of both the method of ethnography, and of the social and cultural processes that I sought to investigate through my ethnographic research. Reflecting on our cigarette exchanges contributed to a realisation that *all* of the exchanges and transactions in this marketplace were both a means of passing useful

things between people, and richly symbolic, creating and recreating the social order of this particular world. As I and the marketplace participants did with cigarettes, so too they did with all the drug-related exchanges they transacted each day, strategically employing these exchanges to establish and affirm their social relationships and, through their social actions, produce and reproduce this particular drug marketplace.

In Chapter 1, I presented two assumptions underlying my account – that society is dialectically constitutive of and constituted by human agents (Ortner, 1984) and that social life is always in a process of being produced, reproduced, maintained and transformed through social action. As such, ethnographic understanding is always intersubjective, partial and fragmentary (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Marcus, 1998; Scheper-Hughes, 1992).

My account is necessarily partial because social life is not fixed but in process, it is continually contested, negotiated and transformed. It is partial and fragmentary because, as ethnographer, I am neither omniscient nor omnipresent. The ‘facts’ I record are “necessarily selected and interpreted from the moment … [I] decide to count one thing and ignore another, or attend this … [event] but not another” (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p.23). Finally, it is fragmentary because the social world of the drug marketplace is but one element in the social life of participants. That said, while this thesis is, indeed, *my* account of *their* lives, I have tried to construct a fair and accurate description and analysis of people, relationships and events as I have known and observed them (Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Maher, 1997).

Scheper-Hughes (1992, p.29) has suggested that ethnographic accounts may provide a voice for people who are generally silenced through political, social and economic marginalisation. The ethnographer can be a “keeper of records; a minor historian of ordinary lives of people often presumed to have no history”. Similarly, in her ethnography of women drug users who engaged in sex work, Maher (1997, p.208) noted that the ethnographer can provide alternative representations of people “whose principal record-keepers to date have been AIDS researchers, the tabloid media and the criminal justice system”. In the Australian context, the ‘record-keepers’ of Vietnamese drug user/dealers have likewise been public health researchers, the

media and the criminal justice system. Through my research, I seek to defamiliarise the familiar categories and understandings inscribed in these accounts and discourses, to “discover relationships, connections … that are missed through the use and naming of the objects of study in terms of categories [seen as] ‘natural’ to subjects” (Marcus, 1998, p.16).

I recognise that there remains a problematic of my research category – Vietnamese drug user/dealers. Although these are terms of identification meaningfully employed by this set of people, there is a danger that these categories risk inscribing either “an essence, or at least the pervasive influence of something called Vietnamese-ness” (Pardy, 2005, p.19) or drug dealer-ness. Through my account I hope, however, to indicate the active and ongoing construction of identity and subjectivity, suggesting the “ambiguous, contradictory and multiple” (*ibid*) meanings of these social categories.

With these considerations in mind, in the next chapter, I introduce the people who participate in the marketplace and present an extended ethnographic description of the dealers’ relations and daily activities in the marketplace. In the two subsequent chapters, my focus turns from the exchange of cigarettes seen in this chapter to a detailed analysis of the drug-related exchanges through which the marketplace was produced and reproduced.

## **Chapter 5**

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# **Locating the people**

This chapter provides a general description of the people who participate in this drug marketplace and a more detailed description of the subjects of my research, the Vietnamese dealers who support their heroin use through daily trade of heroin in the Footscray drug marketplace. I then introduce those dealers with whom I spent the most time (key participants), but also provide some brief detail on other dealers who were also regular marketplace participants. Following this, I present an extended ethnographic description of a typical day in the marketplace in order to illustrate the social relations and actions of this set of dealers and the marketplace in which they operate.

### **Marketplace participants**

Over the two years of fieldwork, I encountered around 300 active drug marketplace participants (drug dealers and users). From my first field visit, I recorded names and generally some details (sex, approximate age, ethnic background) of the people I encountered. Excluding people who were peripheral to the marketplace – for example, health and welfare workers or family members (parents, siblings, children) of participants – I recorded details of 223 people who actively participated in the drug marketplace.<sup>25</sup> Of these people, 149 (67%) were of Vietnamese background. The 74 non-Vietnamese were primarily Aussies, although this group also included a small number of Indigenous Australians and people from South American, Filipino or African backgrounds. The majority of marketplace participants were male (68%) and their ages ranged from 17 years to the late 40s. In the Vietnamese group, men outnumbered women by 4:1 (122 men vs 27 women) while among the non-Vietnamese group, I recorded more women than men (31 men vs 43 women). Within the Vietnamese group, 123 (82%) were engaged in dealing while among the non-Vietnamese group only 20 (27%) were engaged in dealing. Eighteen (14%) of the

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<sup>25</sup> To protect participants' privacy, each person was assigned a pseudonym and all detailed information was stored only in the file containing their pseudonym. A separate password-protected file contained the key to the pseudonyms.

Vietnamese dealers were women. Among the non-Vietnamese dealers, only one was a woman.

The preceding figures might create the impression that, in this marketplace, there are many more sellers than buyers. This is not the case; rather, the figures reflect my research interests. Because I was specifically interested in meeting and establishing relations with Vietnamese participants, there is a bias toward recording Vietnamese people. As Vietnamese heroin users who attended the marketplace regularly were most likely to be dealers, there is, additionally, a bias toward recording dealers. Non-Vietnamese people were generally recorded only if they were partners of Vietnamese dealers, if they were local to the area or if they were regularly present in the marketplace. Customers who purchased in Footscray but did not remain in the area after purchasing were rarely recorded. Additionally, as my relationships with the Vietnamese dealers developed, I spent less time interacting with non-Vietnamese participants. The Vietnamese dealers encounter many customers each day, with whom they engage for short periods of time. Consequently, dealers pay little attention to most customers and would often not recognise them were they to meet again. As I spent more time with the dealers, I came to reproduce this same orientation toward customers. This was a further reason why, as fieldwork progressed, I was less likely to record non-Vietnamese marketplace participants. Other factors shaping my records of who participated in this marketplace were the regularity of dealers' attendance (i.e. I may have missed infrequent attenders), whether dealers were incarcerated for long periods during fieldwork or if they were more likely to sell from indoor locations around the area rather than on the street.

While I recorded 143 people as dealers through the two years of fieldwork, I estimate that there were around 70 active dealers at any given time. This reflects the fluidity of this marketplace where dealers frequently cease selling – because of incarceration or extended holidays in Viet Nam, because they have left the marketplace to sell larger weights of heroin or because they have ceased heroin use. In addition to dealers leaving the marketplace, throughout the two years, new dealers entered the marketplace – either recently commenced heroin users, dealers who had been released from gaol or dealers coming to Footscray from other dealing locations across Melbourne (and occasionally interstate). Thus the marketplace was dynamic,

characterised by ongoing entering, exiting and re-entering by both dealers and customers.

As a particular set of social relations and activities, the drug marketplace was fluid and dynamic, shaped by external factors such as intensive policing or fluctuations in heroin and other drug supply, and internal factors such as dealers ceasing dealing activities for various reasons. On some days when I visited the marketplace, there would be no dealers to be seen; on other days I could easily identify 20 active dealers in one small area of the mall. This fluidity also occurred within a single day. I might arrive to find no one in the mall and then an hour later several dealers would appear. Throughout the day, dealers left the marketplace to purchase more supplies, to consume drugs or to attend to other activities of daily life such as keeping appointments, shopping for groceries or collecting children from school.

## **The dealers**

The men and women who appear in this thesis are people with whom I had regular interactions and, in many cases, came to know well. Some non-Vietnamese participants are mentioned but the thesis is primarily concerned with the everyday lives of Vietnamese user/dealers. Most of the dealers who reappear frequently were members of a core group of around 40 people who, at some point during fieldwork, traded almost daily in the marketplace for a period of at least two months. These dealers were daily heroin users who met personal requirements through the street-based sale of small packages of heroin. They were primarily independent entrepreneurs, who purchased a larger weight of heroin which they then divided into smaller portions for resale. Some worked for other dealers, but this was not common. Although some dealers sold on their own, the majority sold with a dealing partner or, occasionally, partners. For many dealers, these business arrangements were fluid. Alliances could change due to one's partner being arrested or ceasing heroin use, or as a result of personal conflicts. Most had been involved in this trade for between five and ten years.

Many commenced selling heroin before they began using it and the majority smoked heroin for several years before shifting to injecting. For many, heroin was the first

drug they had tried, often commencing heroin use even before having their first alcoholic drink, and this set of people also used few different types of drugs – confining themselves largely to heroin and temazepam capsules – in contrast to non-Vietnamese injecting drug users where heroin is often the last in a series of drugs used and concurrent use of multiple drug types is common (O'Brien *et al.*, 2007).

Most of the dealers lived with their parents or other relatives, although they left the family home frequently, either choosing to stay away while they were actively using drugs or because they were asked to leave by family members ('they kick me out' was an expression I heard regularly). Hearing their childhood stories, I was struck by the number of people whose parents, primarily their mothers, had been employed as outworkers for the clothing industry, working long hours in their garages and being paid minimal piecework rates per garment. As younger children, the dealers had contributed to this employment, cutting loose threads or folding finished garments. For several dealers, a commonly shared experience was that of having responsibility for negotiating with the English-speakers who contracted this work. While some parents remained as outworkers, other families managed to amass sufficient capital to set up their own sewing factories, employing others to perform the sewing. It was not unusual to hear that at an age of 16 or 17 years, some of the dealers had considerable responsibility and autonomy in managing these family businesses.

During the late 1990s, increasing globalisation of industry in conjunction with a domestic, union-initiated campaign against the exploitative practices of piecework sewing shifted the bulk of clothing manufacture off-shore. Ironically, a substantial proportion of this manufacturing work shifted to Viet Nam (Pardy, 2005). By 2003, although many of the dealers still had industrial sewing machines in their garages, their parents had shifted to other forms of employment – farm work or retail businesses such as grocery shops or restaurants. Many of the dealers had family connections with the owners of local Footscray businesses. Most of the dealers I met had limited experience of employment outside their involvement in family businesses. Among the few who had previous experience of employment, this was invariably as unskilled labourers – particularly factory or farm work.

Dealers who were regularly selling in the marketplace were not involved in other forms of employment.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, most were reliant on income support provided by the state in the form of unemployment, youth, sickness, disability or parenting payments. Government benefits were worth approximately \$400 a fortnight. Actual income varied (slightly more than or less than \$400) depending on the type of benefit, whether people were receiving additional rental assistance payments, or whether they were in debt to Centrelink. Debts might accrue for several reasons. For example, once a year, people are entitled to apply for a Centrelink loan (up to \$500). Many dealers applied for these loans, with repayments deducted from their fortnightly benefit until the debt was cleared.

Most of the dealers had completed four years of secondary school. While they frequently continued on to the fifth year, none had completed the final year (Year 12). For those arriving as refugees, schooling was interrupted during the time they spent in refugee camps. All of the Vietnamese dealers I met had been born in Viet Nam. A few arrived in Australia as infants but the majority arrived as young teenagers. Their English language proficiency was variable: some were fluent speakers, others could express themselves reasonably well, while still others struggled to express themselves in English. Among those who arrived as children of refugees, many had left Viet Nam when they were between the ages of 7 and 10 years old. Consequently, many were unable to read Vietnamese and, for some, their spoken Vietnamese was also limited. At home, with their parents or other older relatives, Vietnamese was generally the preferred spoken language. Language is dynamic and in interactions with each other, the dealers spoke a Vietnamese that had been shaped by their experiences in Australia, as well as their experiences of heroin use and gaol. In the next section I describe some of the dealers with whom I spent most time.

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<sup>26</sup> For relatively brief periods, a small minority of dealers were employed – as factory or farm workers. During these periods of employment they ceased selling regularly in the marketplace.

## **Key participants**

### **Tu**

I met Tu on my first visit to the marketplace with Peter Higgs. When we met, Tu was selling and using heroin and also injecting temazepam capsules when these were available. He was also enrolled in an opiate substitution program (on buprenorphine). He had commenced that program a few months previously, but had left it for several weeks before recommencing a few weeks prior to our meeting. His return to the program was motivated by the approach of Tét, the Vietnamese New Year, which he considered a propitious time at which to cease heroin use. Tu was 29 when we met, and when *stoned* (intoxicated), he was sociable, friendly and talkative. In the early months of fieldwork, I always approached the marketplace hoping he would be there as he would always join me. It was a relationship of benefit to both: me wanting to speak with people and Tu telling me, “I’m scared on my own. I’m scared to sit here, scared of the police. I don’t have anything [drugs] but I don’t want them to hassle me. If I sit with you, it feel safe. The police not come if you’re here. They scared of you”. Tu’s parents were living interstate managing a farm and Tu was living with his brother, his brother’s wife and their two young children. Tu was born in Viet Nam. He and his family arrived in Australia when Tu was in his early teens, having spent several years in a refugee camp in Malaysia. Tu was a regular attender in the marketplace until his departure interstate, six months into fieldwork, to “work farm” with his parents. He appeared periodically throughout the remainder of 2003 and then returned to live in Melbourne towards the end of 2004.

Tu had been using heroin for seven years. He began smoking heroin in the form of *snow cones* (heroin sprinkled on top of cannabis smoked through a *bong* – the generic term for a cannabis smoking implement), and then gradually shifted to *foil* (smoking heroin by placing small slivers on a piece of foil, heating it from underneath and inhaling the smoke). He shifted to heroin injection when “it got dry” (i.e. during the reduction of heroin supply in 2000-2001). Explaining why he used temazepam, Tu said “When you use [heroin], after a long time, six months, you not feel, just you not sick. After you use for a time, you no feel”, so he used temazepam in order to experience intoxication. Tu always used his temazepam in conjunction with heroin as he believed that, on its own, temazepam “gets into your blood and it’s bad for your blood”. Tu described his heroin use as a pattern of using and non-using

periods: “I stop, then I jump in again.” He described one substantial period of not using when “I was working as a meat-packer” and in 2002, he had spent eight months interstate working on the farm with his parents. He returned to Melbourne, however, as “there’s nothing to do there. Just drink [alcohol]. Every night.”

Tu was arrested on drugs charges a few months after we met. In preparation for the Court case, he “got job in factory” working as a meat-packer. He retained the job for three weeks before quitting because it was “too cold” rising at 4.30am in the middle of winter. He left Melbourne shortly after this Court case was resolved (he received a non-custodial sentence). Upon his return in late 2004, he gradually recommenced using and then selling heroin. Tu was one of the few dealers who had never been to gaol.

### **Kiều**

Kiều had been using heroin since she was 18 years old. We met when she was 27. According to Kiều, she began using heroin unknowingly because her boyfriend had been secretly sprinkling heroin on top of the cannabis *bongs* he prepared for her. She ceased smoking cannabis for a period and began to feel *sick* (experience heroin withdrawal). Her boyfriend then disclosed that he had been giving her heroin and told her she was now *hanging* (in heroin withdrawal). She believed she had no choice but to continue using heroin because she was now “addicted”, so she commenced heroin smoking. She did this for the next three years before shifting to injecting. Kiều began selling heroin when her boyfriend went to Viet Nam for a holiday and was no longer supplying her with heroin. She initially sold in the suburb of Collingwood, both on the street and in the local Housing Commission high-rise flats where she was living at the time. For Kiều, these were the good times. She was in charge, with a number of other people selling for her. She was making large sums of money, enough, she said, to pay cash for a new car retailing at \$40,000. Kiều also sold heroin in the Melbourne CBD. She had been selling in Footscray since 2000.

Kiều and I met in early 2003, following her release from prison. She was present in the marketplace for a few weeks and then ceased attending. She reappeared in late June following her release from prison again. Kiều sold heroin on a nearly daily

basis throughout my fieldwork. Unusually for a Vietnamese woman in this marketplace, she was not involved in an intimate relationship throughout most of 2003 and nor did she partner with other Vietnamese dealers to sell heroin. As Kiều would always come to sit with me when she was in the marketplace, we spent much of the time in each others' company and developed a strong and enduring relationship.

Kiều was born in Viet Nam, escaping by boat with her family when she was 11 years old. The family spent three years in a refugee camp in Malaysia, before they were accepted into Australia. Arriving in 1990, they lived in Sydney for a few years before moving interstate to the western suburbs of Melbourne. Kiều's mother was involved in the piecework sewing clothing trade and, when she was 16 years old, Kiều obtained a business licence and managed this business, with "eight people under me" (older Vietnamese women), as well as negotiating with the English-speaking purchasers of the garments. As well as her responsibilities for the sewing business – which also included sewing garments – she had to attend school. The pattern of her days was attending school, coming home to eat dinner, sewing and then completing any homework. Kiều completed Year 11 before leaving secondary school. She was the oldest child in the family and had considerable responsibilities, serving as interpreter for her mother as they negotiated the process of settling into Australia – organising housing, social security, schooling, medical visits and so forth. Throughout the two years of fieldwork, Kiều moved between "going home" to her mother's house, staying with friends (and then later, boyfriends) or being incarcerated.

Kiều had been arrested for drug offences numerous times since she commenced using heroin, and had spent a considerable amount of time in gaol. The longest sentence she had ever received was nine months (most of her sentences were either three or six months). She also spent 15 months on holiday in Viet Nam. The remainder of her time had been spent using and selling heroin, interspersed with multiple, short-lasting detoxification attempts. In addition to her heroin use, Kiều was an enthusiastic consumer of temazepam capsules. She would also substitute with

Unisom®<sup>27</sup> when temazepam capsules were unavailable. Kiều was proficient in English but said she was not always confident when speaking. She attributed the gradual improvement in her English language skills to her repeated incarcerations. As with the majority of the dealers, her preferred language was Vietnamese.

### Lộc

I was introduced to Lộc in early December 2003, following his completion of a two and a half year gaol sentence for armed robbery. He had opportunistically stolen some temazepam capsules from a chemist, run around the corner to use them and was found, needle and syringe in hand, by police. It was argued in court that he had used the needle and syringe in the robbery. Lộc disputed this assertion. When we met, Lộc had recently turned 30 years of age. While he had some experience of the Juvenile Justice system, the sentence he had completed had been his first experience of adult prison. It was a lengthy sentence and had an additional 15-month parole period attached. Lộc had been part of Kiều's social circle before his incarceration. Upon his release, he was eager to renew their acquaintance and, indeed, to establish an intimate relationship with her. With considerable persistence over the next few weeks, he succeeded in these efforts and they remained in an intimate relationship until Kiều's departure for Viet Nam the following year. Within a few weeks of his release, Lộc recommenced heroin use and quickly developed a *habit* (heroin dependence). For the first few months, he sold by telephone away from the marketplace but, following Kiều's arrest and bail exclusion from the Footscray CBD, he took over her business and began selling in the marketplace. For most of 2004, he was the couple's primary seller although Kiều maintained a tight overseeing role, which she referred to as "holding the wallet".

Lộc arrived in Australia in 1987, after four years in a Malaysian refugee camp. He and his family had also lived in Sydney for some time before coming to Melbourne. Soon after arriving in Melbourne, his parents established a piecework clothing business and, like Kiều, he spent his time as a teenager, attending school, returning home to complete any homework, have dinner and then sew for the clothing business

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<sup>27</sup> Unisom® is an over-the-counter sleeping-aid. The active ingredient is diphenhydramine, an antihistamine. Unisom® is manufactured as a gel-based capsule.

until midnight. Lộc completed Year 10 of secondary school and then left to work for the family business. Lộc was the oldest son of a large family and, again like Kiều, as a teenager, he had the responsibility of serving as interpreter/translator as the family negotiated their new life in Australia. Throughout 2004, Lộc lived in a series of short-term accommodations – hiring motel rooms, staying with friends, renting rooms in shared houses and once, for three months, renting an entire house which he shared with Kiều.

Lộc commenced heroin use at the age of 20, although he said he had been involved in selling heroin since he was 17 years old. Despite having been in Australia for 15 years, Lộc had spent much of his time solely with other Vietnamese people. As our friendship developed, he would often remark that he had never before been friends with a westerner, claiming me as his “Western chị nuôi” (older stepsister, although he always translated this as *godsister*). By virtue of his relationship with Kiều, Lộc and I spent nearly every day of 2004 in each other’s company. In the latter part of fieldwork, the three of us ate an early dinner together most days, for which they invariably paid. The Vietnamese dealers would tell me that in Viet Nam (“in my country”) the person who extends an invitation always pays. Regardless of who invited whom, throughout fieldwork I was unable to negotiate paying for meals with this particular couple. Lộc is a softly-spoken, shy and particularly polite man. I was fortunate to discover that he was also a talented cook, being treated on a number of occasions to Vietnamese meals specially prepared for me.

### **Van**

Van also regularly sold in the marketplace throughout fieldwork. He was 18 years old when we met. He arrived in Australia in 1995 at age ten. He and his mother flew directly from Viet Nam, as they were sponsored by a relative already living in Australia. He was a shy young man of few words, but much youthful macho bravado. This bravado occasionally led him into violent incidents with other marketplace participants – dealers and customers alike. Van alternated between working for older dealers, working for himself or, when things were difficult, *helping out* other dealers (including Kiều and Lộc). He started smoking heroin at the age of 15, injecting one year later. Van spent much of his time in the marketplace in the company of either Vinh or Đoan, two young men of similar age. Vinh remained

in the marketplace throughout 2003, although he and Van had frequent arguments. In mid 2004, Vinh's mother took him to "go detox in Viet Nam". He returned early in 2005, having married in Viet Nam and with a baby due. Doan was frequently incarcerated for short periods and, in his absence, Van would align himself with other dealers.

At the time we met, Van was socialising with a group of young people who were not involved with the drug marketplace. He would speak of his experiences attending nightclubs in the city. Over time he engaged in these activities less often and by the end of 2003, his activities and social relations were primarily centred on the marketplace. Van experienced his first episode of incarceration in early 2004. He was sentenced to three months in gaol, an experience he said he enjoyed as there were numerous activities to keep him occupied, as well as regular meals. Following his release, Van attended the marketplace periodically for the next month or so, gradually increasing the frequency of his visits until he was, once again, a daily presence.

### **Phuoc**

I met Phuoc around Christmas 2003, when he was helping another male dealer. He had been released from a nine-month sentence for trafficking (one cap of heroin) in October. He spent the first few months in the city and then came back to Footscray. He was present on a semi-regular basis until April 2004 when he ceased attending the marketplace. Between October and April, Phuoc was arrested four times on a variety of charges and, as he failed to appear at court, warrants for his arrest were issued. I encountered him again in the marketplace in August 2004 and he explained that he had enrolled in a methadone program and had been staying at home to avoid arrest.

Phuoc employed diverse strategies to obtain heroin. At times he would *help out* other dealers, sometimes he would sell independently and, occasionally, he even had others assisting him. Phuoc also adopted the role of middleman, persuading groups of Aussie drug users to purchase larger weights of heroin by pooling their money. He would then purchase heroin for them and tax a portion (either with or without their

knowledge) in payment. Phuoc would also *rip* Aussie customers, agreeing that he would purchase for them and then disappearing with their money.

Phuoc came to Australia with his parents and a younger sibling. They escaped Viet Nam by boat and ended up in a refugee camp in Hong Kong, where they remained for six years. Another sibling was left in Viet Nam “in case the family didn’t make it [survive the boat journey]”. Phuoc arrived in Australia when he was ten years of age. He arrived with virtually no English-language skills but was relatively fluent by the time he reached high school. The family settled in Sydney for a few years before moving to Melbourne. In Sydney they operated an ironing business. Upon arriving in Melbourne, his father started a sewing business and built it up quite successfully. Phuoc helped run the business. When we met, his parents were working as unskilled labourers some distance from Melbourne. Asking what happened to the sewing business, Phuoc replied “Crown [Melbourne’s gambling casino] opened”. Phuoc’s experiences were similar to those of Kiều and Lộc in that, as a teenager he would go to school during the day, come home, have something to eat and then sew until 10pm. This left him two hours to do his homework before he needed to go to bed.

Phuoc had been in and out of gaol since he was a teenager. We met when he was 28 years old. He has been incarcerated for a range of offences including assault and theft, as well as drug offences. Phuoc said that when he was “hanging out” he would “do stupid things that I wouldn’t normally do”, which was why he had so many prior convictions. As I heard from several of the dealers, Phuoc considered that “If it wasn’t for gaol, I’d be dead by now.” In his view, gaol provided him with an opportunity to “get healthy” again and cease using drugs.

Phuoc was a confident English speaker, his English layered with an Australian accent. He used this to advantage in negotiating between Aussies and those Vietnamese dealers who were less confident and/or proficient with English. Phuoc’s language skills were also of benefit for the many *scams* (deceits) he practiced in order to procure heroin and meet his other needs. Phuoc lived primarily at his parents’ home, although with numerous periods of short-term homelessness following family disputes. These would usually last only a few days before matters were resolved and he could return to the family home.

### **Thanh and Kelly**

I met Thanh when he was 29 years old. He arrived in Australia when he was nine years old. His father was detained in a re-education camp when Thanh was an infant. By the time Thanh was seven, his mother had made two attempts to escape from Viet Nam. Both times they were caught before they reached the boat. They were sent to an internment camp with other escapees. On the third occasion, they succeeded in escaping in a small fishing boat. After a harrowing seven-day journey, they arrived on an island where they remained until being transferred to a camp in Malaysia. Two years after escaping Viet Nam, Thanh and his mother were accepted and arrived in Australia as refugees. They were placed in a hostel in the outer-Melbourne suburb of Springvale.

Thanh had very little education in Viet Nam and had received no education in the refugee camp. He was in school for two years in Australia but was unable to achieve competency in English. He did not enjoy school as he had difficulty understanding the lessons and he experienced racism and bullying from the other school children. Thanh's mother was rarely at home because she worked as a clothing industry outworker. Thanh began spending more time with his same age peers, "misbehaving", as he said. He ran away a few times, eventually leaving home permanently when he was 14 years old. He stayed at the homes of friends or sometimes slept on the streets. Thanh and his friends began to break into cars in order to travel from place to place. They also stole and burgled to pay for food. Thanh began smoking cannabis when he was 16 years old and said he was offered heroin two years later. He quickly developed a heroin *habit* and, once this occurred, his friends told him he "couldn't get it for free anymore" which is when he started selling heroin.

Thanh had been in a relationship with Kelly, an Aussie woman, for over ten years and they had two children. Kelly did not use any drugs and was continually frustrated by Thanh's drug consumption. My relationship with Thanh and Kelly developed initially through contact with Kelly. It was many months into knowing them before Thanh would speak to me. This was because of his shyness and lack of confidence. As he began to accept me, he would instruct Kelly to relay incidents he wished to share but was too shy to relate directly. When we met, Thanh was selling

in the marketplace and was also an eager purchaser and consumer of temazepam. When intoxicated on temazepam he was more careless with his selling. Kelly was concerned that he would get into trouble and so she would come out to the marketplace to keep an eye on him and ensure his safety. Kelly also wished to be present in the event that Thanh was arrested. She considered she was in a better position to negotiate with police because English was her first language. Kelly was often bored sitting in the marketplace on her own as she was not interested in establishing social relations with other marketplace participants. I provided her with someone to talk to, who was not directly connected with the drug scene. I was also not drug-affected which meant, as she came to trust me more, she felt confident in leaving me to watch over her young child if she needed to make a purchase, go to the toilet or track down Thanh.

As with the other dealers, Thanh had considerable gaol experience. As well as incarcerations in the Juvenile Justice system, he had served three lengthy sentences in the adult prison system. He was incarcerated again in early 2004 and released in September of that year. When I met them, Thanh had received a letter from the Immigration Department advising him that his permanent residency status was under review. The reason provided was that he was deemed to be “not of good character” because he had served more than two years in gaol. He was advised that his residency might be revoked and he could be deported to Viet Nam. With Kelly’s help and support from myself and local welfare workers, Thanh was able to prepare a case which allowed him to retain his permanent residency status. The threat of deportation based on ‘bad’ character was faced by some of the dealers who had not applied for citizenship. None of the people I met during fieldwork were actually deported, although I heard of other dealers who had been sent to Viet Nam.

### **Thi**

I first met Thi in November 2003 when she was trying to organise admission to the local drug detoxification service. She was 21 years old. She completed this *detox* and was absent from the marketplace for a few weeks, reappearing shortly before Christmas in the company of her then partner and another couple – her cousin and his Aussie girlfriend. Although, at this time, Thi and her partner were assisting the other couple with dealing, they spent the bulk of their days out of Melbourne,

working as farmhands. With much hilarity, Thi described her living arrangements near the farm. She and her partner were sharing a house with “ten other people – all users” who also worked at the farm. According to Thi, the farm “foreman” was aware that these workers all used heroin and would even provide them with advances on their pay because “he knows they won’t work if they’re sick [in heroin withdrawal]”. Thi and her partner were often the ones to drive to Melbourne to procure heroin for the workers on the farm.

Thi came to Australia as an infant with her mother. They flew directly from Viet Nam (under the family reunion program) to reunite with her father who had arrived in Australia a year earlier. When they first arrived in Australia, Thi’s father was engaged in piecework sewing, working for others. He gradually saved enough money to open his own factory and hire others to sew for him. As this business grew, the family accrued sufficient capital to enable them to open a jewellery store in Footscray. Thi’s father continued to manage the sewing factory while her mother managed the jewellery shop. Unlike many of the people I met in Footscray, Thi did not have to help with the sewing business when she was a child. She did, however, have responsibility for supervising her younger siblings while her parents were at work.

Thi began smoking heroin when she was 15 years old. She had commenced injecting heroin only shortly before we met. She was introduced to smoking heroin by a boyfriend and, likewise, began injecting with a subsequent boyfriend. For the first few years of injecting, Thi relied on others – usually boyfriends – to administer the injections. It was not until she was 23 that Thi began to inject herself – she wanted to inject and was unable to find anyone to assist her. Thi’s involvement in dealing commenced after she began using heroin. We met when she was selling with her boyfriend but throughout fieldwork she also sold independently when not in an intimate relationship. For a short period, she also helped Kiều and Lộc to secure customers. Her pattern of heroin use was similar to that of Tu, characterised by *jumping in and out*. When she was actively using heroin, Thi would leave home because she did not believe it appropriate to expose her parents to her heroin use. When she ceased using heroin she would return home. Thi left home for the first time at age 15, staying with friends, boyfriends or on the streets. Remarkably,

despite the instability of her housing situation, Thi continued to attend secondary school, remaining enrolled at school until the beginning of the second last year (Year 11). Although Thi had been arrested and detained in police cells, she had never been sentenced to a period of incarceration.

### ***Other regular dealers***

In the table that follows (Table 1), I provide brief detail (name, gender, age, employment and gaol history) on some of the other regular dealers who appear throughout the thesis. I then close the chapter by situating the personal details of the dealers in a more fluid context, through the ethnographic presentation of a typical day in the marketplace.

*Table 1. Some other regular dealers.*

An	Male	29	Unemployed, history of gaol
Chiền	Male	27	Unemployed, history of gaol
Chu	Male	21	Unemployed, arrests but non-custodial sentences
Đam	Male	30	Unemployed, history of gaol
Diep	Female	mid 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Đoan	Male	early 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Đũng	Male	26	Unemployed, history of gaol
Hảo	Male	19	Unemployed, arrests but non-custodial sentences
Hiệp	Male	early 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Hiêu	Male	mid 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Hô	Male	24	Unemployed, history of gaol
Hung	Female	20	Unemployed, history of gaol
Hùng	Male	late 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Le	Female	30	Unemployed, history of gaol
Lê	Male	mid 30s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Linh	Female	early 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Nhan	Male	late 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Nhảy	Male	early 30s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Phương	Female	25	Unemployed, arrests but non-custodial sentences
Quàng	Male	late 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Sơn	Male	late 20s	Unemployed, history of gaol
Tam	Male	26	Employed – casual factory work, history of gaol
Thao	Male	23	Unemployed, arrests but non-custodial sentences
Thuần	Male	29	Unemployed, history of gaol
Tran	Male	38	Employed – seasonal farm work, arrests but non-custodial sentences
Truc	Male	29	Unemployed, history of gaol
Vinh	Male	21	Unemployed, arrests but non-custodial sentences

## **A typical day in the marketplace**

One midweek afternoon, I stepped off the train at Footscray and encountered Hǎo and his girlfriend, Tham. Hǎo was attempting to excuse himself from catching the train with her, under the pretext of a prior arrangement made with his selling partner, Thao. Noticing me, he instantly changed tack, telling Tham that he could not leave with her as he had to “help Robyn by taking her to the mall”. Having used me as his excuse, Hǎo felt honour-bound to accompany me. “There’s heaps of jacks [police]”, he said as we walked, recounting how the “jacks pulled me over before. With my girlfriend”. He expressed surprise as “they don’t usually stop me when I’m with her”. They had been with some of Tham’s school friends, all in their school uniforms. Hǎo said the police “took my name” but not the names of the other people. They asked what he was doing in Footscray and told him, ““If we see you here everyday we’re gonna stop you””. This was the second time he had been stopped by police that day. Two uniformed police were walking towards us. As we passed each other, one spoke to Hǎo, “You still here?”

“I just took my girlfriend to the station”, Hǎo replied as we continued walking.

We separated at the mall and I continued to the café. An Aussie woman, one of the regular drug marketplace participants, was sitting at one of the outside tables. I could not see any Vietnamese dealers in the mall and only three Aussie regulars were visible. There was a police car at the bottom of the mall which remained parked for around five minutes. It began to rain so I went inside the café.

Tran appeared, heading in my direction. He walked directly up to the Aussie regular, asked her for a light for his cigarette and then remained speaking with her briefly before saying goodbye. As he moved away he finally saw me and came into the café. “Friday” he announced as he sat in the chair opposite. It took a moment for me to realise that he was referring to going into *detox* in two days’ time. He had asked for my help in arranging this a few weeks previously. When I had seen him two weeks earlier, he said they had given him a guaranteed date for a bed but suggested that he ring regularly in case one became available earlier. “You ring for me”, he had asked me that day. There was not a bed available but the worker, asking if I was in regular contact with him, had taken my number as a back-up if she needed to contact him.

Tran said, “I go detox. Then I finished! I go farm”. Tran wished to stop using heroin altogether, hoping he could complete the seven-day inpatient detoxification program and then leave Melbourne to work as a farm labourer picking snow peas. He was disturbed by the amount of money he wasted, emphasising the point by telling me “Two hundred. Three hundred [dollars a day]”, while simultaneously holding out his right arm and jabbing towards it with his left hand, simulating injecting. He was also weary of the regular interactions he had with the police. “Be-fore. The pol-ice. I had two hundred and fifty. They took.”

“The police took your money?”

“Yeah” he said as he shook his head in disgust. I asked whether they gave him a receipt. “No. No receipt. They never do.” Tran then asked me for “two dollar?”, explaining, “For eat. I hungry”. I asked if \$2 was enough. “Three”, he said. I gave it to him. “I give you back”, he assured me as he left.

Nhây came to stand in the café doorway, exchanging words with the Aussie woman as he arrived. I had met Nhây on a few occasions when I was with local workers but we did not know each other well. He looked around as he stood in the doorway. On one of the sweeps, he turned his head far enough to see me. Smiling broadly, he said hello. After a minute he came up to my table and asked “What you do here every day?” I told him I was a student, doing a study “like Peter [Higgs, whom he knew]”. “People might think you undercover [police], you here every day. Undercover come out and just sit, look like they do nothing.” I assured him I was not an undercover and he seemed satisfied. He returned to stand in the doorway for a further minute then once again came over to me. As he approached, he asked “You still be here at two-thir-ty?” I told him I would and he came and sat in the chair opposite. “You got ten dollar I borrow? I give back at two-thirty. When my wife come.” I agreed and handed him the \$10. After thanking me, he said, “I give back. I promise. I wait for my wife. She at school now. She learning English. Two days already”. His wife was from Viet Nam and had only been in Australia for six months. He explained that he was “scared” to “let” her learn English because “then she might know too much [about his activities]” but he also understood that he should not just “make her stay home all the time, not see anyone, not talk to anyone”. I agreed that it would make her more settled if she could understand English. He stood up to leave, took a few

steps and then returned. “You not tell anyone I borrow you money. I be a-shamed.” I assured him I would not say anything, as he returned to stand in the doorway.

A Vietnamese male, aged in his early 20s, came to stand next to Nhảy. They spoke intermittently. The newcomer looked around frequently. Every so often, his eyes rested on me then he would turn back to look out at the passers-by. Nhảy took a seat at one of the café’s outside tables. I wanted a cigarette so I joined him. I offered my packet to Nhảy who accepted one and then held out his lighter for me. Tran came back into the mall and approached the tables to ask Nhảy, “xin cho thuốc [can I have a cigarette]?” Nhảy told him he did not have any. As I understood Tran’s request, I reached for my cigarette packet. Tran saw this and smiled at me. The newcomer has also observed the interaction and, as I passed the packet to Tran, he came over and asked “Can I have one too?” I proffered the packet and he slid out a cigarette.

Nhảy shook his head as he complained about the rain, the police (too many of them) and the fact that there were no *normies* (gel capsule temazepam) around. “When you don’t want everybody has. When you do want, nobody has.” I saw Quàng and Nhât walking towards us. Nhât was carrying a very young child. Quàng came up and spoke with Nhảy, while Nhât remained a few shops distant. After a few brief words with Nhảy, Quàng returned to Nhât and the two left the mall.

Vinh entered the mall. When he was within hearing distance, I said hello and warned him “there’s cops down there” (I had noticed two police on bicycles at the other end of the mall). Vinh muttered something about “I have to see [inaudible]”, did a rapid about-face and walked off the way he had come. The police rode up towards the café and then on, to the end of the mall. One stopped at the eastern corner, the other at the west. The one nearest to me appeared to be attending to some problem with his bicycle while the other spoke into his radio. Suddenly, the one using his radio mounted his bicycle and rode back through the mall at a reasonable speed, followed quickly by his colleague.

James, one of the workers from the local drug user health service came into the mall and walked up to say hello. While we spoke, Nhảy left, telling me he was going to “wait down there”. James and I spoke, interrupted only briefly when he said hello to

Linh's brother (who, I found out later from Hảo, was called Nghĩa). James asked him how he was going. I did not hear his reply but then James told him, "It used to be bad, but then it got good for a while so maybe it will get good again". Nghĩa remained talking to James only briefly. While James and I were talking, the police rode back through the mall and stopped an Aussie man, aged mid-20s, about five metres away from where we are sitting. They proceeded to question the man and ask for identification. James remarked, "Nice to see them with an Aussie for a change". The police made the young man stand with both arms outstretched, parallel to the ground. One police officer systematically pulled items from the man's pockets and laid them neatly on the ground. I remarked to James that they were not using their gloves while they conducted the search. "He's not 'dirty' like the Asians" James quipped ironically. Soon after, we noticed that the police officer near the bike had produced a pair of gloves, which he passed to his colleague. The search took about five minutes and was conducted in full view of all passers-by. The police did not appear to find anything before they released the young man.

James left and I sat for a minute or so on my own until I heard "Hello Rob-yn", followed by a nasty hacking cough. I turned to see Hùng smiling down on me. "I still not pay you the money I owe you."

"That's all right."

"Cops just beat me. Twice in one week." He was holding his left hand across his stomach and rubbing it. He coughed a few more times. He asked "Cath here? [referring to Kiều; dealers often gave themselves Anglo names]". I told him I had not seen her. Hùng had an appointment about detox ("just assessment") earlier in the day but told me he did not keep the appointment. "I ring them. See if I can come later." I offered my telephone so he could call but he declined.

Angela, an Aussie market participant, came up to our table. I had seen Angela previously but we had not been introduced and were yet to speak with each other. She asked Hùng if he wanted "normies". He did, but told her he did not have any money. He wanted Angela to go with him to "where my friend is". She did not want to walk there so she told him to go and see if his friend was there and then come back. She went into the café briefly. When she re-emerged she was holding a white paper bag and some plastic spoons. She sat at the table with the complaint, "Three

dollars! Three dollars for a schnitzel! She [the shop owner] wants to make her money fast". She wrapped the plastic spoons in a serviette and, as she did so, explained to me that she prepares lunch for her partner when he goes to work. If she gives him metal cutlery to take to work, he does not bring it home with him, "so he can have these". Having finished that task, she began a new conversational thread: "Somebody legged [reported] me to the police... no, [to] my doctor. They told him I'm selling my normison. I've got cancer so I have to get normison. I don't use them. I can't take [swallow] tablets. I like to inject them [tablets]. But I don't want to inject normison [capsules], so I sell them." Apparently, someone had taken her empty temazepam bottle to her doctor to prove that she was selling them (it has her name on it). I asked if she knew who had done this. She did not know but threatened to "get" the person if she found out who it was. When her doctor confronted her over it, she reminded him that her bag had been stolen a while ago and the bottle was in the bag, thereby suggesting to the doctor that the person could have acquired the bottle then.

Nhảy approached, asking "Angela, where you been?" She asked if he wanted normies. He asked for two. As she pulled them out he placed \$20 on the table in front of her. "What's this?" she asked.

"Twenty dollars. For two."

"Fifteen [each], Tony [his Aussie name]", Angela insisted.

"Nah", he said, shaking his head. Angela relented and gave him the two normies but still tried to explain that if he only bought small amounts, she wanted \$15 for each capsule. Nhảy ignored her. Hảo and Thao came up and took a seat at one of the other tables. Nhảy called to them "Trứng" (Vietnamese term for temazepam capsules) and Thao wandered over. "Thirty [dollars]", Angela told him. Thao paid without question. After Thao returned to his table, Angela looked up at Nhảy. "See Tony, thirty." Nhảy again chose to ignore her. Hảo and Thao left shortly after buying the temazepam.

Hùng returned to the mall alone having been unable to find his friend. He suggested to Angela that she come with him to his "friend's house", as this person would buy the entire bottle of temazepam (25 capsules). Angela asked where the friend lived. "Yarraville [an adjoining suburb], near the station" Hùng told her. She considered

for a moment and then agreed to go with him. As they prepared to leave, Nhảy said “I come with you” and the three walked off together. Suddenly there were no Vietnamese dealers remaining in the mall. Having been sitting at the café for an hour and a half, I decided to go for a walk to stretch my legs.

