**Afterword: Manufacturing gambling**

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Gambling, gambling research, problem gambling, responsible gambling, gambling regulation

**INTRODUCTION**

In 1996 I was due to go to Albania to study shifting landscapes and economic insecurity but the unrest precipitated by the collapse of local Ponzi schemes meant that I was not allowed to travel. Frustrated, I took a job with a firm of security guards. ‘White Knights’ operated a simple racket, taking a little, but not too much, from companies in and around Cambridge who employed them to protect them from greedier thieves according to the maxim of ‘better the devil you know…’. Among the ex-cons and retired policemen who made up our ranks were two committed horserace bettors who spent their night shifts asleep and their days in a betting shop in Cherry Hinton. I was invited to join them to place a bet on a ‘sure thing’ after helping one of them with his daughter’s pony (named Santa because he was bought with the proceeds of Christmas trees knocked off from one of our ‘clients’, a garden centre in Waterbeach). I had stumbled into fieldwork on economic uncertainty after all.

During lulls in the action I read descriptions of gambling including card playing in Melanesia (Zimmer 1987), betting in the smoky bars of New England (Zola 1964) and of course, betting on cock fights in Bali (Geertz 1972). They fitted beautifully with my experiences. Bettors used exterior events to project themselves through time and space, to make connections between themselves and others, to form and sever relations. Betting expressed hierarchies, but also made change possible, and risk productive. It was about subjection, but also agency and creativity. It was anarchic but also intensely social and subject to extensive rules and sanctions. At the time, a disciplinary division of labour existed in gambling research, between anthropologists working in small scale societies (likely conclusion – that gambling is a morally neutral mechanism limiting accumulation or an inauthentic capitalist penetration) and sociologists and psychologists working in Euro-America (likely conclusion – gambling is irrational and exploitative of the mentally defective). The two views of gambling were kept separate by disciplinary and regional divisions and funding mechanisms (but see McMillen 1988). At the time, I hoped to make a small ethnographic contribution to the field. However, twenty years later, it is no longer credible to limit oneself to the analytical and conceptual challenge of producing more adequate descriptions of gambling.

Ethnographic studies of gambling like those contained in this collection undermine the monopoly that the global gambling industry currently enjoys on ways of making gambling and gamblers knowable. The global industry includes executives, researchers and treatment providers. Its apparatus includes research centres, charities set up to collect and distribute contributions from the industry towards research and treatment, journals and conferences. The mechanisms through which it polices the boundaries of gambling as it is made knowable through these apparatus include peer review, calls for applications for funding, committee membership, criticism and threats of legal sanctions made towards those who write against the grain. In his introduction Pickles suggests that ‘Powerful vested interests have been instrumental in the privatisation of acts and decisions around gambling onto punters who have been medicalised and simultaneously “empowered” to choose gambling as a form of “leisure”’ (NOTE TO TIGGER, THIS BRACKETS NEEDS TO CONTAIN THE CORRECT PAGE NUMBER FROM PICKLES’ INTRODUCTION HERE WHEN THAT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE). In this afterword I focus on this process, using quotes from members of the industry to break down precisely how mainstream research turns gambling and gamblers into knowable subjects by counting and categorising individuals and traits (‘science’), and dismissing qualitative alternatives as irrelevant (‘anecdotes’).[[1]](#endnote-1) I begin by describing aspects of the transformation that has taken place in the gambling industry in the past thirty years, the background against which this manufacture has taken place.

**EXPANSION**

In 1996 the gambling world was divided into illegal markets and regulated industries epitomised by the mature markets of the UK and Las Vegas. Both jurisdictions had ‘bricks and mortar’ sites – casinos in Las Vegas, betting shops, casinos, racecourses, arcades and bingo halls in the UK. These industries were legal but retained the shady associations of their recent pasts. Betting shops in the UK were legalised in 1961, after the police found it impossible to enforce laws prohibiting betting off course in cash among the British working class. During the 1960s casinos were illegal but flourishing in London. The government spent the decade mired in legal battles with operators exploiting loop holes in antiquated laws. Randy Steed, who worked as a croupier during this period has described how private gaming clubs in London were managed and owned by a cosmopolitan group of entrepreneurs. The Mint, for example, was run by ‘a motley crew of villains and minor professional wrestlers; mostly strongarm men of Polish extraction who worked for the notorious London slum landlord, Peter Rachman’, the Lions Corner House Casino in Piccadilly was owned by ‘Fritz Demetrious of Bayswater’s Olympic Casino’ and the Villa on Bayswater Road by ‘a demonically tempered Persian named Kouras’ (Steed 2008). In 1967 eight Americans with interests in London casinos, including George Raft and Dino Cellini of the Colony Club, were banned from Britain by the Home Secretary (Gladstone Smith 1968). Only the Mint, Victoria Sporting Club, and Clermont Club survived the 1968 Gaming Act. In Las Vegas during the 1960s, mob influence declined as corporate ownership grew, but residual interests remained into the 1970s and 80s (Schwartz 2003). Discussions among politicians and law makers in the UK and the US from this era show that gambling remained something of a pariah industry, to be tolerated and accommodated to a limited extent and under strict conditions, but certainly not to be encouraged. My fieldwork coincided with global economic downturns, massive changes in technology, and an associated period of regulation and normalisation in gambling. Often presented as inevitable, the categorisation of gambling as leisure is an ongoing project.

