"HIDDEN FROM HEROIN'S HISTORY": HEROIN USE AND DEALING WITHIN AN ENGLISH ASIAN COMMUNITY — A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *Heroin use and dealing within the English Asian community have received little research attention although involvement of Asian entrepreneurs in trafficking chains has been documented. This preliminary report arises from a qualitative case study of a locality in one South-Asian community in northwest England. The paper discusses methodological and background issues but primarily provides a picture of how a heroin distribution network developed. We focus on a key individual who sponsored dealing enterprises in an attempt to ensure they operated within terms and boundaries negotiated with him, rather than see them emerge as independent competitors. Friendships and kinship facilitated such sponsorship and negotiation. Subsequent suspicion, competition and conflict led to fragmentation of networks. The consequence of inter-personal conflict and break-down of trust was increased vulnerability to enforcement attention. The study also suggests there has been a "hidden history" of heroin use and dealing within, at least some, ethnic minority communities in England and that lack of recognition of this has implications for prevention and services.*

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INTRODUCTION

We report on a study conducted in a medium-sized town situated in northwest England. Our emphasis here centres upon the construction and decline of a localised heroin dealing network.' We explore reasons why, as well as how, such activity was conducted by lower-working-class Asian youth[2] in an area of multiple socio-economic deprivation, and how it provided one of a limited number of routes by which they empowered themselves, improved on legitimate low-income opportunities and secured a desired lifestyle (Bourgois, 1995; Collison, 1994; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). The paper is about young Asian males and assertions of identity, status and masculinity (e.g., via "male bonding," business competition, risk-taking, the threat of violence, etc.) (Messerschmidt, 1993; Collison, 1996). We are acutely aware of the absence of young women in this picture but this reflects the focus of the study on the key dealers who were male. We hope to report elsewhere on the role of women in the wider social dynamics surrounding this local heroin scene (cf., Maher, 1997; Taylor, 1993).

Census figures since the early 1980s have indicated that ethnic minorities remain disproportionately concentrated in the deprived areas in which they first settled, and in terms of socioeconomic position and unemployment levels, persons of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin fare worst. At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the community studied faced levels of male unemployment of around 25.9% compared to 14.9% for the regional male population as a whole.[3] Much research suggests that a combination of youthful aspiration, social deprivation and/or structural barriers to opportunity, encourages a disposition toward criminal activity (Fitzgerald, 1990; Duster, 1987; Cloward, 1959). This study supports such a proposition.

Ethnicity, "Otherness" and Discourses of Control

Issues concerning the social construction of perceptions and realities of Asian criminality (Murji, 1999) fall beyond our scope here. However, such issues have been examined and explained with much success by Webster (1997, 1996) who argues that since the late 1980s "...we can observe the construction of a popular and public discourse about young 'Asian' masculine criminality said to reside in British localities" (1997:65). Webster notes that an important element in the manufacturing of a public discourse concerning Asian criminality can be found in local and national press or television reports about Asian communities. The main feature of this discourse is the transformation of Asian youth from "...primarily law abiding and/or

victims of crime, especially racial violence, to being associated with criminality, drugs, violence and disorder ...[According to Webster] the roots of this alleged criminality lay in generational tensions brought by the breakdown of Asian family controls on young people" (Webster, 1997:65).

The foundations of these "racialising" and "criminalising" discourses are evident not only in what Webster terms the "control culture" (media and the criminal justice system) but also among white and Asian youth on the streets as well as sections of the Asian parent culture.[4]

Just as there are popular stereotypes concerning "Asians and corner shops," new stereotypes are emerging concerning unruly Asian youth who reject not only their traditional culture but also reject "respect" for their elders (viewed as the means via which the community regulates itself). The reality is more complex. While the Asian youth engaged in street culture in our study retained a strong sense of Muslim identity, they apparently experienced no tension between strict religious codes and their conflicting lifestyle patterns, which included use of drugs and alcohol and engagement in casual sexual encounters. Arguably, the assertion of a strong sense of religious identity could partly reflect continuity of cultural tradition, especially given the continued significance of kinship, but more likely it reflects individual and collective perceptions of ethnicity and racism held by Asian youth. Such perceptions reinforce a feeling of the need for a strong identity and culture, while forming a response to the experience of "otherness" (Murji, 1999; Said, 1991).[5]

THE STUDY

Very little is currently known about the relationships between ethnicity and drug-user/dealing networks in the U.K. (see Murji, 1999; Pearson and Patel, 1998). This study focuses on how such social formations may function, how personnel operate, and how networks have the ability to mutate in order to accommodate market trends (Hobbs, 1995), especially in the face of increasing law-enforcement attention and penalties (Dorn et al., 1992).