Walking along a street near the mall around 3pm I saw Hảo and Thao walking towards me. “Where are you going?” Hảo asked.

“Just wandering, and then I’ll probably go back to the mall.”

“Back to the mall? We’ll walk you back.”

Hảo and Thao appeared stoned so I presumed they had used the normison they purchased earlier. They spoke with each other in Vietnamese but Hảo, as was his habit, interspersed his Vietnamese with English (which was good for me). They were discussing business. Hảo said he was “short [did not have the money he required]”. They were currently selling for \$40 a cap. They needed to make \$500 as well as some profit so they could buy more normison. They wanted to buy another two. They had just used three caps of heroin as well as one normison each. Thao asked whether Angela was still around. I told him she had left with Hùng. When we reached the café, we were the only people there. I offered to buy them drinks. Hảo asked for “cà phê sữa đá” (Vietnamese iced coffee). As Thao reached into his pocket for some money I told him, “My shout. I buy for you”. Hảo repeated “Her shout” which Thao accepted and asked for a hot chocolate. After ordering, I went back out to the tables in the mall to sit with them. The drinks were brought out quickly. A few minutes later the tables and benches behind us started to swell with dealers. Van appeared and took a seat at our table. Hiêu came up to sit on the bench behind us. He was with another Vietnamese man who I had not seen before. All of them wanted normies as they were discussing the whereabouts of Angela and I heard the word “trúng” (temazepam capsules). The conversation was conducted in Vietnamese. Linh came to join them and she also wanted normison. I sat and listened, not understanding what they were saying but pleased when I picked out the occasional word.

Hiêu approached me. “Robyn, can you lend me twenty dollars?” I told him I did not have it (which was true). A customer approached while Hiêu was standing next to me.

“What you want?” he asked the customer.

“Just a forty [a cap].”

Hiêu told the customer to follow and led him to a bench on the other side of the tree we were sitting near. Hiêu sat on the edge of the bench and leant around it to speak to Thao. He then stood and walked back to Thao who handed him something. Hiêu returned to the customer and took the money as he passed the cap. The customer started to walk away. Hiêu handed the money to Thao who quickly complained, “it’s only thirty.” Hiêu called out to the customer, “Hey, it’s forty! Not thirty!” Thao shushed him, shaking his head at how loudly Hiêu had spoken. The customer walked back in our direction as he told them the rest of the money was in the car and he would just go and get it. The two dealers told him no, he was to return the deal and then bring back the correct money. The customer protested, inviting them to “come to the car with me then”. The dealers refused and eventually the customer yielded, returning the deal and then walking away. He was back within a minute with the correct money. There were five Vietnamese male dealers sitting around the table during the transaction which was probably why the customer chose to comply.

For the next 15 minutes, this group of dealers were up and down frequently. Hiêu and his companion moved a few metres away. He returned at one point and Van spat a cap out of his mouth and handed it to him. Hiêu walked back to join his companion and the two Aussie males who had joined them. One of the Aussie males passed something to Hiêu and then both Aussies left. Hiêu and his friend returned to our table and gave Van \$40. As they walked away again, Hảo remarked “If you can’t support your habit, you shouldn’t play [use heroin]! Isn’t that right?” The last sentence was directed at Van who did not respond. Hiêu and his friend were clearly trying to earn either money or a *taste* (an injection of heroin) by helping get customers for Van, Hảo and Thao. Van had been quiet since he arrived. It was at least five minutes before he asked, “How are you Robyn?” A few minutes later he asked, “Can I use your phone, Rob?” I passed it to him. I heard him say “Hello? Vic? When are you getting to Footscray?” There was a pause and then Van said, “You said ‘an hour’ an hour ago” before hanging up. Vic is the person who sells Unisom® (diphenhydramine capsules – used as a substitute when temazepam was unavailable).

A young Aussie man approached and asked Van,  
“How much for a gram?” adding that he wanted to buy one the next day. Van conferred with Hảo. “Bao nhiêu một gram [How much for one gram]?”  
“Một gram? Năm trăm” Hảo replied.

This was \$500 but I did not hear what Van told the Aussie. The Aussie appeared to dislike the answer, as he walked over to Hiêu and his friend and began discussing it with them. At this stage, they had moved back to sit at the table next to ours. I saw Hiêu indicating a size with his hand and heard the Aussie say, “That’s not a gram?” While, privately, I concurred with the Aussie’s assessment, Hiêu and his companion shook their heads in pretended disbelief at the Aussie’s ‘ignorance’ as they both asserted, “Yes it is”. The Aussie left soon after. When he was out of earshot I asked Hảo, “Did you tell him five hundred for a gram?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s a lot.”

“Well, I’m not gonna tell him the real price. I have to make something.” (Selling a gram for \$500 would yield \$250 profit for Hảo.)

Hiêu came back to our table and asked, “Robyn, could you go to a chemist and get Unisom? Do you think they’d sell to you?”

“I don’t know.”

“Would you try? For me? Please?”

I hesitated, wondering what I should say.

“Please? They’ll sell them to you ’cause you’re white, and you look clean.”

While I was still hesitating Hảo abruptly asked Hiêu, “Which chemist? Where?”

“I don’t know! Any chemist!” Hiêu answered, gesturing northwards and then south.

I still had not responded as I did not want to try and purchase Unisom for him but did not know the best way to refuse.

“Go, on. Can you try? You’re a social worker.”

For want of a better response I latched on to this last point. “I’m not a social worker. I’m just a student, just a uni student.”

“She’s not a social worker. She’s a student”, Thao backed me up.

In response, Hiêu simply repeated his request. I told him I would think about it. This seemed to be effective as he did not ask again and eventually moved away further into the mall. Over the next half an hour, all of the dealers gradually dispersed,

eventually leaving me sitting in the mall on my own. By this time it was late afternoon and I decided to leave for the day.

\* \* \* \*

The preceding ethnographic account illustrates the fluid character of the marketplace and the tempo of dealers' daily activity, as well as highlighting both external constituents of the market in the form of policing (regular police presence, stops for questioning and searching) and internal constituents such as dealers leaving the marketplace through ceasing heroin use (when Tran sought to access detox so he could cease heroin use/dealing and begin farm work) and dealers' actions as customers for the purchase of temazepam. Having described the context of the Footscray marketplace (Ch. 3), my research methods (Ch. 4), and the people who participate in the marketplace (this chapter), in the next two chapters I present a detailed analysis of the drug-related exchanges through which the marketplace was produced and reproduced. In Chapter 6, I analyse the market-oriented exchanges of trade and barter and, in Chapter 7, I analyse community exchanges – primarily service and gift exchanges.

## Chapter 6

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# “It’s my business”: trade exchanges in the marketplace

In Chapter 1, I argued that neo-classical economic theory views economies as the allocation of resources achieved by the interdependent decisions of individuals self-interestedly supplying and demanding (Wilk, 1996), whereas anthropologists interested in economies view them as the social relations produced by people to control the production, consumption and circulation of resources (Gregory and Altman, 1989). This ‘allocation’ or ‘circulation’ of resources is achieved through processes of exchange. In this and the next chapter, I focus on the exchange processes and social relations that constitute, and are constituted by, the Footscray heroin marketplace.

In keeping with Davis’ understanding of kinds of exchange (Ch. 1), I observed market-like exchange, reciprocity and redistribution operating simultaneously in the marketplace. Further, throughout these kinds of exchanges, considerable strategic manipulation of ‘ideal’ forms occurred. In the first instance, and following Gudeman (2001), I separate exchanges that may be easily classed as ‘market-oriented’ from those that may be easily classed as ‘community-oriented’. In this chapter, I examine transactions that fall under the rubric of market-oriented exchange. I show how these are constituted through the networks of social relations within which they are embedded, and how the particular networks of social relations are made, and remade, through these processes of exchange. I also examine how people manipulate exchange strategically. In so doing, I reveal the diversity of ways in which people in this marketplace express agency. I begin with an analysis of trade exchanges and trading practices. This is followed by examination of barter exchanges. Rather than focusing entirely on the material exchanges – the passing of resources between transactors – I broaden the focus to include the exchange practices, that is, the ways in which exchanges are produced by marketplace agents. In Chapter 7, I address community-oriented exchange.

## Trade and trading practices

In this marketplace, trade (i.e. the commercial exchange of heroin for money) was the ideal form of exchange, that is, it was the form by which these people represented what they did in the marketplace. People told me that they “sell heroin” or that they were “dealers”; thus, they defined their marketplace practices in trade terms. In keeping with this, dealers also referred to their dealing activities as their “business” and, like other small-business operators, they represented themselves as acting according to conceptions of good business practice: reliability of service and product, establishment of goodwill and reputation, providing value for money, and so forth.

The two quantities of heroin most commonly sold by the Vietnamese heroin dealers were caps and *hundreds* (the next available sized unit of heroin). A cap, I was told, weighed “around a point” (i.e. 0.1g), although people readily admitted that it was usually much less than this. A *hundred* was stated to weigh between two and three *points*. Throughout the two years of fieldwork, the public price (i.e. the standard price, understood and expressed by both dealers and customers<sup>28</sup>) of a cap was \$40 but the actual prices paid by customers ranged from \$15 to \$50. On a general trading day, the Vietnamese dealers would purchase a weight of heroin from their suppliers outside the marketplace, *chop* it (divide the larger weight) into sufficient caps or hundreds to sell in the marketplace in order to recoup their initial outlay, with any remaining heroin then being available for their own use. The favoured heroin weight purchased by dealers was a *one-point-seven* (1.7g<sup>29</sup>), although, depending on available funds, dealers might purchase quarter- or half-gram weights when funds were low and 3.5g weights when funds were high. Kiều estimated that her caps weighed approximately 0.07g. She and Lộc would make 14 or 15 caps from their 1.7g heroin purchase, leaving them approximately 0.7g for personal use. Where I had

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<sup>28</sup> Dealers referred to the people to whom they sold drugs as “customers”. I follow their convention.

<sup>29</sup> This seemingly unusual purchase weight is a hang-over from the imperial measurement system. Despite Australia’s conversion to the metric system in 1970, many drug transactions are still conducted using imperial measures. This is particularly the case when purchasing larger quantities. Thus, people may purchase drugs by the ounce, half-ounce and quarter-ounce. Drugs may also be purchased as an ‘eight-ball’ – an eighth of an ounce (equivalent to 3.5g). Half of this again (one sixteenth of an ounce) is approximately 1.7g.

the opportunity to observe people *chopping up*, weight was estimated by sight alone. I never saw dealers use measuring scales to accurately weigh caps or *hundreds*. The purchase and re-sale of a portion of a weight was referred to as a *round* and dealers would conduct between two and five rounds per day. In each round, a portion of the heroin would be retained and consumed by the dealer (therefore dealers took several injections of heroin per day). At a conservative estimate, a dealer selling ten caps per round and conducting three rounds in a day, would engage in approximately 30 transactions. With an average of twenty dealers selling in a day, there were, at a minimum, 600 heroin trades made each day in this marketplace.

The typical tempo of heroin trade is illustrated by my experience of sitting with Hǎo and his girlfriend, Tham, one afternoon when Hǎo sold to four sets of customers within approximately twenty minutes. The first customer presented just as two police on bicycles appeared at the top of the mall. Observing the police, Hǎo indicated to the customer that he should move away until they departed. The police rode through the mall and as they disappeared from view, Hǎo wondered aloud what might have happened to his customer, worrying that perhaps he had been misunderstood and the customer had thought Hǎo had sent him away because he was not selling. However, the man returned within a minute and the transaction was successfully concluded.

The second set of customers arrived while Hǎo was speaking on his mobile telephone. He continued talking as he took their money and passed them the heroin. After they had walked away, Hǎo remarked, “I didn’t even count the money. He could have given me anything. It was all in ten dollar notes”. Fortunately, the customers had provided the negotiated sum of \$80 (for the two caps they wanted).

Matt, an Aussie marketplace regular, was the third customer. He was with a companion and the two men approached Hǎo and asked for a *deal*<sup>30</sup> (in this case, a cap). Matt stepped closer, to stand behind Hǎo and speak quietly into his ear. Hǎo did not respond immediately but then grudgingly said, “All right”. He passed Matt a

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<sup>30</sup> A ‘deal’ is a general term used by Australian drug users to refer to drugs purchased. It encapsulates any particular quantity of drugs, e.g. caps, hundreds, half-grams and so forth.

deal and took his money (\$35). As Matt departed with several thanks, Hǎo declared, “I hate the first round”.

“Didn’t they have enough money?” I asked and he nodded in confirmation, adding, “I feel sorry for them you know. And also, he [Matt] spotted for me [directed customers to Hǎo] the other day an’ I said I’d give him a taste, so I owe him”.

I asked Hǎo how low he would sell for.

“Forty... thirty five [few seconds pause]. I want fifty” he replied.

The final customer was another Aussie marketplace regular. He came to stand in a nearby doorway, complaining to Hǎo about the small size deals that everyone had. Hǎo’s response was inaudible, but I heard the Aussie ask, “They’re good sizes? Not match heads?”

“No” Hǎo assured him. Seemingly satisfied to take Hǎo at his word, the Aussie then purchased.

In this fieldwork moment a range of prices is apparent. So, too, is a sense of obligation (albeit grudging) to an established relationship, with the discount provided by Hǎo to Matt based on prior exchange of service (directing customers). The presence of trust in the marketplace is also evident when Hǎo does not check that he has been provided with the agreed money, until after the transaction has been concluded. This central role of trust in constituting marketplace exchange will be discussed in detail later. Finally, the fieldnote extract illustrates how trading practices are shaped by the broader social context; in this instance, by the regular presence of police (further elaboration of this point appears in Ch. 8). Because of the illegality of heroin trade, transactions often need to be negotiated through subtle signalling (nods, gestures, winks) that will not be understood by others in the vicinity. This produces uncertainty for both transactors – although I saw it only from Hǎo’s perspective – as to whether these signals have been successfully interpreted.

### ***Negotiating price***

As noted earlier, the standard price for a cap was \$40. How was this price determined? Neo-classical economic models would suggest that an equilibrated price is achieved through the regulating effects of the mechanism of supply and

demand. This occurs given an assumption of perfect competition between autonomous individuals and given the further assumption that buyers and sellers are both equally well-informed about the costs of goods. However, in this marketplace, as in most real-life markets, disequilibrium pertains (see, for example, Stewart, 1992).

There are information asymmetries in that customers are not as well-informed as dealers. The former do not know how much the dealers actually pay for the heroin that they then re-sell as caps. Further, the dealers have expert knowledge regarding the quality and quantity of the heroin and, on this count too, have more information than customers. Additionally, in the local marketplace, and indeed in most markets in Western economies, buyers and sellers are not autonomous and atomised but, rather, are “linked by power relationships such that one partner is forced to take (within broad limits) whatever price is offered” (Alexander, 1992, p.86). Asymmetry of information, coupled with the presence of large numbers of buyers relative to sellers, means that sellers have the power to set prices.

The Vietnamese dealers in this marketplace set prices in concert with other Vietnamese dealers. They engage in oligopolistic trade practices whereby they agree not to compete over prices but, instead, to compete with regard to quality, size and reliability.<sup>31</sup> This is also a common feature of Western consumer markets. In Footscray, an exception to this co-operative practice occurred in January 2005. Lộc said he was being “forced” to sell caps for \$30 as there had been an increase in the number of dealers and some of them had lowered their price to \$30. Customers were refusing to pay anything higher. Adjusting to this change in affairs, Lộc told me he now had to make up more caps out of the 1.7g heroin weights he was purchasing.

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<sup>31</sup> Just as dealers in the marketplace co-operated to set a public price of \$40, so too did their suppliers, co-operatively setting prices for gram, 1.7g and 3.5g quantities (\$270, \$400 and \$600, respectively). I heard of one occasion where a non-regular heroin supplier was charging considerably less than the established price for grams of good quality heroin. This man actively sought the custom of the dealers, visiting the marketplace and offering his heroin at this cheaper rate. Dealers took advantage of the opportunity and switched to picking up from him. It was a short-lived opportunity because the supplier quickly depleted his available heroin. Dealers then reverted to their original suppliers.

Rather than reduce the amount of heroin he retained for his own use, he made more caps by reducing the amount of heroin in each cap. Thus, Lộc only appeared to have lowered his price. Because he simultaneously reduced the size of his deals, he thereby maintained his original price-to-weight ratio. Although dealers appeared not to compete with one another with regard to price, in practice, price could be manipulated by undercutting – selling caps that weighed more than the average 0.1g – or by selling caps that weighed less than 0.1g. As such, although the ‘official’ price appeared consistent across dealers, the actual price varied considerably once quantity was factored in. In this, the Footscray heroin marketplace differed from many Western consumer markets where goods are standardised in relation to quantity. Rather, the marketplace was more closely aligned with the bazaar markets described by Geertz (1978) and Alexander (1987) where there is considerable heterogeneity in apparently similar goods and services.

Although neo-classical models assume that price is established through the ‘invisible hand of the market’, Alexander (1992, p.91) demonstrated that price setting in Western market economies always “takes place behind the scenes”. Indeed, Adam Smith is quoted as complaining that “people of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or some contrivance to raise prices” (Smith, 1776 cited in Granovetter, 1985, p.484). Although Smith held that such collusion was immoral and interfered with the efficient running of the market, this is in fact how markets are constituted, and is clearly apparent in the processes through which price is determined in Footscray.

Despite the existence of an established public price in the marketplace, there was room for manoeuvre on the part of both customers and dealers. During a transaction between Nam and a customer, I heard the customer telling Nam, “I only pay eighty for a *hundred*”. Nam had already passed the heroin over, but then challenged the customer when he realised he had not received the required \$100. The two bargained, with Nam explaining that his deals were “good size” and therefore he wanted \$100 for a *hundred*. Eventually, the customer successfully bargained Nam down to \$80. In this, the customer was operating through an established cultural lens that recognises that, in drug trades, there are mark-ups at each descending level of

the supply-chain. The customer knew that the dealer purchased at a cheaper price-per-weight than the *hundred* price represented, and was claiming this opportunity for himself because he too was purchasing a larger weight. He was therefore informed (in a general, rather than a specific sense – it is unlikely he knew precisely how much Nam paid) and used this information to bargain.

Prices were also negotiated in relation to the time of day or day of the week. Recognition of, and adjustments to, external constraints were apparent when dealers told me of selling caps for \$15 on Sundays when they believed customers had fewer opportunities for obtaining money. Price variations could also work to the advantage of dealers. One afternoon, Mia relayed to me how she and her boyfriend had been selling since 6am. Asserting that it was “very quiet today” (few customers around), on the previous day, when they had been selling at the same time, they had done very well as everyone was paying “fifty. No questions” and no-one was attempting to negotiate cheaper deals. She said that people were parking their cars at the top of the mall and that she and her boyfriend were running over to sell to them. Her friend, Thi, who was sitting with us, then told of a man who came up to her “begging” her to sell him a cap for \$40, “not knowing that forty is Footscray price”. Thi said she pretended to let him persuade her – “please, please,” she pleaded in mimicry of the customer – until finally she agreed. Similarly, in the early days of our relationship, Kiều told me of a time she sold to a man from the city.

“He not from round here”, she said. “He ask ‘What you give me for \$200?’ I pretend to think about it... ‘Four cap’ I tell him. He say ‘okay’”.

Kiều then explained that people usually expect at least five caps, sometimes even six or seven for an outlay of this amount. Also, she explained, around Footscray, caps were selling for \$40, so if you could sell them for \$50 each then you were doing well.<sup>32</sup>

In both these examples, the position of the customer is weakened by poor information. Thi and Kiều both recognised this when they stated that the customers

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<sup>32</sup> It is worth noting here that four caps would come to approximately 2.5 points and, with the right contacts, five points (half a gram) could be purchased for the sum offered by the customer.

did not know the local price, and revealed that they had manipulated the customers' lack of information to their own advantage. Additionally, Thi acted to produce goodwill, albeit through subterfuge, in her pretence to the customer that he had succeeded in persuading her to reduce her price.

Within any given round of selling, prices could also vary depending on the relationships between dealers and customers. One evening, as Kiều, Lộc, their new helper Tien, and I were on our way to a restaurant, Hùng approached us, asking if he could purchase a cap for \$20. Lộc complained "Twenty! You always ask twenty! Last time, mate!" as he handed over the deal. As we walked away, he muttered crossly that Hùng would re-sell the cap for \$40, the profit going towards helping him accumulate enough money to purchase a larger weight of heroin to start up for himself, that is, to begin dealing on his own. Hùng was given the discount because of their social relationship, firstly, he was Vietnamese and secondly, he was known by Lộc to be in less fortunate circumstances than Lộc was at the time.

### ***Social relations***

The size and boundedness of their social networks accounts for the development of street-based trading among the Vietnamese who sold heroin. They had reliable and regular access to heroin, yet lacked sufficiently large and broad networks through which they could sell it. Most of the members of their social network were other Vietnamese who, in most cases, had access to the same heroin supply networks. Thus, they did not know enough potential customers. Making the heroin available on the street, through subtle (and at times, not so subtle) signalling, brought them to the attention of a larger customer base. This base then expanded through customers passing the information onto other potential customers (and in small part through 'advertising' provided through media reports of the availability of this style of trading<sup>33</sup>). Tu provided another rationale for street-trading. He had been explaining that in the city of Adelaide, from where he had recently returned, drugs were sold in private, in people's homes. I asked why it was different in Footscray where people

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<sup>33</sup> See Fitzgerald *et al*, 1999, for discussion of the role played by the media in reproducing street-trade in heroin.

sell on the street. He responded, “In your house. It’s not safe,” because, “junkies walk in” and out all the time. “The cops know. You get busted.”

“Don’t they see you out on the street though?” I asked.

“Yeah, but you walk away [to make the exchange].” He then said that, “mobile [telephone] is best. You ring”, but added that, “the cops they follow junkies, Aussies, when they go to pick up [from the mobile dealer]” and then they arrest the dealers. A further risk associated with selling by mobile telephone was highlighted by Kiều who said that it was more difficult to assess whether a customer could be trusted when you were speaking on the telephone. A putative customer could be a police officer or working with the police to entrap the dealer.

The dealers understood, and acted in relation to, the range of social ties that differentiated *regulars*, *good customers* (people who purchased regularly from the dealer and always paid the asking price), *locals* (people who were in the marketplace regularly and were therefore well-known) and *blow-ins* (people who came to the marketplace intermittently and were therefore unknown). Prices were shaped by these categorisations. The identifications constitute a comparable typology to that identified by Maher and colleagues (1998, p.9) in Cabramatta (described in Ch. 2) where the Cabramatta categories of “Aussie- or junkie-halves” (half a gram of heroin) and halves reserved for “rank outsiders”, matched the Footscray categories of ‘locals’ and ‘blow-ins’. Maher and colleagues also identified an “Asian-half” sold to other ‘Asians’. The existence of an ‘Asian’ category of social relation was likewise apparent in the extract above where Hùng was able to purchase for \$20 because he was Vietnamese. While in the particular sites of Footscray and Cabramatta a key constituent of social relations was ethnicity, the general point to be made is that dealers acted in relation to various categories of social relations. These observations are consistent with Davis’ argument that people have differential opportunities in exchange because of different classifications of social relationships. These classifications also served to reproduce social distance, especially between Vietnamese and Aussies. Similar practices have been observed in other marketplaces, with goods being sold at different prices depending on whether customers are family, friends or strangers (see, for example, Kaneff, 2002 on marketplace trade in post-socialist rural Bulgaria).

The social relations implied in these classifications are not static. Both customers and dealers work to develop closer ties. In this, processes of clientelisation, as described by Geertz (1978), were apparent. For dealers, cultivating regular customers meant they could be more certain of disposing of their caps, and less concerned they might be *ripped* (e.g. customers stealing drugs or failing to provide the required money). In a context where many sellers are relatively available,<sup>34</sup> and where sales often depend upon being noticed first by a prospective buyer, dealers work to differentiate themselves from other dealers to ensure they make sales. They do this by being alert to potential customers, seeking to attract their attention before other dealers, explicitly asking potential customers if they want drugs and also touting the quality of their deals in relation to size and drug strength. For customers, developing a relationship with a particular dealer means they can be more confident of receiving a reliable deal (i.e. good size, good quality) because they are aware that the dealer wants them to return.

Diverse strategies for the production and reproduction of social ties obtained. These included offers of telephone numbers for more direct contact, exploratory questioning by dealers to acquire information about customer circumstances – particularly whether they had a regular source of income and might be interested in purchasing larger weights of heroin on a regular basis. Customers, too, would work to cultivate relations with a good dealer – that is, one who provided heroin of consistent quality and thus gave value-for-money; one who was reliable, prompt, friendly and discreet – through friendly overtures and consistently returning to that dealer, thereby displaying loyalty. Additionally, relations could be strengthened through other network ties. I have previously described the bounded nature of social relations between Vietnamese and Aussies in the marketplace. These boundaries could be crossed through shifting circumstances, as when Kiều introduced me to her Aussie friend, Mary, with whom she had been associating following release from

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<sup>34</sup> I noted previously that there are many more buyers than sellers in the marketplace. While this remains true, it is also true that in this site there are a high number of sellers. Because buyers come to the marketplace across an entire day, at any given moment there may be more sellers in relation to buyers actively seeking to purchase. It is here that dealers seek to differentiate themselves from other dealers. Additionally, individual buyers make multiple purchases in a day so, again, dealers seek to differentiate themselves such that an individual buyer might be more inclined to return to them for subsequent purchases.

gaol. Although Kiều knew Mary from gaol, their connection had been further strengthened when Mary formed an intimate relationship with Thắng, a man Kiều had known for several years and claimed as *godbrother*. As he was anh (older brother) to Kiều, Mary became chị (older sister) with the rights and obligations entailed by that relationship. For a brief time, this relationship was manifest by Mary accompanying Kiều while she was selling and holding Kiều's wallet (thus keeping money made from dealing separate from the drugs). For her part, Kiều provided Mary with heroin.

Recent depictions of heroin markets in Australia have identified a shift from street sales to transactions brokered via mobile telephone (Jenkinson and Quinn, 2007; O'Brien *et al.*, 2007). During fieldwork, I observed multiple instances of dealers providing their telephone numbers and customers asking dealers for this information. The development of a telephone-based relationship represents an example of processes of clientelisation. Attempts to develop relationships in this fashion could fail, however, when dealers lost their mobile telephones, or failed to recharge them – requests for phone chargers were frequent – and therefore became unavailable to customers. Hảo provided a clear example. On this occasion, he began our conversation by saying his mobile telephone had been stolen. He had been staying somewhere with Van and a few others. They were ‘paying’ for this accommodation by providing their hosts with heroin. Hảo had been vigilant all night, keeping the telephone with him at all times. He had even taken the precaution of leaving the earphone in his ear so he would be aware if anyone attempted to steal the telephone. In the morning, however, he had to release the telephone in order to prepare his *taste*. He reasoned that it was at this point that his telephone had been stolen. The loss of his telephone was frustrating because he had just commenced providing his telephone number to customers. He explained that he did not give his telephone number out until people had purchased from him a couple of (2-3) times. That way, he could assess whether they were worth considering as regular customers. Hảo explained that he and his selling partner, Thao, sold on the street rather than by mobile telephone because, when dealers start out, they do not know sufficient numbers of people to whom they can sell which would allow them to cover their own heroin wants and make “a bit of profit”. Hảo estimated that a dealer could probably sell solely through telephone contacts if they had 30 customers who were

*picking up* (purchasing) every day, or who could be relied upon to pick up large amounts on a regular basis. Over time, dealers might try and build up their number of regular customers, H  o continued, but this was hard work and circumstances, such as having your telephone stolen, could set you back.<sup>35</sup>

As detailed by H  o, the success of mobile telephone dealing rests upon having a sufficiently broad customer base. During one period, L  c and Ki  u had ceased spending time selling on the street as L  c had developed relations with enough customers to sustain his and Ki  u's heroin wants (at least in theory). However, if one of these customers did not purchase in a day, L  c did not then have enough money to pick up from his supplier and would have to travel into Footscray to sell caps on the street. Thus, selling caps enabled dealers to accommodate contingency.

Mobile telephone selling also rests on establishing and maintaining a good reputation, as L  c revealed after concluding a telephone call. "I'm sick of dealing now" he said. "That's why I give the phone to Ki  u. But I think she lose the customers." He explained, "She gives small sizes". When I asked the reason for this, L  c said he did not know but that he believed she simply did "not want to look after" the customers. As a consequence, "they'll be running" (i.e. the customers would seek a new dealer). L  c said that when he was operating the phone they had five customers, "but now, I don't know anymore". Because he provided "good size", when he held the phone "the customers ringing all the time".<sup>36</sup> As this example illustrates, unsuccessful, or limited success at, clientelisation could keep dealers selling caps in the marketplace.

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<sup>35</sup> A further deterrent to telephone sales was the concern of the police arresting a dealer's customer and the police then finding the dealer's telephone number in the customer's mobile telephone, leaving the dealer at risk of having his or her telephone calls monitored.

<sup>36</sup> Reputation was also important for bigger heroin suppliers. Once, asking L  c why he had changed *bosses* (a local term for the people who supply heroin to the street dealers), he replied, "The other one, he played God too much." I asked him what he meant. "When he say [he'll be there in] five minutes, he take twenty. When he say twenty minutes, he mean one hour." The new *boss* was much prompter.

Clientelisation processes were also apparent in the relationships that dealers negotiated with their own heroin suppliers. Because they are not themselves producers, the dealers are simultaneously sellers and buyers. As largely independent entrepreneurs, they purchase the heroin that they then re-sell. Like their own customers, dealers wanted suppliers who provided consistent quality, informed them of changes in quality, provided a good price and who were reliable and prompt.

As with the bazaar economies analysed by Geertz (1963; 1978) and others (for example, Alexander J, 1987; Alexander, 1992), such clientelisation processes arise in circumstances of asymmetrical information and provide some resolution to problems of trust and malfeasance. However, while people worked to establish and maintain long-term exchange relationships – customers and dealers, dealers and heroin suppliers – this did not mean that these relationships were not ambivalent.

This ambivalence derived from the power imbalances in these relationships. For example, non-Vietnamese customers resented the ‘closed-shop’ character of the marketplace that excluded them from directly accessing the Vietnamese suppliers who sold heroin larger weights of heroin at cheaper prices and that enabled the Vietnamese dealers to set prices. Dealers complained about suppliers who flaunted their power, for example, “playing God” by keeping them waiting. Such ambivalence within long-term ties is not unique to the Footscray heroin marketplace. Acheson (1985) observed similar ambivalence expressed by the fisherman in the Maine lobster market. He characterised the relationships the fisherman had with lobster dealers as pervaded by a “good deal of suspicion and tension”. As he wrote:

[f]rom the point of view of the fishermen, the whole marketing process is shrouded in fog, mystery and rumor [and] anyone connected with the marketing of lobsters is at least slightly tainted, if not an outright crook ... ironically, the fisherman’s response traditionally has been to form very close ties with one particular dealer – a man who he often suspects is part of a conspiracy to defraud him at every opportunity (Acheson, 1985, pp.105-6).

Geertz (1978) argued that the ‘art’ of exchanging in the bazaar is to ensure that one is as well-informed as possible and to try to prevent others from obtaining that

information. Middleman roles develop in these situations and this strategy was pursued by locals – both Vietnamese and Aussie – in the Footscray marketplace.<sup>37</sup> For example, some dealers with access to a heroin supplier would work to keep this information from others. For a short period following a release from gaol, Kiều was accessing her heroin through Tan, another local dealer. Tan would not provide her with the contact details of the person through whom he was accessing the heroin. She relayed this story on the day she had finally managed to obtain the telephone number of this *boss*. Tan had been picking up for her, “one time, maybe two time every day” but “he won’t give me boss number”. However, during a conversation with another dealer, the name of the supplier Tan had been accessing was revealed. Kiều realised she knew this *boss*. She was able to assert this prior relationship to the dealer who had provided the supplier’s name, in order to obtain the telephone number. Once she had made contact with the supplier, she “find out” that Tan had been *ripping her*.

“Has he been taxing you, taking gear out [of the deals]?” I asked.

“No, he not tax gear. I shout him [provide him with free heroin], I lend him cap. I pay for taxi” [to meet up with the supplier] but, after she had spoken with the supplier, she discovered that Tan had been adding \$50 onto the price of the 1.7g, telling her it was \$450 when he was only paying \$400.

The effectiveness of such strategies to protect information were generally short-lived as the links between the Vietnamese network of street dealers and their suppliers were sufficiently dense that people were unable to protect contact details for any great length of time. The links were, however, dynamic, with people continually strategising and taking advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves – for example, a dealer re-entering the marketplace following an extended absence because of incarceration.

Middleman strategies, in relation to customers, were also pursued by Vietnamese who irregularly sold in the marketplace. Weights of heroin other than caps or *hundreds* were available for purchase in the marketplace. However, while such

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<sup>37</sup> See also Dalton and Rowe (2004), Furst, Curtis, Johnson and Goldsmith (1999) and Preble and Casey (1976) on the development of middleman roles in drug marketplaces.

transactions might be organised in the marketplace, generally the actual exchanges were carried out in other locations. Dealers who sold in the marketplace on a daily basis confined themselves to selling caps and hundreds. Larger weight negotiations were made by people who did not regularly sell in the marketplace and who sought to either make some money by adding a sum on top of the price they were able to purchase at, or by taking some of the heroin as their payment for organising the transaction. Chu, for example, was very pleased with himself one day as he had just picked up a half-gram of heroin for someone and, by adding a mark-up to the price he had provided to the customer, had earned himself \$100 on the transaction. Likewise, Phuoc said that, at one time, he would come to the marketplace and try to organise a few potential buyers to pool their money in order to purchase a gram of heroin. In exchange for organising and brokering the purchase, Phuoc would keep a portion of the heroin and the other people would end up with more heroin for their money than if they had all purchased caps individually. This tactic was not appreciated by regular dealers who sold caps, as it deprived them of sales.

## **Barter**

Barter – that is, exchanging goods without the direct use of money – was another exchange mode occurring in the marketplace alongside trade exchanges. A range of commodities were exchanged for heroin. These included clothes, shoes, mobile telephones, electronic equipment such as DVD players, computers, game machines or other drugs. In the early stages of fieldwork, temazepam capsules were also directly substitutable for heroin although, within a short time, these exchanges shifted to being money-based.

Barter is differentiated from commodity exchange as it proceeds without reference to money but is also distinct from gift exchange in being conducted without necessary reference to ongoing social ties and obligations. Cellarius (2000, p.74) argued that “barter may occur in several different circumstances including in the absence of money, alongside currency that people prefer not to use for whatever reason (e.g. to avoid taxes) and when there simply is not enough money to go around”. In Footscray, barter emerges in the drug marketplace as customers do not always have access to cash, but they are able to obtain goods (either their own or stolen goods) to

exchange for heroin. However, even if they have goods to exchange, barter only proceeds in this location because dealers obtain sufficient mark-up (at times) to allow them to give away heroin yet still have sufficient money to be able to purchase more of the drug. For the dealer, an object accepted in exchange for heroin is purely something desired. It has no value for their trading business. While barter may proceed in the absence of social ties, it still relies on some degree of both trust and information. The person with the goods for exchange needs to know who might be interested in transacting with them and both parties have to manage the possibilities of fraud.

Huy once received six packets of cigarettes in exchange for a cap of heroin and Lộc showed me an expensive watch he had accepted as payment for one cap. I observed another dealer negotiate for a relatively new laptop computer in exchange for a \$100 deal and, on one occasion, I heard an Aussie call out as he walked past a dealer, asking the latter if he wanted a pair of a particular brand of sports shoes. The dealer assented and, as the Aussie continued walking through the mall, he called back to ask the dealer's shoe size (suggestive of an ongoing barter relationship where the customer was offering a personalised theft service). Mobile telephones were also a common medium of barter exchange, people either offering their own telephones or stealing telephones to then barter for heroin. I suspect that this was the fate of my own mobile telephone after it was stolen one day during fieldwork. Dealers continually lost and acquired mobile telephones. Lộc stood out among them for managing to retain the same mobile telephone for over twelve months.

Sometimes heroin was directly exchanged for other drugs. Kiều told of an occasion when she was with an Aussie friend she knew from gaol. This friend liked to take speed (methamphetamine), so Kiều made a swap with another person – one of her caps of heroin for a *point* (0.1g) of speed – in order that she and her friend could take drugs together (this points to the sociality inhering in much drug use). Temazepam capsules could also be exchanged for heroin. An Aussie woman, Sandy, had a regular prescription for temazepam. On one occasion, she obtained some heroin from Thanh with the promise that on the following day she would give him some of the temazepam capsules from her prescription. She then reneged on this arrangement. However, after the application of some social pressure over the next few days, she

eventually provided Thanh with the promised temazepam. On another occasion, Sandy attempted to interest Rachel and Viktor in injecting a combination of temazepam and heroin, offering to provide the temazepam if they provided the heroin.

Barter attempts were not always successful as the offered good might not be desired. One day, Hiếu and I were having a cigarette outside a health service while we waited for Kiều, who was attending an appointment. An Aussie man approached and asked Hiếu if he would swap one cap for the Aussie's leather jacket. Hiếu felt the leather and held it up so he could get a good view of it from all sides. While he did this, the Aussie maintained a continual sales pitch about the quality of the leather, what it would be worth in the shops and how he wanted only one cap for this valuable item. Hiếu slipped on the jacket, tugging at it here and there, to get the fit right. I told him it looked all right but that perhaps it was a little big for him. Hiếu appeared to be tempted but, after removing the jacket, he told the Aussie he would have to wait, because his "friend" had the heroin. Hiếu and I continued talking until Kiều came out of the service. She walked off up the street and Hiếu and I followed. As we walked away, the Aussie with the leather jacket tried to interest Hiếu in it once more but Kiều brushed him away without a glance.

Another day, sitting with Van and Hảo, we were approached by an Aussie man who asked Hảo whether he would swap one cap for an "ounce of choof" (cannabis). Hảo was not interested and told him so. The Aussie then attempted to negotiate with Van. Despite Van's lack of interest, the Aussie persisted for a few minutes. "C'mon" he pleaded repeatedly. The offer increased to four ounces but Van remained uninterested, ceasing to even look at the Aussie as he repeatedly said "No, I don't want it". Eventually the Aussie gave up and departed.

Barter could also be unsuccessful because external factors might interfere with the negotiations. One afternoon, sitting with Peter Higgs and Vinh, we noticed an Aussie man enter the mall. He was carrying a laptop computer. The Aussie spoke with Vinh and then moved away to sit at one of the other tables. Within a few minutes, two police entered the mall, approached the Aussie and asked who owned the laptop. The man told them it belonged to his "friend". The police remained with the Aussie,

recording his identification details and asking further questions about the laptop. Eventually one said, “We’ve been waiting for fifteen minutes and he [the supposed owner of the laptop] hasn’t come. I’m going to have to arrest you”. At these words, Vinh turned to me and suggested that I should say to the police that “I know the laptop belongs to this man and he has a receipt for it”. I told Vinh I could not do this as I did not know the man. Vinh again asserted that the laptop did belong to the man. “I know him”, he said, and argued that the police were arresting the Aussie without reason. The man was eventually taken away. As Vinh continued talking, it emerged that he did not actually know the man but that the two of them had come to an arrangement where Vinh would receive the laptop in exchange for two caps of heroin. They had been waiting for Vinh’s friend to bring the heroin.

Barter relies on both parties agreeing to the substitutability and/or commensurability of the objects to be exchanged. From the perspective of the heroin dealer, substitutability depended on a number of factors. Among these were whether the dealer wanted the offered commodity, whether they felt it was practical to receive it (street dealers were unlikely to want a laptop computer if they had to remain in the mall for a number of hours as they would most likely draw the attention of police), or whether they felt they might be able to exchange the object with someone else either for money, or for another commodity they might desire. If they had already made enough money to pick up another weight of heroin, they might be more likely to accept other goods in exchange for heroin. However, if they still needed to earn sufficient money to pick up then the barter attempt was more likely to fail.

Barter entails more bargaining and is more uncertain than trade. Although, as I have shown, dealers and customers were able to bargain in relation to the price of heroin, their capacity to bargain was relatively limited. In contrast, barter required far more intensive bargaining and therefore demanded, and depended upon, bargaining skills. The person offering the good in exchange for heroin needed to be able to persuade the potential recipient of its desirability, its value and that it was commensurate with whatever quantity of heroin they sought in the exchange. From the dealers’ perspective, the bargaining skills they brought to bear were, for example, not displaying too much interest in the item or redefining the transaction as one where the dealer was accepting a loss. In this, barter exchanges, in particular, highlight the

intentionality of actors in the marketplace. Rather than being “passive price-takers” (Stewart, 1992, p.100), customers and dealers actively intervened to “persuade one’s exchange partners to see the world as one sees it oneself” (*ibid*) – or at least as one pretends to see it – as they perceived and exploited the possibilities of the marketplace. Additionally, in barter, power imbalances can also be even more pronounced, with dealers usually obtaining significant trade advantage as in the example of Lộc and the expensive watch. This is similar to the opportunism revealed in trade exchanges with pawnbrokers, who never offer the market value for a pawned item.

### **Dealers as ‘homo economicus’?**

If dealers are seen as active agents, making choices and decisions, what may be said of the reasoning upon which their decisions are made? Neo-classical economic models assume actors to be profit-motivated and guided by instrumental rationality. The criminological/law enforcement drug market literature reviewed in Chapter 2 also suggests that people who sell illicit drugs are motivated by profit.

In Footscray, the opportunity to make a profit was available to dealers. Throughout the two years of fieldwork, the price of 1.7g for the Vietnamese dealers remained largely constant at \$400. If 1.7g of heroin cost dealers \$400 to purchase, and if they made up caps of around 0.07g in size, then, at cost, each cap is worth approximately \$16.68.<sup>38</sup> As described earlier, the average price of a cap was \$40, making a mark-up per cap of \$23.32. Because heroin selling was explicitly engaged in to satisfy their own heroin wants, the dealers always kept some of the 1.7g aside for themselves. However, even retaining 0.7g for personal use and making 14 caps from the remainder to sell at \$40, as we saw Kiều and Lộc doing earlier, yields a potential \$560. With \$400 re-invested in the next weight of heroin, this leaves a profit of \$160 each round of selling. Dealers conducting three rounds in a day (at a minimum) could potentially make \$480 profit every day. Rarely, however, did the dealers make and/or retain profit for any length of time. Kiều said that one day she made “one thousand [dollars] prof-it”. She gave \$300 of this to her mother. Later in the same

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<sup>38</sup> Approximately 24 caps in 1.7g, so  $\$400/24=\$16.68$ .

week, however, she had 15 caps and did not sell any, instead *helping out* (sharing with) some other people and thus consuming all 15 caps without financial return.