Gambling has had an offshore component since bets were taken by post in Scotland from England in the nineteenth century (Brown 1999), but telephone betting enabled a step change in tax avoidance, which accelerated exponentially once online gambling became viable in the second half of the 1990s. Remote gambling in the Pacific Islands began in 1989 when Omar Sharif fronted Vanuatu’s Great World Lottery. It wasn’t a great success, but the principle that offshore gambling would be able to undercut ‘bricks and mortar’ operations was sound. Casinos of the South Pacific launched real money online wagering on 16 May 1997 (van Fossen 2003:4). Increased mobility, whether through consumption of goods and products via the internet or through cheap international travel, transformed the gambling industries. Prohibiting gambling for religious or ethical reasons became increasingly difficult in practice. In economic terms, conservative governments who sought to restrict gambling lost out to illegal organisations operating in their jurisdictions. They were also subject to ‘bleeding’: revenues from their citizens flowing out of the state to neighbours with more permissive policies, whether through casino tourism, or online. This created a domino effect in the United States, mainland Europe and Australasia. As individual states permitted more, and more forms of gambling, so their neighbours were forced to do the same, effecting a movement from prohibition to regulation, and creating a revenue stream (part of a wider movement from direct to indirect taxation, or ‘consumption based licensing regimes’), for operators and governments that has proved difficult to foreswear (Hancock and O’Neil 2011).

When I began fieldwork in 1996 I was aware of the role of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC), and the immense market for betting in Asia relative to the shrinking volumes in Britain. With a monopoly on legal gambling, the HKJC was the largest single contributor of tax revenue to the state. It was also involved in providing many of the social functions that were more regularly performed by the state. I thought of Hong Kong as an exceptional casino state, brought about by the coincidence of a stringent colonial racing infrastructure, and a huge local appetite for gambling. The other famous casino state was neighbouring Macau, where Stanley Ho held the monopoly on casino licenses until 2001 and controlled the lucrative market of visitors from the Chinese mainland.[[2]](#endnote-2) Macau eclipsed Las Vegas as the most lucrative market in the world in 2004, and recorded $45 billion in gross gaming revenue in 2013 (Asia Gambling Brief 2014).[[3]](#endnote-3) These incredible figures have stimulated offshore locations to pass gambling legislation including Singapore, where two integrated resorts[[4]](#endnote-4) (IR) produced $6 billion in gaming revenue in 2013 making it the third largest market in the world (Stutz 2014). Dozens of additional developments are planned or underway, including the Ho Tram Strip and Dragon Hill in Vietnam, the Solaire Resort and casino in the Philippines, a casino in Manila, a gaming area in Cambodia to include between 10 and 12 casinos and a massive theme park, a casino on the Taiwanese island of Matsu, and even an underwater casino on the island of Yap, 800 miles from Manila. On Saipan two operators have paid a fee of $1million each to apply for the exclusive casino operating licence which would compel them to invest $2 billion in an IR.[[5]](#endnote-5) The casino on Vanuatu is currently the subject of a bid from Amax International Holdings, a Macau junket investor which has also expressed an interest in running a casino in Northern Cyprus (GGRAsia Newsdesk 2014).[[6]](#endnote-6) The booming market in Asia is predicated on the growth of China, which has stuttered recently, leading to a downturn in gaming shares (Detar 2014). Meanwhile among the contracting economies of Europe (and Japan), and particularly since the financial crisis of 2008, gambling has been heralded as a solution to economic stagnation.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Expansion takes various forms. So-called ‘grey markets’, including those located on the Asian periphery, are explored by private companies able to adapt to local practices and willing to engage in cross border promotion. Operators on the western border of Cambodia target Thai customers, for example, while sports books in Laos attract customers from Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. One bookmaker told a conference in Macau in 2014 that to get into this market you must be ‘very patient’:

You’ve got to be willing to press as much flesh as you possibly can, which means under the table payments, and you’ve got to be thick skinned…Under the table payments that’s just part of doing business in that region and I don’t see that changing even if it becomes regulated.