Methodological Issues

At the outset, we must draw attention to the fact that the research would have been difficult, if not impossible, to carry out if the fieldworker had not grown up in the town where our research took place. Some members of the local scene were well known from the past, and, significantly, some were known intimately through friendship

and kinship networks. The study, therefore, has a distinctly "personal flavour." On the one hand are the advantages of authenticity and "insider knowledge," and on the other are potential problems of bias and the maintenance of analytical distance. We think the "briefing/debriefing" relationship between the authors has provided a balance between ethnographic empathy and critical neutrality, and we seriously doubt that the research would have been possible without some kind of personal route into the everyday life of the individuals and groups studied.[6] We believe that any methodological compromise has been more than outweighed by the value of embarking on what may well be a unique research focus on Asian young men and drug dealing in the U.K.[7]

The research so far has been carried out in two phases related to the availability of both funding and of the fieldworker. It is hoped that a third and final phase will be carried out in 2000, making the project the only longitudinal, qualitative study of an ethnic-minority drugs market in the U.K. of which we are aware. The first phase was carried out between 1994 and 1996 and included emphasis on retrospective data collection. Since then a second phase of several visits back to the site of field observations has been completed (1997-98). At the beginning of the first phase, research began covertly with a view to formulating a research proposal for funding; subsequently key informants were told about the research project and, knowing and trusting the fieldworker, agreed to let him "hang around."

Methods of data collection are principally field ethnography (Pearson, 1993) in the form of contemporaneous or subsequent memory-based riote-taking about general conversations and observations. Where data and personal knowledge have permitted, we have begun to compile short life stories of the key participants. Of course such a methodology draws upon many sources and predictably recollections, accounts and justifications, conflict with each other. These contradictions represent an inevitable problem in this kind of research and, given the obvious absence of other validating sources, all we can do for purposes of analysis and reporting is cross-check accounts, producing the report that seems most coherent and reliable. We acknowledge however that we are only able to "tell a story" (Plummer, 1995).

Historical and Economic Background of the Locality

The town is in northwest England and its history of expansion and decline was bound up with the fortunes of the textile and manufacturing industries that were at the heart of the Industrial Revolution. The socioeconomic experience of the research town par-

allels that of Bradford, just across the Pennine mountain-range, which is the site of Pearson and Patel's (1998) study of outreach work with Asian drug users:

> Having survived the economic slump of the 1930s, [Bradford] shared the fate of other towns and cities dependent on the British textile industry, which has suffered a deep and sustained decline since the 1950s.
>
> In the case of Lancashire cotton and Yorkshire wool, the prolonged post-war decline coincided with the period of substantial immigration of people of Asian origin [Pearson and Patel, 1998: 205; and see note 2]

In the area of the research town, as manufacturing industry was slowly dismantled (Williams and Fame, 1992), the local economy shifted to reliance on textile production. The new South-Asian communities were a source of cheap labour, but in the face of overseas competition, this industry also declined and these communities suffered disproportionately.

HEROIN, LOCAL STREET CULTURE AND SOCIOECONOMIC LIFE: THE EARLY 1980S AND BEYOND

From the late 1970s and into the mid-1980s, the U.K. experienced an unprecedented growth in the availability and use of heroin, alongside the related expansion of drug dealing and trafficking (Dorn et al., 1992; Dorn and South, 1987). The epidemiological, policy and practice issues of the time have been discussed extensively elsewhere (South, 1997; Pearson, 1991). However, one significant conclusion drawn from the available research evidence, the experience of drug services and criminal justice statistics, was that the new heroin problem was "white" (Pearson and Patel, 1998:202). This conclusion seemed reasonable given the absence of contrary indicators. Even when researchers or services sought data on minority drug use to support challenges to "racist assumptions" or complacency (e.g., the argument that minorities "look after their own, that's why they don't present at services") little evidence of heroin use among ethnic minority groups emerged. As Pearson and Patel (1998) observe:

> It is surprising...that, on all the available evidence, Britain's black communities were relatively untouched by the 1980s heroin epidemic. Because of the paucity of ethnically sensitive research in this field, much of the evidence remains anecdotal

> — and it is a matter of controversy as to whether drug use in minority ethnic communities is lower than in the majority community, or whether it simply goes unreported and unknown to public agencies. A late 1980s outreach project.. .clearly identified the way in which drug services were often seen by minority groups as remote and inaccessible - "run by white people for white people" - and this certainly reflects the historical legacy whereby drug services in Britain had traditionally catered to white, male opiate users (Awiah et al., 1990). [Pearson and Patel, 1998:202]

As our study shows, all of this does not mean that heroin use was absent, simply that research did not reveal it. Furthermore, services would indeed be a poor source of indicators, being seen as "white" and representative of a hostile "officialdom" (see below).

A Contrary Story: Heroin in the Case-study Community

During the early to mid-1980s, heroin use began to filter down to street level in the Asian community. Prior to this period, if there was any association between heroin trafficking and this Asian community (as was rumoured), it was confined to the upper levels of the drug trade, discreet and far removed from the daily life of the community.[8] Yet this study has found that around this time, a few Asian youths (referred to here as the "preliminary core group"), were using heroin on a recreational basis. Although numerically insignificant ($n < 7$) and also discreet, this heroin-using social group continued until at least 1985. Its very existence implies that the availability of heroin had been established in the community, even though the source had limited distribution impact and use was confined to a few individuals.

Nonetheless, the formation of this embryonic network was of profound significance. From this point onward, the seeds had been sown for the cultivation of a heroin-using and dealing subculture by a small group of local entrepreneurs, some of whom emerged from this preliminary core group. In the late-1980s a few decided to turn to dealing in order to finance their own habits, or to simply make money.[9] By the early 1990s heroin, both in terms of its sale and use, had become established within the community. Heroin became a source of economic occupation and social preoccupation for a small number of Asian young men in the town, who initially engaged in recreational use. Some eventually moved on to acute, chaotic or addictive states. However, this study concentrates on the development of the careers of the dealers rather than on the users.