Kiều's story highlights that, while dealers framed their heroin selling as a "business", it was by no means an entirely successful one, in the sense of being a long-term profitable venture. According to Hảo, while it was possible for street dealers to expand their business ("build yourself up"), in reality few people ever did, with most of the people "you would see out in Footscray" unlikely to ever get further than just supporting their own heroin wants. "When you're a [heroin] user", he explained, all the profit just "goes back into your arm". Potential profit was also compromised because pricing was flexible and open to negotiation. Furthermore, the possibility of profit was constrained due to dealers' regular encounters with police. These encounters frequently involved the confiscation by police of any money a dealer had in their possession, irrespective of whether the encounter resulted in an arrest.

While it is clear that dealers did not make profit, the question remains: were they profit-motivated? Attempting to get a good price was, indeed, one goal and people did express satisfaction when they made a profit – seen, for example, in previous stories from Hảo, Kiều and Chu. However, people would accept different prices depending on other utilities as well. Other factors shaping the price a dealer would set or accept were whether the dealer had already accumulated enough money to pick up their next weight of heroin, whether the dealer wanted extra money to purchase food or tobacco or other drugs (in particular, for this group, temazepam), as well as whether they thought they had a chance to make a sale or not. Additionally, as seen with Kiều, dealers would, at times, sacrifice profit through acts of sharing. Thus, while profit-making was one intended outcome of their heroin exchanges, in line with Davis' (1992) model of kinds of exchange (Ch. 1), dealers in Footscray acted on the basis of multiple intended exchange outcomes. My findings are also consistent with Wilk's (1996) argument that the neo-classical model of maximisation does not hold up empirically. He proposed a notion of 'satisficing' – where people do not always seek the optimum solution (maximising utility) but rather set a minimum goal and adopt the first strategy that meets the goal. The actions of the Footscray dealers – for example, accepting offers of lower prices once they had accumulated enough money to enable them to purchase another next weight of

heroin – were frequently consistent with this idea of satisficing rather than maximising goals.

Emically, dealing was, on occasion, represented as profit-motivated (and, indeed, profit-making). On other occasions, however, dealing was represented as *just* supporting their habits – that is, the accumulated income was sufficient only to maintain their heroin use, at the expense of other material needs. From my perspective, dealing provided marginally more income than that required merely to cover the cost of heroin. It generally provided sufficient funds to also enable people to purchase food, drink and tobacco. In this, dealing enabled people to subsist and dealers were marginally better off than a comparable group of people trying to survive on welfare benefits alone (approximately \$400 per fortnight). As Bourgois (1995) noted for those living below the official poverty line in New York, people on low or no incomes survive by entering into the informal, underground economy. While the Vietnamese dealers did not represent their heroin dealing as a means of earning an income, in general, it certainly provided a supplement to the income available to them through welfare benefits. Their dealing business, while not the profitable venture implied by much drugs discourse, did enable them to ‘make a living’.

### **Moral and cultural exchange**

Rather than instrumental rationality alone, dealers’ trading decisions were also shaped by moral and cultural elements. The power held by dealers to set prices was tempered by notions of a ‘fair price’. Dilley (1992, p.4) has argued that “prices ... are morally and culturally construed in terms of a just, fair or right price”. Tracing a concern with the morality of trade back to Aristotle’s distinction between ‘natural’ (self-sufficient householding) and ‘unnatural’ (commercial) trade, Dilley quotes Thomas Aquinas who held that prices should accord with the labour and costs of the producer: a “producer charging more than would maintain himself suitably in his social station committed the sin of covetousness and avarice” (*ibid*). Alexander (1992) has also argued that price setting in Western consumer markets operates through notions of a ‘fair price’ rather than being shaped entirely by demand. He provided the example of cinemas charging less on Tuesdays when demand is low; a

practice that is seen as reasonable. However, the converse is not equally true. On days of high demand, such as Saturdays, consumers would be resentful, and perceive it as unfair opportunism, if cinema operators chose to increase prices simply because demand was high. Alexander (1992, p.90) concluded that “[p]rice increases based on cost increases are generally accepted as fair, but many that might be based on demand increases are ruled out as unfair”. Thus, it is not simply the relation between supply and demand that determines prices; cultural constructions of fairness are also implicated.

Moral and cultural constructions of a fair price are apparent in exchange relations between dealers and their customers in the Footscray marketplace and, indeed, in relations between drug sellers and buyers more broadly. There was a shared expectation that customers would obtain sufficient heroin for their \$40 to achieve intoxication. Additionally, customers understood that dealers in Footscray were themselves users of heroin. It was recognised that they sold in order to support their own heroin wants. It was also common knowledge that dealers paid less for the heroin they picked up than the value of the product of 24 caps sold for \$40 each ( $24 \times \$40 = \$960$ ). Therefore, the \$40 cap price incorporated a mark-up which enabled dealers to subsidise their own heroin use. This was understood by everyone as a ‘natural’ feature of the drug scene.

Within the bounds of this structural arrangement, however, it was considered that the extra mark-up should be balanced against fairness of relative value-for-money. The notion of a fair price could be seen in the interaction presented earlier between Nam and the customer who declared he paid only “eighty for a *hundred*”. The customer was using his understanding of the mark-up to lay claim to a ‘fair’ price that gave him some of the benefits accrued through buying larger weights. Likewise, as with the cinema example provided by Alexander, there would be widespread resentment if dealers suddenly raised the \$40 price on days when demand might be greater. In this marketplace, Thursdays were a day of high demand – many people are paid wages or welfare benefits on Thursdays – yet prices did not increase to match the demand. Moral attributions were also revealed, by customers and dealers alike, when dealers were identified as being “greedy” for making smaller deals (and therefore

selling at higher prices) or when dealers were described as “not taking care of” their customers.

According to Dilley (1992, p.6), “[m]oral evaluations, whose forms are always culture specific, result from the processes of contestation within, and over, exchange relations”. Thus, the “extent to which the price mechanism operates within any form of market must also be seen as a function of the social, cultural and political matrices through which the index of price must pass, as well as a function of the bodies of culturally specific knowledge through which notions of price are apprehended” (*ibid* p.9). Culturally, there is a normative reading of drug-selling practices as profit-motivated. Images of the exploitative ‘drug pusher’ preying on the vulnerabilities of hapless heroin ‘addicts’ are common in public discourse (Coomber, 2006; Elliot and Chapman, 2000). These cultural constructions are equally available to people who themselves use heroin, and shape their interpretations and evaluations of dealer practices. Considerable stigma inheres to the drug dealer identity. Moral worth may be reclaimed if the dealing is justified as selling simply to satisfy one’s own drug use rather than seeking profit. As discussed previously, dealers did lay claim to this motivation – declaring that they only sold to “support my habit”. Declarations of trading to make money (profit) were less common (admittedly, the infrequency of declarations of this sort may well have reflected recognition of a failure to actually make profit – even if dealers would have liked to). Some took the assertion of morality even further, declaring that they had made a moral decision to sell, rather than support their heroin use through property crime.

Within this particular set of dealers, price and dealing practices were also shaped by Vietnamese conceptions of luck. Kiều said she would never sell the first deal from the first round at a discounted rate because she believed that it would bring her bad luck. Nor would she give away the first deal. One night, very late after we had been socialising in their home, I observed Kiều refusing to sell a cap to Phuoc for \$20, thereby forcing him to leave the house in order to try and obtain heroin elsewhere. Kiều also preferred not to sell her last cap for the day as she considered this too would bring her bad luck. If she had two caps remaining and someone wanted both, she would sell them but, if there was only one cap left she would leave without selling. While framing her explanation within conceptions of luck, Kiều

simultaneously provided an instrumental rationale in that, because she would be tired and eager to leave after a long day of selling, she might be less vigilant when selling the last cap and therefore run the risk of having the transaction observed by police or even, indeed, selling to an undercover police officer.

Notions of luck as a determinant of business success were shared among Vietnamese people more widely. In contrast to common Western conceptions of luck as coincidental and uncertain, Vietnamese understandings of luck entail intentionality in so far as one is able to perform actions to bring about good luck. This construction of luck is intimately tied to Buddhist understandings, whereby engaging in various Buddhist practices – praying, meditating and so forth – are seen as actions that may be performed to improve one's luck (Soucy, 2000). Stewart (1992, p.109) described a parallel conception of luck held by Gypsy horse-traders in Hungary, where luck is understood as the “rightful consequence of righteous behaviour”. To preserve luck, Gypsy men must avoid “too close contact with polluting objects and persons”. Luck “as efficacy” (*ibid*, p.110) can also be seen in the various actions Kiều performed to generate good luck while she sold heroin.

Vietnamese cultural constructions of karma<sup>39</sup> also shaped dealer practices, as well as providing explanations for undesirable events. It should be noted, however, that among dealers, and indeed among Vietnamese Buddhists more generally (see Soucy, 2000), there were multiple and contradictory interpretations regarding what constituted karma-generating actions.<sup>40</sup> Some dealers expressed the idea that dealing,

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<sup>39</sup> According to Ho (2006, p.82) beliefs in karma have their roots in the Buddhist teaching that “life continues in an eternal cycle of life”. The doctrine of karma holds that the “accumulated deeds of a person consist of thoughts, deeds and actions that establish their specific destiny through the next rebirth” (*ibid*). Thus many Vietnamese believe that what happens in this life is the result of actions in previous lives and karma can also determine the course of events in this life. Karma may be good or bad and is often referred to as the “‘law of causality’... ‘the law of fairness’... and ‘what goes around comes around’” (*ibid*). Good actions can bring good karma, although, among many of the dealers, there was also the belief that children could inherit the bad karma of their ancestors. Likewise, some believed that they could pass bad karma to their own children.

<sup>40</sup> Soucy (2000, p.187) wrote that “tremendous leeway is provided within Buddhism for a variety of understandings, and as there is a belief in Buddhism that different beings are at different spiritual levels and thus have different levels of understanding, there is a tolerance

in itself, generated bad karma as dealers were “making others addicted”. Others considered that dealing did not attract bad karma and that, through dealing, they were avoiding actions such as property crime that would produce bad karma. For some, *helping out* people who were suffering withdrawal (expressed as “I feel sorry for them”), either by gifting them heroin or reducing price, was an action that could generate good karma. Dealers simultaneously held multiple and contradictory interpretations of the relations between dealing and karma, variably expressing different interpretations, in different contexts, according to their different purposes.

The foregoing highlights that, in trade, price is established through the actions and decisions of marketplace actors rather than entirely by an impersonal law of supply and demand. It further highlights that these decisions and actions are shaped by the social and cultural contexts and understandings of marketplace actors.

### **Problems of trust and malfeasance**

A central concern in exchange is the problem of trust and malfeasance. Both parties must trust that the other will not resort to fraud, opportunism or force in order to gain transactional advantage. Liberal conceptions of markets recognised this problem of order and solved it with an apparent ‘natural harmony of interests’ through which discords are automatically harmonised to the public good. Market exchange was framed as advantageous to all parties to the transaction – with the market seen as a “self-regulating system with a role in establishing a natural harmony of interests” (Dilley, 1992, p.10).

Thus, the liberal ‘ideal’ market is underpinned by an assumption of a “generalised morality” (Granovetter, 1985, p.489) whereby parties to transactions pursue these in a civilised, gentle and honest fashion. However, there is nothing in the rational pursuit of self-interest that ensures that actors will pursue it by honest means. Indeed, Dilley suggested that “the logical consequence of the rational pursuit of self-interest

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towards individuals holding a variety of conceptions, and little is done to correct those who hold less than orthodox understandings”.

is chaos and not order" (*ibid*, p.11), a point perhaps well-illustrated by the global financial crisis that began in 2008.

Despite the neo-classical model of the ideal market, in practice, there are few, if any, entirely free and self-regulating markets in Western societies. The majority are regulated through complexes of institutional and legal arrangements to guard against such actions as fraud, opportunism and force. Thus, ironically, in its 'freedom from interference' from government, the exchanges occurring in the Footscray drug marketplace approximate the ideal market envisaged by neo-classical economists. However, because of this 'freedom from interference', drug markets are often understood as particular sites of disorder because they are seen to be unregulated – there are no institutionalised laws, or law enforcers, to ensure that transactions proceed satisfactorily.

Several studies have identified drug marketplaces as sites of violence and disorder and this image permeates discourses around drug marketplaces (Coomber, 2006). The common explanation is that, as sites of illicit exchange, they are not regulated in the same way as licit markets – through legislation, contract law and so on. In this explanation, it might be argued that the supposed violence of a drug market provides proof against 'free markets' and belies the 'order' supposed to derive from the invisible hand. Closer examination, however, reveals that the Footscray marketplace is, in fact, generally ordered. Thousands of routinised trade exchanges proceed to the satisfaction of both transactors. If they did not, then the marketplace would not reproduce. Buyers and sellers would seek alternative arrangements for the circulation and distribution of heroin.

That the drug marketplace does, on the whole, proceed in an orderly fashion indicates the presence of both trust and trustworthiness.<sup>41</sup> Dealers must trust that customers will provide money in exchange for heroin and that they will not seek to

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting here that my informants would most likely disagree with my conclusion. The assertion that "you can't trust anyone" was widely expressed and people were, indeed, alert to the possibilities of untrustworthiness in others. However, in the majority of transactions this possibility was not realised and exchanges proceeded to the satisfaction of both parties.

take the heroin by force. Customers must trust that dealers will provide heroin (of a reasonable quality) for the money they provide. Indicative of trust obtaining in the marketplace is the existence of credit arrangements (i.e. delayed trade exchanges) both between dealers and the people from whom they obtain their heroin, and extended by dealers to particular regular customers. For dealers, credit arrangements with suppliers are essential as the environment in which they operate is one of uncertainty. Intensive policing, for instance, may result in dealers having both their money and their heroin confiscated by police. If charged with an offence but released on bail, they are left in the difficult position of still wanting heroin for themselves but not having the means to procure it.

Trust emerges through social ties and clientelisation processes are directed toward developing trust. The extension of credit to a customer speaks to an implied relationship – that the customer will return to trade with the dealer in the future. I often heard customers explicitly seeking to negotiate such relationships when they told dealers “if it’s good, I’ll come back to you”. Additionally, even though trading parties may not know each other, they are embedded in a social and cultural context through which they share understandings of the appropriate ways for exchange to proceed. For example, both parties draw on shared understandings of ‘good business practices’ and a ‘fair deal’. Assertions that “Asian dealers” were “good business people” were commonplace; though, in fact, there was often ambiguity here in the implication that, although they gave a fair deal for the price, they were also canny opportunists exploiting a demand. This ambiguity speaks also to the symbolism and social meanings of exchange and the ways in which exchange creates and maintains social hierarchy (Davis, 1992). The attitudes held by Aussie customers about the Vietnamese dealers were framed by wider resentments over Vietnamese immigration (see Ch. 3) and also by the recognised power imbalances in this marketplace where Vietnamese dealers largely set the terms of trade.

While trust was apparent, it was not fixed. Trust always has to be negotiated and renegotiated and is often imperfect. It may break down and actors on either side of a transaction may, at times, engage in force, fraud or opportunism. Indeed, close social ties may actually provide “occasion and means for malfeasance and conflict on a scale larger than in their absence” (Granovetter, 1985, p.491). For example, dealers

who are trusted by their suppliers may be provided with opportunities to steal large quantities of heroin – and I was told of this occurring. Trusted customers, or other dealers, may also find an opportunity to steal money or drugs from a trustful dealer who has relaxed his or her wariness – and again, stories of this occurring were not uncommon.

The neo-classical ‘ideal’ market model assumes order is derived from a natural harmony of interests or the ‘invisible hand’ of the market. However, my findings indicate that it is the social relations and shared cultural expectations obtaining in the marketplace that generate trust and thereby maintain order. Correspondingly, these relations and expectations also, simultaneously, create possibilities for disorder. For example, expectations of trust may be exploited to one party’s advantage which then breaks down the order of the marketplace. Both the order and disorder of drug (and other) marketplaces are constituted by social and cultural processes.

### ***Violence in the marketplace***

A particular, and spectacular, form of disorder is violence. Drug markets, as I have noted, are widely constructed as sites of violence and danger. Coomber (2006, p.117) identified the “archetypal” images of drug markets. These images included turf wars, guns, markets “driven by large sums of money and managed by increasingly unrestrained violence” and “relative chaos on the streets or housing estates where ... dealers ... are constantly fighting the competition to keep their clients and the ‘corner’ that they operate”. Coomber suggested that these pervasive images of drug markets derive in large part from research and media reports from the 1970s and 1980s of drug markets in New York, London, Bristol and Liverpool.

Despite these commonly held understandings, however, violence in many drug markets and marketplaces is exceptional. Drug markets and marketplaces will have “vastly different levels of associated violence” (Coomber, 2006, p.118) depending upon their organisational and structural features (e.g. closed or open, rural or urban, emerging or declining) and depending upon the gender, cultural background or class of their participants. The social and political contexts in which drug markets and marketplaces are embedded will also shape the levels of violence expressed within

them – drug markets in producer countries (e.g. Columbia) demonstrate extreme and consistent violence but this is often related to “significant levels of long term political and social destabilization” (*ibid*, p.116).

In Footscray, although infrequent, heated arguments, altercations and instances of extreme violence did occur throughout fieldwork. These occurred between dealers, from customers to dealers, and between non-dealing marketplace participants. It is often assumed that violence in drug markets is always related to disagreements arising as a consequence of unregulated drug transactions – for example, retaliations over theft (Coomber, 2006). In Footscray, the precipitators of arguments and altercations were multiple and not always necessarily related to drug exchanges; other kinds of interpersonal disagreements could also generate verbal or physical conflicts. Bucerius (2007, p.687) identified a similar pattern among Turkish-minority drug dealers in Germany. For example, these dealers said they rarely engaged in violent retribution over thefts, seeing it as a risk of drug dealing and resolving it via “cessation of business” with the thief. However, in matters of “honour” – for example, insults to their family members – they would restore honour with physical fights.

#### *Violence between dealers*

As noted above, violence in drug markets is often attributed to intense competition between drug sellers over customers. For the most part, dealers in Footscray did not overtly compete with one another for customers. Indeed, Kiều once described dealers acting co-operatively when she said that, sometimes, other dealers directed customers to her. Occasionally, however, dealers might argue over a customer. The declared ‘rule’ structuring these interactions was that if a customer had approached a dealer then it was inappropriate for another dealer to try to take that customer. The exception to this was to assert an existing relationship with the customer. Thus, the latter dealer would declare the customer to be a *regular*. I observed some instances of these types of disagreements, and, while the unsuccessful dealer might be angry, perhaps resort to name-calling or other insults, it rarely went further than this and any conflict appeared to be quickly forgotten. An episode involving Hảo provides an example:

A customer approaches Hảo. Hảo holds his hand out below the table, takes the money and then passes the deal to the customer who walks away. Van protests in Vietnamese, challenging Hảo but with little apparent anger. Hảo defends himself and I hear him say “why’d he come up to me then?” Van rises and walks away. I ask Hảo whether Van was arguing that it was his customer. Hảo says “yes”, adding that Van had claimed him as a regular. “But he came straight up to me. You saw him didn’t you?” he asks me, defending his actions. (Field notes, 2003)

The existence of a ‘rule’ indicates that people recognise the possibilities of disorder and conflict and actively develop cultural guides for managing such situations.

In addition to verbal arguments, physical altercations sometimes occurred. Vinh and Van had been selling together for some weeks. At this time, they were using “ice” (crystalline form of methamphetamine) in addition to their heroin. They had been without sleep for several days and these stressors compounded, leading to a verbal argument which rapidly escalated into a physical altercation. While both young men swung punches at each other, none of these landed on their targets. One of the young men picked up a chair from a café, raising it above his head and threatening the other. At this point, the proprietor of the café emerged to chastise the two men for causing trouble. This was effective, as the one holding the chair returned it to the café table and both men immediately left the area – albeit in different directions. A few days later, the conflict was forgotten and they were selling together again.

Several of the long-term Vietnamese dealers said that, in the past, they would combine to intimidate and threaten any Aussies who attempted to sell on the street in Footscray. These stories implied that, at least at one time, the Vietnamese dealers actively maintained and enforced their monopoly on street-based heroin trade. One dealer told of an incident where an Aussie who was trying to sell was stabbed. The Aussie had been selling “big size” deals cheaply as “he not care about making money”. He was stabbed because he was undercutting the Vietnamese dealers.

Two instances of more extreme violence occurred in the marketplace over the two years of fieldwork. The first was a physical fight between two dealers. The initiator

of the attack entered the mall with four other men (some of whom were regular dealers) and approached another dealer. A heated discussion ensued before this man threw the first punch. Several more punches followed and then the initiator of the fight produced a knife and stabbed the other dealer. At this point he was led out of the mall by his four friends. The man who had been stabbed left in the opposite direction, supported by another man. The second incident consisted of a fist fight between two dealers. Lasting around ten minutes and ranging across the top end of the mall, the fight concluded with the arrival of police. Both men attempted to flee, but only one was successful. The other was arrested by police.

A third extremely violent incident occurred away from the marketplace. It was an attempted *standover* (i.e. the extortion of money and/or drugs through the use of intimidation and threat) which escalated, resulting in the stabbing of a young dealer. One of the people involved in the standover subsequently resolved their conflict with the young dealer by apologising. The other people involved in the standover left the marketplace – either through staying away for a time or because they had been gaoled. The dealer who had been stabbed remained selling in the marketplace.

These three instances of extreme violence occurred over a period of two months. One particular dealer, Nhât, – recently released from gaol – initiated all three incidents. During this period, Nhât appeared to be attempting to control heroin sales in the marketplace by standing-over some of the younger dealers, attempting to intimidate other dealers into not selling, claiming customers as his own and reinforcing these claims with the threat of violence or, less often, actual violence. Nhât was described as “crazy”, with people saying that “no one like him”. These exceptional instances of violence in the marketplace ceased occurring once Nhât was again arrested and incarcerated.

#### *Violence from customers to dealers*

Heated arguments between customers and dealers were also observed occasionally. These generally entailed complaints over the authenticity of heroin, the strength of heroin or the size of the deals. These were resolved by the dealer through various means: assuring the customer of a better (larger, improved-strength) deal next time;

providing genuine heroin to compensate for the fake deal; or by providing a cap for free.

Customers sometimes used force – in the form of standovers – against dealers. Usually, their threat of violence was sufficient to extract money, drugs or both from dealers, but there were occasions where the threat was enacted. Le, for example, was stabbed in the thigh by a customer as he demanded her heroin without payment. They were in the customer's car at the time, as he had provided her with transport to her supplier. Le said that she had accepted his offer of transport because, prior to this incident, the customer had always been reliable. Relative to the number of drug transactions occurring in the marketplace, however, standovers were infrequent and often associated with particular persons who established a reputation for this activity. Strategies employed by dealers to avoid such hazards included congregating with other dealers, and remaining visible by conducting transactions in public view. Guarding against standovers was also one of the reasons dealers frequently sold as members of dyads or small sets of people.

#### *Violence between non-dealing marketplace participants*

Altercations between non-drug dealing marketplace participants also occurred. These incidents were at times related to disputes over drugs – theft or fraud (e.g. selling fake drugs) – but they were also precipitated by wider concerns – relationship jealousies, suspicions that someone was a police informer or, especially from women, suspicions that someone may have reported them to child protection services.

Coomber (2006) argued that violence in drug markets needs to be understood in relation to the broader social and cultural context in which the market is embedded. In the social and cultural milieu of Footscray, physical altercations as a means of managing disputes were culturally normalised and, indeed, many people expressed pleasure in being able to watch a “good punch-on [fist fight]”. These incidents were still regulated by cultural norms of morality such that people would declare that it was “dirty” [unfair] to bring knives to fist fights, or indeed, to fight with knives at all. Most dealers said that they did not actively seek out fights, but they were prepared to defend themselves if necessary. They also spoke casually of fighting. In

contrast to my own experience, physical fights were neither framed as exceptional nor as something to be avoided. As I actually saw few of my informants ever engaging in fights, their representations could, perhaps, be seen as attempts to establish and maintain a reputation so as to defuse the need for actual violence. Being seen as someone who is prepared to physically defend themselves may be sufficient to avoid actually having to do so (Denton, 2001 drew similar conclusions in her study of women dealers in Melbourne). Additionally, levels of violence in drug markets are also contingent upon broader structural environments. Few people in Australia have access to guns. Consequently, gun-violence within Australian drug markets is relatively unknown, in contrast to some of the American drug marketplaces described during the 1980s (see, for example, Bourgois, 1995; Curtis, 1998).

It is clear from the foregoing that instances of violence in the marketplace were not unknown. They were spectacular, however, by the fact of their relatively rare occurrence. Thus, violence, although present, was not a defining characteristic of this drug marketplace. Instead, the marketplace was characterised by routine and mundane exchanges of heroin, by order rather than disorder. This set of dealers had been involved in street sales of heroin for between five and ten years. Several told me that they had determined that excessive violence was not in their interests as it was likely to bring the attention of the police which would then compromise their heroin selling. As the title quotation for this chapter indicates, heroin selling was their “business”. Like much work, it was often routine and commonplace but dealers acted to keep it that way by avoiding, as far as possible, actions that might increase their risks.

## **Conclusion**

The key focus of this chapter has been trade – the normative market exchange form. I have also described barter exchange – often conceived as a ‘primitive’ form of market exchange (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones, 1992). My ethnographic findings have demonstrated how the processes of trade and barter exchange are constituted through networks of social relations and how these networks are, themselves, made and remade through processes of exchange. Through this discussion, I have also

illustrated how people manipulate exchange processes, revealing the diversity of ways in which people express agency.

In contrast to neo-classical economic models that understand price as a function of supply and demand, I have shown how: price is established through the co-operative actions of the dealers; it is shaped by moral and cultural understandings; it is established through various styles of reasoning (rather than instrument rationality alone) and in relation to multiple intended exchange outcomes; and it is flexible and negotiated by marketplace actors. As discussed in Chapter 2, epidemiological approaches to the study of drug markets focus on aggregate measures of price. This obscures the variability in price and the social processes entailed in price-setting and it also obscures other ways in which heroin is exchanged in a marketplace – for example, through barter. The assumed subject of epidemiological and criminological approaches to drug markets – the rational calculator and the profit-motivated criminal – also obscures the morality operating in the marketplace.

Close examination of trade in this marketplace indicates that, in many ways, the illegal economic activity of drug dealing proceeds in the same manner as much legal economic activity and operates through similar cultural understandings of ‘good business practice’. Despite widespread images of the violence of drug markets and marketplaces, in general, the Footscray marketplace was a site of order. This is not to say that there were not occasions of disruption (arguments, altercations, excessive violence) but, as I have shown, these were rare. On the whole, the marketplace was characterised by the daily repetition of multiple routine and mundane drug exchanges. This order derived from the social relations people established and maintained and from the shared cultural understandings they produced and reproduced.

While market-oriented trade and barter were key modes of exchange in the marketplace, they were not the only ways in which heroin was passed between people. In the next chapter, I detail other modes of exchange that also constituted, and were constituted by, the Footscray marketplace.

## Chapter 7

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# “Hôm qua em giúp năm người”: community exchanges of heroin

“Hôm qua em giúp năm người [Yesterday I help five people]”, Kiều announced, describing the previous evening when she had shared her heroin with five others. Her remark, which provides the title for this chapter, captures the modes of exchange to be discussed in it. Whereas in Chapter 6, my focus was market-oriented exchanges, in this chapter I focus on non-market forms of heroin exchange. Following Gudeman (2001), I classify these under the rubric of ‘community exchange’. These exchanges can be divided into the categories of employment, service, gifts and theft. Community exchanges rely on, and generate, more intimate social ties than do market-oriented exchanges. Although I observed some instances of community exchange between Vietnamese dealers and Aussies, they were most common between Vietnamese dealers or between dealers and other Vietnamese heroin users.

As Gudeman (2001) and Gregory and Altman (1989) have argued, economy should not be seen as separate from other elements of people’s lives. Likewise, the practices in which people engage in the drug marketplace should not be isolated from other aspects of their social and cultural lives. Indeed, marketplace practices are one of the ways through which people create and affirm the social relationships that constitute their everyday lives. Gudeman (1992) wrote of a three-way model of exchange where the form of exchange “can be mapped onto social distance in a precise way: among intimates in a social group, altruism, the free gift or generalised exchange obtains; at the next distance, such as between affines, reciprocity or give-and-take holds; finally bargaining and trade are found between those with no social ties” (Gudeman, 1992, p.284).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Gudeman attributes this model to Marshall Sahlins (1972, pp.194-5). However, Sahlins’ model was that of a continuum of reciprocity mapped onto social distance: generalised reciprocity which he argued was the “solidary extreme” – putatively altruistic transactions (he cites such terms as “sharing”, “generosity”, “hospitality” and “free gifts”); balanced reciprocity at the midpoint – applied to transactions which “stipulate returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period” (here he included “gift-

Although, as I showed in Chapter 6, I disagree with Gudeman's argument that trade and bargaining occur only between those with no social ties, the notion of 'social distance' provides a useful analytic frame for comprehending the patterning of exchange forms in the marketplace. Some community modes of exchange – for example, gifts – were more likely to occur, and to occur more regularly, among those with closer social ties. Others, such as theft, were more likely to occur between those who were more socially distant (although, as noted in Chapter 6, theft was potentially more spectacular and profitable when it occurred between intimates).

In this chapter, as with the preceding one on trade and barter exchange, I examine how people manipulate exchange forms strategically; how they use processes of exchange to create and affirm the social relations that constitute, and are constituted by, the drug marketplace; and how people express agency through these exchange processes.

## **Working for dealers**

Particular dealers would sometimes "work" for other dealers. These relationships tended to be short-lived, in part because most dealers preferred to sell as independent operators, but also because of the relatively high risk that one's employer might be arrested and gaoled. For example, for a few months, Van was working for Son. He would introduce Son as "my brother", clarifying that he did not mean a blood relation. When Son was arrested, Van was left to fend for himself. For a few weeks, he sold heroin independently until he joined Nhât and his crew. This association lasted for a few weeks until Nhât was also arrested and gaoled. Van then returned to selling heroin independently or partnering with another of the younger men.

In contrast to formal labour exchange in a capitalist economy, working for a dealer was generally compensated through shares in the surplus rather than through a wage

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exchange" as well as "trade" or "buying-selling"); and finally negative reciprocity at the unsociable, most impersonal, extreme which he argued represented attempts "to get something for nothing", transactions "conducted toward net utilitarian advantage" (here Sahlins included "haggling", "barter" "gambling" and "theft").

system.<sup>43</sup> The productive activities of purchasing a weight of heroin, breaking it into smaller portions, packaging it into caps and then selling these in the marketplace, produces a surplus of both heroin and cash. Those working for a dealer receive shares in this surplus in the form of heroin, other material goods such as food and cigarettes, accommodation during the period they work for the dealer and sometimes even small sums of money for minor expenses. These shares were not formally or contractually constituted (c.f. St Martin, 2007). Rather they were apportioned and distributed according to the decisions of the employing dealer, with some dealers being generous and others less so.

Working for dealers was intimately tied up with the status of *brother*. Carrying implications of involvement in illicit activities – in the sense of a gangster – the role of brother is that of the leader of a group of people. The most well-known of such Vietnamese collectivities in Australia was the Sydney-based group known as 5T (Maher *et al.*, 1998; Thomas, 1999). This group was comprised of single young people (mainly men) without family. Their name was derived from five Vietnamese words (all beginning with the letter ‘t’) that, together, meant young people who, without the love of parents, find love among themselves. There were reports of similar groupings in Footscray in the 1980s (see Byrne, 1992) but, by 2003, such organised collectivities were no longer operating in the area. However, smaller, more labile groupings of people continued to form and coalesce around particular *brothers*.

Age was an important factor shaping whether dealers worked for others. Younger dealers were often described as starting out working for a *brother*. A *brother* is usually (but not always) older than others in the group and is the key decision-maker. The role carries obligations of care for the other members of the group. Quàng, for example, described how he “detox” at his “friend house” and his “friend look after”; he was referring to Nhât during the period that he worked for him. The status of *brother* was one to which many of the younger men aspired. There is a transgressive pleasure in being part of a *gangster* group. Many of the dealers began selling before

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<sup>43</sup> This shares system has also been identified within the fishing industry where crew members are compensated with a share in the catch (St Martin, 2007).

they started using heroin and in those days they sold for an older *brother*. As they aged, however, the glamour of being in a gang paled and they were less interested in having to follow the directives of a *brother*.

Đũng was one young man who aspired to the status of *brother*, although, in fact, he was unsuccessful. Early in our relationship, Đũng described himself as an older *brother* who was trying to “take care” of the younger people. Kiều confirmed that Đũng “try and be like brother”, also noting the constraining role of arrest on *brother* aspirations. “He got pinched [arrested]. So he can’t work. Before, he got young boys, he make them work for him. He just sit back.” An alternative assessment was provided by Tuan, who suggested that Đũng wanted to be a *brother* but had not managed to achieve the respect required, achieving instead only a reputation as a “bully”.

Others who aspired to and achieved the status of *brother* were Nhât and Son. Nhât appeared in the marketplace toward the end of 2003 (he had been in gaol prior to this). Truc and Quàng, who had previously operated independently, began working for him. As well as selling heroin, Nhât was interested in establishing a trading monopoly in the marketplace. Supported by Truc and Quàng, he would standover and intimidate other dealers in an effort to take a larger proportion of the customer base for himself. As noted earlier, Van also joined this group for a short period.

Son was another who achieved *brother* status for a period. One of the few violent incidents that occurred in the mall during fieldwork involved Sơn and Nhât, during the period in which the latter was attempting to establish a monopoly (as discussed in Ch. 6). Their physical fight ended when the police arrived and arrested Nhât (Son managed to avoid being implicated). During the fight, Kiều, who was observing with me, declared that Son was a “real brother” whereas Nhât was only a “want-to-be”.

A frequently told local story was that the drug marketplace was controlled by *two brothers* (this title referred to their *gangster* role though, additionally, they were

biological siblings).<sup>44</sup> The *two brothers* had “lieutenants” who would actively recruit young people to work for them. Phuoc told of a “lieutenant” of the *two brothers* who would spend time in the local amusement arcades in the early 1990s, impressing young men with “easy money” and then recruiting them to work as dealers. The Footscray marketplace may well have been actively regulated by the *two brothers* in the past but, by 2003, although their reputations still held currency, they did not appear to be actively controlling the marketplace.<sup>45</sup> The *two brothers* had grown older, made money and diversified into more legitimate business enterprises. A recurring story was that the *two brothers* still retained control by determining who was allowed to provide heroin to the marketplace dealers. Any would-be dealer was to pick up only from suppliers approved by the *two brothers*.

However, there were always new entrants to dealing and controlling the supply of heroin in the marketplace would have required the *two brothers* to maintain a constant presence and be ever-vigilant. The older dealers said that it was impossible for them to do so and so dealers picked up from whomever they chose. On one occasion, Kiều was told she had to pick up from the *two brothers*. She did so for a while until she found a supplier with cheaper and better quality heroin, at which point she ceased accessing heroin through the *two brothers*-approved supplier. Likewise, May, a young Vietnamese woman who was selling for a brief period, also represented Footscray as a would-be controlled marketplace, but one where the control was easily circumvented:

May returns and sits with us for a while. Peter [Higgs] remarks that he hasn’t seen her for a long time and that he didn’t expect to see her in Footscray. May says that “no”, she usually sells in the city but had to stop because of her “bail conditions”, which don’t allow her in the Melbourne CBD. She then tells us that she is being hassled by the Vietnamese sellers in Footscray, “because I do better than they do”. Apparently Kiều had been involved earlier in checking May out,

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<sup>44</sup> Although I heard about the *two brothers*, I never saw them.

<sup>45</sup> Around the time of the stabbing of the young dealer described in Chapter 6, several people suggested that the *two brothers* would step in and hold the perpetrators to account. One person even suggested this was why the perpetrators appeared nervous the few times they returned to the marketplace following the incident.

approaching her and asking her to come and speak with some of the Vietnamese men. The men wanted to know who May was buying from. She tells us, “I said his English name”. The other dealers remained concerned until she then gave the dealer’s Vietnamese name, at which point they were satisfied. May then added that she only buys a small amount from this dealer, preferring to purchase most of what she sells from another dealer. The approved supplier is just used to appease the local Footscray dealers. May repeats that they, “try and bully ya.... you just have to stand up to them”. (Field notes, 2003)

Working for dealers was an opportunity made possible through shared ethnicity: Aussies did not work for Viet dealers. It was also an opportunity shaped by Vietnamese cultural understandings of the obligations older people owe to those younger than themselves – looking after them, providing for their material needs – and reciprocally, that younger people owe to those who are older – loyalty, obedience, respect. Employment, in this local context, was a less socially distant exchange relation than that of selling one’s labour in capitalist exchange. As noted, it was a relatively infrequent mode of exchange because most dealers preferred to sell for themselves. It was more common away from the marketplace, with dealers’ suppliers more likely to employ people to carry out deliveries, prepare heroin for sale and so on.

## **Service**

Obtaining heroin through the provision of service, or providing heroin for services rendered, was a regularly enacted mode of exchange. Service exchanges were more casual and short-term than working for a dealer and there were fewer social obligations on the part of the person receiving the service. I observed two main categories of service: *helping out* and sexual service, although a range of other services were sometimes rendered in exchange for heroin.

### ***Helping out***

Vietnamese heroin users who infrequently attended the marketplace (and therefore would not identify as ‘dealers’) were able to negotiate with a Vietnamese dealer to help secure customers, in exchange for one or more *tastes* of heroin or a few caps to keep for themselves. This service was designated as *helping out*. This was the preferred strategy for procuring heroin used by one particular young man, who would appear every so often for a few days, *help out* a dealer in exchange for heroin, and then not be seen in the marketplace for another few months. People could also be recruited for service by a dealer (as was seen in the episode involving Tu in Ch. 1, pp.4-5).

*Helping out* was also an opportunity that could be negotiated by regular dealers when they  *fucked up*, that is, found themselves without the wherewithal to sell for themselves. A variety of events could result in this state of affairs. Dealers might have been arrested and lost any money they were carrying; they might have been robbed; they might have *shouted* more people than they could afford to; or they might have remained at home to avoid police or simply because they could not be bothered coming out to sell and, thus, used up all their heroin supplies. These were well-recognised experiences among the dealers. If the *fuck up* could be attributed to an external cause – for example, being *ripped* by a *customer* or having money and/or drugs taken by police – then it could be used as an acceptable justification for asking other dealers to *help [you] out*. Such requests for assistance were common and sympathy was expressed for those who had *fucked up* as a result of forces beyond their control.

This sympathy could be exploited by people who were in this situation as a result of their own actions, and, equally, requests for assistance could be dismissed by dealers who did not wish to provide aid. A dealer could refuse assistance by asserting that the claimant was responsible for their situation and hence not deserving of help. A conversation with a young woman, Diep, is illustrative:

Diep’s partner, Thuân, was helping out Van and ĐÔng. Thuân was allowing the two men to help him find customers, in return for which they would each receive a taste. Diep had come to sit with me to complain about Van and ĐÔng, saying that their claim about the police taking their gear [heroin] was

“bullshit”, and that it was more likely that they “just stayed at home” and used all their heroin which is how they “fucked up”. She told me she had tried to tell Thuân that “they’re just using [exploiting] you” but that he wouldn’t listen. (Field notes, 2004)

On this occasion, Thuân had accepted Van and ĐÔng’s assertion as legitimate, despite his girlfriend’s scepticism.

In addition to *fucking up*, frequent sojourns at the local inpatient detoxification unit also meant, for some people, they had to *start up* again after they were discharged. Providing service to a dealer might give them a few caps with which they could re-commence selling. Kiều explained this method of “working your way up”. If you have nothing at all, somebody else might give you, for example, three caps. Selling these provides enough to purchase a *hundred*. From this you would make five caps (at \$40 each) and then have enough money to buy a half-gram (and have a small *taste* for yourself). Repeating this process a few times, within a few hours you can work your way up to buying a *one-point-seven*, which will make your money back, give you a “nice taste” and also give you some “prof-it”.

Over an 18 month period, either Kiều on her own, or Kiều and Lộc together, had accepted this service from more than twenty different helpers. Some of these helpers lasted for only a day, others for a week or two. Only once did I see Kiều *helping out* another dealer. This was the morning following her release from hospital when she had come straight to Footscray, seen Tran, told him she was “hanging out” and asked him to “help me out.” Tran had given her a *taste* which she then worked off by helping him sell a round. Through this assistance, she was also given three caps for herself enabling her to *start up* again. By that afternoon, she was picking up 1.7g weights from her suppliers.

As with working for dealers, the *helping out* opportunity was also generated through shared ethnicity. I did observe three Aussie men (Macca, Al and Kosta) helping find customers for Vietnamese dealers for brief periods, but these were exceptional. In general, Aussies were said to be unreliable while other Vietnamese were viewed as more trustworthy. This is not to say that there were never complaints about the Vietnamese helpers. In the course of praising her current helper, Kiều complained

about many of her previous helpers. She said that sometimes when she “help people out”, as soon as she had provided them with a *taste*, they “get lazy” and stop looking for customers. Her current helper was “good” because he had continued to actively seek out and sell to customers even after receiving the heroin.

It was understood as less risky for dealers to extend trust to another Vietnamese person<sup>46</sup> because Vietnamese dealers interacted with each through multiple domains – within the drug marketplace, but also through the domains of family and friendship. Thus, Vietnamese were highly interconnected. This interconnection meant that dealers were more able to find and seek recompense from a Vietnamese person if they stole from them. As dealers had fewer connections with Aussies, tracking down an Aussie thief would have been more difficult.