In grey markets, each jurisdiction requires a different approach. In Thailand for example, according to the same bookmaker, ‘It is, has been and will be for some time illegal to conduct oneself in any kind of gambling space … and the reason is simple. The police and the government are making too much money running the underground casinos. That’s why we focused on building a brand along the western border of Cambodia. Do I see them legalising gambling in Thailand anytime in the near future? No.’ Regulated markets, such as Singapore or Japan, attract publically listed companies. With share prices to consider, and licenses in other jurisdictions at stake, their approaches are less fluid. As the representative of a corporation operating in Asia explained at a conference in Macau in 2014, ‘Every time we enter a new market our preferred model is to look for licenses from regulators. We’ve got a longer term view, we believe regulation is going to happen, it’s just a question of whether it’s going to be two years, three years, five years.’

The process of creating regulation in new jurisdictions is iterative and derivative, as this Asian regulator explains: ‘Basically, we stole the stuff that Nevada came up with, added some stuff from the UK, and a sprinkling of Australia and there you have it. The perfect recipe!’ Singapore’s Casinos Control Act of 2006 draws explicitly from legislation in New South Wales in Australia and Nevada and New Jersey in the United States. Operators in Asia explained how lobbyists for gambling interests were able to use this model to encourage other jurisdictions to follow suit, saying: ‘Now would be a good time to copy and paste some of the Singaporean legislation.’ The cornerstone of the model that Singapore has reproduced is the promotion of responsible gambling. As I was told by a North American casino executive at a conference in Tokyo in 2014:

Regulation in every jurisdiction has the same essential components. Companies have to have procedures for managing money laundering which most of the big ones have, and they need a program of social responsibility. That’s where you researchers come in. That’s your job! That’s what we pay you to do. Come up with things that the regulator will like and make us look good.

**PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING**

The gambling industry is impenetrable. It reproduces seamlessly, and the problem gambling stuff is a big part of that… Have you read Polanyi? If you don’t get how the economy reproduces itself you have no idea of how to make an intervention. (Senior executive, online gambling industry, UK, 2012)

‘Problem gambling’ and ‘responsible gambling’ are stable tropes which are reproduced by governments, operators, regulators, researchers and treatment providers in legislation, journal articles, books, reports, conference papers and corporate social responsibility policies. They set the terms of entry into regulated markets. Discussions about gambling in new jurisdictions fall inexorably into these well-trodden paths. Politicians are provided with answers (‘responsible gambling measures’) which determine the kinds of questions which may sensibly be asked. These solutions are (literally in some cases) cut and pasted by new regulators. Who are problem gamblers? And what problems do responsible gambling policies solve? In the introduction, Pickles correctly suggests that problem gambling is constructed around the twin pillars of sovereign individualism and ‘informed choice’. Here are two exemplary descriptions by members of the gambling industry:

the problem gambler (that) is obsessive, has a psychological problem and will bet on all forms of gambling. You are, therefore, dealing with the nature of the individual. They will often have drug problems, they will often have alcohol problems, they are predominantly smokers, and the person has a problem, because gambling in itself is not intrinsically addictive. (Neil Goulden, oral evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2011)

Problem gamblers are problem people. They are drug addicts, criminals, they are unable to control their impulses, and this is why it is impossible and pointless trying to prevent them from harming themselves. (Independent consultant engaged by European and Asian facing operators)

The corollary of conceiving of problem gamblers as defective individuals is the obligation to promote ‘responsible gambling’. In the UK, the Association of British Bookmakers is at the forefront of these programs, announcing recently that, ‘we intend to create a step change in responsible gambling thinking based around informed choice by adult consumers.’ (ABB 2013). Unibet, which describes itself as a ‘leader in the European Moneytainment ® industry’, describes responsibility as ‘part of their corporate DNA’:

For the vast majority of people, gambling – online and offline – is a fun and entertaining hobby or social activity. The questions to answer are: what do 98 per cent of gamblers get out of their gaming? What do they do right, that the minority does wrong? What good does it do them? What are the moral benefits for society as a whole? …When consumer protection at large is based upon an informed choice and self-responsibility, why should European consumers be denied and restricted in their choice to purchase services across borders?

The same key features are found in the United States, where ‘Promoting responsible gaming is part of the heritage and culture of Caesars’ (Caesars 2014). These traditions are introduced into new jurisdictions by envoys including operators and researchers. At a conference in Japan, for example, where the Diet (the Japanese legislature) is considering legalising casinos to coincide with the hosting of the 2020 Olympics, Alan Feldman, Chairman of the National Center for Responsible Gaming (NCRG)[[8]](#endnote-8), and senior vice president of public affairs for MGM Resorts International was asked ‘what is problem gaming and responsible gaming?’ ‘And what kind of measure is usually used in overseas operations and how effective it is?’ Feldman responded:

we need to acknowledge the fact that there are people who are addicted to gambling, but their addiction is a brain issue, a brain disorder that is going to exist whether or not there is legalised gambling in the environment.