Setting the Scene: A Mount with a View

A common point of convergence in the locality was a parking lot on a small hill or "mount" that overlooked the local Asian pub and parade of shops. From the hill one could note how often and by whom the shops and pub were frequented. The parade of shops included: an Asian clothes shop; pharmacy; two newsagents; car-repair shop; launderette; take-away kebab shop; and betting shop. Particularly referring to the pharmacy, the knowing observer could distinguish between ordinary patrons and those visiting to either exchange their prescription for methadone or to exchange their syringes under the "old for new" scheme.[10]

From the view the mount afforded, one could examine many of the intricacies and intimacies of daily life around the parade. A closer inspection could identify which prostitutes were "punting" for business and those who were the punters. One could detect other illicit market activity taking place that the disinterested observer would miss, e.g., buying and selling stolen goods. Much research time was spent on the mount observing and listening to an endless flow of gossip.

The mount became an established place where Asian youth would regularly meet for aid, trade and conversation.[11] Aid comprised of helping one another, usually only as long as both sides benefited. Aid and trade were part and parcel of "doing the business" (Hobbs, 1988). Conversation generally centred on some incident such as: who was doing what (usually with the view of procuring a stake for oneself), who was seeing whom (business or sexual relationships), and where one was going for "a night out." However, despite the significance of gossip as a currency for friendship and to oil the wheels of business, individuals were nonetheless careful not to expose too much about themselves or their activities.

The mount became central to the fieldwork since it was *the* place to hang out. Apparently, (1) it was a place where, knowing that friends and associates would pass by, one could park a car, relax and smoke cannabis; and (2) since the mount was situated directly opposite the local pub and shops, one could see the patrons and if anything interesting was happening.

Types of Heroin Dealers

Lewis et al. (1985:284) define a dealer as: "an individual who supplies drugs for a cash return, operating below the import level and distinct from a solely 'social' supplier, who provides drugs in friendship or for a share of the purchase." Dorn et al. (1992) describe dealers and their motivations within a typology of several categories:

Trading Charities; Mutual Societies; Sideliners; Criminal Diversifiers; Opportunistic Irregulars; Retail Specialists; and State-sponsored Traders. In analysing the material produced by this study, we adapted two existing categories familiar in the British literature and created one new one.

(1) *User-dealers* — A prime motive is to support and regulate one's own habit. Dealing was generally chosen as an alternative to shoplifting or burglary.

(2) *Bread-heads*[12] — Dealing is a business engaged in solely for profit. It provides the support for a desired lifestyle and the means to make substantial sums of money. Most dealers observed had no formal qualifications or employment skills. Instead, they opted for what they saw as the rational choice of making money by selling heroin. The vocabulary of motives (Mills, 1940; Sykes and Matza, 1957) employed construed this as a "survival strategy" since other economic options were perceived as limited or nonexistent.

(3) *Fashion and life-stylers* — These dealers tended to be younger and far more image-conscious than the bread-heads. Although making money was a primary goal, this aim ran parallel to having a good time — "for all junkies to see," as one dealer quoted from a song.[13] Their lifestyle was conspicuous and flamboyant. Life was all about "being flash" and drawing attention to how well you were doing in business by driving around in expensive sports cars. Little attempt was made to conceal the fact that one was dealing heroin. All that mattered was to act in a way that emphasised "you are a somebody!" These dealers did not hang around the same dealing locations all the time. Since their self-publicising obviously drew attention and suspicion from members of the local community and the police, it was prudent to move around the town.

From the 1980s to the early 1990s, we can identify a process of transition. From the preliminary core group of users emerged the user-dealers, some of whom "mutated" (Hobbs, 1995) into bread-heads and fashion-lifestylers, who subsequently developed into organised distributors, the Crews. The development of the latter is the focus of the next section.

HAKIM'S STORY[14]

One of the dealers had been engaged in the drug culture from the age of 16 (using cannabis from 1983; heroin from 1985). After leaving

school he attended college to study for a vocational qualification but found himself edging into the drugs scene and eventually drifted into the use of heroin. The latter started in the mid-1980s when he became the driver for a group of older Asian young men (7 to 10 years his senior) to locations where they bought drugs. This group was the "preliminary core group" introduced earlier. At this time Hakim confined himself to cannabis and alcohol but after a while, once the group had scored, they would offer him heroin as payment for his driving services and discretion. Hakim was quite naive and was unaware of what was being bought or offered. He had heard of heroin but had never seen it before and did not know how to use it. When introduced to smoking the drug by chasing it off the foil ("chasing the dragon"),[15] he claims that he did not realise he was smoking heroin. This account echoes the experience of other new heroin users in the early-to-mid 1980s in the U.K. as reported by Pearson (1987). This was Hakim's initiation into heroin culture.

Around this period other friends began to experiment with heroin use, which rapidly became a recreational pastime for a small, but now visibly significant, number of Asian young men (the "first core group"). For some, recreational use quickly gave way to being a preoccupation.[16] From the early 1990s onward, heroin use in the community grew, which led to the "second core group." The first core group were generally a few years older and were evidently fully addicted. The new entrants were younger and more aware of heroin and its effects. This awareness was partly related to national drug-information campaigns and also because the problems of the "first core group" provided clear illustrations of the downside of heroin, its effects and associated life-style.