The *helping out* opportunity was further supported by regular presence in the marketplace – *helping out* local dealers who were temporarily not in a position to deal independently, was low risk because they were likely to return to the marketplace and therefore less likely to chance taking the heroin for themselves. Regular presence was not a necessary condition for *helping out*, however, as was seen when Lộc allowed an unknown young Vietnamese man, who had recently arrived from Sydney, to help him get customers for a week. This young man’s service entitled him to stay at Lộc’s home and share his food as well as heroin (in this it shifted to a ‘working for’ relation).

The ambiguity of the *helping out* mode of exchange was apparent in the ways in which it was discussed. Those assisting the dealer to find customers would describe their actions as *helping out*. The same phrase was used by the dealers about the assistants, that is, the dealers would say they were *helping out* the person by permitting them to find customers. The implication was that the dealer was not gaining anything by allowing this service to be rendered. Often a dealers’ acceptance of service was presented as “feeling sorry” for the would-be-assistant and, thus, an act of charity. On separate occasions, Kiều and Lộc both told me they did not need

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<sup>46</sup> This is not to say that thefts between Vietnamese did not occur, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

anyone to *help them out*. Lộc would also frequently complain that they had yet another helper because Kiều “feel sorry for them”. Supporting his complaint, Lộc argued that having helpers was more trouble than it was worth because you could not trust them. He said that he had told Kiều “a million times” that dealing on their own was the least risky strategy.

Although dealers were able to sell without assistance, having a helper did offer advantages. The *round* could be completed more quickly thereby minimising the time spent out on the streets and reducing the chances of detection by police. With a trusted helper, one person could hold the money while the other held the drugs, thereby minimising potential charges if searched by police. Having a helper meant there was someone watching out for you as well, therefore reducing the risk of violence or theft. Prestige was also a factor in allowing people to assist you while you sold, indicating that you were generous, and in a position to take care of not only yourself but other heroin users as well. In this sense, having helpers provided opportunities to demonstrate largesse – to be in charge of the distribution of heroin and, perhaps, to also provide money for food, drinks and cigarettes.

One of the factors to be assessed by dealers when allowing others to help find customers, was whether the helper could be trusted to hold the heroin. Kiều either held the heroin herself and required the helper to return to her each time they found a customer, or she would give the helper only one or two caps at a time, thereby minimising any potential loss if they took the heroin for themselves. Once, when she and Lộc had Dung helping them, Kiều grew concerned when she had not seen Dung for about 30 minutes. She complained that she had given him two caps to sell but then Lộc had given him another three, despite not having received any money from the first two caps. Kiều speculated that Dung had “run off” and would use the money he obtained for the caps to start up for himself; she believed that everyone wanted to sell for themselves and would be always thinking about the best ways to achieve this. In this instance, Kiều was mistaken as Dung reappeared a few minutes later. A factor ensuring his loyalty this day may have been that Kiều and Lộc were also allowing him to stay at their house.

A further risk was whether the dealer could trust the helper not to *lag* (disclose illicit activity) to the police if detained or arrested. Kiều was once caught in possession of a cap. The police had not seen her sell so she could easily have claimed it was for her own personal use. However, the person who had been helping her procure customers provided a statement that she was selling. The police showed Kiều the statement, leaving her with no option, as she saw it, but to admit to trafficking.

Dealers who helped people out were both admired and resented. There was a sense in which dealers were seen, and saw themselves, as being altruistic, feeling sympathy for those who might be *hanging out* and so helping them. There was also admiration for the person who was in a position to take care of others with heroin and other material resources. The much admired *brother* status was always associated with taking care of other people. At the same time, resentment of dealers was also expressed, with dealers being spoken of as *playing God*, dictating when and how much heroin their assistants could have and, in some fashion, enjoying the power they could wield over others. Discussing these practices with Phuoc, I remarked that helpers received equal shares of heroin. Snorting with derision, he corrected me, declaring that, in his view, the helpers received considerably less heroin than the dealers and were often made to wait for their share. As with working for dealers, compensation received for *helping out* a dealer was dependent upon the particular dealer and the existing relations between the helper and the dealer.

As noted, *helping out* was at times constructed as charity (“feeling sorry” for the helper) while, at other times, it could be understood in terms of either balanced reciprocity (a counter-gift for past giving or past *helping out*), or generalised reciprocity (informal gift-giving for which no accounts are kept, no immediate or specific return is expected and no source of repayment specified (Sahlins, 1972)). *Helping out* exchanges were one of the ways in which dealers created and affirmed the social ties that connected them with other Vietnamese heroin users and dealers in Footscray. Through these social processes they produced and maintained the particular social category of Vietnamese identity and acted to reproduce the bounded nature of the marketplace, where Vietnamese and Aussies rarely interacted, other than during trade or barter exchanges.

### ***Sexual service***

Another form of service exchange in the marketplace was the provision of sexual services in exchange for money or drugs or both. Several studies have identified strong associations between illicit drug markets and sex work (see, for example, Maher and Hudson, 2007; May, Edmunds, Hough and Harvey, 1999; Moore and Dietze, 2005). In contrast, in the Footscray drug marketplace, explicit sex work was uncommon (highlighted by the absence of established local sex work rates). I was aware of only three drug-using women who engaged in explicit sex work in the marketplace. One of these, Nicky, a young Aussie woman, came to the marketplace regularly for a few months and offered sexual services in exchange for money. Her services consisted of masturbation, fellatio or both. She provided these services at a short distance from the marketplace. On one occasion, Peter Higgs and I were with Nicky in the mall. A Vietnamese man approached her, smiling as he asked “Hello, remember me?” As Nicky returned his greeting the man leant in closer to whisper in her ear. Nicky’s response was a clear, although not angry, “Fuck off”. “Fuck off?” he repeated, grinning as he walked away to another table. Nicky called out to him, “Sucky-sucky” and then turned to Peter and me to tell us “I don’t remember him at all”. A few minutes later the man returned. Peter, who was still recruiting for another research project, attempted to persuade the man to participate in this research. After some discussion the man agreed. As they were about to depart, the man again said something privately to Nicky, who replied “All right”. The two then walked off together, despite the man having agreed to be interviewed by Peter. Within ten minutes the man was back in the mall. Nicky reappeared an hour later, indicating to me that she had provided sexual service to this man.

I was also told of occasions involving two other Aussie women offering sexual services to dealers in exchange for money or drugs. One, a woman Peter Higgs had observed, was offering fellatio for \$10, while I was told about the other woman by one of the local health workers. The latter woman was young and visibly pregnant. She had been observed approaching a group of Vietnamese men and offering sex in exchange for drugs. According to the health worker, the Vietnamese men were “disgusted” and “wouldn’t even look at her” because of her pregnancy.

However, while explicit sex work exchanges were rare, sexualised exchange did occur, in the form of attempts to establish intimate relationships with dealers in order to secure access to heroin (by bringing oneself into a sharing exchange relation). The gendered quality of these exchanges was apparent. In a recent metasynthesis of qualitative literature on women's involvement in drug economies (Maher and Hudson, 2007, p.817), a key identified theme was the sexualised quality of female roles in the drug economy. According to the authors, a 1986 study by Miller found that "women involved in street life used their sexuality to secure partnerships and resources". Other studies reviewed (i.e. Adler, 1985; Waldorf *et al.*, 1991) also provided evidence of sexualised roles "in the form of 'trophy-women' and 'dope-chicks' who utilize their appearance and sexuality to facilitate access to drugs and lifestyle comforts". Finally, the authors found that a 2004 study by Bourgois and colleagues similarly highlighted that women continue to occupy sexualised roles and depend upon "older men to facilitate access to drugs, money and protection". Maher and Hudson (2007, p.821) concluded that within illicit drug markets, female roles "continue to be sexualised, but some women utilize 'feminine' attributes and institutional sexism to their advantage".

In Footscray, an example of these sexualised exchanges is provided by Theresa, a young Aussie woman who appeared in the marketplace on a regular basis ten months into fieldwork. I began hearing stories about her from other women. Hung reported that Theresa, who had been spending time with Hung's *godbrother* Đoan, had filled Đoan's syringe with water instead of heroin when they were injecting together. A few weeks later, Kiều repeated this story, adding a further tale involving Theresa's theft of Van's heroin and money. During the theft, Theresa took the added precaution of also removing Van's clothes so he could not chase after her. Asking if there had been repercussions for Theresa, I was told that "they [Vietnamese men] can't hit girls" so Theresa had escaped any consequences. After a few weeks, characterised by regular changes of male companions, Theresa commenced an intimate relationship with Chiền. Early in the relationship, Chiền would complain that Theresa only wanted him so she could access heroin. He said she would "disappear" if he was ever without heroin, only returning when he again had heroin. Despite these initial complaints, and although marked by frequent break-ups, their

relationship was still ongoing when I completed fieldwork, and generally described by both in terms of romantic love.

A further example is provided by Diep, who appeared in the marketplace around December 2003, when she was heavily pregnant. For three days, I saw her always in the company of Viêt and then Viêt was back on his own. Later, Viêt told me that “my girlfriend” – she “ran off with all my gear [heroin]”. He had not heard from her for two days and her mobile telephone had been switched off. He added that a previous girlfriend had taken \$3,000 from him, asking rhetorically, “Why they all ripped me off?” A few weeks after this, I saw Diep sitting at a café with Thuân, sharing a plate of food. These two were together over the next month or so with one brief interruption. Thuân spoke to me about it, saying he had been telephoning Diep for two days but she was not answering the calls. Reminiscent of Viêt’s experience with Diep, I felt sorry for Thuân, who seemed attached to her. The following day, however, they were back together again. The relationship lasted for a few more weeks and then Diep ceased coming to Footscray. This relationship provided Diep with heroin. In return, she became Thuân’s “girlfriend”, a role that was about providing affection, company and display rather than sex. Diep explained one day that Thuân must “really care” about her if he was prepared to form a relationship with her while she was six months pregnant and therefore, in her view, unable to have sex.

Diep represented her relationship in terms of romantic love – she cared for Thuân and he for her. Similarly, Chièn and Theresa’s relationship was constructed by them as a love affair. While such cultural models of romantic love were pervasive in the marketplace, alternate interpretations of these forms of relationship (between women and dealers) were also in circulation.

In discussions regarding the various ways people access heroin in addition to trade, Kiều and Kelly, on separate occasions, both asserted that women, particularly young women, tried to gain access to heroin by making themselves available to men. Kiều was speaking in terms of romantic relationships rather than sex, such that the women agree to give the men the things they wanted (e.g. affection, companionship, the prestige of having a girlfriend) in return for which they hope to be provided with

heroin as well as other material goods. Kelly, on the other hand, acknowledged the potential sexual component of these exchanges when she expressed sympathy for some young women, feeling “sorry for them” because they were seemingly unaware that the men were “just using them for sex”.

Kiều also acknowledged that men sought to attract women by offering them drugs. She described a particular dealer who did not use heroin himself, but was “always trying to catch the fish [impress women]”. According to Kiều, he enjoyed having young women attached to him and he offered them heroin to “try and get them hooked” so that they would then be dependent upon him. Kiều considered that young women were pleased to do this as they enjoyed “being famous” by being connected to a successful dealer. When they grew older and “more experienced”, however, they might begin questioning the man, not doing everything he wanted and then they would be discarded.

In their constructions, Kiều and Kelly reproduced stereotypes of (generally male) drug dealers as ‘pushers’ who try to ensnare the innocent and drug naïve (see Coomber, 2006 for detailed discussion of dealer stereotypes), as well as reproducing stereotypical understandings of women who use sex and sexuality to obtain things from men. Within these constructions is an implicit moral critique of women’s assumed use of instrumental rationality directed toward utilitarian advantage, in a context that ought to be about ‘love’. Similarly, Bourgois and colleagues (2004, p.255), in their study among homeless injecting drug users in San Francisco, observed that “the sexual naïveté or immorality of women becomes the subject of condemnation on the street”. These authors further observed that “the predatory behavior of men who demand sex in exchange for their gifts of drugs remains largely unexamined”. This was also apparent in the Footscray marketplace. While sympathy for the young and naïve women was expressed, men’s practices in seeking to attract women in this fashion were accepted as ‘what men do’. Bourgois and colleagues (2004, pp.256-7) argued that it “is difficult and dangerous for young women to remain independent and autonomous on the street. Their vulnerability to direct violence and sexual predation obliges them to enter into an exclusive ‘running partnership’ with a man”. Despite Bourgois and colleagues’ utilitarian interpretation,

many of the women in their study constructed their relationships through discourses of romantic love, just as Diep and Theresa did in Footscray.

Manipulation of ‘institutional sexism’ could be read in the sexualised exchanges in the marketplace. Both the ideas about, and the practices of, women using their sexuality to secure heroin were framed by local cultural models of gender roles among both Vietnamese and Aussies, where males are seen as providers and breadwinners. Women’s practices in forming relationships were also shaped by prevailing expectations of women as ‘passive’, ‘docile’ and economically dependent upon men. Cultural models of romantic love, and cultural models of being in a romantic relationship as a measure of success and worth, reproduced these gendered practices and positions. This cultural rhetoric shapes women’s understandings of their available strategies and they draw on these understandings to be strategic. There are multiple ways of reading these practices (e.g. utilitarian, romantic) and they are interpreted in multiple and contradictory ways by participants in this scene who recognise, and play with, the ambiguity of social actions.

Notwithstanding the cultural rhetoric of women aligning themselves with men in order to secure heroin, actual practices were more complex. I met Phuong, a woman aged in her late 20s, towards the end of fieldwork when she began visiting Kiều and Lộc in their house. Phuong and a man had come to pick up some heroin. After everyone had injected heroin, the man left and Phuong remained. She told us about her recent three day relationship with Sĩ, a young dealer from Footscray. She said he had started out sounding confident and like “a man of action” (thereby fitting cultural models of masculinity where men are seen as strong providers), but she quickly realised he was “all talk”. Phuong had a 3.5g weight of heroin which she intended to sell so she could “look after myself [meet her heroin wants]” but, instead, the two of them had consumed the entire amount. According to Phuong, Sĩ kept assuring her, “I’ll help you sell” but would then suggest they have just one more *taste*. This continued for three days until all the heroin had been consumed. Kiều remarked that “he’s good”, referring to Sĩ’s ability to persuade Phuong to support his drug use. Kiều considered it was unusual for a man to be supporting his heroin use in this way as, in her experience, this strategy was usually employed by women.

Despite Kiều's remark that it was unusual for men to have their habits supported by women, she herself supported the heroin use of at least three different men. In June 2003, she was released from one of several stints in gaol and for the next few months remained single, selling independently or, occasionally, with helpers who were usually male. Between September and December of that year, prior to commencing her relationship with Lộc, she established a series of relationships with males that she described as "boyfriends". These relationships did not last long, the shortest being three days. They were confined to kissing and hand-holding and, throughout, Kiều retained full control of her heroin selling (much to the frustration of the boyfriends who complained that she would not let them hold the heroin).

Despite the expectations and understandings of women's practices in the marketplace, the Vietnamese women were able to, and often did, sell independently to provide for their own heroin use. In addition to Kiều and Phuong, other Vietnamese women also sold independently, including Le and Hung. Although Le was in an ongoing relationship with Kien, she was generally on her own when she sold in the marketplace. Hung was involved in a series of short-term relationships with men but, in between these relationships, she also sold for herself. A third woman was selling independently for a short while following her release from gaol and, towards the end of fieldwork, another women appeared in the marketplace – similarly, recently released from gaol – and she also sold independently. Maher and Hudson (2007) noted that where women are involved in drug selling, it is usually at the most marginal and subordinate levels. Although I did not collect data on this, given the male to female ratios in the Footscray marketplace (i.e. predominantly male dealers), it was notable that when dealers referred to their suppliers, these were frequently women. Furthermore, some twelve months after fieldwork, I was told that one of the women dealers had moved away from dealing in the marketplace and commenced supplying larger weights of heroin to the Footscray street dealers.

Several women who were in established relationships also sold heroin alongside their partners. Linh and Hiệp, for example, would arrive in the marketplace together but would sell separately from each other. Other partnered women, Diep and Thi, for example, would hold the heroin while their partners made the actual sales. If these women's partners were incarcerated, the women would continue selling in their

partner's absence. Thus, in the marketplace, if women were single they sold heroin independently. If they were in relationships, then selling activities were generally shared. That this was expected was apparent in a complaint made by some of the dealers in relation to the heroin-using Aussie girlfriend of one of the dealers. She was held to be "lazy" because, unlike Viet women, she just "sits back" and lets her boyfriend "do all the work".

### ***Opportunistic services***

Other services that could be rendered in order to access heroin included *picking up* for others, providing accommodation, or one-off services such as driving a dealer to their supplier or injecting a dealer who was unable to inject themselves. *Dealers* in the marketplace sold caps and *hundreds* to the Aussies. These customers were aware of the substantial reduction in price if they bought a larger weight. However, they needed a Vietnamese person who could broker such a deal with a local supplier. Chu was one person who would occasionally *pick up* a larger weight for Aussies, adding a mark-up to the price. Phuoc would also *pick up* for groups of Aussies who had pooled their finances in order to purchase a larger weight. Phuoc would add a mark-up, as well as negotiating to take some of the heroin for his effort. Finally, dealers seeking to re-establish themselves sometimes had to rely on another Vietnamese dealer to *pick up* for them if they did not have contact details, as Tan briefly did for Kiều following her release from gaol.

Providing accommodation was another service that could generate access to heroin. Kiều stayed with Mary on two occasions, both times supplying Mary with heroin in exchange. Sandy also often allowed people to stay at her house in return for heroin (although she always presented this as feeling "sorry for them" because they were homeless). One-off services such as driving a dealer to their suppliers could be compensated through heroin,<sup>47</sup> as could providing assistance in finding veins. Macca once offered to inject Kiều (who at the time was having difficulty finding veins). In return for this service, she provided him with a *taste* of heroin.

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<sup>47</sup> Driving dealers around in exchange for heroin was also described by Coomber (2006) in his analysis of 'freebies' and credit in drug exchanges.

## **Gifts**

Another form of community exchange commonly transacted in the marketplace was gift exchange. In common usage, a gift is defined in English as “something given” (Delbridge, 1982). In western societies, the ideal gift is understood to be voluntary, spontaneous and unobliged – given without expectation of return or reward. In everyday social practice, however, gifts are more complicated. Expressed succinctly by Sahlins (1972, p.186) when he wrote, if “friends make gifts, gifts make friends”, scholars of the gift agree that gifts create and affirm social relationships. Just how they do this has been a matter of long debate. One of the earliest theorists on the gift, Mauss (1974), argued that gifts constitute social relations through obligation and indebtedness. In his *Essay on the Gift*, Mauss (1974, p.1) wrote that while gifts are “in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous,” they are in fact “obligatory and interested”. Concerned with gift relations in societies seen as operating through gift systems (gift economies), Mauss argued that these systems were based on “three obligations: giving, receiving, repaying” (*ibid*, p.37). By creating obligations, gifts tie people together in a temporal, lasting cycle of giving, receiving and repaying. According to Mauss, what obliges people to reciprocate is the ‘spirit of the gift’:

The obligation attached to a gift itself is not inert. Even when abandoned by the giver, it still forms part of him. Through it he has a hold over the recipient ... [therefore the] bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person ... to give something is to give a part of oneself, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence. (Mauss, 1974, pp.9-10)

Mauss invoked the Māori concept of *hau* to establish his model. The *hau* is the “spirit of things and particularly of the forest and forest game” (*ibid*, p.8) and gifts are animated by the *hau*. The *hau* always “wants to return to the place of its birth” (*ibid*, p.9) and this can only be achieved through the exchange of things of “equivalent or superior value”. Failure to return a gift can result in serious misfortune for the recipient, including death (*ibid*, p.10). Mauss further recognised the power inherent in exchange where “the donor gains prestige and power by transforming the recipient into a debtor” (Yan, 2002, p.68). Thus for Mauss, gift

exchange, while producing social solidarity, was coercive, with its cycle of indebtedness and obligation.

Later scholars critiqued the notion of ‘spirit’, arguing instead that obligations are met because either side may break the “bonds of reciprocity” (Yan, 2002, p.67). Thus, “one gives because of the expectation of return and one returns because of the threat that one’s partner may stop giving” (*ibid*). Still others (see, for example, Gregory, 1982; Weiner, 1992) revised the Maussian concept of ‘spirit’ in favour of the notion of ‘inalienability’ (i.e. that the object cannot be separated from the donor). Recently, Danby (2002) has argued that rather than being concerned with gifts, Mauss’ key interest was the principle of reciprocity and that, similarly, in many contemporary gift analyses, gift giving is interpreted in terms of the principle of reciprocity, thereby disallowing the possibility of a truly ‘free’ or ‘pure’ disinterested gift (see also Osteen, 2002, on Derrida’s 1992 essay on the impossibility of the gift).

In these analyses, however, consideration of the relationship between the donor and the recipient is of key importance. Thus “gift theory explicitly poses some degree of continuity between the giver and the gift” (Waldbay, Rosengarten, Treloar and Fraser, 2004, p.1463). In contrast to market exchanges, where the “exchange relation of a commodity is a relationship between things … The exchange relation of gifts … is one between persons” (Thomas, 1991, p.14). In sum, most contemporary gift theorists agree that: gifts create, extend, and maintain social relations; gift exchanges are forward transactions (i.e. they have a temporal dimension in contrast to the spot transactions of trade and barter where the exchange relationship is concluded immediately); and gift exchanges carry the implication that the exchange remains open.

Gift exchanges in the Footscray marketplace likewise created and affirmed social relations. They were forward transactions and implied the exchange was still open. Although three key forms of gift exchange were observed, a difficulty in categorising these exchanges is that the practices were not fixed or static but were processual. The relationships they produced were always in a process of negotiation and, thus, the gift exchange itself was always open to renegotiation. Furthermore, co-existing with the recognition of the obligations of gifts was the Western ideal

understanding of a gift as free, altruistic, disinterested generosity. Osteen (2002, p.34) notes that gifts do not fit within rigid theoretical categories but, rather, are uncertain exchanges shaped by “fluid … subjectivities and negotiations”. As such, gift exchanges are ambiguous and, recognising this, people play with the categories tactically, in relation to varying circumstances. Thus, what may have been presented as altruism – as a “free gift” (Gudeman, 1992, p.284) – might, at a later time, be redefined as something for which later payment had been expected, that is, reciprocal “give-and-take” (*ibid*). Dealers gave gifts in exchange for prestige or to feel good for being generous but, then, finding themselves without heroin, might redefine the transaction as one where future repayment should have been forthcoming – “I helped you out so you should now help me out”. Rather than being organised by ‘rules’ of exchange, these exchanges were processes – thus fluid and negotiated. Consequently, I have categorised them according to what the gifts did, rather than assigning them fixed labels: thus there are gifts to maintain, gifts to substantiate and gifts to reincorporate.

### ***Gifts to maintain***

Falling into the category of ‘gifts to maintain’ were exchanges of heroin that could be read as charity (i.e. “the private or public relief of unfortunate or needy persons” (Delbridge, 1982). These gifts were generally provided when the recipient was either *hanging out* (in drug withdrawal), or soon likely to be *hanging out*. One morning, a very downcast Thuần came up to Kiều, Lộc and me. Squatting next to Kiều, he placed a hand on her thigh and spoke to her quietly. As Thuần stood up, Kiều reached down for her heroin and passed him a deal. Thuần was suffering heroin withdrawal and had no money to purchase. He had been stopped by police the previous evening, the money he was carrying had been confiscated and he was not due to receive his welfare payment until the following week.

Kiều represented these sorts of gifts in terms of feeling sorry for people who were *hanging out*. Van was another recipient of Kiều’s charity. During the time he was working for a dealer, according to Kiều, the dealer did not treat him well, speaking “down to him” and paying him only in heroin “but not very much”. Kiều said that, “sometimes I help him out” by giving him heroin to supplement that which he

received from his *boss*. Phuoc also represented himself as the sort of dealer who, provided he was in a position to do so, would give people a *taste* if they were *sick* (in withdrawal).

Kiều herself was, at other times, the recipient of charitable exchange. Returning to the marketplace after she had been arrested, Nhan offered her a *taste* because, Kiều explained, “They think I fuck up”. Only “two people offer me” Kiều said, adding that when she has heroin they all “want to talk to me” but now, because they believed her heroin and money had been confiscated by police, “no one is coming near me”. Tam was the other person who had offered to give her a *taste* once he had picked up. In this instance, Kiều was not in need of their charity as she had been able to retain “a hund-red dol-lar rock” because the police had failed to find this during their search.

Such maintaining gifts of heroin were for the most part offered only to other Vietnamese Aussies who were *hanging out* (and known to the dealer), if they did receive assistance, would usually receive trade discounts or credit. These gift exchanges were shaped by notions of social obligation – either directly as repayment for past gifts (the recipient had directly helped out the donor previously), or indirectly as obligations because of friendship or shared experience (e.g. the discomfort of heroin withdrawal). They may be read in terms of generalised reciprocity within the overall network of Vietnamese dealers. Such exchanges are an effective strategy in the uncertain environment of a heroin marketplace. Being generous to many improves the chances that someone will be generous to you if, later, you find yourself in need (Bell, 1995). Being charitable to people in need was also represented among both the dealers and Aussie drug users as morally normative – as the right thing to do. For example, two Aussie heroin-users, discussing a third woman, complained, “I help her out when she’s got nothing and then when she’s got [heroin] and I’ve got nothing she won’t help me out”. Asking them whether they had brought this up with the woman, one replied, “I don’t say nothing. They should know [what is right]”.

It is worth reiterating here that dealers often represented their practice of allowing others to assist them in finding customers as an act of charity; they agreed to the

arrangement because they “feel sorry” for the person concerned. People did not always fulfil these social obligations but the existence of the obligations was apparent, in that denial of requests for assistance was generally framed in terms of the dealer wanting to help but being unable to at the time as they did not have any heroin to spare. Vinh once told Kiêu that people were criticising her for not helping others out (and, therefore, appearing stingy). In self-defence, she said that she “help people out” but if they “fuck her up”, then she does not help them again. If she helps them and then “they rip me when I’m nodding off”, then she will not help them again because she “can’t trust them”.

Charitable exchanges place recipients in an inferior position vis-à-vis the donor as well as placing them in debt. Sahlins argued that “gifting creates and extends social relations as well as maintaining them; critical for this is the lapse of time between the initial gift and the counter-gift because during this time the gift recipient is obliged to behave well toward the initial gift giver” (Danby, 2002, p.25). While counter-gifts from the initial recipient were not always forthcoming, charitable exchange did create goodwill and served to maintain social relations within the dealer network. In addition, they served to maintain the recipient within the network of local Viet heroin users/dealers. Individuals could drop out of the network if they were unable to maintain their heroin habit, as it was through their heroin use that people came to be members of this local heroin user/dealer scene. These gifts were also maintaining in that they contributed to the donor’s prestige and reputation. As seen with Kiêu, when she was told others were speaking about her failure to help people out, dealers preferred to be seen as generous. Charitable gifts were thus also for display to an audience rather than being solely for the succour of the needy.

### ***Gifts to substantiate***

Substantiating gifts were those that substantiated existing relationships. As Sykes (2005, pp.59-60) wrote: “gifts make the ideal relationship a material fact.... The gift also makes the relations of exchange substantial.... By giving gifts people create concrete or substantial forms of their relationships”. Most substantiating gift exchanges could be glossed as sharing or generalised reciprocity. Gudeman (2001) defined sharing – ‘apportionment’ in his terms – as the allocation of resources seen

to be held in common such that all people have an equal right to a portion of the resources. Thus, to insiders, sharing affirmed or substantiated relationships.

In the Footscray marketplace, dealers informally shared heroin and other goods and services, through *shouting* others, whether the others needed these things or not. Return for *shouting* was not calculated and return may not have been made by the recipient (e.g. I might share with Van but my return comes from Thuần). Prestige could be gained by regularly being in a position to be the donor. Sharing exchanges usually occurred between kin, fictive kin or friends, and were used to express and substantiate these social relations. Substantiating gift exchanges usually implied people using the heroin together and, in this, sharing heroin also expressed sociality.

In contrast to the assumption of a rational decision-maker maximising his or her utility as suggested by the neo-classical economic market model, such giving could, at times, result in a dealer using more heroin than they could afford to and so finding themselves without sufficient funds to pick up again the next day. An episode involving Linh and Hiêt is illustrative. The two had enjoyed a successful day of selling and so, flush with money, they were taking Linh's brother, Nghĩa, and his wife and baby out for the evening. It was Valentine's Day, so roses had been purchased for both women. They ate at a restaurant in the city where Linh and Hiêt ordered a whole fish for the two couples to share, as well as a few other dishes and congee (rice porridge) for the baby. The bill came to \$170 – a substantial charge for this restaurant. Returning home, they continued the celebrations and used all of Linh and Hiêt's remaining heroin. Waking the next day, Linh and Hiêt had no caps to sell, nothing for their morning taste and no money to start up again. As Nghĩa explained, "that night, they fuck up. In the morning, they hang-ing out".

Sharing was also a frequent feature of people's experiences of commencing heroin use. Tu started to use heroin in 1996. Describing his initial experiences, he said, "When I start, I go to my friends' house, they always have gear. They give me for free, for two years, they give me for free." Thanh, Kiêu and Thi described similar experiences of being provided with "free" heroin when they first began using the drug.

In addition to offers to share, demand sharing was also apparent. As discussed in Chapter 4, demand sharing signifies the relatedness between the donor and the demander, through the presumption of the right to ask and the expectation that the demand will be met. Demand sharing could be verbal or non-verbal – a forceful demand, a request or even simply presenting oneself when heroin is available – and demands for sharing could be made either to test the state of a relationship or to make people “recognise the demander’s rights” (Peterson, 1993, p.871). In this way, demand sharing may be seen as substantiating social relationships.

Demand sharing, framed as a verbal request, was enacted by Van. On several occasions, he asked Kiều to provide him with heroin or temazepam. I was amused to see him approach Kiều one day, speaking in Vietnamese and assuming a look of sweet and youthful innocence, tinged with just a hint of pathos. His voice was gentle and low. Rather than demanding help, he was asking nicely and trying to look as appealing as he could. Kiều chose not to answer his request and after a short while he gave up. As he walked away I asked Kiều if he had wanted something from her. “Yeah. Normison”, she replied. Laughing, I remarked on his pleading expression and she chuckled in agreement. Van’s demand to Kiều can be seen as testing the current state of their relationship. In this instance, the relationship was weak as Kiều denied his request. On other occasions, Van was more successful with Kiều. For example, she was banned from a local motel for breaking motel policy regarding visitors because she had invited both Van and Vinh to stay at the motel with her and had *shouted* them both for the duration of their stay.

Demands could also be expressed forcefully. An episode involving May is illustrative. Peter Higgs and I were in the mall when May came over to chat. A well-muscled Vietnamese man approached May and they spoke heatedly. The man then turned to Peter, telling him he had just been at the local police station but they released him as he “wasn’t carrying anything [had no drugs in his possession]”. After his departure, May told us that a few days earlier this man had “hassled” her for drugs. She had told him she “only had two [deals] left” to which he responded “so I can have one!” She gave him the deal, telling us resentfully how “they just bully you”. This instance of demand sharing was coercive. At the same time, it was

substantiating of a relationship with May, in that the man's action asserted his right to ask.

A further example of demand sharing occurred with the new intimate partner of a woman who was fictive chị (older sister) to Thuần. On several occasions, this man exploited the obligations due to his partner in order to solicit heroin from Thuần – often through simply presenting himself when Thuần was preparing heroin so that Thuần would be obliged to share. The new partner's demands made concrete (substantiated) the shift in his relationship to Thuần, which had occurred as a consequence of his relationship with Thuần's chị. Even though the man was younger than Thuần and therefore an 'em' (younger sibling), once he formed an intimate relationship with Thuần's 'older sister', he automatically assumed her status and became 'older brother' (anh). Thuần's response to the new partner's manipulation of these social obligations was to develop counterstrategies of concealment, aimed at preventing this exploitation.

While demand sharing for heroin did occur, this mode of exchange was more apparent for less scarce goods such as food and cigarettes. Indeed, these latter goods were regularly shared – through both giving and demanding – between Vietnamese dealers. As Peterson (1993, p.869) observed, "relatedness has to be produced and maintained in social action". Substantiating gifts were social acts that served to produce and maintain relationships between Vietnamese dealers in Footscray.

### ***Gifts to (re)incorporate***

The third form of gift exchange was that of gifts to (re)incorporate someone into the donor's social network. In contrast to maintaining (charity) gifts, (re)incorporating gifts were unsolicited and the recipient was not in need. Neither were these substantiating (sharing) gifts as consumption was not communal and the relation between donor and recipient was more socially distant. (Re)incorporating gifts were generally extended to people who, for various reasons, were outside the regular social network. Gudeman (2001, p.80) argued that such gifts could be seen as initial presents rather than reciprocity. He saw them as extending community resources outside the community as a tentative invitation toward developing closer ties: in his

words, “offering a gift probes, defends, secures and expands the borders of community”. However, the outcome of such acts is uncertain and an “unrequited offering remains a gift”.

A key occasion that elicited such gift giving was when someone was released from gaol. They would visit the marketplace and someone would give them a cap or a *taste*. Such gifts served as a way of reaffirming relationships between people, of reincorporating them into the network of social relations. For example, Hoàng and I were having coffee, when he was approached by a Vietnamese man asking him for a “smoke”. Hoàng handed over his tobacco pouch and the man sat down at the table with us to roll the cigarette. He remained at the table after Hoàng left. We did not speak until I smiled at his attempts to attract the attention of young Vietnamese women as they walked by. He introduced himself as Thịnh. He had been released from a 12-month gaol sentence the previous week and said he felt “good” and “healthy”. He asked whether I “used [heroin]”, congratulating me when I replied in the negative. He was no longer using and was pleased with himself, as “using just take all your money” and “cause you trouble”. He told me he knew everyone “out here” from before he had been in gaol. One of the people he knew had given him a cap which he intended to sell so he could get “forty, fifty dollar. Buy smokes. Buy food”. He explained that the person who gave him the cap did so in order to get him using again and get him addicted – “They try to make you use, so you come back”. He considered he had outsmarted them, however, as he was going to use the cap as a way of generating \$40. He outlined his plans for the money: “get a nice girl, get some beers, go down to the beach, lie in the sun”, joking with me that I should help him get a “nice girl”. Thịnh was not having much success selling his cap. After so much time away he did not know to whom to sell. There was a young Vietnamese man around and Thịnh asked him for assistance in selling his cap, but to no avail. Some time later, Truc arrived in the company of two other men, coming up to our table and speaking with Thịnh. Within a few minutes, Truc had engaged and transacted with a customer, taking the money while simultaneously reaching his other hand towards Thịnh. Thịnh spat the cap out of his mouth and passed it to Truc, who then handed it to the customer before passing \$30 back to Thịnh. As Truc walked away, Thịnh explained happily: “He help me sell. I give him ten dollar”.

Thịnh had apparently been an active member of this community up until his gaol sentence and the gift he received reaffirmed those social ties. Such affirmations were open to multiple interpretations. Thịnh took a negative view of the act, interpreting it as a way of tying him back into the community through a return to “addiction”. Phuoc also saw these gifts in a negative light, believing that the donor, seeing the recipient “looking healthy” after his or her time in gaol, sought through the gift to “bring” the recipient “back down” to the donor’s “level” – unhealthy, on the streets and dependent once more on heroin. Lộc, however, saw these gifts in more generous terms, interpreting them as expressions of pleasure in the opportunity to renew the social connection. His interpretation incorporated the shared understanding that throughout their gaol terms, many heroin users look forward to the *taste* they will have on the day of their release.

(Re)incorporating gifts could be used by the recipients or they could be re-exchanged through trade. Thi had spent an afternoon sitting with me, albeit with much to-ing and fro-ing to speak with other people. Returning after one of these trips away, she announced “That was good”, explaining that earlier someone had given her three caps. She did not want to use them all herself and as she was returning to the table, someone had asked her if she had heroin so she was able to sell two of them. Thi’s interpretation of this gift was that the donor sought to incorporate her in a new form of relationship to him: “to make me an em”. In this context, ‘em’ refers to bringing her into a girlfriend relation. It also carries implications of subordination. Regardless of their respective ages, Vietnamese male-female intimate relations (boyfriend-girlfriend or husband-wife) are nearly always expressed as “anh-em” (older male-younger female) relations, structuring the man in a higher social position to the woman

Although people spoke of receiving these kinds of gifts, no donor ever informed me that they had made a gift of this sort. People considered that such admissions would be “bragging”. Additionally, donors were aware of the ambiguity inherent in these gifts – that they could be read as either generous or manipulative – and, therefore, they were reluctant to make their own presentations of these kinds of gifts public. As Thi said, if someone recently released from gaol did recommence regular heroin use,

nobody would want it known that they “had given them the first taste that got them hooked again”.

### ***The value of gifts***

The value of heroin gifts may be assessed across several dimensions. There is the value of the heroin itself. Heroin, in the form of a cap to be traded, has a price. But heroin as gift is not subject to the same quantification. Rather, its value is measured with reference to its quality as help or its quality in expressing or substantiating social relations. A cap of heroin gifted for the relief of withdrawal is valued more highly by the recipient than the same quantity shared when the recipient is not in need. This in turn is of higher value than a cap provided on credit, to be repaid either with another cap or with cash. Similarly, a small quantity of heroin shared from the last of a donor’s supply is valued more highly by the recipient than a larger quantity of heroin gifted from a plentiful supply.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the value of heroin is measured by users with reference to current circumstances and the social relations expressed through the transaction.<sup>49</sup>

From the donor’s perspective, gifting is of value for establishing prestige. It demonstrates success as a dealer through having produced sufficient surplus to be able to give heroin to others. Gifting also has a moral dimension. It establishes a reputation for generosity and also as a person who meets generalised social obligations of caring for others. Gifting is also of value given the “structural indeterminacy” (Sansom, 1988, p.169) of the dealing environment where, for

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<sup>48</sup> This is also seen in relation to the sharing of cigarettes. A cigarette provided from a nearly empty packet elicits more appreciation than one provided from a newly opened packet. There are also social norms that exclude the last cigarette from the conventions of sharing. These norms are contingent on social distance, such that intimates have few, if any, qualms in accepting (or taking) a last cigarette.

<sup>49</sup> My interpretation owes a debt to Sansom’s (1988) analysis of the value of money among Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin. He wrote that: “[w]hile in Aboriginal possession, the dollar is a thing both transformed and ambivalent. It is transformed because, if entered into transactions between Aborigine and Aborigine, it will no longer function in market terms as a generalised medium of exchange but will instead take on character as an amount subject to valuation in acts of help, helping and helping out. When this happens, dollar amounts lose their capacity to function as prices” (Sansom, 1988, p.189). In this respect, the local drug marketplace bears similarities to the fringe camp described by Sansom.

example, because of regular policing, dealers can be suddenly placed in a situation where they have no heroin.

I have noted that gifts may be read as generalised reciprocity. As such, they may be seen, and interpreted, as establishing a form of ‘stored credit’ to be drawn on when a dealer finds him or herself in need of assistance. Assertions that “I’ve helped you out” or “I help everyone out” were common. As an episode involving Hô illustrates, however, stored credit was not always able to be redeemed:

Hô is wandering up and down in the company of an Aussie male. He approaches Phuoc’s table and sits to talk briefly with Phuoc before heading away again. Although I keep looking in his direction to try and catch his eye to say hello, he doesn’t acknowledge me. About half an hour after I first notice him, he is back around the café. This time he is complaining loudly to Phuoc at one table and then coming over to stand close to me at my table where I am sitting with Kosta and Chiền. He loudly asserts that no one will help him out with gear. Repeating the words several times, he complains that “No cunt will help me out. I help everyone out when they need it and now when I need it, no cunt will help me”. He waves his arms around as he outlines his grievance. After establishing his complaint, he takes a few steps away from the table and then returns to take up the theme once more. For most of Hô’s performance, Kosta studiously ignores him, neither uttering a word, nor looking at him. Throughout, Hô’s Aussie friend stands with him, quietly repeating the phrases that Hô utters, thereby backing him up. Sometimes the Aussie friend expands on the theme, adding his own experiences of how people “never help you out” despite his “always helping them out”, and expressing the immorality of such behaviour. I am slightly uncomfortable sitting in the middle of this as I’m not certain whether the performance will be restricted to verbal complaint or whether Hô might feel so aggrieved as to further his claims with physical action. Apart from hand waving, he restricts himself to forcefully and angrily delivered verbal statements. Chiền is sitting with us for some of the performance but walks off part-way through it. I don’t say a word. Altogether, Hô’s

performance lasts around five minutes. Towards the end, Kosta finally acknowledges Hô by turning to face him and telling him that he can't help him as he doesn't have any gear [heroin]. He tells Hô, "I don't have anything. I'm going with Phuoc now. I'm just holding it for him. Ask him" ... This seems to be an effective way to quieten Hô as he walks away and I don't see him bothering Kosta for the rest of the day. (Field notes, 2004)

Shared understanding of a moral obligation to help can be read through the manner in which Kosta framed his refusal. He presented it as a situation of lack of choice – it was not his heroin to distribute so the decision was not his to make – rather than as his choice to deny Hô's request.

Most importantly, as already argued, gifts of heroin have value as “concrete representations of social relations” (Osteen, 2002, p.3). Contained as they are within the Vietnamese network, gifts produce and reproduce shared identity, as well as substantiating close, affective ties between kin, fictive kin and friends.

## Theft

The final form of exchange to be discussed is theft. This took many forms and discussion of it could logically sit within the preceding chapter on market-oriented exchange, as theft did occur during trade transactions. Dealers were explicitly *ripped* when customers *stood over* (threatened) them until they handed over their drugs, money or both. Theft was also enacted through deception when customers received heroin and then ran away without paying, or when customers disguised the fact that they were exchanging less than the required amount of money. However, I have chosen to include these exchanges within the present chapter because theft was more profitable, and easier to accomplish, when it occurred between people who knew each other and who were in a relation of trust. Dealers were at times *ripped* by their helpers who would run off with the caps they had agreed to sell or, as was seen earlier, would-be intimate partners sometimes stole heroin, money or both.