Hakim's Entry into Serious Heroin Dealing

In the late 1980s to early 1990s, Hakim had a severe heroin addiction and had been sentenced to prison for his user-dealer activities. On release in the early 1990s, his attempts to establish himself in legitimate forms of self employment, as well as working for others, were all unsuccessful. He found self employment problematic in the absence of funds for investment. Employed by others, he quickly became disenchanted with the opportunities available, described great difficulty in finding a job with financial prospects, and attributed this (rightly or wrongly) to his criminal record and lack of marketable employment skills. "It's hard getting a good job. Whose gonna wanna employ an ex-junkie and ex-con? — no one."

After approximately a year of such disenchantment he decided to again turn to drug dealing. This time he wasn't an addict and he

convinced himself he knew the strategies to employ to avoid police attention. He established himself with a credit purchase of 1/4 of an ounce of heroin and began to build his local network into what became the first dealer business.

Around this time, Hakim gave a cousin, Safraz, a ride to college. Safraz knew little of the detail of Hakim's business but was well aware of rumours that he was dealing in heroin. One day, while dropping Safraz off at college and apparently without any prompting, Hakim began to explain and justify what he was doing. He stated that he had "nothing going for him" and that dealing was the only way he could make some decent money quickly. He also wanted "to make up for what he had lost" during his period in prison. He presented Safraz with this rationale and with one of the most familiar statements found in the research literature that he wanted to "get out of the business" when he had reached a set financial target. Not long after, he purchased a new sports car and increased his target.

For the first three months Hakim operated as a one-man enterprise, purchasing merchandise from his established supplier. Within a short space of time he had acquired a sizeable amount of cash and increased the volume of his purchasing. He had started at the 1/4 ounce level, quickly moved to buying a single 1/2 ounce, then a whole ounce. When business was brisk, purchasing of ounce quantities would be frequent. Prices of heroin varied, depending on quality and source, from as low as £700 to as much as £1,100 per single ounce. Although price was often a good indicator of quality, it did not necessarily follow that the more expensive the heroin the greater the purity-content. The average price paid by Hakim for an ounce of heroin was £800 to £900, and the quality was described as good. Nonetheless, Hakim next located a better source of supply in a neighbouring small town and began to capitalise on his "better deal."

It is worth reemphasising here that we are describing a network and market based almost exclusively on heroin. The exception was the occasional availability and sale of crack-cocaine (not cocaine powder), which we assume came from the nearby major city. Availability of cannabis was widespread but not the business of Hakim or associated dealers. This availability came from other sources and buying a great deal of cannabis and smoking it were activities that saw an overlapping of Asian and white friends in the area.

THE CREATION OF THE CREWS "

Shortly after Hakim began dealing, Maqsood (Hakim's brother), Safraz, Shaukat (Hakim's neighbour), and Anwar (very close friend of both Hakim and Maqsood), began to socialise in the evenings, enjoy-

ing a "champagne lifestyle" at Hakim's expense.[18] Both Maqsood and Shaukat were heroin addicts.

Shaukat's Entry and Exit

Taking advantage of Hakim's hospitality, Shaukat made considerable efforts to associate closely with him and before long found employment with Hakim. However, Shaukat was soon supplying his own habit by skimming the individual sales units for personal consumption.[19] This lasted for seven months. Although Hakim suspected Shaukat was still using heroin despite denials, since there was no discrepancy with the money he received, Hakim felt he had no reason to seriously interrogate him.

Throughout the period that Shaukat was working for Hakim, Maqsood was also using heroin. Hakim knew full well that his brother was still using heroin and instructed Shaukat not to serve him. However, Maqsood threatened Shaukat with violence unless he diverted some of the heroin he was dealing. By telling Hakim that he was selling £25 sales units (1 unit = .4 g) but actually selling 2 x £15 units (1 unit « .2g) instead, Shaukat managed to "sort" Maqsood for free. Then, for every 6 x £15 units sold, Shaukat would tell Hakim that he had sold 3 x £25 units, the £15 profit would purchase a £15 sales unit of heroin for Maqsood or accumulate as profit for Shaukat. Since Hakim placed a great amount of trust in Shaukat at this time, he brushed aside the infrequent complaints aired by customers about "short-weight," as Hakim knew the buyers were always "coming up short" with money and seeking cheap deals wherever possible. Besides, reasoned Hakim, the money Shaukat was giving him was correct.

In the course of the next few months, Hakim was to drastically question his trust in Shaukat. The turning point was marked by the disappearance of his "stash," the location of which only Shaukat knew, leading to threats of violence and the termination of Shaukat's employment.

Safraz and Heroin Dealing

Safraz was introduced to dealing by Hakim during sales preparation when Hakim and Shaukat were "bagging up" heroin.[20] Only when customers placed larger orders for heroin would Hakim be personally involved in face-to-face deals. He preferred to distance himself from even these deals and he was always hoping to find reliable "lieutenants" or "under-managers" he could trust. At a time when numerous large orders were being placed, Hakim felt under pressure and invited Safraz into the top-level of his operation. Using latex

gloves, a McDonalds tea/coffee spoon and small plastic bags with sealable tops, Hakim showed him how to "bag up' the individual sales units. Intriguingly, Safraz did not seem to derive any fixed financial benefits from such participation other than those Hakim chose to provide. Having grown up together, the relationship seemed to be based on a set of personal obligations arising out of kinship and friendship between the two. Encouraged by Hakim, Safraz had soon acquired knowledge of all Hakim's business practices. Throughout this period Shaukat was still dealing for Hakim and engaged in his "double deceit," supplying Maqsood for free and skimming units to create additional profit for himself. At this point, such embezzlement must have been lucrative. At the height of the business, in the period of transition involving Shaukat and Safraz, indications were that crew members were making up to 60 to 70 unit deals per day, serving customers who were occasional £15 unit users up to those with £100-per-day habits. An income of £1,500 per day was routinely reported. This scale of business gives some indication of the size and value of the market, though demand could fall just as significantly.

In this crew, the first of several subsequent and inter-linked groupings, Hakim saw his role as "chief executive." Shaukat, before his removal, had constructed a position as day-to-day managing director by overseeing the overall pattern of street-trade; and Safraz now joined the team as a kind of "management-trainee," and coordinated street-trade after Shaukat's fall. Hakim's small inner-circle also included a few other close friends and relations who were advisors and hangers-on. At the level beneath Shaukat and Safraz, a small number of street-level distributors were trusted with several sales units at a time. In turn, these personnel distributed units to small-scale user-dealers for use and sale (Johnson et al.$_3$ 1985). Generally speaking, as far as we could ascertain, the street-level dealers with no management responsibility were not recruited on the basis of friendship or kin connections but in terms of reliability on the street.

The Organisation of Business

The selection criteria for street-level distribution employees in Hakim's business (and for those who followed in other crews), emphasised, (1) trustworthiness; (2) willingness and ability to execute operations in an effective and successful manner; and (3) physical ability to defend business interests. On the latter point, it is interesting to note that all the personnel recruited into dealing operations were physically weaker than their bosses and that control was a criterion in assessing suitability for recruitment. Selection of personnel would not take place if potential recruits were perceived to be physically

stronger than their prospective employers and, hence, a potential threat. Physical power was emphasised as central to management control techniques.

At the same time, physical weakness had no value. Being part of a crew implied having the strength to at least display a show of force if the need arose to protect the enterprise. The crew bosses were unquestionably willing and able to fend off a physical assault on their commercial interests (whether from desperate and potentially violent heroin addicts or any predator out to steal drug profits). But only by acting organisationally as "a crew" could groups successfully regulate and enforce their business interests.

The Beginning of the End

The collapse of the heroin-distribution crews and their networks was not a result of the attentions of the police but from what was described as "the dishonouring of friendships" and business arrangements resulting in disagreements between Hakim, his employees, supplier and rivals.

Fall-out

A dishonoured agreement about the division of the market lay at the root of the fall-out. Hakim had helped establish his close friend Anwar in the £15 street market business on the understanding that, even if he built a successful crew of his own, he would not encroach on the £25 and £50 unit market. Anwar had barely been operating for two months when allegations that he was overstepping the agreed boundary began to surface. As a result, animosity developed between Hakim and Anwar. Although initially there was no face-to-face confrontation, all were aware of the new tension. As Hakim began to see his trade falling, and angered by rumours that Anwar was selling £25 and £50 sales units, he eventually confronted Anwar in person. Anwar strenuously denied the allegations but Hakim remained unconvinced and made it clear to Anwar that he would begin to sell £15 street units. Anwar responded by stating that this would force him to sell £25 and £50 bags. (See note 19 on value of units.) This was to become the turning point in their friendship. Money, greed and market-share had become the central issues.

Hakim: "I fucking set him up and that's how he pays me back." By now Hakim considered Anwar a direct threat to his operation by encroaching on his territory and poaching his business. On the other hand, Anwar was making good money and felt unable to turn away trade, especially when Hakim stated that he would begin to sell £15

bags. Anwar: "It's hard turning away money, if they're coming to me why shouldn't I sort 'em out?"

Although there was considerable animosity between Hakim and Anwar, they remained in contact. Disagreement, however, was firmly established. Dishonour and mistrust now characterised relationships. Among employees of Hakim, themselves part of the friendship network involving Hakim and Anwar, disagreement and split loyalties followed. The resulting fragmentation and dispute within the local drugs market was highly disruptive. Thereafter, vulnerability to the attentions of the police and their use of informants was greatly enhanced.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

We cannot present here a full picture of the activities and intrigues, complementarity and competition among rival crews in the study locality. We have only been able to provide an introductory picture. Nonetheless various themes for discussion emerge.

(i) Cultures of the Oppressed

Honour and Friendship

Many of the key participants in the new, heroin-dealing businesses had grown up and gone to school together, they were "friends from way back" and while kinship was important, so, too, was the honouring of friendship. Within the group, close friendship was equated with "having a good time" — and now having the money to pay for this! — as well as "knowing who you could trust," or that was the theory. Friendship was also important, of course, for external reasons: to present a united front and assert an identity when confronting dominant society, which was largely seen as racist and exclusionary.