An example of a helper stealing from a dealer was reported by one young man. He described how he had twice “ripped off” a Footscray dealer who was temporarily selling in another drug marketplace (Richmond, a suburb in Melbourne’s inner east). The first time, he was provided with some caps to sell but instead he used them himself. He returned to the dealer and managed to persuade him to give him more caps to sell. The dealer agreed, but told the young man that if he stole from him again then he (the dealer) would take him “for a drive and break his legs”. The young man said he had intended to sell the second lot of caps but there were customers around who he had also previously *ripped*. As a result he felt nervous, so he left the area without selling any caps and again he used all the heroin himself. He now owed the dealer approximately \$700. For two months following the theft, he remained “hiding at home” because he considered that it was “not safe” for him to be seen in Footscray, Richmond or the Melbourne CBD – three inner-city drug marketplaces dominated, at that time, by Vietnamese dealers – in case he encountered the dealer or the dealer’s friends. In addition, he was on a methadone program at the time and had to change to a new pharmacy for dosing because he could not attend his original pharmacy in Footscray. As well as illustrating theft from a dealer, this episode also highlights the interconnectedness of the Vietnamese dealers and the difficulty of avoiding a dealer from whom one has stolen.

Dealers who were working for other dealers would also sometimes steal from their employers. An example is provided by Van, who, one afternoon, came running into a café followed by an angry man, yelling at him in Vietnamese and approaching him threateningly. This man was being held back by another two men and was told to leave the café by the owners, who appeared happy for Van to remain. After a few departures, returns for more yelling and then departures again, the angry man was eventually persuaded to leave. Van left the café a few minutes later when it appeared safe for him to do so. A woman who had been attempting to calm the situation explained that Van had stolen a gram of heroin from the man, for whom he was working at the time.

A more substantial theft by a helper was enacted by An. He had been helping Tu sell for the first few weeks of my fieldwork. Arriving in the marketplace one day I asked Tu, “Where’s An?”

“He’s...[waves arm in general direction of the main street]. He’s a dirty cunt! He take all my money. One thou-sand dollars. He do it to everyone. Everyone know it.” Tu continued, explaining that no one will have anything to do with An as he *rips* people “when he’s hanging”. I noticed An near the phones, on his own, looking around. Tu noticed him as well. “There he is...on his own. I asked him where my money. He doesn’t remember [denies he had it].”

I also witnessed the opportunistic theft of a small sum of money from Kiều. She had 25 *normies* to sell and there was a ten-minute frenzy of eager purchasing. Kiều had been pushing the money she received into a side-pocket of her jacket. Tony was the last of a small rush of buyers. I had been distracted by another person, when I felt Tony bending forward next to me. I glanced down and noticed a ten-dollar note and a plastic-card wallet on the ground, near the foot of Kiều’s chair. Tony was bending down to reach for the \$10. “What are you doing?” Kiều asked him. Tony told her, “I dropped my wallet and ten bucks [dollars].” Kiều made no reply to this and Tony picked up the \$10 and the wallet and put them in his pocket. He made his farewells very soon after. As Kiều was counting the money she had received, she said, “That was my money. He a smart cunt. He took my money”. In her recapping of the incident, she expressed a degree of respect for his opportunism in conjunction with her anger at his theft. The worst part, in her assessment, was that she knew him – “he help me out sometimes” – and so she had given him a discount, selling him two *normies* at only \$10 each (instead of \$15). She concluded that “You shouldn’t be nice to no one”.

The general perception in the marketplace is that the Vietnamese have access to heroin. Consequently, Vietnamese people, whether dealing or not, are regularly approached by Aussies asking if they know where to score. Phuoc regularly exploited this situation. On one occasion, he had been approached by an Aussie man who wanted to go halves with him in a *hundred*. Phuoc explained several times that he had no money and was, therefore, not in a position to contribute the other \$50. Because the man persisted, eventually Phuoc pretended to agree, telling the man to give him his \$50 and Phuoc would go and purchase for them. Once he had the money, Phuoc immediately left the area.

Dealers would also sometimes steal from their suppliers. One morning when I drove Phuoc to collect his methadone, he encountered an old acquaintance at the pharmacy. The man was late for an appointment and asked Phuoc if we could drive him to a train station. Catching up on each other's news and sharing gossip enroute, the man asked Phuoc if he had heard about a particular mutual acquaintance who had stolen an ounce of heroin from his supplier.

Goods other than heroin were also stolen. On one occasion Hảo, Thao and I were joined by Van:

Hảo and Thao tell him about the undercovers who were in the marketplace, and Hảo also tells Van, "I lost my phone. Somebody pinched it". The conversation then moves into Vietnamese. Van must have asked who did it as Hảo said, "Yeah, I know who it was". He was referring to the woman whose home they had stayed at the previous night. Hảo said "She probably took it and didn't even tell him [her partner]". He further speculates that the woman probably came straight into Footscray to "hock" the phone and get herself a taste without sharing it with her partner. (Field notes, 2004)

The consequences of theft varied. The young man, An, travelled interstate after he stole the large sum of money from Tu. He remained away for some months and, although he eventually returned to the marketplace, his visits were few in number and he did not re-establish himself on a regular basis. However, other than having to make himself scarce for a time, An suffered no other consequences resulting from his theft.

Making oneself scarce following theft was a useful strategy, if it could be managed. As disappearances from the marketplace were often assumed to be the result of arrest, it was possible to claim that the police had taken the heroin. And because this was a common occurrence, it was a credible excuse. When a theft was not able to be denied, Kiêu suggested that the victim would "smash" (punch) the perpetrator and then the matter would be considered resolved. Despite Kiêu's assertion, however, instances of retribution of this kind were rare in the marketplace, although, very occasionally, people would be chased through the marketplace or someone would

approach a group of dealers and ask the whereabouts of a particular person held to have stolen from them. Furthermore, although she was stolen from on occasion throughout fieldwork, Kiêu did not “smash” any of the thieves or seek other forms of retribution.

Less confrontational strategies were described by Phong who said he would “let it go” if the theft was perpetrated on him, thereby accepting the loss as part of dealing. If he was the thief on the other hand, Phong held that he would offer a cap by way of apology. This would then resolve the matter. For these active heroin users, who support their use through dealing, it is imperative that they be able to resolve such conflicts in order that they may continue selling in the marketplace. Additionally, the local Vietnamese community is relatively small and even if not dealing in the marketplace, people need to be able to come to the suburb to access Vietnamese groceries (often accompanying family on such shopping visits). As described earlier, Van was chased through the marketplace by the dealer from whom he had stolen heroin. As a regular in the marketplace, Van needed to resolve his conflict with this dealer. He successfully managed this as I saw the two them together a few weeks after the chase and they were speaking without any obvious signs of animosity.

When discussing the management of conflict, Phong said “Heroin, it’s really addictive. They really need it. It’s the most important”. Through this statement, he implied that it was understood that people might steal from others because of their “addiction”. The response to this was to be vigilant and, as many said, to “trust no-one”. However, thefts continued to occur, indicating that people were not always vigilant and clearly did extend trust. People would disband associations following thefts but, over time, these transgressions were often forgiven or resolved through apologies and small tokens of recompense. This, again, speaks to the interconnectedness of Vietnamese dealers. Conflicts need to be resolved because it is difficult to avoid each other when interactions occur through multiple locations and domains.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have detailed exchanges that I have categorised as employment, service, gifts and theft. The existence of a range of exchange types, from which people choose depending on circumstances, accords with the concept of exchange repertoires proposed by Davis (1992). The types of exchanges discussed in this chapter could be read as expressions of both generalised and balanced reciprocity. Over time, people cycle through associations with other dealers from within the set of dealers comprising this social scene. When the members of this set are considered as a whole, then exchange can be seen as generalised. However, at any given moment, people would assert that only some dealers are likely to help them out, and they themselves are only likely to help out particular people because those people have helped them out previously – thus, they describe a form of balanced reciprocity.

Gudeman (2001, p.52) proposed that a community's shared interests (including lasting resources such as land or water, produced material things, and ideational constructs such as knowledge, laws, practices, skills and customs) could be considered their “base”. Within the Footscray Vietnamese heroin-using scene, heroin might be considered part of their base. It is a “flow” (distinguished from a stock or permanent fund) that is organised and owned individually, but is shared within this scene to create, maintain and substantiate social relations. As the flow is uncertain for all, sharing with others when you have a surplus is storing credit for when you might be without. In this marketplace, people sometimes shared heroin to the extent that they were left facing withdrawal and without the money to purchase more heroin. Similarly, Sansom (1988) showed that the members of Aboriginal “mobs” do not save their cash and other material resources for hard times. He argued that people gave out freely when they had resources as a solution to structural indeterminacy because “by incurring multiple debts, one creates a generalised but unspecific potential to be able to collect … [thus people] put cash out to create a generalised though indeterminate potential for recovery” (*ibid*, p.175). Bell (1995, p.829) also identified sharing as “risk reducing”, arguing that sharing generates prestige, which means that there are more people available from whom one might receive. The heroin flow is also extended to new people to bring them into the social scene and extended to previous members to reincorporate them. The uncertainty of the micro-

environment of the drug marketplace, in terms of access to capital and supply of heroin, means that people create diverse strategies and opportunities in order to meet their material needs.

The argument so far might be read as supporting the notion that, in markets, people operate on a basis of instrumental rationality, that is, that they use exchange to maximise their utility. However, I have also shown that people regularly acted in accordance with notions of social obligation, that is, through constructions of responsibilities to others in the group, as well as to generalised understandings of care for the less fortunate. Furthermore, people used exchanges of services and goods to symbolically substantiate social relations, even at times at the expense of their utility (understood in terms of ensuring a constant heroin supply).

As with the market-oriented exchanges discussed in Chapter 6, the types of exchange described in this chapter were constituted through the networks of social relations within which they were embedded and, importantly, these particular networks of social relations were made and remade through these processes of exchange. In contrast to trade and barter (Ch. 6), I have shown how community exchanges more explicitly rely on, and produce, more intimate social relations. I have shown also how these types of exchange are not fixed and certain but ambiguous and that people play with this ambiguity strategically for both instrumental and symbolic purposes. Although I have focused on heroin exchanges, it is important to note that reciprocity may entail an exchange of heroin for other goods and services, such as food, cigarettes, information, supporting someone in a fight, offering a floor to sleep on, companionship and so on.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the analysis was confined to transactions within the marketplace – that is, transactions between dealers and between dealers and customers. In the next chapter, I broaden the focus to consider the transactions between dealers and the police, who play a key role in shaping the everyday lives of this set of heroin user/dealers.

## **Chapter 8**

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# **“Anh hai nhiều quá”: transactions with police**

A central feature of the Footscray marketplace was regular but unpredictable street-level policing, at varying levels of intensity. Although less frequent than interactions between dealers or between dealers and customers, interactions with police played a significant part in shaping practices and social relations in the marketplace. The regularity of this interaction was reflected in dealers' speech such that, as noted in Chapter 4, the first full Vietnamese sentence I understood was “Anh hai nhiều quá [too many police]” because it was expressed so frequently. In this chapter, I analyse interactions between dealers and the police, exploring in the process some of the constraints upon choice which obtained in the lives of this set of dealers. I begin with a general discussion of drug market policing before moving to describing people's experiences of, and responses to, police and policing in the Footscray drug marketplace. Through this account, I explore the ways in which policing contributed to the constitution of the marketplace, focusing on how people interpreted and negotiated policing, which was understood as a given of their heroin selling environment.

### **Policing drug marketplaces**

In Australia and overseas, street-based drug marketplaces are subject to intensive policing. Reflecting this, there is a growing body of literature on the policing of these sites. Some studies describe and analyse policing methods (e.g. Dixon, 1999b; Dorn, Murji and South, 1992; Green, 1996; Jacobsen, 1999) while others examine the impacts of drug marketplace policing. Among the latter are studies investigating impacts on market characteristics of supply and demand (e.g. Caulkins, 1993; Edmunds *et al.*, 1996; May, Harocopos, Turnbull and Hough, 2000; Weatherburn and Lind, 1997) as well as studies focusing on the impacts of policing on the drug use practices and health outcomes of drug marketplace participants (e.g. Aitken, Moore, Higgs, Kelsall and Kerger, 2002; Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1999; Kerr, Small and

Wood, 2005; Maher and Dixon, 2001; Small, Kerr, Charette, Schechter and Spittal, 2006).

Green (1996, p.2) identified several strategies traditionally deployed in anti-drugs policing: “undercover observation, electronic surveillance, undercover purchases and controlled purchases by informants”. Undercover purchases are deployed either in the form of “test-purchases” – the purpose of which is to seize available drugs to test for purity – or “buy-bust” purchases, where undercover police purchase drugs and then arrest the seller. In addition to these traditional policing methods, since the rise of highly visible drug marketplaces, policing methods have expanded to include large-scale “crackdowns” (also referred to as ‘saturation policing’). Crackdowns are defined as “an abrupt increase in police activity, especially proactive enforcement, which is intended to increase the perceived and/or actual threat of apprehension for specific types of offenses in certain places or situations” (Jacobsen, 1999, p.9). Often employed as part of ‘zero-tolerance policing’ (Dixon, 1999b), crackdowns are frequently represented, and understood, as an effort ““to take back the streets”, to ‘claim’ or even ‘liberate’ public spaces which have become the domain of drug dealers and others who threaten public order” (Jacobsen, 1999, p.9).

Drug market policing is represented as having several goals. As discussed in Chapter 2, drug market policing aims to interrupt supply and, theoretically, to increase drug prices and, it is assumed, reduce demand. Evidence of the impacts of policing on drug prices, however, is inconclusive: some studies suggest increases in drug prices while other studies have shown no change (Kerr *et al.*, 2005; Weatherburn and Lind, 1997; Wood, Spittal *et al.*, 2004; Wood *et al.*, 2003) .

Additionally, drug market policing aims to disrupt localised drug marketplaces, thereby reducing “public disorder” and improving perceived “quality of life and safety” (Kerr *et al.*, 2005). In their review of drug market policing, Kerr and colleagues (2005) concluded that there is some evidence that street-level policing does disrupt marketplaces and improve public order and quality of life. However, this begs the question of what constitutes ‘order’ and ‘quality of life’. Chesluk (2004, p.254) noted that “quality of life” is an ever-changing trope serving to give “flesh” to vague feelings of dissatisfaction or to a sense that life is no longer as pleasant as it

once was. As such, it can signal a range of ‘disorderly’ but non-criminal behaviours as well as speaking to perceptions of decay in the built environment. Additionally, several scholars have identified the increasing conversion of public space into locations of consumption and the subsequent exclusion from that space of people seen as ‘non-consumers’ – the young, the marginalised and the poor (Coleman, 2003; Fischer, Turnbull, Poland and Haydon, 2004; White, 1990; Yarwood, 2007). Drug market policing aimed at reducing ‘public disorder’ and improving ‘quality of life’ very often takes the form of excluding marginal, non-consumers from public spaces. Furthermore, disruption of marketplaces often results in displacement to neighbouring areas and several studies have highlighted the fact that any disruption and/or displacement effects are generally short-lived (Caulkins, 1992; Maher and Dixon, 2001; Mazerolle, Soole and Rombouts, 2007).

A growing body of research has investigated the public health effects of policing on drug markets and marketplaces, demonstrating that intensive, saturation policing may produce a range of adverse health and social impacts on both drug users and communities. Several studies have reported the emergence of more harmful forms of drug use and injecting practice during police crackdowns through drug user/seller efforts to avoid police attention or to minimise the chances of arrest if they are stopped by police. These include shifts from smoking to injecting heroin (Maher and Dixon, 2001), sharing of injecting equipment (Aitken *et al.*, 2002; Cooper, Moore, Gruskin and Krieger, 2005; Maher and Dixon, 2001; Small *et al.*, 2006), increased risk of overdose (Cooper *et al.*, 2005; Dovey, Fitzgerald and Choi, 2001; Small *et al.*, 2006) and shifts to oral-nasal storage of drugs (Maher and Dixon, 2001). Other studies have identified associations between disruption of drug markets and increases in violence and volatility within these markets (Aitken *et al.*, 2002; Maher and Dixon, 2001; May *et al.*, 2000), as well as reporting instances of excessive use of force and threats of violence by police during crackdowns (Cooper, Moore, Gruskin and Krieger, 2004; Kerr *et al.*, 2005).

Taken as a whole, existing research challenges the efficacy of intensive proactive policing of drug marketplaces, highlighting the pathogenic effects often produced by these tactics and suggesting that police crackdowns may ultimately render street-based drug marketplaces more harmful – both to drug users and to the wider

communities in which they live. While existing research identifies some outcomes of drug market policing, in terms of both the marketplaces as a whole and the practices of drug marketplace participants, there is little research describing the everyday negotiations of power between drug marketplace participants and police. Furthermore, in much of this literature, there is little attention paid to the agency of the policed and, in these studies, police are generally represented monolithically, as ‘the police’. Yet in a context of ongoing policing, such as in the Footscray marketplace, police simultaneously come to be known as individuals and dealers seek ways to interact with them on this basis.<sup>50</sup>

In the material to follow, I provide a brief historical account of drug marketplace policing in Footscray before moving to a detailed account of dealers’ interpretations of, and responses to, ongoing policing in the marketplace. My analysis shares many similarities with the work of Maher and Dixon (1998, 1999, 2001, 2002) among Indochinese heroin sellers in Cabramatta. It differs, however, in its focus on: the everyday negotiations and interpretations of dealers in relation to policing; the impacts of policing on marketplace processes (rather than the public health implications which are the concern of Maher and Dixon); and in its more explicit consideration of agency.

Underpinning the aims of drug market policing are two key assumptions: firstly, that drug users/dealers interpret their environment as one of risk and calculate probabilities on which they base their decisions to remain in or leave the marketplace and, secondly, that drug users/dealers are risk-averse. I argue, however, that dealers (and customers) perceive and construct their environment as entailing both risk and uncertainty – with differing implications for decision-making – and that they are risk-takers as well as risk-avoiders. This raises challenges to the efficacy of policing

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<sup>50</sup> Correspondingly, in his ethnographic research among police officers in Germany, Huttermann (2003, pp.382-3) argued that the daily routines of police practice take place on the border between the “corporative world” and the “real world”. In the corporative world, actors rely on the monolithic, “authorising corporative habitus” of the police force and its “corresponding functional roles”. In the real world, “real actors meet in a world where their interactive roles and habitus are constituted through immediate interaction” and are continually negotiated.

interventions that are predicated on assumptions of risk-averse subjects acting in relation to calculations of probability.

## **Policing Footscray**

Street-level, anti-drugs policing of Footscray began in the early 1990s. In a 1993 conference paper, the Acting Chief Inspector of Footscray Police reported on the establishment of the Footscray Council Police Ethnic Unit in response to growing concerns over levels of drug dealing and associated crime. One activity of this unit was regular attendance at local amusement (video-game) parlours in response to reports of heroin dealing in these premises (Tuck, 1995). Several of the dealers I came to know had been involved in heroin selling in these amusement parlours during the early 1990s. Their reminiscences were cast nostalgically, as the days before police really “knew what was going on”. In these times, they said, the dealers were all “in it together” as a group and the heroin could be stored in their hands and pockets, or stashed in various places around the amusement parlours. There was no need to spruik their wares; they spent their time playing video games and customers would approach them in order to purchase heroin.

As police increased their activities in the amusement parlours – arresting people for drug offences and charging parlour owners with Local Government offences, which resulted in their business permits being restricted or withdrawn – the heroin dealers shifted onto the streets. Fitzgerald and colleagues (1999) reported a similar shift in the Melbourne suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood where dealers moved to street sales following intensive policing of the high-rise public housing flats where they had been selling. In response to the increased police surveillance, dealers in Footscray also adapted their practices and began to store caps – wrapped in foil and enclosed in miniature balloons – in their mouths. This allowed them to swallow evidence if stopped by police – a pattern also reported by Maher and Dixon (2001) among Indochinese dealers in Cabramatta. The practice of oral storage of drugs was well-entrenched by 2003.

Although policing followed dealers onto the streets, it did not have any lasting impact and street-based heroin selling continued. By 2003, routine policing of the

Footscray CBD was primarily targeted at suspected drug users and dealers. The two most common forms of policing were foot patrols by uniformed or plainclothes police. Car patrols of laneways and parks were also regularly made and crackdowns had become a well-established element of policing in Footscray. Aitken and colleagues (2002) analysed what has been described as the first of these crackdowns. Known as Operation Clean Heart, it commenced in early December 2000 and continued into January 2001. According to the local police Inspector, prior to Operation Clean Heart, drug law enforcement in Footscray consisted of irregular foot patrols by pairs of uniformed police through the CBD. During these patrols, police were expected to attend to the “full range of law and order concerns” (*ibid*, p.191). Operation Clean Heart, however, was a saturation policing initiative specifically targeting the drug marketplace. If indeed this crackdown was the first of its kind in Footscray, it marked the beginning of what has become a regular pattern.

Throughout fieldwork, policing practices in Footscray entailed the range of strategies described in the literature – routine harassment of suspected dealers and drug users through stops and questioning, directives to remove themselves from the area, publicly-conducted searches, buy-busts, arrests through observation of drug transactions, crackdowns, camera surveillance and instances of violence and excessive force. In the next section, I examine the ways in which dealers responded to such policing and its impacts on dealer practices and social relations.

### **Responding to policing: “Nobody selling today. Too much police”**

Policing shaped dealers’ actions and social relations in several ways and, as such, was a significant element in the constitution of the local marketplace. The quotation in the above subheading, from Thuân, was uttered during a period of intensive policing. At these times, it did appear as though the dealers were no longer selling in the marketplace – either they had been arrested and were in custody, were remaining at home until the crackdown subsided or had shifted to other locations to sell. Despite appearances, however, at least a few dealers usually remained in the marketplace. Their dealing became more covert. As well as dealing more surreptitiously, any remaining dealers also spent less time actually selling. Because

there were fewer dealers (and therefore more customers per dealer), remaining dealers were quickly able to sell the quantity of drugs necessary to support their own use, thereby decreasing the time they had to spend selling in the marketplace – an observation also made by Curtis and Wendel (2000) in their study of the impact of saturation policing on three drug marketplaces in New York City. The absence of dealers ‘hanging around’ furthered the impression that “nobody was selling”.

During 2003 and 2004, there were six separate periods of intensive crackdowns. Crackdowns involved three to four pairs of uniformed police, some on bicycles, as well as two or three sets of plainclothes police and occasionally sniffer dogs and handlers – one crackdown also included two police on horseback – all concentrated in the Footscray CBD. Generally, these groupings comprised police who were based at the Footscray police station, although one operation involved a special squad from a nearby police station. On occasion, crackdowns also involved the collection of surveillance footage from closed-circuit television (CCTV) over a sustained period, followed by the arrest of any identified drug sellers. Police made arrests of identified people either opportunistically in the marketplace or by seeking them out in their homes. One of these operations, in March 2004, resulted in the arrest of approximately 50 Vietnamese suspected of selling drugs (Berry *et al.*, 2004).<sup>51</sup>

Crackdowns, however, although recurring, were unusual events. More frequent and enduring were the routine foot patrols of uniformed and plainclothes police. These occurred at least every few days – and as such constituted, and were understood as, a ‘natural’ feature of the environment (or, as Maher and Dixon (2001) described, an ‘occupational hazard’). Pairs, or sometimes trios, of uniformed police on foot patrol walked around the CBD. At times, they simply made their presence felt, patrolling the area but not interacting with drug marketplace participants. At other times they spoke to people – particularly those they recognised from previous interactions – and, on occasion, they stopped people, asking for identification, checking for

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<sup>51</sup> High numbers of arrests did not always result in corresponding criminal sentences. For example, much of the CCTV evidence from the operation in March 2004 was insufficient to be used in court despite the arrest of so many people. For one man, his case took six months to be fully heard and the police were finally reprimanded by the presiding Magistrate for wasting the court’s time with insufficient evidence.

warrants or even conducting physical searches. Often their routine consisted of a few circuits of the mall and surrounding streets and laneways to reconnoitre, with these observations used later to target suspected dealers and drug users for stops, searches and/or arrests. Sets of plainclothes police (pairs, trios and even quartets) also regularly patrolled the CBD on foot. These sets were most likely to spend the morning observing the marketplace without interacting with and thereby identifying themselves to drug marketplace participants. By the afternoon, they had generally collected sufficient information to be aware of which people were buying and selling. They used this information to follow people in an attempt to apprehend them in the act of transacting. Uniformed and plainclothes police also patrolled the surrounding areas in marked and unmarked patrol cars, paying particular attention to areas where people went to inject – such as nearby laneways and parks, for example.

On these patrols, police used harassment tactics of questioning, recording identification (ID) details, requiring people to have a ‘valid’ reason for being in the area and ordering people to leave the area within a set time limit (“If I see you here in thirty minutes time I’ll arrest you”, in the words of one police officer). They also used their ‘stop and search’ powers<sup>52</sup> to check ‘suspicious people’ for possession of illegal drugs or outstanding warrants and they arrested and prosecuted people for illegal drug use, possession and other drug-related offences.

#### *Questioning and recording ID*

Stops for questioning and recording ID were a frequent experience for participants in the marketplace. Sitting with Kelly, Thanh, Rachel and Viktor, we were approached by three uniformed police officers (two men and a woman). As they drew near, one remarked “beautiful day for it”. One officer sat down at the table with us while the other two remained standing. Viktor asked how long they had been working that day and the officer at the table replied “since nine [am]”. Viktor then asked whether he would be finishing at 3 pm and the man told him “five”. Small talk continued for a

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<sup>52</sup> In Victoria, police have the power to search people without a warrant “if they believe on reasonable grounds” that the person is carrying illegal drugs (or items that can explode, items that could be used to make graffiti or guns/offensive weapons) (Victoria Legal Aid and Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre, 2008).

few moments longer until Viktor said “I suppose you want ID and that”. All three police laughed and the officer sitting with us replied “Yeah, we weren’t just sitting down to pass the time”. Viktor and Rachel presented their ID. I asked Kelly quietly whether she thought we would be expected to provide ID as well. She nodded as she pulled out her driver’s licence. The male officer who was standing asked Thanh whether he had ID. Thanh replied “no” and Kelly added “I didn’t bring his wallet with me”. The officer then asked Thanh his name, which he gave. He also instructed Thanh to “empty everything that’s in your pockets”. Although Thanh did not comply with this instruction, the officer did not pursue it. Kelly had placed her driver’s licence on the table and I retrieved mine from my wallet and did the same. By this time, the seated officer had produced his police notebook and was writing down the details from Viktor’s ID. The male officer who was standing picked up Kelly’s and my licences and, after glancing at them, handed them to the seated officer with the comment “You don’t often get given driver’s licences”. The officer who was recording our details asked Kelly, “This still your address?” She nodded in agreement. He then picked up my driver’s licence and asked whether I was still at the address indicated. I replied that I was and he then returned our licences. The seated officer started to close his notebook, when the other male officer suddenly asked Thanh, “What was your name again?” Thanh repeated his name. The seated officer writing down the details checked the spelling and then asked Thanh for his address. Thanh provided an address which was also written in the notebook. Having checked all our details, the three police were satisfied and departed. Once they had left, I asked Kelly whether Thanh has given the same address as was on her licence. She answered “Didn’t you hear me? I told him ‘ba mươi ba, thirty three’, so he knew to give our old address”. Thanh had provided a false address as he was worried that he might have outstanding warrants and did not want the police to come looking for him.

During periods of intensive policing, it was not unusual for people to undergo questioning several times in a day. Such intensive scrutiny was also described by Aitken and colleagues (2002) during Operation Clean Heart and by Maher and Dixon during similar crackdowns in Cabramatta (Dixon and Maher, 2002; Maher and Dixon, 1999). More generally, scholars have noted that stops and questioning are a central feature of policing of young people in Australia and that they are

especially common among Indigenous, ethnic minority and other marginalised (e.g. unemployed) youth (Adler, O'Connor, Warner and White, 1992; Blagg and Wilkie, 1997; White and Wyn, 2004).

### *Stops and searches*

‘Stop and search’ tactics were employed by both uniformed and plainclothes police engaged in routine foot patrols, as well as by police during crackdowns. There were three levels of search. The first involved the person being required to empty their pockets and remove headgear, footwear and jackets – all of which were thoroughly searched. These searches might also involve a physical pat-down where the police used their hands to feel over the person’s body through their clothes. The second level involved undressing down to underwear as well as sometimes being required to allow police to search visually inside underwear. In second-level searches, police also searched inside people’s mouths, as well as grabbing people around the throat (chokehold) to prevent them from swallowing any drugs they might be storing in their mouths. The final level was a full strip-search where the person was required to completely remove all items of clothing. These were most often conducted at the police station although I heard allegations that people were sometimes strip-searched inside police vehicles parked on the street.

First-level searches were generally conducted where the police had engaged with the person and so, frequently, people were required to empty their pockets and remove articles of clothing in full view of passers-by. Thus, in addition to the risk of being found with drugs in one’s possession, searches were an occasion of humiliation and embarrassment. As Footscray is a hub for the Vietnamese community, the likelihood of these searches being observed by either family members or family friends was high. Such humiliation constituted an enormous source of shame or “losing face”, a shame that was felt by the entire family, not just the person being searched. Cooper and colleagues (2005), in their study of perceived police violence in New York, likewise reported on the shame and embarrassment afforded recipients of publicly-conducted searches.

For second-level searches, police generally took people into locations that provided some degree of privacy – a laneway leading off the pedestrian mall was regularly

used. While being more private than the street or mall, these areas were often thoroughfares and thus people might still be observed by passers-by. Kiều described one such incident which resulted in her arrest. Her current helper had told her there was a customer and so she stepped into a laneway to retrieve her drugs in privacy. The customer followed her and then suddenly a “head pop out from a doorway”. It was the same plainclothes officer (a male) who had arrested her a few weeks before. Kiều relayed: “I said shit and I try to bang it up [conceal the drugs in her underwear]”, but it was too late. A radio-call was made to the police station to send out a female police officer to conduct a search. When this woman arrived – joining Kiều and the other police in the laneway – she ordered Kiều to lower her trousers and pull her underwear down to her knees. As Kiều had not had sufficient time to fully conceal her drugs, the package was visible. She was arrested and taken to the police station along with her helper and the customer.

Second-level searches were occasionally conducted in full view of the public as illustrated by the following incident:

Bay told me that, this morning, the cops pulled him over and searched him at the top of the mall. They didn’t make him strip completely but they searched him thoroughly. Bay said they “felt inside my pants, under my balls, everything”. They let him go as “they didn’t find anything”. (Field notes, 2003)

Police in Victoria are legally entitled to conduct pat-down searches in public places, where they have reasonable grounds for believing a person to be carrying drugs. During a pat-down search, however, police are only allowed to request that people remove “their outer layers of clothing” (Victoria Legal Aid and Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre, 2008, p.22). A more intrusive level of search must, by law, be conducted in private – usually at the police station (*ibid*). The second-level searches described above, where police directed people to remove clothing down to their underwear and also searched visually or manually inside underwear, were thus a breach of the law. As well as the shame and humiliation deriving from these public violations of privacy, searches were stigmatising in that police donned rubber gloves before carrying out the search. Both dealers and local health and welfare workers made comments about police conducting searches “with

their gloves on". Protective covering is necessary for invasive body searches, however, it is unnecessary when handling clothing or the contents of pockets. While it is recognised that the practice of wearing gloves may be generated through police concerns about blood-borne virus transmission, it still serves to reinforce, to drug users and the public at large, the construction of drug users as 'dirty' and diseased (Elliot and Chapman, 2000).

Dealers and customers developed and enacted a range of tactics to accommodate, resist and evade the policing practices outlined above. These tactics were inconsistently effective and, at times, policing did succeed in disrupting the marketplace. However, these tactics illustrate the ways in which dealers expressed agency in the everyday negotiation of power between dealers and police.

### ***Accommodation***

Uniformed foot patrols were most easily managed. Dealers (and customers) were generally alert and on the look-out for police and remained in the main selling areas, selling with caution. Uniformed police were highly visible and so dealers simply ceased transacting whenever they observed police in the vicinity. If police were observed after a transaction had commenced, the dealer would warn the customer to wait, as illustrated when Thuần was approached by two customers who asked him "You got?" Thuần answered "Yes. What you want?" but followed this by warning them "not now, cops here". In this instance, one of the customers was forceful and urgent. He wanted to purchase immediately, ignoring Thuần's protestations to wait until the police had gone. Thuần continued to deny him. Generally, however, dealers and customers either waited for the police to depart or sometimes would walk away together to conduct the transaction in a more private location. Thus, uniformed police foot patrols briefly delayed transactions but had little lasting impact on dealing practices.

As well as ceasing transactions in the presence of police, dealers were also sensitive to actions that might be construed as drug transactions. On one occasion, Hùng had asked to borrow a small sum of money to pay for his methadone. I was rummaging in my bag to retrieve my wallet, when Thuần, who was nearby, warned me, "Anh hai

[police]! Don't do it now or they think you a customer". As noted in previous chapters, Vietnamese and Aussies were spatially separated, coming together primarily to conduct transactions. As Hùng's warning indicated, marketplace participants were sensitive to this spatial separation and they recognised that police were too and thus were likely to interpret exchanges of money between Aussies and Vietnamese people as drug transactions. Cooper and colleagues (2004, p.1114) observed a similar suspicion of social interactions in their study of police and community relations in New York. They concluded that because dealers and drug users "camouflaged their transactions so they blended into innocent streetscape social activities ... exchanging drugs for money through hugs, handshakes, and other covert means", this resulted in police coming to view all social interactions with suspicion. Thus, "if dealers concealed their business behind the trappings of innocent interactions, then officers would come to label interactions occurring in local public places as suspect" (*ibid*). Because of the historical construction linking Vietnamese and heroin dealing (Ch. 3), young Vietnamese in Footscray were seen as suspect and those seen interacting with Aussies, as doubly so. A few of the dealers in Footscray did have friendships with Aussies and were frustrated that they were frequently stopped by police whenever they were in the company of these friends. Hiêu, for example, told of an occasion when he was in his car with an Aussie workmate and they had been pulled over by police. He described how the police conducted a search by "tearing the car apart" and how they legitimised their actions by saying "well what were we meant to think, an Aussie and an Asian [together]?"

While uniformed police were instantly recognisable, plainclothes police (known as *undercovers*) were more difficult to detect. Marketplace participants were aware that plainclothes police routinely patrolled the area and so they were always alert to the possibility that sets of people might be plainclothes police. Identifying *undercovers* was a regular past-time. After a set of plainclothes police had been identified, this information was quickly transmitted among the marketplace participants. Once, with Ngoc and Hung, two plainclothes police walked past us. Minh and his brother were a few paces behind them. Ngoc called out to Minh in Vietnamese. He responded as he continued walking. His reply produced laughter from both Ngoc and Hung. When I asked what they had said, Ngoc explained that she had called out to them a

description of the undercovers. Minh's response was that he already knew because these two had just finished strip-searching him.

While people would express their competency in identifying undercovers ("I can always pick them"), there were also many 'war stories' of failure to detect them. Such stories were underpinned by the theme of cleverness, that is, that the undercovers "are getting clever". People told stories of a select few plainclothes police who had "mastered" the undercover appearance so "he look like a user". Or they would tell stories of plainclothes police who gave themselves *track marks* (tell-tale injecting scars). If a dealer was suspicious, they could roll up their sleeves to display these *bona fides* of an injecting drug user on their arms. There were also tales of undercovers purchasing and consuming drugs in the presence of dealers and the dealer then being arrested at the conclusion of the transaction. These stories included the construction of undercovers developing heroin dependence in their efforts at authenticity. According to one dealer: "This guy, he used in front of me and then wham, four cops came out of nowhere and busted me. I heard that this guy went down there [to the drug marketplace] later to score 'cause he was hanging. He went after work, in his own time. He had a habit. But no one would sell to him. No one trusted him". I could not substantiate the narratives of undercovers using heroin in front of dealers or developing heroin dependence in the course of their undercover activities. However, my reading of these narratives is that they served as cautionary tales to keep dealers vigilant. Additionally, they provided a face-saving rationale for those occasions when dealers were arrested during buy-busts.

Although buy-busts were more common during crackdowns, attempts were also made by plainclothes police on routine patrol. Thus, in addition to efforts to identify plainclothes police before any interaction occurred, dealers were alert to the possibility that customers might be undercover police. An episode with Tuan and Kiều is illustrative:

While we're sitting around, an older, unfamiliar Aussie couple (male and female) approach Kiều asking, "Do you do anything?" Kiều is suspicious and tells them "I don't know what you mean". They persist, saying "Your friend told us to come up and see you". Kiều is trying to ignore them and the male of the couple searches for eye

contact with anyone else, settling on me as I'm facing toward them. Tuan also shakes his head saying "we can't help" and I add, "I don't know". We all then turn to face each other so as to exclude them from our attention. They stay for a moment longer and then walk away. We see them later, walking through the mall again. When they are out of view Kiều says she was "suss" [suspicious] of them, adding, "when you have a feeling, you don't sell". (Field notes, 2003)

Researchers have classified drug markets as either 'open' or 'closed'. Open markets are "those which allow equal access to all" (Edmunds *et al.*, 1996, p.3) such that, provided buyers look and act like drug users, they can make purchases. In 'closed' markets, on the other hand, access is "limited to known and trusted participants" (*ibid*). In their analysis of the impact of policing on three different drug marketplaces in New York, Curtis and Wendel (2000) noted that buy-busts were successful in the 'open' drug marketplaces where people sold to anonymous buyers but far less successful in the relatively 'closed' marketplace where sellers usually sold only to regular customers. In the closed marketplace, attempts by undercovers to purchase drugs were "rebuffed by wary sellers who insisted that no drugs were sold there" (Curtis and Wendel, 2000, p.6). Given the character of trade exchanges in the Footscray marketplace – sales to regular and known customers as well as to unknown customers – the need to assess the authenticity of customers was an enduring feature of dealing due to the ongoing presence of police.

In sum, accommodating responses to uniformed and plainclothes police were increased vigilance, ceasing transactions when they were present or denying engagement in selling if suspicious of a supposed customer. Despite the police presence, people remained in the marketplace. They did so because, as user/dealers, they had to sell in order to cover the costs of their own heroin use. As Hảo explained, when police were present, he was "careful. I look around, glance around" before conducting a transaction but he stayed in the marketplace because "I need to sell". Hảo acknowledged the limitations of this, admitting that he did not always check thoroughly for police and also acknowledging that he could not always know whether police might be observing the marketplace from an indoor vantage point.

### **Resistance**

Dealers in Footscray also resisted policing. However, in their resistance to policing, dealers employed the ‘weapons of the weak’. Scott (1985, p.29) identified tactics such as “foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, … and so forth” as the ordinary everyday weapons of relatively powerless groups. Stopping short of outright collective defiance, these everyday forms of resistance “require little or no coordination or planning … and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms” (*ibid*). In Footscray, dealers engaged in dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance and other tactics of resistance to avoid arrest for heroin trafficking and other offences.

False compliance was apparent, for example, when dealers agreed to leave the area when ordered to do so by police but then remained. Feigned ignorance could be seen when dealers (and other drug marketplace participants) denied knowledge of offences they had witnessed. For example, following the stabbing incident in the mall (Ch. 6), several people who had observed the incident denied this when questioned by the police officers who came to investigate.

Dealers employed several tactics of dissimulation to minimise the likelihood of attracting police attention. Aware that their actions and social interactions were the object of elevated scrutiny, many of the dealers would come to sit with me (and other ‘workers’) when police were around.<sup>53</sup> As Tu explained soon after we met, “I’m scared on my own. I’m scared to sit here, scared of the police. I don’t have anything but I don’t want them to hassle me. If I sit with you, it feel safe. The police not come if you’re here. They scared of you”. This belief that workers afforded protection from the police extended as far as believing we were protected from being searched

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<sup>53</sup> Although health and welfare workers in Footscray were generally of Aussie backgrounds, they were less suspect when interacting with Vietnamese as police utilise a range of signs in assessing whether a person might be a drug user, including: age, demeanour, pallor, dress and accoutrements. Workers could be distinguished because they, for example, wore work clothing, carried bags labelled with organisational logos or carried collections of papers (e.g. questionnaires or pamphlets). Generally, workers were recognised as such by police – for example, I was questioned only a few times throughout two years of fieldwork. One local Vietnamese worker, however, was regularly stopped for questioning.

by police. One dealer even asked if I would hold onto his heroin because “they can’t search you”. I declined.

Oral storage of caps was a further example of resistance – allowing people to swallow evidence if stopped by police – as was the practice of only purchasing small weights of heroin (1.7g) for sale in *rounds*. In theory, this protects people from a charge of ‘trafficking in a commercial quantity’ (3g or more) and renders more plausible assertions that any drugs in one’s possession are for personal use. Of course, any protection afforded by carrying only small amounts of heroin at any one time is undermined by: selling to undercovers; by police observing the drug transaction; or by customers identifying the dealer from whom they purchased their drugs. People also resisted policing by denying any law-breaking and providing false identification details during questioning (as seen earlier with Thanh). The latter strategy was available for those dealers who chose not to carry identification with them when they came to Footscray.

### **Evasion**

While dealers generally continued selling during routine patrols, sometimes patrols were increased slightly (although not to the level seen during crackdowns) by the addition of another one or two sets of police. When this occurred, many dealers left the marketplace – sometimes only for a few hours until, they hoped, the police had finished patrolling; on other occasions, for a few days. Kiều, having been absent for three days, explained upon her return, “I not come out. I stay home. It too hot [too risky to sell because of the police]”.

One goal for police during intensive operations was to move the drug users/sellers out of the area. As such, they did not mind if marketplace participants were forewarned and removed themselves from the vicinity. Workers from local services said that police often notified them of forthcoming operations. Police also warned marketplace participants during routine patrols preceding the intensive operations. Some dealers did shift their heroin selling to other drug marketplaces (Richmond or the Melbourne CBD). However, for most dealers, removal to a less familiar drug marketplace was not an attractive option and they still needed to sell in order to

support their own heroin use. They therefore saw themselves as having no choice but to take the risk of selling “when it’s hot”. During periods of intensive policing, dealers knew that the overall risk of arrest for the population of dealers was higher. However, they also understood that this did not necessarily mean that they themselves would be arrested. They considered that a combination of good management (being cautious) and luck might allow them to avoid arrest.