The "Establishment" and "Officialdom" — The Enemy

The groups distrusted and had no respect for official law and authority, particularly the police. All were perceived as racist and part of a "white establishment." Perceptions were shaped by a mix of sociocultural street-level folklore (Keith, 1993) and the individual subjective experiences of police racism and racism of other public/official institutions.[21] Racism was *the* central issue. Without exception, all those observed were conscious of their ethnicity and

identity and of their attribution of a secondary status by mainstream society. Mistrust among young Asian males in the drugs scene was abundant at times, related to business and territory. This was quite different to mistrust of the white "establishment" and "officialdom":

> You know so'mat, Pakis can't do shit in this town without being busted. How many Goray [whites] do you know who have been sellin' all kinds of shit for life and they haven't got busted? Tell me so'mat, why is it whenever a Paki tries to do so'mat, they get busted straight away? Ill tell you why, cause racist redneck pigs are always try'in to keep Pakis in their place, that's why...it's well on top for Pakis [Anwar].

Police were viewed as "pigs" and as racist, trying to "keep Pakis in their place." Asian youths reported that they were treated unfairly compared to white youths. This opinion, reported in local press stories on "police-community" liaison meetings, was supported by views of nondeviant, young Asian males.

Mirza and Karim: "Gangsta Rap" Aspirations — "Keeping it Real, Know How I Feel"

Some others engaged in the drug dealing culture, such as Mirza and Karim (members of a different business), had lifestyle aspirations borrowed from American gangsta rappers: "living life in the fast lane," portraying themselves as "coming from the ghetto." Their conversation focused on: (1) which local figures were successes in their eyes and which ones were not; (2) "machismo stuff" concerning how "tuff" [sic] a person is; and (3) conversations focused on their own material ambitions. Although they Missed" (cursed) people who did not fit their description of a "street-wise, superfly guy," they did not take kindly to reciprocal verbal banter that they could not counter. This inability tarnished their street-smart, public image so essential to their sense of status. Mirza and Karim saw those in everyday legal employment as "suckers" and instead respected "gangstas, thugs and smugglers."[22] Since they perceived society to be oppressive, particularly toward ethnic minorities, those who defied laws and conventions for their own ends were "respected."

Younger than the other heroin dealers, and heavily influenced by Afro-American rap, gangsta and hip-hop music, film and fashion, Mirza and Karim consciously constructed identities based upon a fusion of these sources and their own ethnic background (Hebdige, 1979). In the absence of an Asian "cool cat" role model (Finestone, 1957) other than Bollywood (South Asian) movie stars, they tried to

emulate in every manner possible, Afro-American urban/ghetto/ street youth culture.

(ii) Drug Markets and Dealers

"Ployaz": Being a Player — Style and Form

The perception of being a "player" meant that one was able to look after oneself. A player was a "handy lad" and "game" (i.e., one who would be "ready and willing" to fight if trouble came along). Hence, in order to be a player, one had to be able to take care of oneself, successfully "take care of business," and also fend off potential predators.

For some, "image" was also thought to be a vital component in the role of being a player. Appropriate dress and "presentation of self (Goffman, 1971) were essential elements in constructing street credibility, and as important for some as street knowledge. If one did not have the necessary street credentials, such as identification as a "hard man" who "knows the score" and was willing to employ violence, one could at least attempt to fake the image through style and dress codes.

Entrepreneuriality and Illicit Markets: "Who Says it's Easy Money? Those Who Deal or Those Who Don't?"

All involved in the businesses at an organisational level argued that the money they were making was good and was more than they would be making in lawful work. However, most, though not all, qualified the observation by saying that the notion that this was "easy money" was certainly not the case. Although street talk would often refer to: "easy money," "good money" and "a nice little earner," discussion and observation revealed these were bravado statements implying how well the speaker was doing. In fact such talk ironically covered-up the considerable work that went into running a dealing enterprise:

> You know so'mat, everyone [other than heroin dealers] thinks it's easy money but it isn't. I'm running around sweating, honestly, watching out for the junkies and pigs. Sometimes I'm so fucking paranoid that my minds working overtime. Too much going on in mi head, hard to control, that's paranoia for ya. Or is it cautiousness? I can't tell the difference anymore. The only time I'm relaxing is when I've clocked off and I've got nowt on mi. Even when I go to bed, sometimes I can't fucking sleep.

> People think it's easy money, saying so an so's making good money, but you know so'mat, it ain't like that. I'd like to see them doin it, see how much balls they've got, then tell us it's easy money. It might be quick money, but I wouldn't say it's easy, I can tell you that. Well for me anyway [Karim].

Most of the organisers and distributors concerned suffered from episodes of paranoia. Given the illegal nature of the trade and that many of their clients were — sooner or later — likely to encounter the police, the majority suspected that some of their clients were "grasses" (informers; Dorn et al., 1992; Greer and South, 1998). Consequently they would often err on the side of caution when dealing with some individuals. However, care was taken not to identify someone as a "grass" unless one could prove the accusation. Suspicion was often provoked by an arrest followed by a surprisingly speedy release on police bail or the dropping or reduction of the severity of the charge. Most of the organisers felt they had a good idea which heroin addicts were "grassers" and those whom they thought were "all right" and "safe." Those who were seen to be "shady" were kept at arm's length. Paranoia is part and parcel of the drugs trade.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Fragmenting Drug Markets

The outcome of the events described above was the fragmentation of the local market. Significantly, this was not in the manner described by Dorn et al. (1992), which can render market operatives elusive, security conscious and difficult targets for police intelligence gathering. Rather, in this case, fragmentation meant the breakdown of relationships and trust, resulting in interpersonal conflict that greatly enhanced vulnerability to enforcement attention. The already recognized implication for law-enforcement, is that market disruptions may be achieved by use of undercover agents and informers, but degrees of effectiveness are dependent upon the vulnerabilities of the dealer organisations. To identify and possibly exacerbate such vulnerabilities, strategies may involve generating intelligence and distributing disinformation with the aim of stimulating new or emerging mistrust and erosion of mutual support within networks. The significant point here is that, if the nature and scope of a market is largely an "unknown," then neither enforcement — nor aid services for drug users — will have much chance of successful intervention. Of course, as the eventual success of police operations showed, there

is another "hidden story" here, one which given the nature of our study, we have not been privy to. This is the history of police intelligence gathering, targeting and eventual action against the crews. Even so, the chronology of events suggests that prior to "fall-out" in the networks, police enforcement intervention was difficult to operationalize.

Social Capital and Institutional Racism

Recent work in the sociological and political science literatures has drawn attention to the notion of "social capital" as a source of community resources and strength:

> The premise is that the social networks generated by...patterns of sociability constitute an important form of "social capital" in the sense that they increase the trust that individuals feel towards others and enhance their capacity to join together in collective action to resolve common problems or to ensure that governments address such problems....Social capital is said to facilitate effective participation in politics, the implementation of many kinds of public policy, and generalized support for the political system [Hall, 1999:418].

However, in deprived communities facing various forms of social exclusion and institutional racism (Macpherson, 1999; Younge, 1999) such social capital is hard to identify, and lack of confidence in the political and policing processes is palpable. Resources and initiatives provided by families, the community, and by statutory or non-statutory services, face particularly difficult challenges where drug dealing and misuse, generational tensions, and distrust of police and the political establishment, are combined. Clearly, there are major questions of social policy and social justice that might be raised here but space precludes such discussion. For now, it seems clear from the case study presented that in an area where distrust of the police seems so strong, at least among young people, strategies aimed at policing drug — or other illicit — markets will meet with little assistance from the community. Since such strategies are usually information-dependent, police operations will be seriously hampered. In this study, police success was only made possible by the supply of information, which followed internal dispute and distrust in the dealing networks.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests there has been a "hidden history" of heroin use and dealing in England. Members of the community studied here have kinship and social links with other young men in other parts of the country, (e.g., a Thames Valley city and parts of West London). Field visits by the fieldworker for this and other projects (Akhtar et al., 1997), confirmed parallel, modest-to-heavy heroin user and dealer careers among South Asian young men in these areas. Yet the "official" history has been unable to record and reflect such developments. Perhaps problems arose because of difficulties of access, because of lack of funding (a problem this project has faced), or because of "political correctness" and sensitivity about research that associates minorities with criminal activities and social problems (Ruggiero and South, 1995; 1997).

In the past, data from U.K. survey-based research has consistently suggested that self-reported drug use among Asians of Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani descent is low. However, more recent data derived from the 1994 British Crime Survey, show interesting variations regarding the results for young Asians. As Pearson and Patel (1998:203-4) note:

> Although their reported levels remain lower than average on some measures, the gap appears to be closing between them and other groups. Moreover, where self-reported heroin use is concerned, the rate for Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents is four times higher than that for whites (Ramsay and Percy, 1996:57-60). This finding is so much out of line with the consistent trends identified by earlier research that it must be treated with caution. If further exploration should confirm that heroin use is much more prevalent among young Asians, however, this would suggest that there might be substantial numbers of Asian opiate users unknown to service agencies.

Quite so! This study cannot quantify a hidden population of Asian heroin and/or other drug users. However, it most certainly provides some qualitative evidence about the erroneous assumptions concerning the limited experience, use and dealing of heroin within Asian communities and that there is a "hidden history" of heroin use and dealing in the U.K., which is yet to be fully documented.

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NOTES

1. This paper reports early work arising from the project. Further fieldwork is planned and analysis of other material is ongoing.

2. The terms Asian(s) and Asian youth refer to British residents whose ancestry lies in the Indian sub-continent, (especially Pakistani Muslims from the state of Punjab and province of Mirpur), including those, as well as their descendants, who came from the Indian sub-continent directly or via other countries. We are aware of controversy regarding the broad use of the term "Asian" to categorise people. Benzeval et al., (1995) con-

tend that the inevitable tendency of ethnic taxonomies to aggregate heterogeneous groups of people into single categories obscures significant variation. See Benzeval et al., (1995).

3. Source: *1991 Census - Local Base Statistics,* London, UK: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

4. For definitions of "racialisation" and "criminalising" see: Miles, 1989; see also Webster, 1996. More recently, the Macpherson Report (1999) has drawn attention to the institutional nature of racism within the British police service, an analysis quickly extended by many commentators to other key institutions of society (Younge, 1999).