### ***Disruption***

Intensive policing was sometimes successful in disrupting social relations. This occurred when people were arrested or when they chose to leave the area to sell elsewhere. Such disruptions, however, were not long-lasting and, over time, served to strengthen and expand the social ties between dealers. As dealers often sold drugs in partnership with one other, when one member of a set was arrested, the remaining member would initiate a new alliance. This had occurred, for example, in the case of H  o and Thao. Although they had known each other for a long time, they had only recently commenced dealing together. Before coming to Footscray, they had both sold in the Melbourne CBD with other “partners”. However, these partners had been “pinched [arrested]” and were currently “inside [incarcerated]”. When this happened, H  o suggested to Thao, “Why don’t we work together?” Such ongoing formations of new sets of dealers broadened and strengthened the overall network of Vietnamese dealers. H  o and Thao were originally from Springvale. They, along with their dealing partners, had moved from Springvale to the Melbourne CBD in response to policing (an example of evasion). Then, when policing increased in the city and their original partners had been incarcerated, they had shifted to Footscray. Once in Footscray, they cemented relations with known dealers (for example, Thao was a distant cousin of Thanh’s) and established new relations with other dealers. A broad network of social relations is a resource that helps to keep people dealing in the marketplace, by providing people to whom a dealer can turn for help when in need. Thus, despite the disruptions resulting from policing, dealers found various ways to reproduce their marketplace social relations.

### ***Trust in the marketplace***

In Chapter 6, I discussed how the presence of credit arrangements and processes of clientelisation were indicative of trust obtaining in the Footscray marketplace. I also noted that trust had to be negotiated and renegotiated. Policing, both actual and potential, constituted a challenge to trust and shaped the ways in which it was extended and expressed. Dealers maintained a suspicious orientation towards Aussie outsiders for fear that they might be police. Generally, once authenticity (as a drug user or worker) was established, then trust was extended, although never completely. Customers, for example, might potentially *dog* to the police – that is, provide a dealer's details as a way of reducing their own charges.

In rendering these situations knowable, dealers theorised circumstances that would make this outcome more likely. The age of a customer was seen as a significant factor. It was considered that young people were more likely to be intimidated by police than were older, experienced drug marketplace participants and, thus, young people were seen as more likely to be persuaded to disclose information about dealers. It was also understood that customers might be more likely to do this if they were *hanging out*, wanting to leave police custody as quickly as possible so they could obtain drugs and relieve their discomfort. Given the hundreds of exchanges occurring each day in the marketplace, it was relatively rare that dealers were arrested on the basis of information provided by their customers. This indicated that, more often than not, people in the marketplace generally adhered to the moral 'code' of not informing on others. I also heard of several instances of people "taking the rap" (taking full responsibility for, and bearing the consequences – including gaol time – of arrests) for other people.

Although less common, other Vietnamese dealers were also suspect. Rumours occasionally circulated that such-and-such a dealer would inform on other dealers in order to be let off any charges they might be facing. If someone was arrested and then released within a relatively short time, this was grounds for suspecting they may have provided information in exchange for an early release without charge. Similarly, because police generally refused bail to those arrested during crackdowns, anyone who did receive bail was also suspect. Analysing these events was one of the ways in which dealers constructed a sense of control over the hazards of their

environment. Their suppositions were not necessarily accurate. The system is not so complete that police have total control over criminal justice outcomes. Competent solicitors, sympathetic magistrates, lack of evidence or errors made by police in the process of making an arrest – such that Magistrates consider due process not to have been met – could all contribute to someone being granted bail.

People expressed their awareness of the threat policing posed to trust when they interpreted friendly engagements by police as attempts to undermine trust between marketplace participants. As Kiều expressed it, the police “always talk to you friendly to make other dealers think you are close”. Viktor made a similar point after we had observed an undercover call out to an Aussie couple. The male of the couple approached the undercover and they spoke briefly. The couple then continued walking through the mall. As they drew close to us, Viktor said hello and then teased them about their interaction with the undercover. “Were you just organising to meet up later?” Viktor asked. “Yeah, going out for a few beers after work”, the male joked. Viktor then shared his interpretation of the undercover’s behaviour. “They’re trying to make everyone think them two are dogs [police informants], staying with ‘em, talking”. The Aussies nodded as though this was an understood tactic of the police. While Viktor’s overt interpretation was that the police were trying to undermining the couple’s reputation as trustworthy, his effort to inform them that he had observed the interaction also served as a warning to be careful regarding to whom they were seen talking.

Notwithstanding these constraints on trust, policing of the marketplace simultaneously brought marketplace participants into alignment with one another against this shared threat. Dealers and customers shared knowledge of police presence, informing others of the whereabouts of uniformed patrols and transmitting descriptions of plainclothes police. There were several instances when a dealer, about to commence a transaction, would be warned of the presence of undercovers by another dealer or drug user, either by running up to give them the information or calling it out in Vietnamese. Warning others was an expression and affirmation of social identity – being part of the drug using scene – and of moral worth – having concern for one’s fellow drug marketplace participants.

## **Producing ‘order’: “You can’t be in Footscray today!”**

The quotation above is drawn from an anecdote relayed by a local welfare worker. The occasion was the official opening of the redeveloped Footscray mall. Opened by the state government Minister for Planning and the Mayor of Maribyrnong, and attended by senior police, local government councillors and staff, and local business owners ('traders'), as well as members of the general public, police presence was high. A young Vietnamese man was standing just off the mall watching the proceedings when he was approached by two police who told him 'You can't be in Footscray today!' The welfare worker was nearby and, overhearing their interaction, he intervened, telling the police, "He can be here. He's not selling drugs, he's not breaking the law. He can be in Footscray". With the intervention of the worker, the police did not pursue their demand.

This episode suggests a key function of policing in Footscray, that of producing 'order' through the removal of persons constructed as being 'out of order' in the context of a public event showcasing Footscray's urban 'revitalisation' (Pardy, 2008) and consequent changing image. The commonsense understanding of policing – one shared by dealers in Footscray – is that it is about enforcement of the law and the prevention of crime; that is, the role of police is to arrest people who break, or who are about to break, the law (Maher and Dixon, 1999). While police in Footscray do enforce the law by arresting dealers (some, several times) for selling drugs or being in possession of drugs, it is well recognised that this will neither stop the drug trade nor prevent people from breaking the law by selling or using drugs. Aitken and colleagues (2002, p.196), for example, reported that the Footscray Police Inspector recognised the displacement effects of crackdowns when he stated that Operation Clean Heart would "create a waterbed effect" such that pressure applied to one location, while reducing the problem locally, would merely inflate the problem elsewhere. Far from being an initiative to stop the drug trade, Operation Clean Heart was constructed by police as a "response to calls from local shopkeepers" for police to address public 'disorder' (*ibid*). The police held that the shopkeepers were "happy with the visible results" (*ibid*). Similarly, in local 'community' meetings I

occasionally attended,<sup>54</sup> police representatives acknowledged that their policing initiatives would not stop people buying, selling and using drugs. They likewise indicated that crackdowns were initiated in response to complaints from local (licit) traders and were aimed at demonstrating that police were ‘doing something about the problem’.

Despite the rhetoric of policing as being about enforcing the law, these examples support the argument that the core mandate of policing is actually that of ‘maintaining order’ (Dixon, 2005). Much of the routine patrolling of Footscray was not about law enforcement but, rather, about establishing a visible presence. The presence of uniformed police on foot patrols is seen to increase the public’s perception of safety and prevent overt law-breaking in the vicinity of the police (Loader, 1997).

Similarly, stops for questioning or conducting searches in the marketplace were as much about “imposing authority, claiming territory, [and] collecting low-level intelligence” (Dixon, 2005, p.18), as they were about preventing people from committing crime or arresting them for breaking the law. This assertion of authority was clearly evident in the following encounter:

Rachel and I return to the mall to join Viktor, who is sitting outside at a café with Jenny and another older Aussie. Rachel continues to tell me about their experiences with the methadone doctor, so we are standing about a metre away from their table. While we were talking I had noticed a uniformed male police officer walking up the mall. He’d entered one of the shops so I didn’t pay him much attention as he seemed to be shopping and I thought, if he was patrolling, he would have been with a companion. He came out of the shop and strolled past Rachel and I but, then, stopped and walked back towards Viktor and his companions, asking “How are we all today?” He remained with them for a few minutes. I didn’t hear all their interaction because Rachel continued talking, perhaps in the hope that

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<sup>54</sup> These were regular meetings comprising council staff, local service providers, local business owners (traders) and police, which were facilitated by the local council.

we would be ignored (which we were). The other Aussie moved away and eventually the police officer made to take his leave. He'd walked away a few steps before he turned back and asked them "Are you eating here?" Almost simultaneously, Jenny, Rachel and Viktor all responded with variations of the statement, "we're having coffee". The police officer again asked whether they were eating and Rachel said "I've just had a kebab". He then told them that if they weren't eating they should vacate the table so that "customers" could use it. Jenny and Viktor again repeated they were having coffee. The police officer's parting words were "and don't swear while you're sitting here". Jenny and Viktor murmured agreement and then he finally left. There was a bustle of activity from Viktor and Jenny as they began taking coffee orders. (Field notes, 2003)

In this instance, Rachel, Viktor and Jenny were not engaged in law-breaking activities. Nevertheless, the police officer approached them to remind them they were under scrutiny. Although the café owner had not requested that they move away from their seats, the police officer elected to regulate their behaviour in what was, ostensibly, the private space of a café, defining the parameters of 'appropriate' use of this space. Here, the three were being regulated by the police officer, not for any illegal behaviours – the supposed purview of police – but because they might behave in ways he defined as disorderly. While this could be read as 'maintaining' order, through his actions the police officer actually *produced* a particular form of 'order', one demanding consumption and a certain style of verbal expression (not swearing).

Non-consumption is increasingly "being constructed as a form of deviance" and used as justification for criminalisation and/or exclusion of economically marginal/non-consuming subjects from public space (Coleman, 2003, pp.27-8). It is noteworthy that intensive anti-drug policing in Footscray occurred in the CBD – a space given over to consumption. The providers of these sites of consumption, the traders, were the ones who were generally cited as initiating the requests to police for management of drug marketplace participants – seen as both 'non-consumers' and as people who potentially deter other 'legitimate' consumers.

Chesluk (2004, p.251) has argued that ‘order-maintenance’ policing is underpinned by a “belief system structured around the imagined threat of a permanent and intensifying *crisis of crime* – of criminal outsiders who threaten stable, homogenous communities, creeping into the structures of society through neglected cracks in the orderly facades of everyday urban life”. Vietnamese dealers (and other drug marketplace participants) in Footscray are constructed as these criminal, dangerous ‘others’. They are economically marginal as well as being ‘drug users’. Drug use in the Western world is a potent signifier of “immorality and social disutility” (Maher and Dixon, 1999, p.491). It is constructed as indicative of a failure to achieve neo-liberal values of self-regulation and autonomy (Keane, 2002). Additionally, as Dixon and Maher (2002, p.93) noted, young people from Indochinese backgrounds “constitute one of Australia’s most potent folk-devils” where the “popular media have constructed an image of a group which is alien, threatening, dismissive of ‘Australian values’, and linked to organized crime”. These subject positions contribute to the construction of young Vietnamese as ‘out of order’ in Footscray – irrespective of whether they are engaging in illegal activities – and produce encounters such as the one that introduced this section, where people are excluded on the basis of who they are rather than what they do. Through the construction of the ‘disorderly’, policing plays a role in producing ‘orderly’ neo-liberal subjects – productive, consuming, homogenous members of the ‘community’ in whose name policing is conducted (Chesluk, 2004; Grytnes, 2003).

At times, dealers appeared to accept these ascribed ‘disorderly’ subject positions, describing their treatment at the hands of police as acceptable and merited because they were “bad” drug users and “not normal” in the way of non-drug users. Often they expressed aspirations to neo-liberal normativity – which, in their terms, meant not using drugs, being responsible, being employed, owning a house and having a family (spouse and children). However, subjectivity is multi-faceted, dynamic and situationally-produced. At other times, they resisted these constructions, resenting their treatment at the hands of the police and asserting a subject position that afforded them the same rights as other citizens and which resisted attempts to marginalise and exclude them.

## **Reading policing: Anh hai**

Policing was understood as a given of the dealers' environment. As such, people worked to interpret and manage this 'natural' hazard. A conversation I had with Đam, one of the regular dealers, is illustrative of the ways dealers read policing:

"Have they told you about police?" Đam asks after I explain my research. We chat about police. He complains that "you come in for coffee because it too boring to stay at home" and they "ask you what you doing here, tell you to go home. They keep picking on you until you go". Once, when he was standing outside Centrelink having a smoke, two cops on bikes ("they here all the time" – thus he knew them and they knew him) stopped him, took ID and asked what he was doing in Footscray. 'You sell drugs?' one accused. Đam explained he was waiting to see a Centrelink worker and the cop countered, 'but you live [outside Footscray]. Why do you have to come here?' "'They [Centrelink staff] told me to come here'" Đam says he told the cops. Then the cops told him they'd just continue pulling him up until he left the area. Generalising about his experiences of policing Đam says: "They take me to the station, take me to lane, beat me". Once, he says, "they broke my arm". They take his money and "pick on me all the time" [harassing him with frequent stops]. In his view "They don't want you here". He acknowledges: "They [dealers] don't have money, they not rich, don't have nice car. They using. They just do this to support their habit. All right, they break the law, they know this" and will accept being arrested, but in his view it is unfair that the police harass drug users and dealers, beat them and "steal their money". The conversation continues: "It's always like this. Nothing change". Đam suggests that workers (naming myself, Peter Higgs and a local welfare worker) need to take action. "If you do something, then maybe we start to come forward." As he sees it, drug users themselves can't make complaints because "it's the system" and as police are "too powerful, people scared to give their names [identifying oneself is a requirement of lodging a formal complaint]". According to Đam, if someone did complain, the

police officer responsible for perpetrating the harassment might “get moved [to another police station] but his friends [police colleagues]” remain in Footscray and they’ll “pick on” the complainant. (Field notes, 2003)

Such accounts and analyses of policing practice were part of the shared body of knowledge that the dealers had built up over time as they acted within the drug marketplace. As Đam described it, “users learn how they [police] work”. This knowledge included elements such as the time police commenced and finished their work shifts and the time they took their breaks, as well as the knowledge that if an arrest was made, this generally meant that the police would return to the police station to complete the required *paperwork*, thereby freeing the marketplace of further policing for a period of time. Acquiring and developing knowledge of policing provided marketplace participants with a sense of being able to manage this hazard by “staying one step ahead” of the police. Status was derived from having knowledge about policing practices and being able to identify undercovers. Such knowledge and skill marked one’s experience as a street-based drug user as well as one’s expertise in negotiating the hazards of participation in the drug marketplace.

Young Vietnamese in both Footscray and Cabramatta, refer to the police as *anh hai*, literally meaning *older brother two* and translated as oldest/biggest brother. Among the young people in Cabramatta, the word *anh* (older brother) is also used to refer to the leader of a gang and, thus, *anh hai* conveys the meaning that the police are the ‘biggest gang of all’ (Dixon and Maher, 2002). As described in Chapter 7, Vietnamese dealers in Footscray also used the word *anh* to refer to a *gangster* or a leader within a group of people. However, when I asked their reasons for naming the police *anh hai*, their responses usually referred to the kinship sense of *anh hai* wherein the oldest brother can do anything he chooses and younger siblings must obey him. This appellation for the police captured the dealers’ reading of the coercive power and authority of the police. At the same time, it incorporated the belief that the police were beyond the law, that is, that they could do anything they chose because ‘the police’, as a cultural category, are considered beyond reproach – thus, for instance, the word of a police officer would always be taken over the word of a drug user.

Two distinct readings were contained within dealers' construction of police as beyond the law. On the one hand, police were seen as sometimes breaching the 'letter of the law' in their efforts to protect society from criminals. In this reading, criminality was seen as an enduring characteristic of subjects rather than as a particular form of action, and police were accorded a moral authority to control these criminalised subjects through any means necessary. In this, dealers' understandings were shaped by broader representations of police and criminals, expressed particularly through film and television – the series of 'Die Hard' films starring Bruce Willis is a good example. This reading – of criminalised subjects and the police's moral authority to breach the law – was occasionally expressed by dealers in relation to the policing of other dealers but more often was expressed in relation to persons engaged in violent forms of criminal activity.

The second reading implied by dealers' construction of police as beyond the law was that of the police as corrupt. This view was universally shared by dealers and was evident in constructions of police as thieves (confiscating money to keep for themselves), as drug dealers (confiscating drugs to then sell themselves) or as drug users (confiscating drugs for their own personal consumption). Workers in Footscray informed people that police were required to have them sign for any goods or money they confiscated but this rarely occurred. On occasion, confiscated drugs were disposed of in the presence of the apprehended person but at other times it was not clear to dealers what had happened to their drugs or money. The phrase "they put in their pocket", was frequently expressed. It is worth noting that this precise quotation was also reported by Dixon and Maher (2002, p.99), with the same readings of police evident among Indochinese dealers in Cabramatta.

Playing a significant role in interpretations of police as corrupt is the ambiguity which inheres in police powers of discretion. Confiscation of drugs and money are tactics that form part of the overall police strategy of harassing drug users and dealers so as to increase the costs of remaining within the market (see Ch. 2). However, as I noted earlier, because dealers understood the police primarily as 'enforcers of the law', their failure to enforce the law when people were found in possession of drugs was interpreted as evidence of corruption. Additionally, confiscation of drugs and releasing the person without charge may also result from

police acting within a harm minimisation framework: that is, treating drug use primarily as a health issue and not targeting small-scale dealers who sell in order to finance their own drug use. This reading of police actions was rarely articulated by the local dealers. It is ambiguities such as these that shape interpretations of police as “the biggest gang of all”. While it is certainly not the case that all members of the police are corrupt, Australia’s history of Royal Commissions into Police Corruption (see, for example, Dixon, 1999a) and recurring media reports of police corruption (see, for example, Oakes, 2007) suggest that it is not unreasonable to suppose that at least some police actions may have been corrupt.

As is clear in Ðam’s account, in their readings of power in relation to police, dealers understood themselves as being without power. The police were able to do anything they chose. A key factor contributing to this determination was the use of violence or excessive force by some police officers. In common with other studies of policing in drug marketplaces (Aitken *et al.*, 2002; Cooper *et al.*, 2004; Dixon and Maher, 2002), there were repeated instances of police using violence, excessive force and intimidation with threats of violence. These acts were gendered in that physical violence was only deployed against men. Women were more likely to be verbally abused – such as insulting and disparaging remarks about their lack of femininity or their sexual comportment (e.g. ‘dirty sluts’). Such remarks reinforced constructions of women drug users’ deviancy through their supposed compromising of appropriate gender roles (Maher and Hudson, 2007).

I spoke with one young man at a local health service shortly after he had been allegedly assaulted by a police officer. The officer had reportedly told him that “going to gaol is just like a holiday camp for you scum, so I’m not going to arrest you. I’m just going to give you a hiding [beating] every time I see you”. The assault was described as brutal, involving punching and kicking from the male police officer who was described as much bigger than his victim. The young man said the police officer’s colleague stood by and watched, while keeping a look-out for passers-by.

On another occasion, one of Kiêu’s helpers told me the police had recently beaten him, kicking his leg (which was currently swollen and painful due to deep vein thrombosis). He had been in the mall when they approached and asked him what he

was doing. He replied that he was not doing anything. They asked him to show some identification which he provided. The police then took him to a laneway to search him (“they put on gloves”). “They find nothing” the man said, but then they beat him, telling him, as they did so, to “go home” as they did not want to see him in Footscray. “I not selling” he told me, “I do nothing. I just come out” because “it’s boring” to remain at home. “Why they do that?” he asked. “If I’m selling, okay, but I not selling”, expressing his resentment that the police were excluding him from coming to the mall to have coffee or see his friends. He added that the police threatened him, saying they would beat him every time they saw him in the mall.

Excessive force was sometimes employed in the course of ‘stops and searches’. Sitting at a café with Kelly, we heard a commotion. We both turned towards the café entrance to see Khang being slammed to the pavement by a male police officer. His head hit the pavement with an audible thud. Khang was a friend of Thanh’s, recently released from gaol, who was staying at their house at the time. The officer pinned Khang down by pushing one knee onto the centre of his back. A second officer approached Thanh inside the café and directed him outside. The police officer with Khang informed him he was to be searched. Then, having pulled Khang’s hands behind his back, the police officer gripped them as he pulled him back up to his feet. Keeping Khang’s arm bent firmly behind his back, the police officer forced him to walk some 100 metres to a nearby laneway where he proceeded to conduct the search. The other officer escorted Thanh so that he could also be searched. Kelly and I followed. We stood a few metres away but the police officer with Khang was uncomfortable with our presence, yelling at us to “Fuck off unless you want to be arrested too”. No drugs were found and both men were released.

Not surprisingly, there was considerable resentment over police violence and reports of these experiences were shared throughout the social network (indeed, experiences of policing were often the first personal information dealers would share with me through the process of developing our relationships). Scholars have argued that police violations of the law can have counter-productive effects (Bayley, 2002; Dixon, 1999b; Maher and Dixon, 2001). They may alienate the public, increasing the likelihood that “encounters with the public will generate hostility and violence” because “actions that are perceived to be arbitrarily tough may encourage the very

confrontational violence they are supposed to discourage" (Bayley, 2002, pp.141-3). Additionally, "when police act beyond the law, they lose their moral authority" and "perceived legitimacy" (*ibid*, p.143). Police violence in Footscray was a key element in readings of them as the "biggest criminals of all".

Younger male dealers, in particular, articulated the view that police "hide" behind their uniforms and police badges. For example, on one occasion, Chièn directed a customer into a laneway, following a minute or so later. As he rounded the corner, I noticed an undercover stride purposefully towards the laneway. Some ten minutes later, Chièn returned to the table where I was sitting with some other dealers. "The cops just bash me" he declared. He proceeded to describe the undercover's action during their encounter, in Vietnamese, but acting out the story. He mimed using his elbow to strike, then mimed a kick. He put his hands around his throat and then he dropped to the ground and put one hand behind his back. This was followed by a kick and two punches. These were aimed low as though he was now the undercover kicking and punching him while he is pushed to the ground. Over the next ten minutes he retold his story several times. He did not want to make a formal complaint but he was angry. He recounted his words to the undercover: "You a top man. You have badge and gun" and how he challenged him to a "fair fight, one-on-one". Resentment over this undercover's actions then reminded him of a previous policing encounter in which, he told me, an officer pulled his gun and threatened to shoot him. He concluded his story with the assertion that police "should do the right thing. Not do the wrong thing". Chièn's challenge to the undercover expressed the humiliation and frustration experienced by the young male dealers in a context where, because of the police uniform, dealers cannot respond as 'men' to what they frequently interpreted and experienced as a contest over masculine authority, rather than police authority. This was particularly the case when police officers were of similar age to the dealers.

The use of violence and excessive force contributes to the production of order. It can be seen as a technology of the "social disciplinary model" of policing identified by Choong (1998, pp.625-626). He argued that the chief distinguishing characteristic of this model of policing is:

its lack of interest in legal or factual guilt. Its concern is with the police objectives of reproducing social control, maintaining authority by extracting deference and inflicting summary punishment ... its initial and primary purpose is to remind an individual or a community that they are under constant surveillance: the objective is to punish or humiliate the individual, or to communicate police contempt ... or to demonstrate that the police have absolute control over those who challenge the right of police to define and enforce ‘normality’”.<sup>55</sup>

Dealers attributed their lack of power to their status as drug users and also to their ethnicity. In their eyes, policing tactics aimed at arresting and removing suspected drug sellers from the marketplace were primarily targeted at people of “Asian” appearance. Young Vietnamese people, in particular, were required to have a valid reason for being in the area and frequently told to “go home”.

From their perceived position of powerlessness, dealers (and marketplace participants more generally) considered others to have more power in relation to police than themselves. This was demonstrated through their beliefs that the police were “not allowed” to question or search me. Dealers also believed that the presence of ‘workers’ during police stops would offer protection from the misuses of police powers. Đam once told me to join Kiều, who was being questioned by plainclothes police, expressing his belief that my presence would ensure that she was questioned appropriately (in his words: “they can’t do anything if you’re there”). I complied and when I greeted Kiều the police asked her if she knew me. She told them I was her “worker” and the police interacted with me politely, informing me what they were doing with Kiều and why. This contrasted starkly with my experience with Kelly when we observed the search of Khang and Thanh (“Fuck off unless you want to be arrested too”) and the police would have understood us simply as friends of the two men. Thus, at some level, dealer constructions were accurate as, if the police

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<sup>55</sup> It is worth noting here that, in the context of drug market policing, because police are also exposed to discourses about violence among drug users and within drug markets (Ch. 6), their use of excessive force could also be shaped by their imaginings of drug users’ and dealers’ violent tendencies, these imaginings then serving to legitimise their own violence.

believed someone to be a ‘worker’ they tended to conduct themselves in accordance with the law and police policies and procedures.

The belief that police could do whatever they chose was reinforced in information provided to dealers (and drug users, youth or marginalised populations) by health, welfare and legal workers. For example, the booklet ‘Your rights: Police powers in Victoria’, produced by Victorian Legal Aid (2008) and available in many drug user services, advises people to comply with all police directives – even if police are in breach of the law – and submit any complaints subsequent to the encounter. This advice acknowledges the coercive power of the police, that police can use this power inappropriately and that complaints or resistance during encounters often serve to render the situation worse. Indeed, in their examination of young people’s experiences of policing, Blagg and Wilkie (1997, p.2) noted the common situation where “the most serious charges laid in court … will have arisen out of the police intervention itself”. Thus, young people, constructed by police as challenging their authority, are frequently charged with offences such as ‘Resist arrest’, ‘Offensive language’ or the more serious ‘Assault police’. These offences are resources the police can use to assert their authority and they are disproportionately applied to young, Indigenous, ethnic minority and other marginalised people (White and Wyn, 2004). Aware of this, and recognising that police have a range of means at their disposal for expressing their displeasure, dealers were strategic in complying with police directives and not making complaint. Furthermore, as has been noted by Dixon and Maher (2002, pp.99-100) in relation to police confiscating drugs and money without receipts, such “informal taxes” were preferable to being arrested and charged.

While dealers recognised and acknowledged their powerlessness, this did not mean that they remained passive. They still acted to minimise the impacts of policing. As described earlier, they would sit with ‘workers’ to create the impression of being in the area for ‘legitimate’ purposes, if possible they would send ‘workers’ to act as witnesses to police-drug user interactions, and they adopted various tactics to evade police attention or arrest – wariness, swallowing drugs if apprehended and denying wrong-doing. A few dealers described more direct resistance to police. Early in my relationship with one young man, he recounted an incident that had occurred a few

weeks earlier. He and some friends had been physically detained by police. They struggled and he had managed to flee the scene. Such acts, however, were rare. For the most part, once stopped by police, dealers complied with their directives, usually with considerable politeness (for example, addressing police as “sir” or “ma’am”).

Criticism of police practice was a frequent topic of conversation although their ‘right’ to arrest drug users was rarely challenged. Dealers considered it to be “fair” if they were arrested while they were selling heroin because “we’re doing something wrong” and the police were “just doing their job” – arresting people breaking the law. As such, it became a “game” between police and drug users<sup>56</sup> where the “smart” drug user could avoid police or, if failing in this, should bear the consequences stoically. Their objection was when police stepped outside the rules of the “game”. Thus, they were resentful when they were assaulted or had money confiscated by police when, in their view, “I not do anything” (i.e. coming to the mall to meet up with friends, have a coffee or get out of the house). They were also resentful over their exclusion and over the perceived discrimination they experienced from police, such that, in their view, Vietnamese were targeted for arrest and received harsher penalties for drug-related offences than did Aussies. This perceived discrimination against Vietnamese people, which went against their understanding of Australian values of egalitarianism and non-discrimination (see also Dixon and Maher, 2002), also contributed to readings of police as the “biggest gang”. Dealers were regularly subject to racist remarks from police and they were aware that they were more likely to be targets of policing than were Aussies. Workers were likewise aware of the targeting of Vietnamese youth. For example, they sometimes made ironic remarks when police were searching an Aussie, suggesting that it must be because there were no Vietnamese young people around. Dixon and Maher (2002, p.105) identified similar resentment at perceived racist exclusion among young Indochinese in Cabramatta, who have expectations that, in Australia, they will be “treated fairly and equally with the respect due to them as citizens of a liberal democracy”.

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<sup>56</sup> Of course, I recognise that the two sides considered the rules of the game differently.

## **Reading police: Good cops/bad cops**

Police were understood, and represented categorically, as ‘the police’ – a monolithic state agency with coercive power and almost unlimited authority. This reading is also apparent in much of the literature on policing of drug marketplaces where ‘the police’ act, for example, to harass drug users, disrupt drug marketplaces or produce order. As such, any particular police officer is the embodiment of the power of the corporative police entity. At the same time, dealers did seek ways to interact with, and come to know, members of the police as individuals.

The same individual police officers were often engaged in routine plainclothes patrols. I came to recognise many of the police who constituted these groupings and they were likewise well-recognised by local marketplace participants. Greetings were often exchanged and enquiries made about people’s lives. On one occasion, sitting with Hùng, Kiều and some others, two undercovers approached. One called Hùng over, asking him how he was and telling him “I’ve got three warrants for you sitting on my desk”. He told Hùng to come to the police station so that the warrants could be executed (i.e. cancelled by the reissue of a court appearance date). Their conversation was friendly, with occasional pats on Hùng’s shoulder. The police also asked Hùng whether he had seen a particular person, giving him the impression that they were in the area specifically searching for someone. The undercover who had initially called to Hùng glanced over at our table and said “It’s Kiều. All the celebrities are out today”. Kiều said hello and then turned back to face me. The police took their leave of Hùng after a few minutes, telling him not to “blow their cover [reveal their identity]” to other people. In this example, it is clear that in the everyday context of the drug marketplace, dealers and individual police interacted with sufficient regularity that they came to know each other as individual persons rather than simply as representatives of particular categories – ‘the police’ and ‘drug dealers’. Thus, although all officers represent the authority and ‘force’ of the police, part of how dealers negotiated their environment was to learn about and share information on individual officers and to interact with them as individuals.

Particular police were known through past experiences, with some assessed as “good” and others as “bad”. Sitting with Minh, a young dealer, he pointed towards

two people. “Those other ones, a girl and a guy. Undercovers. They’re nice. You speak to them nice. Don’t talk shit to them. They speak to you nice.” Likewise, as we sat in the mall identifying undercovers, Hảo and Thao told me about a group of three (a woman and two men) who they were certain were undercovers. “We know them”, Hảo asserted. As we were talking, a man and woman approached, walking around our table to stand behind us. The man stood between Hảo and me, while the woman stood a few steps back between the man and Hảo. As they had approached, Hảo and Thao had murmured to me that undercovers were coming, adding that these were the ones they had mentioned. The man initiated the conversation, asking Hảo and Thao “What are you doing?” “We’re helping her. With her study”, Hảo told him. After some questioning of me to assess my legitimacy as a researcher, the male undercover turned back to Hảo and Thao, asking them, “You’re staying out of trouble?” Hảo agreed that they were. During the interaction, another man in police uniform rode up on a bicycle. He asked Thao, “Are you allowed to be in the mall?” Thao replied that he was and the female undercover also affirmed Thao’s right to be in the mall. The uniformed officer asked Thao, “You haven’t got any warrants?” “No”, Thao told him and again the female undercover defended Thao, confirming that he did not have warrants. “You know these two?” the uniformed police officer asked the woman. “Yeah, we know them. They’re all right”, she told him. The uniformed police officer then rode away.

Turning back to the two Vietnamese men, the woman undercover repeated, “We know you. We like you. You’re good”. The woman was friendlier than the man, teasing Thao about how he was “always smiling. You always look so happy”. This embarrassed Thao who continued smiling while trying to hide his embarrassment, covering his face with his hand. Noticing this, the woman teased, “You’re blushing now”. Concluding the interaction with an admonition that Hảo and Thao should “stay out of trouble”, the two undercovers took their leave. Once they were out of sight, Hảo and Thao began analysing the interaction. Both men declared that these two undercovers were “good to them” and did not harass them. They considered that these police “like us” and that, in general, undercovers usually treated drug users well while it was typically the uniformed police officers who beat drug users and took their money. Thao added that the undercovers had dismissed the uniformed officer when they stated that they knew him. In his view, the undercovers were

superior in rank to the uniformed officer and therefore “he has to do what they say”. Their assessment of undercovers as “nicer”, fairer and less likely to be corrupt than uniformed police was commonly shared. Similar assessments of undercover police were also reported by Maher and Dixon (1999) in Cabramatta.

If some police officers were assessed as “good”, there were also particular police officers who had established themselves as notoriously “bad”. Usually, such a reputation was associated with their use of excessive force and violence. While I never heard “good” police being identified by name, “bad” police were always referred to by their full names. Two, in particular, were seen by dealers as especially “bad”. Indeed, their reputations extended beyond the drug marketplace participants – local health and welfare workers and a local solicitor also spoke about these two police officers.

While knowledge of individual police could not be used by dealers to control their environment – coming to the attention of a known or unknown police officer was a matter of uncertainty – the existence of some relationship between individual dealers and individual police could entail a less fraught encounter than might occur between dealers and police who were unknown to each other. For example, if a particular dealer is known to be polite and compliant when detained, then the police officer would be less inclined to use force during an arrest. Likewise, if the police officer is known to be fair and to exercise their authority reasonably, then a dealer is less likely to be resistant or hostile.

As with the assessments of police as corrupt described in the previous section, police powers of discretion also provided an opportunity for individualising police. For example, while police who did incorporate harm minimisation approaches into their everyday practices could be read as corrupt; alternatively, they were read by some dealers as “nice”. Since the formation of the Victoria Police Drug and Alcohol Strategy Unit in 1991, police drug policies have been informed by harm minimisation principles and training has been available to police on drug and alcohol issues. Some police in Footscray brought these ideas to their interactions with drug users. One older detective, who had arrested Kiêu, told me, “she’s got a health problem”. He carried this conviction through to the court, when he recommended

that the police prosecutor support Kiều’s application for consideration for a court-supported bail program mandating her participation in drug treatment so that she could “get some help”.

Thus, while dealers made generally negative assessments of the ‘police’ category, within this they did differentiate, allowing that some police were good while others were bad. Dealers operated with an abstract conception of “the police” and individual police officers were judged in relation to this understanding of what police ought to do.

### **Being “busted” and “going hol-i-day”**

Throughout this chapter, I have described various tactics employed by dealers to evade and resist arrest. Given the volume of drug exchanges they transacted, these were relatively successful, at least some of the time. However, they were never consistently successful and, thus, most dealers had been arrested for trafficking on numerous occasions. Their frequent experience of arrest is mirrored in other studies of Vietnamese-Australians in Victoria. For example, young Australians born in Viet Nam have been shown to have significantly higher arrest rates for drug-related offences than their Australian-born counterparts. Beyer and colleagues (2001) reported that between 1994 and 1998, Viet Nam-born persons comprised 38%-48% of those arrested for selling heroin.<sup>57</sup> This is a large proportion given that those born in Viet Nam constitute only about 1% of the total Victorian population. In 1997/98, 679 Viet Nam-born people were arrested for heroin trafficking. The number of Australian-born arrested for heroin trafficking in the same year was also 679. When these figures are considered as a rate per 100,000 population, arrest rates for the Viet Nam-born in 1997/98 were 2,265.8 per 100,000 of the Vietnamese-born population compared to 369.1 per 100,000 for the Australian-born. Among young people aged between 15-24, these differences are even more striking, with arrest rates of 4,301.1 per 100,000 population among Viet Nam-born people aged between 15-24 years compared with 82.7 per 100,000 among Australian-born youth. Beyer and colleagues

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<sup>57</sup> To my knowledge, the figures reported by Beyer and colleagues (2001) represent the most recent data on which analysis of this kind has been undertaken.

(2001) argued that these figures reflect an arrest bias, generated by an increase in ‘special police operations’ in suburbs of both high street-level drug activity and high Vietnamese residency (including Footscray). As young Vietnamese street-based heroin users and dealers are highly visible, they are “easier to arrest than are offenders of other backgrounds who have less visible patterns of selling and using heroin” (*ibid*, p.174). These high arrest rates also correlate with high rates of incarceration. In a study of young Indochinese injecting drug users in Sydney and Melbourne, for example, 78% of the Sydney sample and 31% of the Melbourne sample reported experience of incarceration (Maher *et al.*, 2001).

Arrests of dealers in Footscray largely resulted in custodial sentences. Of the 123 regular Vietnamese heroin sellers I met during fieldwork, only eight had avoided incarceration. Many had experienced multiple episodes of incarceration over a period of years. For example, Kiêu had spent much of the preceding eight years serving sentences ranging from three to nine months. Often she would be released only to be re-arrested within the next three months and returned to gaol. This was the experience of most of the dealers. In a brief encounter with a male friend of Đam’s who had recently been released from prison, the man told me that of the twelve years he had been in Australia, eight of these had been spent in gaol. Sustained absences from the marketplace were invariably due to incarceration, referred to as “go hol-i-day” by this group (although ‘go hol-i-day’ could also refer to an actual return visit to Viet Nam to stay with family – often prompted by parents’ desire for their children to undergo heroin detoxification).

Certainly not a deterrent to selling in the marketplace, dealers constructed these frequent episodes of “going hol-i-day” as an opportunity to re-establish health and re-develop relations with family. In this light, it could be argued that regular incarceration served to reproduce the marketplace. It did this in two ways. Firstly, in providing time out for consolidating health, it ‘strengthened’ dealers, allowing them to re-establish and sustain drug use when they were released. Secondly, histories of recurring and lengthy incarceration further excluded dealers from other legitimate means of making a living, thus making their return to selling in the marketplace more likely.

## **Dealing with uncertainty**

In Chapter 2, I discussed how law enforcement strategies in drug marketplaces are based on principles of risk. Policing is thought to disrupt supply and demand by increasing risks for marketplace participants. For drug sellers, increased policing is thought to increase the costs of dealing through increasing the risk of arrest. Even if this does not deter drug sellers, it is assumed that they will require financial compensation for the greater risk and they will pass this on to drug buyers in the form of increased prices (Weatherburn *et al.*, 2000). Thus, policing initiatives targeted at drug sellers are predicated on the construction of the drug selling environment as risky. Policing models also conceive of risk as a single hazard – arrest – and assume a unity of response to this risk. Additionally, as I have noted, these models are underpinned by an assumed rationally-calculating subject who performs an arithmetic felicity calculus to assess risk. They assume that drug dealers make decisions based on the probabilities of being arrested, which they use to determine whether pay-offs are worth the risk of being caught.

Formally (or etically), in relation to policing, the drug marketplace environment is indeed one of risk; where a risky context is one in which it is possible to assess the likelihood of a particular event occurring (Dwyer and Minnegal, 2006). In Footscray, with sufficient information, gathered over time, the probability of arrest is measurable. However, from the perspective of dealers (the emic view), the drug marketplace is understood as both risky and uncertain – an uncertain context being one where it is not possible to assess the likelihood of events (*ibid*). People's understandings of their environments depend upon knowledge (past experience) but also scale. Using the temporal scale of a month, based on their past experience, dealers could predict that, in any given month, policing would occur. However, using the temporal scale of a day, dealers could not predict that policing would occur on a particular day. Thus, on a day-to-day basis, decision-making (choice) occurred in a context of uncertainty. Given that both knowledge and scale are implicated in interpretations, dealers move between constructions of their environment as either risky or uncertain. Consequently, their responses to policing are diverse and divergent.

When dealers were deciding whether to come to the marketplace to sell, the environment was uncertain – they could not know whether police would be there. Once they arrived and became aware of a police presence, dealers reconstructed the environment as risky. In this context of risk, dealers made decisions using rules-of-thumb – based on past and present experiences (e.g. their readings of police practices and police crackdowns) – and acted to minimise their chances of detection. In this they were risk-averse, adopting various risk management strategies, as I have described throughout this chapter.

However, in the dealers' view, even in this environment of risk, whether they were detected by police still remained a matter of indeterminacy. That is, if the risk was that 90% of people in the marketplace might be likely to be arrested, dealers could still imagine that they might be one of the 10% who were not arrested. Here, dealers who continued to sell, as most did, can be seen as engaging chance (risk-takers) and, in this, notions of fate, karma and luck also operate to shape dealers' choice and decision-making.

Dealers understood life as contingent and while they did, at times, act to avoid risks, at other times they engaged risk, they took the chance of not being arrested in an environment where arrest was highly likely. As Kiêu said, in response to my asking whether she was “scared to be in Footscray” when she was in breach of her bail conditions, “if it comes, it comes”. Kiêu’s statement highlighted her intention to continue acting as she always did – selling in the drug marketplace. Despite the risks, she presented herself as unconcerned about what could happen to her. In her defiance of the odds, Kiêu expressed choice (i.e. agency).

The everyday world of dealers is one of multiple risks and risk is understood to entail hazard (for example, arrest, drug withdrawal, boredom), but also opportunity (for example, selling more caps because other dealers have been removed from the marketplace or the chance of an enjoyable social encounter with friends). In medical, epidemiological and criminological discourse, risk is frequently equated with hazard and the opportunity aspects of it are downplayed. However, as Malaby (2002) has argued, there is no reason to suppose that risks will always be judged as threats and

nor is there reason to assume that actors will alter their usual practices (for example, ceasing dealing) when, in their view, outcomes remain indeterminate.