5. For an understanding of the social constructions and defining of the Orient, hence "otherness," see Said (1991).

6. We emphasise that the researcher was as close to "the action" and operation as one could get without actually being actively involved in the enterprise. However, the researcher established a firm line to avoid participation. This does mean that, while we have a great deal of background information, some more sensitive details were not revealed.

7. Pearson and Patel [1998] discuss the issue of "the missing minorities" in drug-related research in the U.K.

8. The anonymous reviewer of this article observed that in a study of heroin dealing in Bradford, the importers from the Asian community usually dealt the drug away from their own community. The heroin, however, was then sold back into the Asian community by white dealers from outside.

9. Other illicit means employed to support heroin use included: car crimes (theft of car stereo equipment and/or the car itself for the purpose of selling spare parts or "ringing"); house burglaries; shoplifting; and the occasional "armed blag* (armed robbery).

10. The prescribing of methadone and the operation of a needle-exchange scheme must have generated some statistics for the Health Authority and other agencies. What seems strange is that no specific research or public health attention seems to have followed submission of data indicating intravenous drug injection in a predominantly Asian area. One explanation seems to be that, given suspicion of white establishment systems of authority and surveillance, only a relative few chronic Asian users employed the syringe exchange (in any case an anonymized system). In-

stead, most users apparently obtained their works from other users, including white users.

11. Although the mount was described as "the" symbolic meeting location for Asian street youth, this had not always been the case. Previously, a local community centre served this purpose. However since its closure by a local authority as a cost-cutting measure, little was left by way of locally accessible recreational facilities for Asian youth or a place to sit, relax and pass time conversing with friends and acquaintances.

12 "Bread-head" is a street term in common use in Manchester, Liverpool and elsewhere. It describes preoccupation with the sale of heroin for profit rather than to sustain personal consumption ("bread" denotes money, and "head" refers to person.)

13. From: "Pusherman." This is a reference to a song from the film *Superfly* (Curtis Mayfield, Curtom Records 1972).

14. Hakim was one of the main subjects in the study and a key "broker" for the research.

15. In this environment, heroin was mainly used by "chasing," although some subsequently turned to intravenous use. The local culture did not embrace smoking heroin in a spliff (cigarette mixing tobacco and drug) as is reportedly common in the Asian drug scene in parts of west London. This process of heroin administration is conducted by placing a quantity of heroin on a piece of foil. The heroin is then cooked by placing a flame directly beneath the heroin powder in order to heat it until it turns into a liquid, care being taken not to burn it. With the aid of a pipe instrument (usually another piece of foil rolled into a cylindrical tube) the heroin liquid is chased from one end of the foil to the other, aided by running a flame underneath the foil in order to help chase the heroin. The fumes resulting from the burning of heroin are then inhaled. The inhalation of fumes deep into the lungs would get one high. Often a "puff of a cigarette would accompany the inhalation of heroin fumes. This would be undertaken directly after, and between every inhalation of lines, in order to ensure the precious heroin fumes went into the lungs. Another name for this mode of ingestion is "tooting."

16. Most of these users were either on unemployment benefit, had low-paid, menial jobs in textile and clothing factories or were minicab drivers. Hakim held jobs as a minicab driver and textile worker in between periods of unemployment after dropping out of college.

17. The dealers did not use any particular term for their business operation. Crew is used here as a term familiar on the streets at the time and is still used. It also conveys the image of individual friends coming together to "take care of business" (Johnson et al., 1985).

18. From the moment Hakim engaged in the heroin-dealing culture, the money earned afforded him a lifestyle he craved and an ability to entertain. Cocaine and ecstasy were occasionally used as celebratory drugs by Hakim and associates. They always ate at restaurants and Hakim paid for those around him. This ability to entertain attracted free riders. Throughout the course of his dealing career, those who knew Hakim (and even those who didn't) endeavoured to socialise with him.

19. Of course, "units" had already been skimmed to create a profit, so customers were being given "short-weight" twice over. In the mid-1990s, a £15 unit should have been .25g but was skimmed to ,2g; a £25 unit should have been .5g but was skimmed to between .4 and .45g; a £50 unit should have been lg but was skimmed to .8g. These prices and weights obviously fluctuated but they roughly correspond to Hough's (1996:12) assessment of street pricing at this time: "Dependent heroin use generally ranges from a third of a gram to a gram a day. Street prices of £80 per gram are often quoted, although anecdotal evidence suggests a sharp fall in price in the north-west of England at least, with current prices [in 1995-96] of £10 a bag (putatively a quarter of a gram). Thus a dependent user might have to lay hands upon a minimum of £70 per week, rising to £300 or more for heavy users paying top prices."

20. At this point the sales preparation took place in Hakim's attic. Occasionally Safraz, Anwar and Razaq would also be present.

21. Such streetlore and subjective knowledge were shaped by a long accumulation of experiences of racist victimization, inadequate police protection, and perceptions of the police as more sympathetic to racists than minorities. The confrontation of National Front racists by the Asian residents of Southall on 23rd April 1979 was an early expression of resistance to these experiences. More recently, the outcome of the Inquiry into the Death of Stephen Lawrence (a young black man murdered by a gang of white youths) has concluded that racism is institutionalised in parts of the police and other public services in Britain (Macpherson, 1999).

22. Taken from the song "White Lines" by Grandmaster Flash, Melle Mel and the Furious Five, 1984.