Earlier, I noted that drug users/dealers have been constructed as ‘disordered’ or failed neo-liberal subjects in relation to their ‘criminality’, non-consumption and ‘otherness’. Arguing that they do not act as rational-calculators in relation to policing risks might be seen as adding further support for this view. Neo-liberal subjects are called upon to prudentially manage risks, that is, the neo-liberal subject “should practise and sustain their autonomy by assembling information, materials and practices together into a personalized strategy that identifies and minimizes their exposure to harm” (O’Malley, 2004, p.465). However, O’Malley has argued that this is a narrow view of neo-liberal subjectivity. Conceiving the neo-liberal subject as a prudential risk-manager renders her simply as a “consumer of risk” in that she is free only to “choose rationally among available options”. As such, the prudent subject “would know what not to do, what to avoid, but not what creative agendas to follow”. O’Malley points out, however, that the neo-liberal subject is equally an enterprising subject, she is an innovator who reinvents herself and her environment. “Innovation and enterprise are forays – if not into the unknown – then into a future that cannot be mathematically calculable, or even derived from expert knowledge and theory, precisely because it will be successful to the extent that it creates a future distinct from the past and present” (*ibid*). O’Malley further notes that in economic and governmentality analyses, risk and its management have increasingly come to dominate. Yet throughout the preceding two centuries, theorists have recognised the centrality of uncertainty, indeed “uncertainty – in the shape of the entrepreneurial reliance on practical experience, inspiration and foresight rather than statistical calculation or the expert planning of economists – is central to profitability and good economic governance” (*ibid*, p.463). Far from supporting the construction of dealers as failed neo-liberal subjects, my account suggests that, through their active engagement with both risk and uncertainty, they also act as the enterprising subjects of neo-liberal normativity. The discussion in this chapter of dealers’ engagement with uncertainty as well as risk, and the discussions in Chapters 6 and 7 around the limitations of models of atomised, self-interested, maximising subjects, show the inadequacies of unidimensional conceptions of subjectivity in accounting for human action and personhood.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented an ethnographically informed account of the everyday negotiation of power between dealers and the police. I have shown how policing shaped dealers' actions and social relations and thereby contributed to the constitution of this particular marketplace. I have shown that in the everyday world of the marketplace, dealers and individual police officers were themselves socially related and that dealers' understandings and interpretations of these social relations shaped their actions in the marketplace. Through this, I have drawn attention to the agency of dealers – a theme that is frequently absent in other accounts of policing in drug markets. The choices dealers were able to make in the marketplace (i.e. how they were able to express their agency) were constrained by police but not completely curtailed. From their position of 'weakness' vis-à-vis police power, dealers acted to resist or evade policing with varying levels of success. Individual dealers outlasted individual police (both of the two 'bad' police officers are no longer working in Footscray, having been transferred to other police stations) while the marketplace, has, to the time of writing, resisted policing efforts to eradicate it.

In this chapter, I have also addressed the drug using/dealing subject – disorderly, dangerous and out of place – who is inscribed and produced through policing discourse and practice. In the following chapter, I extend this discussion to the forms of drug user subjectivity inscribed within health discourses. I then challenge these constructions of subjectivity through an in-depth analysis of dealers' engagement in the practice of temazepam injection.

## Chapter 9

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# Privileging pleasure: injecting *normies* in the marketplace

Sitting with Peter Higgs and some of the dealers on my first field visit, a young woman re-joined our group, declaring “I’m so happy” and thereby signalling the successful conclusion of her efforts to obtain *normies* (temazepam gelatin capsules). Observing her determined search on that first day, I did not know that this would be a recurring scene. Over the following months, I learnt that the injection of *normies* was both highly-valued and enthusiastically pursued by the majority of local Vietnamese dealers.

Thus far my analysis has concentrated on the Footscray dealers as sellers of heroin, exploring processes of heroin exchange in Chapters 6 and 7 and examining dealers’ responses to policing in Chapter 8. In this chapter, I shift the focus to consider these dealers as users of drugs, examining their subjective experiences of drug consumption. I do this through an in-depth analysis of the widespread practice of *normie* injection.

Up until March 2004, temazepam was available either in tablet or gelatin (gel) capsule forms in Australia. Injection of the gel capsule formulation of temazepam was widespread and popular among the Vietnamese dealers. In dosages of both 10 and 20mg, temazepam gel capsules were available under the brand names Euhypnos®, Normison® and Temaze®. Regardless of brand name, people invariably referred to all temazepam capsules as *normison* or *normies* and I follow this convention. Among Aussies, the capsules were also colloquially known as *footies* in reference to the fact that they were shaped like an Australian Rules football. When speaking with each other, the Vietnamese also referred to gel capsules as trứng (eggs – again because of their shape) or as thuốc ngủ (sleeping medication).

*Normies* were generally used in conjunction with heroin. A *taste* of heroin would be prepared and drawn up into a syringe. Holding the syringe with the needle pointing upwards, the temazepam capsule was pushed onto the needle and pierced. The capsule was then slowly heated and, as the viscous liquid inside thinned, it was slowly drawn into the syringe to combine with the heroin, and then injected. Injection of these capsules is a high-risk practice. Most of the *normie* injectors in Footscray had experienced health problems directly linked to their use of the drug (which I discuss later in this chapter). Yet, despite possessing embodied knowledge of the multiple harms attendant upon temazepam injection, they continued to engage in the practice. In seeking to interpret their actions, I argue that pleasure and its pursuit are at the heart of their engagement with *normie* injection. While these people were all heroin users, it was their injection of temazepam gel capsules which most clearly expressed, and through which I read, the pleasure they found in drug use.

In the first section of the chapter, I describe the character of *normie* exchanges to highlight the enthusiasm evinced by dealers in relation to *normies*. Following this, I present detail on *normie* injectors' experiences of the harms associated with their use of temazepam and then present an analysis of the pleasure they experienced from its injection. In the final sections of the chapter, I consider the implications of my ethnographic findings for models of the drug-using subject. Throughout the thesis, I have made reference to the subject who is both assumed and produced through public (largely medical, epidemiological and criminological) discourses and practices in regard to drug use, drug markets and policing. I have discussed the liberal subject underlying economic models of drug markets – the autonomous, rational, maximising subject (Ch.s 2, 6 and 7) – and the disordered subject interpellated by policing – the irrational, immoral, criminal or dangerous subject (Ch.s 2 and 8). In this chapter, I focus on the subject implicit in discourses of drug use and of harm reduction and I use the actions and accounts of this set of *normie* injectors to critique these contemporary models of subjectivity.

## Trading temazepam

Between January 2003 and March 2004, trade in temazepam capsules was an irregular but recurring feature of the marketplace, with the majority of dealers being eager purchasers of temazepam capsules. Temazepam trade was specific to the formulation rather than the actual chemical. Only gel capsules were desired.<sup>58</sup> Sitting with Kelly, Le and Kien one afternoon, Kelly asked, “Did Peter [Higgs] tell you about the guy selling *normies* before?” She proceeded to relate the story. This man had been telling everyone he had *normies* for sale. “He had all the Asians around him and he opened the bottle to give them a look. I heard ‘Đu má’ (Vietnamese expletive) and then all the Asians walked away. He had tablets! He was so embarrassed”, Kelly said, laughing at the man’s ignorance. Le, Kien and I also burst out laughing, all of us aware that temazepam tablets were of no value in the marketplace.

Temazepam prices varied according to the strength of the capsules (either 10 or 20mg) but also, over time, the price gradually increased because of decreasing supply. During fieldwork, the average price was between \$10 and \$20. Towards the end of 2003, and on into 2004, \$20 was the more usual price. However, throughout the two years, prices did fall as low as \$6 (for 10mg capsules) and reach as high as \$25 (for 20mg capsules but also, eventually, 10mg capsules as the 20mg capsules became increasingly scarce). The low price of \$6 was available only if purchasing in bulk while the \$25 price would be asked by providers who knew that the capsules were currently scarce. There was a general steady decline in supply over the two year period but supply did fluctuate such that, on some days there would be several providers supplying capsules, whereas on others there would be only one (in which case a strategic provider could set their price high). On still other days, there would be no one with capsules to sell.

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<sup>58</sup> For a large part of their day, dealers injected in public settings – laneways, public toilets, parks. In these contexts, where injections need to be taken quickly, dealers considered it to be too difficult to crush and inject tablets. Additionally, many dealers considered the injection of tablets to be “too dangerous” – the ‘danger’ being threats to their health.

While they were still available, the ‘market’ value of temazepam capsules underwent a dramatic shift over the years. In 2000, I was aware that customers could barter an entire bottle of temazepam (25 capsules per bottle) for one cap of heroin. I also heard this from a few of the dealers in Footscray when they were reminiscing about “before the dry [reduction in heroin supply]”. Towards the end of 2000, as the supply of heroin declined, temazepam became more sought after. Aitken and Higgs (2002) reported that 20mg temazepam capsules were selling for \$5 each in Footscray during this period. By the time I commenced fieldwork in 2003, the desirability of temazepam capsules had further increased the price, and those who had access to them were able to sell capsules for between \$10 and \$25 each. On my first visit to Footscray in January 2003, I observed a bottle of 25 x 10mg capsules being sold for \$150 (i.e. \$6 per capsule). By October 2004, Lộc said that he had been offered a bottle of 25 x 10mg temazepam capsules for \$450. He had declined, complaining that this price was greater than that of a 1.7g weight of heroin and therefore “too expensive”.

The significant increase in price during fieldwork was in part a result of changes in government policy. Health worker concerns over the increased injection of temazepam gel capsules and the concomitant serious medical complications during the reduction in heroin supply in 2000-2001 (Dobbin, 2001), resulted in a government-led initiative aimed at reducing their availability, while simultaneously educating both drug users and medical practitioners about the risks associated with their injection. Medical practitioners and pharmacists were advised that the practice was common among ‘Asians’ and, as a result, they became less willing to prescribe or provide the drug to people of ‘Asian appearance’. Dealers considered that they were no longer able to go to a doctor to access *normison* because “we’re Asian”. In addition to educational materials outlining the potential health hazards of injecting temazepam, the Victorian Drugs and Poisons Unit spearheaded an initiative to re-schedule the drug on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) (Dobbin, 2002). The aim was to restrict access to the subsidised drug by requiring medical practitioners to obtain an authority from the PBS when writing a prescription. The drug was still available on private prescription which meant that people had to pay \$25 per bottle rather than the subsidised sum of \$3.50 (Breen, Degenhardt, Bruno, Roxburgh and Jenkinson, 2004). In April 2004, the last remaining manufacturer of

the gelatin-based formulation distributed a letter to all pharmacists and general practitioners informing them of its intention to cease production (Dobbin, 2004). Over the next few months, the supply of temazepam capsules in the marketplace diminished. In June 2004, Kelly said she had spent an unsuccessful day ringing twenty pharmacies across the greater Melbourne metropolitan area searching for one which still had *normies* in stock.

As with heroin trade, temazepam trade was also, for the most part, demarcated by ethnicity. However, here the situation was reversed such that, generally, Aussies sold to Viet. The pattern of Aussies selling temazepam to Vietnamese dealers produced a shift in local power relations. Aussies, who resented “Asians taking our money” (via heroin sales), now found themselves in a position to reclaim some of that money by selling *normies* to the dealers. Thus, the broad government policy aimed at reducing access to temazepam capsules shifted the balance of power in the micro-environment of the Footscray drug marketplace and shifted social relations accordingly, including producing greater interaction between Viet and Aussie as the Vietnamese dealers sought to cultivate relations that would facilitate their access to *normison*.

Among the Aussies, only two people would regularly seek out *normies* to purchase for consumption, while I observed a third Aussie purchase on a few occasions. Aussies had direct access to temazepam through medical prescription whereas none of the dealers directly obtained a prescription during fieldwork (see also Higgs, Dwyer *et al*, 2009). A few of the dealers (particularly Kiều, Thanh and Sơn) would buy in bulk from *normie* sellers and then re-sell to other dealers, but mostly I observed Vietnamese dealers buying one or two *normies* at a time for their personal use.

Dealers declared that, prior to 2001, they had easy access to temazepam through the prescribing practices of a local General Practitioner (GP). This GP apparently wrote temazepam prescriptions for a small fee. For example, Thi told of a time she ran after the GP at the close of business, as he was walking to his car. After some discussion, the GP agreed to write her a prescription for a \$25 fee. This GP’s medical practice was well-known. Patients would begin to arrive around 9am and dealers would go there, knowing they would find customers. Thi described it as

being “like a fish-market” (conjuring the image of a busy, overt market). This GP’s medical registration was cancelled in March 2002, when he was gaoled for three years after being convicted of drug trafficking and prescribing a drug of dependence other than for the medical condition of the patient (Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria, 2002). The loss of this access rendered the dealers more dependent upon Aussies for their *normies*. Aussies were more willing to access multiple doctors in order to try to procure a prescription whereas the dealers considered they would have difficulty doctor-shopping. This was in part because of the attention paid to temazepam use among Vietnamese injectors but also because one has to be able to provide a convincing story to persuade a doctor to write a prescription and this is a challenging task when fluency in English is poor.

During fieldwork there were two Aussie women who had regular access to temazepam prescriptions and who, therefore, found themselves in possession of a highly valued commodity. Angela had a regular prescription due to a medical condition but, as she did not use them herself, was soon reaping a profit from selling to dealers. Sandy, the other Aussie woman, liked to inject her temazepam but she would also sell some of the capsules. For a few months, Kelly also had a regular prescription. She gave the temazepam to her partner, Thanh, to sell but, as he liked to use *normies* himself, his involvement in selling was intermittent. When the opportunity presented itself, Kelly would also purchase temazepam from other Aussie providers and pass them to Thanh to sell.

As with heroin customers who act to strengthen their social ties to dealers, the Vietnamese who used temazepam attempted to develop closer ties with those who had regular access to the capsules. Kiều and Le, in particular, cultivated relationships with Kelly and Thanh in order to improve their access to *normies*. Arriving in the mall one day, I found Le and her partner Kien sitting with Kelly. They remained talking for some time before Kelly caught Le’s attention saying, “He’s just over there. Go and get him before he gets here ‘cause then everyone will be after him”. Kelly was pointing Le to Thanh who was standing on the other side of the main street, suggesting that Le get in first for whatever Thanh was carrying, as there would be a rush on him once other people saw he had returned to the marketplace. Le and Kien headed toward Thanh, with Le turning back to thank Kelly before she

went. Kelly explained to me that Thanh had *normison* which was why Le had been waiting.

Kiều would also seek out Kelly or Thanh when she came to Footscray. Having just met up with me:

Kiều tells me, “I’m hanging”, before asking, “Anyone got normies?”

I tell her I don’t know. Kelly and Thanh return to the mall. Kiều approaches Thanh and then walks to the ATM [Automatic Teller Machine] to withdraw some money. Thanh asks Kelly for the car keys and she chides him, telling him he has them. He then checks with her about where the car is as he can’t remember, before heading off in the direction Kelly points him. Kiều comes back to us.

“Where your husband?” she asks Kelly.

“He’s just gone to get them”, Kelly tells her.

Kiều remains standing with us for another minute before walking off in the direction Thanh had taken. Thanh then returns without Kiều, who has gone off to use her normies. (Field notes, 2003)

Others were irregular sellers of temazepam, selling them only when they managed to acquire an entire bottle. Rachel and Viktor told me how they tried to get in on “this normie-selling rort”. They were not as successful as they had hoped, with Rachel only managing to obtain a prescription for one bottle of 10mg capsules. The two of them had arrived at Footscray around 6pm and managed to sell a few of the *normies* for \$10 each. Receiving the money in dribs and drabs meant that they hardly noticed getting it. Rachel said it would have been better if they had just sold the entire bottle for \$40. Rachel’s other reason for wanting to sell the whole bottle, rather than individual capsules, was that “it’s too hot [hazardous]” selling *normies* to the “Asians” as they all come “running up and red-light you [draw attention to the illicit activity]”.

There were occasional attempts at market manipulation with people trying to fix *normie* prices at higher levels. Correspondingly, there were also attempts to resist such price increases. Rachel told me that the night she and Viktor had returned with the bottle of *normies* to sell, they had been approached by an older “Asian bloke”,

who asked Viktor, “You sell normies, you sell normies?” According to Rachel, this man had told Viktor that although “I not use, I not use”, he “ran things” in Footscray. He told Viktor that the price for *normies* was \$15, not \$10, apparently insisting that everyone should sell *normies* at the price he had set.

Some of the Viet *normie* users, including Kelly’s partner Thanh, resisted these attempts to raise prices, but were usually unsuccessful. This is illustrated in the following extract:

Maria’s ex-partner comes in with normies and there is bustling around our table and then all the Viets move off towards where he is sitting. Thanh returns to us, telling Kelly that the man wanted to sell the normies for \$15. Thanh was refusing the price but, as some of the other Viets were willing to pay this price, the seller refused to decrease it. Thanh was disgusted, declaring that they should all stick together and refuse to pay the high price. Kelly responded “they’ll pay anything when they’re desperate”. (Field notes, 2003)

However, I did observe successful resistance to such tactics by Nhảy, previously described in Chapter 5. He had approached Angela who had asked him if he wanted *normies*. He said he wanted two. As she was retrieving them, Nhảy placed \$20 on the table in front of her. She queried this, insisting that the price per capsule was \$15. As Nhảy refused to accept her price, she relented and provided him with the two capsules for \$10 each. After her next sale at \$15 per capsule she made a point of remarking on it to Nhảy but he ignored her.

As with heroin, temazepam prices could be negotiated and claims for discounts could be made on the basis of existing relationships or past services. Kiều would sell at \$10 (cost price) to some of the Viets (“my friends” as she referred to them) and \$15 to others. I also saw her sell for \$10 to an Aussie man because previously “he help me out”. One evening, she was called over by an older Aussie woman. Returning to me, she said this was a “friend” from gaol who had just sold her two *normies* at \$10 each. A few moments later, a young Vietnamese woman, Hue, approached Kiều asking if anyone had *normies*. Kiều told her they were available, saying she had just bought two herself. Hue asked how much? Kiều told her that

they were \$15 each and that she could get her some. They looked around but Kiều could no longer see her friend. The two discussed it, with Kiều eventually telling Hue that she would let Hue buy her two *normies*, and she would get more when her friend returned. Hue then changed her mind, asking Kiều whether she could get one cap and one *normie* for \$50. After discussing the matter a while longer, they reached agreement and Kiều passed the drugs to Hue in exchange for the \$50.

Kiều expected such favours to be reciprocated and was angry when this failed to transpire. We had gone to the local needle and syringe program and were standing outside the service about to have a smoke when Thao and Phu appeared, walking towards us. Kiều started to speak to them when they were two shops distant. Whatever they were discussing (it was in Vietnamese), Kiều was clearly unhappy. Her speech was punctuated with much swearing and she paced back and forth between the two men and myself as she spoke. Thao started to head towards the service. Phu followed, with Kiều trailing behind. A stream of angry Vietnamese continued to flow from her, directed at Phu. Thao entered the health service. Kiều managed to hold Phu outside for a moment while she continued to berate him, but then he too went inside. Kiều followed them, reappearing seconds later with both men. The three of them walked into a nearby laneway but Kiều soon rejoined me. She declared “That young boy, he’s a shifty cunt”. She had asked Thao if he had *normison* and he had told her he did not. She had then discovered that he had deceived her. She was angry because she had previously sold him *normison* at cost price (\$10) to “help him out” and now she felt that he was not reciprocating this favour. As she was holding two Unisom® capsules in her hands as she relayed this story, it appeared that she had been somewhat successful in her claim to Thao for reciprocation, such that, although not receiving exactly what she wanted, she did receive something in return for her prior favour.

Throughout fieldwork, temazepam availability was uncertain. After searching for a few hours, some dealers would give up, while others would turn to Unisom® as a substitute. A small minority of the dealers would present to pharmacies to purchase Unisom® but most believed that they would be refused. Thus, access to Unisom® was also primarily through Aussies. One man in particular had established a very

lucrative trade. He would drive to regional areas of Victoria, purchase Unisom® in bulk and was available by phone to deliver to Footscray. He would usually be called in the afternoon when people had given up the search for *normies*. I heard repeated stories describing the “car-boot full of unisom”. I was also asked on a few occasions if I would go to the chemist and buy Unisom®. I was told variously that pharmacists would sell to me because I was either “old”, “white”, “normal” (i.e. non-drug using) or a “social worker”.

### **Normie exchanges**

Although heroin was the primary drug exchanged during fieldwork, it was the tempo and emotionally-charged timbre of *normison* transactions that imbued the marketplace with its distinctive quality. These latter exchanges occurred in an atmosphere of noisy, palpable excitement and the determination not to miss out on securing the drug resulted in bursts of activity, running, and loud cries to other Vietnamese *normie* users. It was always apparent to me when *normison* were available. A huddle of Vietnamese would suddenly form, encircling a *normie* seller and jostling for their chance to purchase. Loud negotiations over quantity and price would be heard, accompanied by a flurry of hands as people excitedly reached for their wallets, passed over money and received their temazepam capsules in return. Calls would go out to others informing them that *normies* were available. As awareness spread through the marketplace, those who were further away would begin to run, hoping to reach the seller before supplies ran out. In these moments, discretion was abandoned.

The highly-charged character of *normie* purchasing is captured in an episode involving Kiều.

“I ran, chí!” Kiều announced as she returned to the café table, flush with success. And indeed she had run, along with four other Viet who had suddenly dashed out of the mall, across the main street and up towards the fresh produce market, heedless of oncoming traffic, in their haste to reach the normison seller who had just parked his car.  
(Field notes, 2003)

The search for *normison* commenced as soon as people arrived in the marketplace. They would traverse the mall, approaching friends and strangers alike with the ubiquitous question, “Normies? You got normies?” When they were available *normison* sold quickly. Once sales were concluded the marketplace would rapidly clear; the successful buyers eagerly dispersing to enjoy their purchases.

Recognition of the dealers’ enthusiasm for *normison* could be used strategically, as illustrated by Kiều. A *normie* seller had come through the mall and all the Viets who had purchased had dispersed, apart from Kiều and her current helper. I remarked that they were doing a good trade – they had sold to four separate sets of customers within ten minutes. With a smile, Kiều told me that this had been planned. She and her helper had chosen not to use their *normies* immediately because they knew that all the other dealers would leave the marketplace in order to use their *normies*, thus leaving all the customers for her. Kiều said she and her helper would use their *normies* once all the other dealers returned.

By 2003, *normie* injection had been practiced by Vietnamese injectors in Footscray for between three and five years. Two distinct historical accounts were offered with regard to the introduction and diffusion of *normie* injection. To some dealers, the origins traced back to 1998, when a few of the local Vietnamese heroin-using men were taught the practice by older Vietnamese men who, they said, had been injecting temazepam for years, many even before they left Viet Nam. The practice gradually spread, as people taught others the necessary skills required for injecting the gel capsules. To others, their *normie* injecting commenced in late 2000, during Australia’s “heroin drought” (Degenhardt *et al.*, 2004). People reported that they began supplementing their heroin with *normison*, as heroin was in short supply and the purity was low. This increase in the use of temazepam gel capsules occurred among Vietnamese and Aussie heroin users alike. As noted earlier, the burgeoning demand and an increase in associated health problems ultimately culminated in the decision, in April 2004, to cease manufacture of the gel capsule formulation.

The impact of this decision was observable by July 2004, with *normison* rarely available in the local marketplace. A conversation with Đam, in September of that

year, highlights the effect of this broad policy decision on the character of the local drug marketplace micro-environment:

“Footscray’s so quiet now”, Đam remarks, laughing about how “Before, there were all the dealers … running around. When there were normies … you see them running everywhere.” Đam reminisces about how all the dealers would run for the normies and then “One would go that way. One would go the other way”, and they would all disappear to go and use [the temazepam]. If all the dealers had disappeared, he said, you would know that normies had been available just beforehand. (Field notes, 2004)

### **Temazepam harms: the “normie shuffle”**

Temazepam is an irritant that directly damages the lining of the veins. In the capsule formulation, potential hazards are further exacerbated by the viscosity of the oily suspension substance. Some of the more serious complications that can develop as a consequence of injection of temazepam capsules include: abscesses, cellulitis, thrombophlebitis, deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and gangrene (see, for example, Aitken and Higgs, 2002; Dobbin, 2001; Feeney and Gibbs, 2002; Wilce, 2004). Vascular damage from temazepam injection had resulted in amputation of fingers among some of the *normie* injectors, while others experienced chest pains and shortness of breath as a complication of DVT, and required intensive medical management over long periods. Kiều, Linh, Hiệp and Nhan, for example, had been hospitalised together in 2002 to be treated for cellulitis. Kiều had a further hospitalisation in 2003. Both Khang and Tien had lost digits on their hands while Tran, Lê, Truc, Hiếu, Hoàng and Đam had all experienced episodes of significant swelling of lower limbs during fieldwork. Tran had also experienced continual chest pains and breathing difficulties which required medication for six months, while Lê had to self-administer an anti-coagulant injection for a lengthy period of time.

It was a common sight to see Vietnamese dealers limping around the marketplace – a condition designated the “normie shuffle” by some local health and welfare workers. My greeting of “Hello. How are you?”, would frequently result in the person sitting down and rolling up their pants to display how one lower leg was twice the size of

the other. Along with the swelling, people experienced painful cramping and numbness, often finding it difficult to get their legs moving when they woke up in the morning. The swelling could be extreme, requiring the use of crutches, as illustrated in the following episode:

I noticed Đam walking through the mall on crutches. I asked Quàng what had happened to him. He explained that Đam was “using normies and he miss” [‘missing’ refers to failing to inject into the vein. It was an incorrect explanation of the problem, which was actually caused by deep vein thrombosis]. When Đam reached the table he spoke (in Vietnamese) with Truc and Quàng about his leg. I asked him if he was “okay” and he too told me that he “missed”. Quàng started telling me how all the blood was staying at the bottom of Đam’s leg as it couldn’t get back up. Đam nodded as this explanation was being relayed and then pulled his trouser legs up to show me that one calf was bigger than the other. (Field notes, 2004)

Most of the *normie* injectors had extensive thromboses (blood clots) as a result of injecting the gel capsules. Known among injectors as “blocked veins”, the condition meant that many experienced enormous difficulty finding veins in which to inject. Kiều could spend hours attempting to find a viable vein. Her search entailed considerable poking and prodding until she was able to draw blood back into the syringe – indicating that she had found a vein with sufficient blood flow – leaving her bruised and further exacerbating the trauma to her veins. In a conversation with Lộc, he attributed Kiều’s poor venous access to her use of *normison*:

“That’s why she have no veins.” As he has done before he tells me, “Only three years. And now she have no veins”. He is referring to how Kiều did not have this problem before Lộc went to gaol but since his release she has very few veins left. “Sometimes she’s still lucky” he says, meaning that after much searching they can still sometimes get a vein relatively easily, but most times I see them injecting it is a struggle for him to find and keep a viable vein. He has to help her all the time now.... “They’ll never come back” he says about Kiều’s veins. He adds that “I have fifty percent [vein health]. Even I work

out [exercise at the gym], I still only get fifty percent. But she never get her vein back". (Field notes, 2004)

Blocked veins resulted in ongoing complications, culminating, for one woman, in emergency surgery under general anaesthetic just short of the final stage of labour, in order to access a vein deep within her chest so that doctors could administer intravenous antibiotics. I was present for this operation. The surgeon remarked to the anaesthetist that the procedure was certainly not "ideal" practice (i.e. placing a woman under general anaesthetic while she was in the final stage of labour) but that sometimes circumstances demanded such interventions. He further commented that he had not performed surgery of this nature for more than ten years. As he was completing the operation, another staff member entered the theatre with a request that the surgeon perform the same procedure as there was another pregnant woman in the Chemical Dependency Unit (specialist maternity service for drug-dependent women) presenting with similar venous access difficulties.

In a study conducted in the Footscray drug marketplace in 2001, Aitken and Higgs (2002) also observed abscesses, vein blockage and vein collapse among their sample of 39 temazepam injectors, 15 of whom were Vietnamese. The authors reported that "in 23 cases vein damage was so widespread that venous blood samples were difficult or impossible to obtain". Seventeen people "had damaged all the accessible veins in their arms or legs and were injecting in their necks or groins" (p.79). By 2003, injection in the femoral vein, accessed through the groin, was common among the *normie* injectors. There were several reasons for this practice. Among older injectors, groin injection had been initiated because they had damaged other veins. For newer injectors, groin injection was quickly adopted as it was common in this social milieu and thus they were exposed to the practice relatively early. Many *normie* injectors also considered groin injection a necessary part of gel capsule injection. The larger diameter of the femoral vein means that large volumes of drug solution could be injected more easily. Further, the heroin-temazepam solution needed to be injected more slowly than drug solutions comprised of more soluble substances (e.g. powder heroin). Injection in the groin allows people to use both hands while injecting which renders the process more stable. Additionally, because of the large size of the femoral vein, it was also less likely to become 'blocked', thus

allowing people to sustain the practice for a greater length of time (see Higgs, Dwyer *et al.*, 2009 for further discussion of femoral injection among this set of injectors).

Several of the *normie* injectors who injected in their groins had injecting sinuses – permanently open holes at injection sites as a result of scar tissue forming through repeated penetration. While these conferred advantage with respect to accessing an injection site swiftly and efficiently, they posed an increased risk of infection. Indeed, in early 2005, there was an outbreak of hospitalisations for serious complications related to Group A *Streptococcus* infection. One of the dealers with whom I was especially close went to hospital with a painful leg, which turned out to be septic arthritis in the hip joint. This required immediate surgery, so that the joint could be flushed out, followed by the administration of four-hourly intravenous antibiotics for a period of three weeks in hospital and a follow-up of two months of daily oral antibiotics. Two days after his admission he told me that one of his friends was in an adjoining ward. The friend's condition was even more serious as the infection had already spread to his heart. A week later, another person with close connections to this group was admitted to the ward with the same condition. One of the local health and welfare workers reported that there were another three Footscray Vietnamese dealers in a nearby hospital with similar diagnoses.

Most of the *normie* injectors had also experienced non-fatal overdoses from the combination of heroin and *normies*. Analysis of coronial data on heroin-related overdose deaths demonstrates that concomitant use of benzodiazepines, including temazepam, increases the likelihood of overdose. In 2000, for example, the combined use of benzodiazepines was implicated in 55% of heroin-related overdose deaths in the Australian state of Victoria (Gerostamoulos and Drummer, 2001). According to Kiều, when people first started using *normison*, they did not know much about them or their effects, which is why so many people were overdosing (“seven out of ten” she estimated). Eventually, they learnt “how to use them properly” and now fewer people were overdosing (“three out of ten” was her estimate). One of the few overdoses I observed – sufficiently serious as to require the attendance of ambulance paramedics – was a consequence of combining heroin with *normison*.

In addition to these serious medical complications, *normison* intoxication frequently compromised people's heroin selling business. They would lose track of how many more caps they needed to sell in order to purchase another weight of heroin for sale; they would misplace their heroin and other possessions such as mobile phones or wallets; or they would slide into deep intoxication and risk having their money and drugs stolen. When people were intoxicated on *normies*, they were less vigilant about keeping watch for police and were more cavalier about their heroin selling. These features were highlighted in a discussion with Thi:

Thi tells me she doesn't like them [*normison*]. She thinks people are stupid for using them, especially when they are dealing. She says that if you're going to use them, you should do so at the end of the day, when you're back at home and it doesn't matter how smashed [extremely intoxicated] you are. She says that when people are dealing, and on *normies*, they lose their money, lose their gear [heroin], and are also more likely to be busted because they're not watching for police as much as they should be. (Field notes, 2004)

Thi also considered that her ex-boyfriend was now "stupid", because he had "brain damage" from long years of *normie* injection. Other dealers agreed with Thi, also reporting how their partners did or said "stupid things" while on *normison*. Kiều, who, by her own admission, "love *normies*", was once in a potentially physical altercation with a young man who was extremely intoxicated on temazepam and heroin. The threat was defused by others and at the conclusion of the incident, Kiều announced to the group in general: "I hate *normies*". Likewise, Tu explained why he and others used *normison*, but also described some of the problems associated with their use:

Because people had been chasing *normison* I ask Tu why people like them. He answered: "So they get stoned. You just need a little gear." He then adds that people don't "know what they done" when they're on *normies* and that they "lose their mo-ney, lose their gear". Speaking of himself, he tells me, "One time, I wake up at home. I not remember how I come home." (Field notes, 2003)

The amnesiac properties of temazepam gave rise to the colloquialism “a pinch in every bottle”. This saying referenced people’s understanding that there was a greater chance of coming to the attention of police and being arrested (“pinched”) while intoxicated on *normison*. Phuoc, for example, described an occasion when he had awoken in the police cells with no recollection of how he had come to be there. The police asked him, “You know why you’re here?” When he replied “no”, they explained “for stealing a pair of socks” and for “intention to deceive”, because he had ordered and eaten a meal in a restaurant and had informed the police at arrest that he knew he did not have the money to pay for it.

In Footscray, injection of temazepam capsules was stigmatised by health workers, other drug users and even, at times, by temazepam injectors themselves in reference to their peers (as seen above with Kiều). On one occasion with Lam, a non-temazepam using regular heroin seller, he had noticed what he correctly assumed to be an unfolding temazepam transaction. Clucking with disapproval he remarked: “No good”. When I asked what was no good, he replied “Normison. Normison no good”. For local health workers, the practice of temazepam injection engendered considerable frustration in the face of people’s continued use of a substance that resulted in serious and life-threatening medical conditions. The practice was also seen to cause difficult and disruptive behaviour among intoxicated people accessing services. As well as frustration, the practice also engendered considerable distress and concern among workers over the risks they considered people to be taking. Attending court with one of the dealers, we encountered a solicitor who had previously represented the dealer. The solicitor confided to me that she was relieved to see this person was still alive as she had felt certain that the person’s life was at risk because of their continued use of temazepam. Local marketplace participants, both temazepam users and non-users alike, would also discuss how normally upright and respected people would commit inappropriate or morally questionable acts while intoxicated on *normison* (robbing and assaulting people, for example). Thus, in Footscray, there was a shared understanding that *normison* might compromise one’s reputation and threaten one’s social, as well as physical, integrity, and yet, they were still enthusiastically pursued and consumed.

### **Normie pleasures: “More stoned. More smashed”**

For this set of people, the potential harms associated with temazepam injection were not abstract risks that they might gamble would not happen to them. Nor were they risks the consequences of which would not be felt until some distant time. Rather, they were directly experienced harms. However, people continued to engage in the practice regardless of these harms. They did so because they experienced pleasure through *normie* injection. The Vietnamese heroin dealers searched consistently, and persistently, for *normies*. Their excitement when presented with an opportunity to purchase was spontaneous and unmistakeable, and their consumption of them was almost immediate. Through these actions, these people clearly articulated their enjoyment of *normies*. Their actions expressed their desires and, in all likelihood, the excitement surrounding acquisition also served to stimulate these desires.

Reinforcing the meanings articulated through these actions, these people also expressed their passion for *normie* injecting through their accounts of the practice: accounts invariably framed by pleasure. An episode with Kiều is illustrative. We had been sitting together for most of an afternoon and she had been emotionally flat, quiet and withdrawn. I went to purchase a drink and when I returned, Kiều had left the table. Arriving back a minute later, she declared: “I so happy. I excited”. She described how her “friend” had called her over and asked: “Do you love me?” Kiều had replied that she did and the friend had given her “two normie for ten dollar”. Kiều explained to me that she was happy, not just because she had acquired the *normies* cheaply (at the time they were selling for a minimum of \$15 per capsule), but also because of the friendship that had been expressed. This, she told me, was “more important than money”. Receiving the *normies* brightened Kiều up considerably. She told me she now had something to “look forward to” for the night, happy in the knowledge that she would be able to achieve a “nice stone” (an enjoyable level of intoxication).

People’s accounts of their attraction to *normison* consistently emphasised a desire for intense intoxication. A common assertion among regular heroin users is that, over time, they no longer feel intoxicated when they use heroin; rather the heroin just makes them feel *normal* or stops them *feeling sick* (experiencing withdrawal). As

heroin sellers, these heroin-using *normie* injectors had regular access to considerable quantities of heroin. Consequently, their use of heroin was perceived, and represented, as simply preventing withdrawal symptoms. Dealers asserted that when they used *normison*, however, they were once more able to experience sensations of intoxication: feeling *stoned* or, the even more highly-valued, feeling *smashed* (extreme intoxication verging on overdose). Such intoxication was desired for the pleasurable bodily sensations and emotional feelings it produced. This pleasure in intoxication was sometimes signified through the use of the Vietnamese expression “quá đã”. Meaning ‘too good’, this expression accompanies pleasurable satisfaction of a desire – finally quenching one’s thirst on a hot day, for example, would be followed by a satisfied “quá đã”, in the same way that many Australian men emit an audible, satisfied sigh after the first swallow of cold beer. “Quá đã” is at times uttered by these Vietnamese drug users upon experiencing the intoxicating sensations that immediately follow from injection of drugs, their employment of the term in this context signalling the pleasure they are experiencing.

When I observed people injecting *normies*, they would jack-back (the process of drawing blood into the syringe) several times. On many occasions, people would also draw blood back into the syringe after they had fully emptied the contents into their vein. Jacking-back is necessary to test that the needle is in the vein (McElrath, 2006). Frequently repeating the process is technically unnecessary, as is re-filling the already emptied syringe. Lộc explained that people repeat the process to test that they are still in the vein but also sometimes to “pump” the drug through the vein: “With gear [heroin] you only do one or two times. With normison, you have to do ten or fifteen times”. Thus in Lộc’s view, because *normies* are “gel” you have to “pump” them more times to help them move through the veins. Phuoc agreed that people jacked-back repeatedly to check that the needle was still in the vein, but he suggested that people also did it “for the feel of the steel”; that is, that they enjoyed the process of injecting and this was a way of extending their pleasure.

In arguing that pleasure is the underlying motivation for these people’s engagement with *normie* injection, it is necessary, however, to unpack understandings of pleasure. In Western thought, pleasure is a multilayered concept. In biomedical paradigms, the emphasis is given to neurochemical explanations, linking pleasure to

the dopamine and opioid receptors, for example, and the experience of pleasure is seen as a human universal (see, for example, Phillips, 2003). The pleasures of drugs are seen to arise from their interactions with specific receptors in the brain. Interpretive paradigms, on the other hand, give emphasis to “culture, history and subjectivity” (Bergschmidt, 2004, p.69), highlighting differences in the experience and interpretation of pleasure across time and across cultures. Coveney and Bunton (2003), in tracing a ‘history of pleasure’, identify four classes of pleasure: carnal, disciplined, ascetic and ecstatic. Carnal pleasures are physical, bodily pleasures; disciplined pleasures are pleasures of the mind or reason – reading or listening to music, for example; ascetic pleasure is based in denial and domination of the body and its desires; and ecstatic pleasure arises through ritualistic or spiritual bonding practices.

By their own accounts, for the Footscray injectors, the pleasures of *normison* were carnal – sensuous, bodily experiences of intoxication. However, there are many ways to achieve intoxication and/or pleasurable bodily sensations and emotional feelings. In saying that these people’s *normie* use was motivated by pleasure, the question remains – why this particular object of pleasure? Why did *normison* injection come to be interpreted as such a pleasurable activity, particularly when it carries such immediately apparent negative consequences and is so heavily stigmatised?

As noted earlier, the pharmacological properties of heroin are such that people are no longer able to achieve the desired feelings of intoxication once tolerance develops. These properties of heroin account for some of the attraction of *normies*. However, they do not sufficiently account for all the pleasures *normison* held for this particular social group. The same intensity of intoxication could have been achieved by taking temazepam orally prior to injecting heroin, with considerably reduced risk of harm. These people’s active rejection of this option whenever it was proposed suggests that their pleasure in *normies* was more complexly constituted.

Klein (1993), in his book *Cigarettes are Sublime*, argued that the pleasures of cigarettes lie in the very fact of their negativity. Smoking cigarettes, he suggested, has been associated with distaste, transgression and death, and it is these aspects that make them pleasurable. The transgressiveness of engaging in a practice that is

reviled, taboo and even dangerous, is thus part of the attraction or pleasure. Pleasure in transgression has also been identified by MacLean (2005) in her study of people who engaged in the stigmatised practice of inhalant use, or ‘chroming’ as they termed it. The Vietnamese drug users frequently expressed their delight in being *naughty*, as they deemed it, by taking drugs. Additionally, there was widespread admiration for *gangsters*, those people who had amassed wealth and prestige through criminal activities, including heroin selling. Transgression and transgressive practices were thus valued in Footscray – though it should also be noted that conformity, and success through legitimate business or educational endeavours, were equally admired. People’s pleasure in challenging themselves through engagement with risky, dangerous practices has been demonstrated in studies ranging from the fields of sexual activity (Davis, 2002; Westhaver, 2005) to cycling (bicycle and motorcycle), rock climbing and parachute jumping (Albert, 1999; Bellaby, 1990; Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). The *normie* injectors in this marketplace were cognisant of the risks that inhered in their practices but, for them, the elements of transgression and dangerousness added a further dimension to the pleasure they found in the practice.

A further layer to the pleasure of *normie* injection was its social and cultural currency. Although actual *normison* injection was largely a private matter, and the capsules themselves were infrequently shared, *normie* injecting was shared, and thus social, in the sense that it occurred within a particular set of interrelated persons. This group shared cultural understandings of the value of *normies*, of the desires they aroused, and of the sensations they yielded. As a group, they produced and reproduced these cultural understandings through their ongoing actions and accounts. The pleasures of *normie* injection were created and recreated through the same processes delineated by Becker (1963, p.53) in his famous article ‘Learning to be a Marijuana User’. Becker argued that to develop the motivations necessary to continue to use “marijuana” one must learn to use the drug in a manner that produces real effects, learn to recognise these effects and to connect them with the use of the drug (that is, learn to “get high”) and learn to enjoy the sensations that are perceived. Learning to enjoy the sensations, and to interpret them as pleasurable, occurs through social interaction with other drug users who teach the novice to find pleasure in the new sensations which are not “automatically or necessarily pleasurable”. With

regard to temazepam intoxication, it is not hard to imagine that medically recognised “side-effects” of temazepam – “drowsiness”, “loss of muscle co-ordination”, “disorientation” and “dizziness” (MIMS, 2003) – might require social interpretation to be understood as pleasurable.

*Normison* injection also acted as a marker of social identity. In this drug marketplace, it was the Vietnamese who were the main consumers of *normies*. Gel capsule injection was thus one of the practices that constituted, and was constitutive of, being a Viet heroin user in the Footscray drug marketplace. Interestingly, in the Sydney suburb of Cabramatta, Vietnamese heroin users distinguished themselves from non-Vietnamese drug users through their rejection of temazepam injection, representing it as a ‘dirty’ practice of Aussie drug users (Maher, 2005). In Footscray, the pleasures to be had from the injection of *normies* in combination with heroin, were not simply an essentialised pharmacological property of the drugs themselves but, rather, were socially and culturally constructed as pleasurable in this particular location and time. Bergschmidt (2004) provides a similar example of the social construction of drug pleasure when she notes that for some participants in the Swiss heroin trials, the prescribed heroin was experienced as less pleasurable. Even though the heroin provided through the trial would have been of greater purity than heroin obtained on the streets, consuming the drug outside of its usual social context rendered the experience less enjoyable.

### **The *normie*-injecting subject**

My foregrounding of pleasure as a motivator for drug-taking marks a departure from many accounts of drug use, and from discourses around the management and regulation of drug use, namely, the discourses of public health and harm reduction. The concept and practice of harm reduction in relation to drug use had its beginnings in the HIV/AIDS epidemics of the early 1980s. While harm reduction is a contested concept (see, for example, Keane, 2003), a working definition is that “it focuses on reduction of *harm* as its *primary goal* rather than reduction of *use per se*” (Lenton and Single, 1998, p.213). Harm reduction initiatives for drug users include provision of sterile injecting equipment, access to opiate substitution (e.g. methadone or buprenorphine) programs, other forms of drug treatment, and education on safer

injecting and drug use. As an “assemblage of pragmatic practices and practical goals” (Keane, 2003, p.232), harm reduction has achieved considerable success in reducing the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Importantly, for the purpose of this chapter, harm reduction practices and policies have also generated a shift in the way drug use and drug users are conceived.

Prior to the emergence of harm reduction, explanations of illicit drug use commonly drew on notions of individual psychopathology or the ‘enslaving’ pharmacological properties of the drugs themselves (Jay, 1999; Keane, 2002; O’Malley and Valverde, 2004). As harm reduction principles became more established, drug users came to be constructed as “health-conscious citizens capable of rational decision-making, self-determination, self-regulation and risk-management in order to minimise drug-related harm” (Moore and Fraser, 2006, p.3037). This shift in the construction of the drug-using subject is apparent in Lenton and Single’s (1998, p.218) article where they argued that “typically, harm reduction policies, programmes and interventions:... *Treat drug users with dignity and as normal human beings*” [emphasis in original]. The key notions here are the construction of drug users as ‘normal’ – that is, as equivalent to non-drug using citizens – and the emphasis on responsibility. In this respect, harm reduction has followed shifts in public health more broadly where, it has been argued, governmental strategies are directed at fostering neo-liberal subjects and bodies that are “contained” and “under the control of the will”, subjects who are “self-regulated, ‘health’-conscious, middle-class, rational, civilised” (Lupton, 1995, p.131). In this view of subjectivity, to be ‘rational’ is, it is assumed, to be risk-averse, a notion that rests on the idea that risks are knowable, calculable and therefore preventable. Furthermore, it becomes the duty of citizens to manage and avoid known risks (Petersen, 1997). Pursuing behaviour that compromises one’s utility or health is suggestive of irrationality and irresponsibility. By implication, it also signals failure in a key test of good citizenship. There is thus an additional moral element to engaging in unhealthy practices, leading to stigmatisation of those who fail to behave in risk-averse ways.

A key element in neo-liberal discourses of public health and harm reduction is the elision of pleasure. This stems, in part, from the frequent counter-posing of pleasure (or, at least, particular forms of pleasure) and rationality in Western thought, and

from the model of the subject implicit in these discourses. The neo-liberal subject is a prudentially-minded, or risk-averse, rational calculator who consciously weighs up the pros and cons of possible courses of action, and decides which will provide maximum utility. Here, the subject is seen as autonomous and disembedded from social relations; he or she is seen to act independently of other persons (Moore and Fraser, 2006; Westhaver, 2005). In harm reduction initiatives, therefore, subjects are provided with ‘knowledge’ that allows them to choose to avoid known, or potential, harms. In these models, ‘health’ is privileged as the ultimate satisfaction, or good, to be achieved. As such, it is assumed that all people will value health most highly (Lupton, 1995). The neo-liberal subject thus derives utility (as distinct from pleasure) by maximising health (Moore and Fraser, 2006). According to Moore (2008), the elision of pleasure from the concept of utility can be traced through developments in the notion of utilitarianism. In the original formulation of utilitarianism, utility was “described as ‘that property which produces benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness’”. In subsequent developments, however, “the ‘good’ became identified with the ‘necessary’, that which served to meet human needs, with the consequence that the concept of pleasure was largely ignored” (Campbell, 1987, p.60 cited in Moore, 2008, p.355).

Returning to the Footscray injectors, if a complexly constituted pleasure motivates *normie* injection among this set of people, what are the implications of this finding for the subject model of harm reduction? An immediate difficulty is that, as noted above, in Western thought, pleasure is frequently constructed as being in direct opposition to reason and rationality. As Coveney and Bunton (2003, p.6) wrote, “pleasure and pleasure-seeking activities are often considered to be at the root of irrational, spontaneous actions, which predispose individuals to unhealthy, so-called risk-taking behaviours”. Under this argument, *normie* injectors who enthusiastically pursue a practice that seriously compromises their health, and do so despite having direct bodily knowledge of the harms associated with the practice, would appear as ‘irrational’. As such, the provision of harm reduction knowledge, which could be used to choose healthier actions, would have little utility. The problem here, however, is that ‘rationality’ and ‘irrationality’ are too narrowly conceived. The Footscray *normie* injectors adopt various strategies to minimise the possibility of arrest and to avoid being robbed of their drugs or money. Each day they make

hundreds of strategic decisions in attempting to satisfy their own heroin needs at minimal financial cost. To accept these behaviours as instances of rationality but to then assert that the use of *normies* was irrational – perhaps because the drug had power over the person – would be unsatisfactory.

Accepting that they are not irrational, it could be argued that they are rational in most respects, but when it comes to *normison* they lose all reason. This familiar argument fetishises the drug, according it power over the person (see, for example, O'Malley and Valverde, 2004). It is an argument frequently made about heroin (and, increasingly about nicotine); that people have no control, that they are slaves to the drug. This set of injectors would, themselves, make this point when describing their relationship to heroin, yet they rarely spoke of *normison* in the same terms. They were not “addicted” to *normies*, only to heroin. Neither were their actions those of the stereotypical, desperate addict. As my ethnographic material suggests, they would actively seek *normison* but were not devastated when their searches proved unsuccessful. Nor would they buy *normison* if this meant they would not have enough money to buy their next weight of heroin. These elements of rational action around their use of *normison* suggest that the argument that the drug robs them of reason is also an inadequate account of their practices.

O'Malley and Valverde (2004) have argued that pleasure is actually implicit in the calculations of the rational actor; what will most satisfy will be the thing deemed most pleasurable. This understanding challenges the assumption that health is universally valued, and always privileged over other things. Behaviour may still be rational but be framed by a different logic than that of the ‘health imperative’ (Lupton, 1995). In the particular social context of the Footscray marketplace, immediate, pleasurable bodily and emotional sensations and experiences were accorded higher value than concerns for one's health. Stated another way, this group valued health but was prepared to sacrifice it in return for the pleasures afforded by *normie* injecting.

This point can equally be made with another set of people for whom other activities are privileged over health – the social group of Australian Rules Football (AFL) players. Playing competition AFL football is undoubtedly a pleasurable pursuit for

those so engaged and football players are admired by many others for their skills, athleticism and devotion to the game. However, not a week goes by during the AFL season where players are not injured, some so seriously as to require surgery. Notably, many of their injuries are reminiscent of those occurring among the Footscray *normie* injectors – groin and lower limb injuries. For AFL players, unlike the *normie* injectors, their ongoing engagement in a practice that clearly carries serious health risk, rarely raises questions about their rationality. Indeed, their injuries and health-harming practices are celebrated in newspapers and on websites such as the Herald Sun’s ‘Casualty List’ ([www.news.com.au/heraldsun/sport/afl](http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/sport/afl)). It is accepted that AFL players sacrifice health for other pleasures because these are pleasures that are more widely understood than are the pleasures of *normie* injecting. The object of their pleasure-seeking is socially acceptable.

The notion of uncertainty strengthens this argument. Despite the best efforts of insurance companies and epidemiologists, life remains uncertain. Epidemiologists, for example, have shown that smoking puts people at greater risk of lung cancer, but they still cannot determine if any particular individual will develop lung cancer. The tale of the person who smoked two packets of cigarettes a day and lived to the age of a hundred is a familiar one. If life is uncertain, and one can never tell what tomorrow might bring, then why deny yourself a certain pleasure today, for the sake of health that may be of little use in the uncertain tomorrow. Uncertainty was indeed a key organising principle of the everyday lives of this set of Vietnamese heroin sellers. The risk of arrest and detainment was ever-present, but always unpredictable. These people always expected that arrest and incarceration were likely, but never knew when they might happen. At times, they displayed a fatalistic attitude toward arrest. Gaol, although not actively desired, was frequently represented by the positive ideas of an opportunity to “get clean” and “get healthy”. Such fatalism contributed to their willingness to inject *normison*, as they considered they were unlikely to be able to sustain the practice for any length of time before being arrested once again. Health could then be recovered while in gaol.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that pleasure is at the heart of these injectors' engagement with *normie* injection and that this pleasure is socially and culturally constituted. With regard to rationality, I have argued that despite failing to act as the harm reduction model of the subject requires, these people are not irrational. Nor has their rationality been stolen from them by the powerful, all-controlling properties of the drug itself. The implication is that for Footscray *normie* injectors, subjectivity does not conform to that implicit in conventional harm reduction discourses. Similar conclusions have been reached with regard to sexual practices and HIV/AIDS prevention (see, for example, Davis, 2002; Westhaver, 2005) and illicit drug use and harm reduction (see, for example, Coveney and Bunton, 2003; Moore and Fraser, 2006). Harm reduction discourse needs to develop a model of subjectivity that more fully accommodates the experiences and understandings of the persons to whom these health initiatives are directed.

Temazepam gel capsules are no longer manufactured in Australia and, since 2004, this group of people has ceased *normie* injection. Such regulatory responses, to remove harmful substances, may sometimes be effective in reducing drug-related harm. However, these initiatives are reactive and people often respond to the environmental changes through adaptation and innovation. New innovations then diffuse through social groups (see also Fountain, Griffiths, Farrell, Gossop and Strang, 1999 who described innovations and adaptations in response to the withdrawal of temazepam gel capsules in London). With respect to temazepam injection, the response from the Footscray dealers has been to substitute another gel-capsule, Unisom®. While not as dangerous as temazepam, injection of this substance still causes many of the same harms (Higgs, Dwyer *et al.*, 2009).

Within harm reduction, there is increasing recognition of the multiple ways in which structure and environment constrain choice and produce risk and harm (see, for example, Bloor, 1995; Rhodes and Cusick, 2002). However, such shifts, while seeking to improve the environment, leave intact the assumed neo-liberal subject. It is acknowledged that the conferral of neo-liberal subjectivity has been empowering for drug users, offering "political benefits in terms of recognition, trust and

legitimation” (Moore & Fraser, 2006, p.3035). Recognising that there are political implications in challenging the model of subjectivity implicit in harm reduction discourses, I argue, however, that there are also risks in leaving the model unexamined. As Lupton (1995, p.131) observed, health promotion “strategies *do* succeed … but not for all individuals, and not all of the time”. If we do not critique the limits of neo-liberal subjecthood, the risk exists that those of us who do not act as this subject model suggests, that is, those who do not make the ‘healthy choices’, become further marginalised.

## **Chapter 10**

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# **Conclusion: agency and exchange**

This thesis has been concerned with the exchange of heroin in localised, street-based marketplaces. These sites have been the focus of considerable public activity – policing, health and welfare service provision, research and governmental policy initiatives – and are widely conceived as dangerous and threatening, as visible signs of social disorder. The actors who participate in these sites (drug sellers and buyers) are also frequently constructed as dangerous and alien, as ‘other’. Although some qualitative investigations have been undertaken, the dominant approach to understanding these sites in Australia has been quantitative. By contrast, this thesis is positioned within a long tradition of ethnographic accounts of drug users as active agents (for example, Agar, 1973; Burr, 1984; Ning, 2005; Taylor, 1993) and of drug markets as embedded in particular social, cultural and economic contexts (for example, Adler, 1985; Bourgois, 1995; Curtis, 2003; Maher, 1997; Pearson, 1987; Preble and Casey, 1976; Waterston, 1993).

My ethnography of the Footscray drug marketplace has revealed that the marketplace is constituted by complex and dynamic social processes and relations. With a focus on dealers, my analysis condensed to two major themes – those of agency and exchange. Throughout the thesis, I have shown the multiple and strategic ways in which dealers express agency. I have also demonstrated the complexities of heroin exchange in the marketplace, revealing that heroin is exchanged in multiple ways, for multiple purposes and according to multiple and fluid classifications of social relationships. My account has shown the embeddedness of the Footscray drug marketplace – that it is shaped by its particular historical, social, cultural, political and economic context. I have shown also how market processes – such as exchange – are shaped by culturally patterned ideas about what is right, wrong and even conceivable. My analysis further suggests that the subjectivity of Footscray dealers is ambiguous, contradictory and multiple, constituted not simply by instrumental rationality but by a complex of motivations and by the cultural and social formations which shape these motivations. In this final chapter, I review the major arguments of

the thesis before concluding with reflections on the implications of my analysis for understandings of drug markets and of people who sell, buy and use drugs.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the dominant approaches to the study of Australian street-based drug marketplaces have been epidemiological and criminological perspectives. These approaches generally conceive of drug markets from within a neo-classical economic framework and are underpinned, implicitly or explicitly, by supply and demand models. Consequently, they usually focus on the economic ‘market’ characteristics of drug price, purity and availability (in economic terms – price, quality and quantity). In epidemiological analyses, it is seldom made explicit that these measures are seen as key to the constitution of markets. Criminological/law enforcement analyses, on the other hand, tend to be explicit regarding the theoretical model underpinning the analysis. In these latter approaches, drug markets are understood as operating through the ‘law of supply and demand’. As such, it is assumed that changes in drug price, purity and availability are brought about by the intersections of supply and demand. Law enforcement interventions are concerned with interrupting supply and demand – for example, increasing costs to sellers to push up prices and thereby, it is assumed, decrease demand. Criminological analyses focus on the impacts of changes in supply and demand, in terms of increased prices or increases in numbers of people seeking drug treatment. Evidence of the impacts of law enforcement on drug prices is inconclusive: some studies suggest that drug prices increase while others have shown no change (Kerr *et al.*, 2005; Weatherburn and Lind, 1997) or even reductions in price (Caulkins and Macoun, 2003).

My ethnography of the Footscray drug marketplace suggests that epidemiological and criminological analyses of Australian drug markets are limited in two key ways. Firstly, they ignore the complex social processes and relations through which a drug market/marketplace is constituted. Secondly, they ignore the ways in which market actors express agency. On both counts, therefore, they provide inadequate accounts of drug markets/marketplaces. These absences, I argue, follow from the adoption of the neo-classical market model and its assumptions. In brief, this model assumes that the market comprises a set of anonymous buyers and sellers who engage in spot-transactions. It also assumes that the market is perfectly competitive and that all actors have perfect information. Through the intersection of supply and demand,

prices adjust in the direction of market equilibrium. Here, all actors will be maximally satisfied and the market will clear, that is, the quantity supplied will equal the quantity demanded. Underlying this model are further assumptions about the human subject who acts in the market. This subject is *homo economicus* – the individual, autonomous, rational, risk-averse, self-interested, maximiser of utility.

The findings discussed in Chapter 6 demonstrated that, far from being a collection of anonymous buyers and sellers, participants in the Footscray drug marketplace are, embedded in complex and ever-shifting networks of personalised, reciprocal relationships. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrated how dealers and customers engage in processes of clientelisation – actively working to develop and maintain social ties – in order to reduce risk in an environment where there are information asymmetries and problems of trust. The drug marketplace is constituted by and constitutive of these social relationships. In turn, these social relationships are continually created and affirmed through such processes as the ways in which goods are exchanged. These findings fundamentally contradict the assumptions of the neo-classical economic market model.

Again, in contrast to the neo-classical economic model that understands price as a function of supply and demand, the analysis in Chapter 6 revealed how price-setting in the Footscray drug marketplace occurred through the co-operative (oligarchic) actions of dealers. It further showed how price was shaped by moral and cultural understandings of fairness. Additionally, price was established through various styles of reasoning (rather than instrumental rationality alone) and in relation to multiple intended exchange outcomes. Finally, rather than being determined solely by the ‘law of supply and demand’, price was flexible and actively negotiated by marketplace actors. Epidemiological approaches to the study of drug markets focus on aggregate measures of price. This obscures the variability in price and the social processes entailed in price-setting and, as was seen in Chapter 6, it also obscures the other ways in which heroin is exchanged in a marketplace – for example, through barter.

In line with neo-classical economic models, epidemiological and criminological analyses of drug markets focus on commercial (i.e. trade) drug exchanges. My

ethnography shows, however, that multiple modes of exchange operate simultaneously in a drug marketplace. Chapter 7 discussed other forms of exchange, forms I classified as ‘community’ exchanges. Thus, between Vietnamese dealers, generalised and balanced reciprocity obtained in relation to heroin exchanges and such sharing served to create, maintain and substantiate closer social ties between Vietnamese dealers. The uncertainty of the micro-environment of the drug marketplace, in terms of access to capital and supply of heroin, means that people create diverse strategies and opportunities in order to meet their material needs. This indicates that models that confine analysis solely to the buying and selling of heroin are insufficient to account for the on-the-ground practices that constitute drug markets and marketplaces.

Returning to Davis’ (1992) argument that exchange may be understood as a system of classifications of intended exchange outcomes, of things and of social relationships, it is clear that in the Footscray marketplace heroin exchange was used for a range of intended outcomes. Profit – that is, selling heroin and making more money than you paid for it – was an intended outcome of some exchanges. However, other intended outcomes of exchange included subsistence – that is, selling only enough heroin to satisfy immediate heroin wants – and reciprocity – that is, making return for goods or services received in the past. Another intended outcome of exchange was stored credit. As shown, the success of credit-storing strategies was variable but requests for assistance based on previous giving were common. Processes of exchange were also used to express identity and to establish prestige. Helping people out or gifting them drugs creates an image of self as one who is both generous and also successful enough to have a surplus available for providing to others. Finally, the intended outcomes of the various modes of exchange included the creation and substantiation of social relations.

Chapters 6 and 7 also revealed how different types of exchange were transacted according to classifications of social relationships. The types of exchange employed varied in relation to social distance, with generalised reciprocity enacted between those with close social ties, and trade and barter between those who were more socially distant. However, as my analysis showed, social distance is not fixed but fluid and is always in process of negotiation. Furthermore, while different types of

exchange were identified (e.g. helping out, gifts to maintain), I showed that these types of exchange were not fixed and certain but ambiguous and that people played with this ambiguity for both instrumental (e.g. gifts reconstructed as stored credit when a dealer was without heroin) and symbolic (e.g. sharing to establish prestige) purposes. Understanding exchange as a process rather than as a set of rules accommodates the flexibility and ambiguity observed in this marketplace.

My analysis also raises challenges to the model of the subject – *homo economicus* – that is implicit in epidemiological and criminological drug market analyses. While this model assumes that people rely solely on instrumental rationality, the findings in Chapters 6 and 7 show that dealers employ diverse styles of reasoning through exchange. Moral reasoning is apparent both in notions of a fair price in trade and also in the social obligations to provide assistance to those less fortunate than oneself. The important place of reciprocity within this marketplace was also identified. Some scholars have suggested that the obligation to reciprocate may be interpreted in terms of giving in order that the other will continue to give, which – conceptually – leaves a maximising *homo economicus* at the heart of the transaction. However, I have shown that beyond obligation, acts of helping or giving were also intended to substantiate social relations, to make concrete the affective ties. This provides further evidence that the neo-classical economic market model, with its *homo economicus* subject, provides inadequate insight into the subjectivities of people who participate in the Footscray marketplace.

Turning to the question of agency, Chapter 1 drew attention to two common constructions of heroin user/dealer agency – that of the heroin user lacking agency because it has been ceded to the drug, and that of the heroin dealer having a circumscribed agency that is motivated by criminality and the amoral pursuit of self-interest in the form of profit. In addition to the agency of heroin users being understood as being mediated entirely by the ‘demands’ of heroin, the ‘agency’ of heroin (and other drugs) is further instantiated in much Australian drug market literature through analyses that focus on changes in a drug’s price, purity and availability. By focusing on the drug rather than people and their relationships, such analyses have the effect of suggesting that it is the drug that produces change, rather

than changes being produced through the actions of people acting through webs of relations to constitute any particular, albeit fuzzily-bounded, drug-related network.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the economic supply and demand market model underpinning many analyses of Australian drug markets and marketplaces, agency is often located in the market itself rather than in the actors who participate in these sites. The ascription of agency to the market has also been identified by Dilley (1992) and Stewart (1992). These authors argued that while the market is understood as constituted through the self-interest of atomised individuals maximising utility, at the same time, the ‘invisible hand’ of the market is seen as itself constituting an agent to which individual actors respond. Under the assumptions of the economic market model, there is a single optimal course of action where all buyers and sellers will be maximally satisfied and, thus, under this model, marketplace actors are essentially passive, responding to the conditions established by the market force of supply and demand. Consequently, economic market models, which most Australian drug market scholars have adopted, can be seen as overly deterministic and as leaving little room for the flexibility and creativity of participants in the market.

However, spending time with Footscray dealers on a nearly daily basis for two years, it was impossible to see them as lacking agency – they *did* all manner of things every day and not everything they did was directed toward the acquisition of heroin. Nor was it possible to see them as acting solely in criminal ways or only in relation to a desire for profit. Dealers did engage in criminal acts – most obviously, selling and using heroin – but, simultaneously, they also acted within the bounds of the law – for example, obeying road rules when driving or paying for goods in shops. In regard to profit, dealers enjoyed making money on the occasions that they did so, but they also gave away considerable amounts of heroin for the pleasures of making *a party* (socialising with friends), because they were feeling generous, or because they felt that looking after those less fortunate than oneself was the *right* thing to do. Together, these findings suggest that conceptions of drug user/dealer agency that locate it outside these actors (i.e. with heroin) or that see it as restricted only to criminal or profit-seeking actions, provide inadequate account of the multiple ways drug users and dealers express agency. Furthermore, far from the market being driven by an ‘invisible hand’, my ethnographic analysis has shown how the drug

marketplace is produced and reproduced through the actions of the marketplace participants.

In addition to highlighting the agency of heroin user/dealers, this thesis has also highlighted the importance of situating marketplaces in their broader social, cultural, economic and political contexts. While the economic market model focuses only on the buyers and sellers in a market, drug marketplaces (and indeed, marketplaces more generally) are not constituted solely by the people who buy and sell drugs. Such sites are embedded in particular local contexts and also constituted by other actors – for example, police, health and welfare workers, local government agents and members of the general public. The Footscray drug marketplace was also constituted by social relations and transactions with these other actors. Among these, encounters with police were the most regular and enduring and, while dealers and customers would have preferred to avoid these encounters, they nevertheless played a significant role in constituting the marketplace.

As was shown in Chapter 8, policing contributed to the constitution of the marketplace through shaping the sorts of actions that were possible in this site as well as shaping dealers' and customers' comportment and the ways in which exchanges were transacted. Policing also shaped the ways in which trust was established and extended between people in the marketplace – producing a general wariness as well as tactics for probing the trustworthiness of others (e.g. signs of legitimacy as a drug user). Policing further shaped the marketplace by providing opportunities for identity-making and establishing prestige – for example, being a skilled dealer who avoided police attention, establishing a reputation for not informing on others, ‘taking the rap’, or conversely, informing on others. Additionally, in the everyday world of the marketplace, dealers and individual police officers were socially related and dealers' understandings and interpretations of these social relations shaped their actions in the marketplace.

Chapter 8 presented an account of the policing activities in the marketplace and of dealers' responses to this policing. Here, the focus was on the everyday negotiation of power between dealers and the police and on the ways dealers responded to police presence in the marketplace. As was shown, dealers adopted various risk

management strategies to minimise the possibility of arrest. Importantly, it was also revealed that dealers did not always act to avoid or minimise policing risk but, instead, at various times, they actively engaged risk – taking the chance that they would be lucky – and that, for dealers, risk was multiple and complex, not confined simply to the hazard of arrest.

Risk (and opportunity) were present across multiple domains of the everyday lives of dealers – the hazard of arrest, the possibility of overdose, the chance to make money, the possibility of withdrawal, the opportunity to achieve extreme intoxication on *normison* or the chance of an enjoyable social encounter. At the same time that the drug marketplace environment was understood by dealers to be risky, it was also understood as uncertain. Thus, dealers' responses to policing were divergent and diverse rather than being always based on risk-averse probability calculations, as assumed in much criminological drug market research and practice. These findings raise challenges to the efficacy of policing interventions that are predicated on an assumption of drug market participants reacting in risk-averse ways.

As with the discussion of exchange, my analysis of dealers' responses to policing drew attention to the agency of dealers – a theme that is frequently absent in other accounts of policing in drug markets. The choices dealers were able to make in the marketplace (i.e. how they were able to express agency) were constrained by police but not completely curtailed. Dealers acted in multiple ways to resist or evade policing. However, while this thesis has stressed the expression of agency by these people, at the same time it has revealed the multiple ways in which those expressions of agency are constrained. For example, in relation to policing, while dealers did act to resist or evade policing, for most dealers these actions were ultimately unsuccessful, as evidenced by their regular experiences of arrest and incarceration, and, for at least some dealers, of police violence.

Drug use is frequently constructed as indicative of a failure to achieve neo-liberal values of self-regulation and autonomy (Keane, 2002; Moore and Fraser, 2006; Petersen and Lupton, 1996; Seddon, 2007). As noted in Chapter 8, young Vietnamese people in Australia are also constructed as threatening 'others', in contrast to mainstream European Australians. These two subject positions contribute

to the construction of young Vietnamese as being ‘out of order’ in Footscray – irrespective of whether they are engaging in illegal activities – and produce encounters with police in which they are excluded (explicitly, by being instructed to leave the area or implicitly, by being continually scrutinised) on the basis of who they are rather than what they do.

At times, dealers appeared to accept these ascribed ‘disorderly’ subject positions, describing their treatment at the hands of police as acceptable and merited because they were “bad” and “not normal” in the way of non-drug users. Often they expressed aspirations to neo-liberal normativity – which, in their terms, meant not using drugs, being responsible, being employed, owning a house and having a family (spouse and children). At other times, however, they resisted these constructions, resenting their treatment at the hands of the police and asserting a subjectivity which afforded them the same rights as other citizens and which resisted marginalisation and exclusion. In Chapter 8, I also argued that conceptions of the neo-liberal subject as a prudential risk-manager are, even within that framework, narrow and that the neo-liberal subject is also an enterprising subject who engages with risk and makes forays into the uncertain future. Thus, despite constructions of dealers as failed neo-liberal subjects, through their engagement with uncertainty as well as with risk, dealers may also be seen, at times, as acting as the enterprising subjects of neo-liberal normativity. Together, these findings suggest that subjectivity is multi-faceted, dynamic and situationally-produced.

Chapter 9 extended the discussion of subjectivity to consider the forms of drug user subjectivity constructed through health discourses. This chapter specifically addressed subjective experiences and meanings of drug use for the Vietnamese dealers, as well as highlighting that dealers were simultaneously customers, in relation to temazepam (*normison*). Here, it was argued that the dealers’ engagement with *normie* injection and their privileging of pleasure indicated that their subjectivity does not conform to that inscribed in conventional harm reduction discourses. This chapter highlighted the inadequacy of models of subjectivity that assume instrumental rationality as the “exclusive motivating force” (Ortner, 1984, p.151) of action. Although my analysis focused on desire, as Ortner argued, need, fear, suffering, and other emotional conditions “surely must be part of motivation”

(*ibid*) as well. While acknowledging that the conferral of neo-liberal subjectivity within harm reduction discourse has been sometimes empowering for drug users, offering “political benefits in terms of recognition, trust and legitimisation” (Moore & Fraser, 2006, p.3035), I argued that there are risks in leaving the model unexamined. Key among these is the risk of further marginalisation of those who do not act as this subject model suggests, that is, those who do not make ‘healthy choices’.

As I argued in Chapter 2, underlying economic accounts of markets and marketplaces are assumptions about human subjectivity. This thesis has also illustrated that similar assumptions underpin discourses and practices around policing (Ch. 8) and health promotion (Ch. 9) in relation to drug users and drug markets. Throughout the thesis, my analysis has revealed the active and ongoing construction of identity and subjectivity, suggesting the “ambiguous, contradictory and multiple” (Pardy, 2005, p.19) meanings of these categories. The analysis of exchange in the drug marketplace, of dealers’ responses to policing and of *normie* injectors privileging of pleasure suggests that the subject implicit in economic, policing and health discourse does not sufficiently account for the subjectivity of Footscray dealers.

As well as the marketplace being shaped by ongoing and active policing, the Footscray drug marketplace is embedded in a particular geographical, historical, social, cultural, economic and political context. As described in Chapter 3, the suburb of Footscray is multicultural and socio-economically disadvantaged. The Vietnamese have been present in the area for close to thirty years. They arrived at a time of economic recession and the decline of traditional working-class unskilled employment. While some members of the Vietnamese populations in Australia have achieved considerable success in areas such as employment and education, others experience ongoing socio-economic disadvantage reflected in low educational attainment and high rates of unemployment. In particular, the collapse of Australia’s clothing industry during the late 1980s had a significant impact on the Vietnamese community, members of which had been employed in this low-paid, unregulated sector. In conjunction with economic difficulties faced in Australia, Vietnamese people who came as refugees (including the majority of dealers) underwent

considerable hardship during their journeys to Australia and faced ongoing discrimination and racism once they had settled in Australia.

In the context of these structural and environmental conditions, heroin dealing provided this set of people with economic and social opportunities from which they had been excluded. Additionally, the relatively small size and interconnectedness of the Vietnamese community in Footscray (and in the wider Melbourne area) provided opportunities in terms of becoming involved in heroin distribution. As discussed, this interconnectedness helps account for the ongoing production and reproduction of the Footscray drug marketplace and of the dealers themselves – seen, for example, in such processes as gift exchange that keep dealers selling in the marketplace despite arrest and confiscation of their money and heroin.

The ways in which involvement in drug dealing provided economic opportunities for the Footscray dealers have also been observed in other studies (for example, Bourgois, 1995; Maher *et al.*, 1998; Waterston, 1993). However, dealing also serves to reproduce dealers' structurally marginal positions – for example, the lengthy histories of repeated incarceration experienced by the Footscray dealers further entrenched their social and economic marginalisation. While structural elements significantly shaped Vietnamese participation in drug dealing, in this thesis, I have not provided an in-depth discussion of these features of drug marketplaces. Instead, I have chosen to focus on other unexplored elements in the constitution of drug markets – that is, on market processes.

While some scholars have highlighted the diversity across drug marketplaces (for example, Coomber, 2006; Dorn *et al.*, 1992), in much Australian drug market literature, the adoption of an economic market model has meant that drug markets are abstracted from the particular social contexts in which they are located and, as a consequence, this literature tends to posit a universal ‘drug market’. In the epidemiological and criminological approaches to studying Australian drug markets/marketplaces, there is considerable conceptual slippage between on-the-ground, specific locations of drug exchanges and abstract conceptions of a ‘market’. By abstracting the ‘drug market’, much of the information pertaining to its constituent social processes is lost because these processes are localised to the

particular social contexts and relations in which a given market/marketplace is embedded. The focus on ‘market-like’ characteristics – price, purity and availability, for example – conceals the complex social, cultural and economic processes that underlie the production and reproduction of particular drug marketplaces.

Comparison of the Footscray drug marketplace with the well-studied Cabramatta drug marketplace highlights the importance of localised understandings of such sites. Both marketplaces were dominated by heroin sellers of Indochinese (mainly Vietnamese) backgrounds. In both marketplaces, similar structural and environmental conditions obtained – marginalisation, unemployment, social exclusion and aggressive forms of policing (see, for example, Maher, et al., 1998; Dixon and Maher, 2001). However, the Footscray dealers constructed different sets of drug use practices and meanings to those seen in Cabramatta. The injection of temazepam is a prime example. As described in Chapter 9, in Footscray, *normie* injection was a cultural practice primarily associated with Vietnamese user/dealers, it was constructed as a desirable practice and it was a practice that both expressed and constituted Vietnamese drug user identity in this local context. Conversely, in Cabramatta, Vietnamese drug user/dealers did not inject temazepam and constructed it as a ‘dirty practice’, adopted by ‘Aussie’ drug users and, thus, in their view, constitutive of Aussie drug user identity. Likewise, the practice of groin injection was widespread among the Footscray dealers and valued for its convenience and efficacy in relation to *normie* injection (Higgs, Dwyer *et al.*, 2009) while, among Cabramatta dealers, groin injection was uncommon (Dwyer, Power *et al.*, 2007) and stigmatised (Maher, 2007).

These findings remind us that the meanings of drug use do not derive solely from either the pharmacological properties of drugs or from inherent, stable characteristics of those who use them. They are also socially constructed through ongoing interaction and negotiation in particular localised contexts. The findings further suggest that drug marketplaces cannot be understood without consideration of the local context because, as seen in the example of Footscray and Cabramatta, even in these ostensibly similar settings, diverse outcomes are produced. If public health and policy interventions are to resonate effectively with those to whom they are directed,

local drug-using scenes need to be understood on their own terms rather than through the etic categories of policy makers, health workers and researchers.

In common with much of the drug market literature discussed in Chapter 2, my analysis has been economic. However, in contrast to this literature, I have adopted a substantive definition of the economy, rather than the more narrow understanding drawn from the discipline of economics. Theoretically, I have drawn on economic anthropological understandings to frame my analysis. Here, economy is understood as the “social relations people establish to control the production, consumption and circulation of food, clothing, shelter” (Gregory and Altman, 1989, p.1) and other “valued objects and services” (Gudeman, 2001, p.1).

In the Footscray marketplace, heroin is one such valued object and this thesis has revealed the networks of social relations people establish to control its circulation and consumption. As with any market, exchange was a key social process of the Footscray marketplace. However, as argued, exchange in the drug marketplace was not confined solely to ‘market’ exchange, that is, trade. Rather, multiple kinds of exchange operated simultaneously and trade was just one instance of more general processes of exchange. Furthermore, while I have drawn an analytical boundary around exchange in the marketplace, exchange is not something that occurs only in market contexts but rather is a socially and culturally constituted process in which people engage throughout all spheres of their daily lives. The heroin economy of this marketplace entails more than simply buying and selling – it entails reciprocity and redistribution. Even in trade, this is just one point in the circulation of heroin through chains of social relations. It is kinds of exchange in their entirety that constitute the overall heroin economy.

Through the repetition of routine drug exchanges, dealers’ actions in the marketplace can be seen as generally analogous to those of any petty-commodity trader. Close examination of trade in this marketplace indicates that, in many ways, this illegal economic activity of drug dealing proceeds in the same manner as much legal economic activity and operates through similar cultural understandings of ‘good business practice’. Despite widespread images of the violence of drug markets and marketplaces, in general, the Footscray marketplace was a site of order. This is not to

say that there were not occasions of disruption (arguments, altercations, excessive violence) but, as I have shown, these were uncommon. On the whole, the marketplace was characterised by the daily repetition of multiple routine and mundane drug exchanges.

As discussed in Chapter 6, selling heroin provided economic opportunities for dealers. In addition to being re-invested in the purchase of more heroin for sale, money made from dealing also flowed into other economic domains in the form of purchases of goods (e.g. food, drinks, tobacco) and services (e.g. rental payments, public transport). However, my choice of focus – the drug marketplace – precluded detailed consideration of how the illegal economy of the drug marketplace is intertwined with other sectors of the illegal economy and of how it intersects with the legal economy. As all these economic activities are related and people simultaneously participate in exchanges across all three domains, further investigation of such intersections would greatly enhance our understanding of the constitution of drug markets and marketplaces and of the everyday lives of the people who participate in these sites of social exchange.

The discussion of the practice of temazepam injection in Chapter 9 indicated that many Footscray dealers experienced severe health harms. Other potential health harms arising, for example, from needle-sharing, groin injection, systemic infections or heroin overdose, were also a significant element in dealers' lives. Additionally, other research in Footscray has shown that several members of this set of dealers were infected with HIV and the majority have, at some time, been infected with the hepatitis C virus (Aitken, Higgs and Bowden, 2008; Hellard *et al.*, 2005; Higgs, Yoannes, Hellard and Maher, *in press*; Hocking, Higgs, Keenan and Crofts, 2002). In conjunction with health harms, people experienced emotional distress. Being arrested, having pending court cases and facing the possibility of gaol sentences were stressful and, subjectively, most dealers at some point expressed unhappiness with their heroin use and with the 'daily grind' of having to come to Footscray to sell heroin.

In this thesis, however, I have not provided a detailed discussion of the harms experienced through participation in street-based drug selling and use. These have

been admirably addressed in research by other scholars with respect to both Footscray and Cabramatta (see, for example, Higgs, Dwyer *et al.*, 2009; Higgs, Maher *et al.*, 2001; Ho and Maher, 2008; Maher, Chant, Jalaludin and Sargent, 2004; Maher *et al.*, 2001) but were not focal to my research efforts. While not denying the considerable suffering of the Footscray dealers arising from marginalisation and health-harms generated through their drug using practices, in this thesis, I have sought to show that the everyday lives of drug user/dealers are simultaneously constituted by opportunity and pleasure and that drug user/dealers' lives are multidimensional – providing both risk and opportunity, distress and delight, suffering and satisfaction, pleasure and pain. While this set of people did experience times of distress and suffering, these were not a constant feature of their everyday lives. Studies that focus only on the negative aspects of drug marketplace participation, while important, particularly in the face of such serious health threats as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C, tend to reinforce constructions of drug users and dealers as victims and do not do justice to the complexities of drug users' and dealers' lives.

A final absence is worth noting. My account of the Footscray drug marketplace does not provide detailed discussion of the dealers' heroin suppliers, although they qualify as a significant part of the everyday world of the drug marketplace. This absence was a deliberate methodological choice. Both dealers and I were aware that my recording of their illegal activities was potentially dangerous to them. I considered that, were I to express interest further up the chain of supply, this may have threatened my development of trust at the street-supply level with which I was concerned. As described in Chapter 4, I sought to minimise the risks to the street-dealers by not recording notes in the field and by assigning pseudonyms to dealers and other drug market participants. To minimise the risk to the development of trust, I chose not to seek contact with the dealers' suppliers.

This thesis provides an alternative to the dominant approaches to understanding Australian drug markets and marketplaces. It has concentrated on particular aspects of drug markets and marketplaces that are often overlooked in Australian drugs research. All investigations of drug markets/marketplaces provide partial pictures but, if we are to expand our understanding of such sites of human activity, then it is

necessary that we expand our theoretical and methodological approaches beyond the perspectives of epidemiology and criminology. Ethnography, with its concern with process, temporality and social relationships, can illuminate dealers' subjective understandings, interpretations and practices in response to the drug marketplace environment, in ways that quantitative snap-shots of markets are seldom able to do, thereby adding drug user/dealers voices to the voices of public health researchers, the media and the criminal justice system that usually dominate accounts and explanations of these phenomena.

To further expand our understanding of drug markets and marketplaces, some fruitful avenues for future research suggest themselves. Through my ethnography, I have critiqued dominant subject models of drug users, arguing that these do not capture the complexity of drug user subjectivity, or indeed, of human subjectivity in general. Further exploration of how drug users resist, accommodate, comply or collaborate in the production of these subject positions would be of value, as would further research on how drug users understand their subjectivity. Comparative studies directed toward investigation of the elements producing localised differences in drug meanings and practices as seen between Cabramatta and Footscray would further enhance our understanding of drug markets and drug market participants. Additionally, research that more directly connected the interpretations from the present study to issues of health and drug-related harms that have been the focus of past studies would also be of value – for example, research into the ways in which processes of clientelisation or gift exchange might impact upon the sharing of injection equipment. Finally, further research investigating the social and cultural links between the street-dealers and their suppliers – for example, the ways in which suppliers are recruited, whether they are of the same ethnicity – would further expand our understanding of these sites of drug distribution and exchange.

My analysis of the Footscray heroin marketplace was stimulated by the observation of two key absences in drugs and drug market/marketplaces discourse. Firstly, the absence of adequate considerations of the social relations of the people who participate in drug marketplaces and, secondly, the absence of adequate considerations of the agency of these people. Accounts of drug markets tend to privilege an etic view that, as I have argued, is theoretically underpinned by neo-

classical economic models of markets. Additionally, the quantitative methodological approaches that predominate in Australian drug market research tend to preclude considerations of process and temporality. In contrast, in this thesis I privilege an emic account of the drug marketplace. Influenced by theoretical frameworks drawn from anthropology, in my examination of the everyday lives of drug user/dealers, I have stressed the importance of social, political and cultural dimensions of these people's lives and have directed attention to the importance and creativity of personal agency.

Rhodes (2002) proposed a risk environment framework for understanding drug-related harm. Discourses of drug users and drug dealers can be understood as another element of environments that may produce and sustain harm. Drug users and dealers are widely stigmatised and demonised as 'other', juxtaposed against supposedly 'normal' non-drug users. Dominant representations of drug users are unidimensional and do not capture the complexity of drug user agency and subjectivity. This thesis demonstrates that the people who sell heroin in the Footscray marketplace actively engage in a range of exchanges, for a range of purposes – subsistence, the creation of identity, the pursuit of prestige, reciprocity, sociality, the production and reproduction of social relations, and profit-making. My account, therefore, repositions drug users, challenging their stigmatisation by revealing that, in their everyday lives, they struggle with many of the same challenges that confront us all.

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