He went on to describe how the notion of responsible gambling is ‘very real, it’s very identifiable, it’s very consistent country to country in various parts of the world and it is something that is readily applicable here in Japan’. Also speaking was Jan Jones Blackhurst, twice mayor of Las Vegas and Executive Vice President, Communications & Government Relations, Caesars Entertainment Corporation. Jones was asked whether IRs were good or bad for society. She responded:

taking into consideration that you have responsible gaming policy and regulatory practices in place and you have centres such as the National Centre for Responsible Gaming, (but) if you (also) look at jurisdictions where large scale integrated resorts or regional resorts as Caesar’s Entertainment operates, in cities across America, the science will show you that you do generally not find any increase in problem gambling and in many cases you find significant increases in quality of life.

The promotion of responsible gambling is the unchallenged response to problems constructed as expressions of individual frailty and a failure to consume appropriately.

**KNOWING GAMBLING**

I have been interested in why the field is dominated by problem gambling and it certainly has to do with how the field is constructed and where researchers are getting their money. (Researcher, Canada, 2013)

In 2004 McGowan asked ‘how do we know what we know?’ about gambling. She described the trend in gambling research between 1980 and 2000 towards ‘an increasingly narrow range of topics, focused on pathology, and curiously disengaged from advances in contemporary social theory’ (2004). Based on a literature review, McGowan commented on the proliferation of studies counting pathological gamblers and the relative absence of nuanced sociological studies. Interviews with 109 stakeholders conducted between 2011 and 2013 confirmed that this narrowing and refining of the field continues (Cassidy, Loussouarn, Pisac 2014). In the face of shrinking budgets in higher education, and the increased value placed on ‘impact’ by assessments in higher education, many researchers choose, or are obliged to accept, money from the industry whether directly, or indirectly, through charities like the Responsible Gambling Trust in the UK and the NCRG in the US.[[9]](#endnote-9) Like the tobacco industry during the 1950s and 60s, the industry extends their influence through trusted researchers who are thus freed from other obligations and able to publish and sit on boards, as one UK researcher explained:

The industry are very good, they can offer a very nice little perk. I was the recipient of quite a lot of corporate hospitality, very nice, thank you very much! They can do that so they are very good at getting people on their side by legitimate acceptable ways in this country or not. I mean I don’t know if they cross the line, they probably do at times, like everybody else does.

Those who fail to conform to the dominant paradigm are unlikely to receive funding, and their work often attracts strident criticism of a kind that is not usually experienced within academia, as another researcher described:

We ran some seminars and workshops to disseminate our findings and people came to those and attacked us – people from the industry primarily…They tried to intimidate us indirectly in terms of what we published. And to discredit us in the eyes of other people. No one tried to shape directly what we wrote, but I didn’t try to take the work forward after that.

Critical alternatives to industry funded research have emerged from psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists in Australia (Hancock 2011: Woolley and Livingstone 2009; Young 2013), New Zealand (Adams 2008), Canada (Cosgrave and Klassen 2009), North America (Schüll 2012) and the UK (Orford 2011). However, anthropology is only very rarely brought into conversation with Euro-American studies of problem gambling. Scholars tend to attend different conferences and to publish in different journals. Historians, sociologists and anthropologists described being lumped together at gambling themed conferences. One psychologist described such a panel at a conference in Las Vegas in 2013 as ‘the exotic, the vain, the eccentric’ and argued that it should not have been included in the program as it was ‘Of absolutely no practical use.’ Social scientists could find very few incentives to contribute to the gambling field which they describe as unwelcoming and lacking academic prestige (Cassidy, Loussouarn and Pisac 2014:53). When they are brought together these differences are often reinforced. A psychologist’s response to a paper by a geographer on card playing in south eastern Europe, for example, was typical, ‘So what?’ he asked the audience. ‘How is this going to help us cure problem gamblers?’ Eventually, these distinctions do not require active management as each group learns to maintain their distance – social scientists making connections with colleagues working on critical finance, risk, and money, psychologists focusing on problem gambling and harm minimisation.

Ethnographic descriptions that are embedded in particular social environments create resistance to the dominant tropes – of responsible gambling and problem gambling, for example - that underwrite gambling expansion. The essays in this edition show that the dominant frameworks for understanding gambling are contingent. Most importantly, gambling is presented as one way of building and severing relations rather than pertaining to individuals who are thereby diagnosed as ‘normal’, or ‘pathological’. When played according to village rules, for example, Gende card gambling is an exchange system which keeps wealth flowing (‘good work’). ‘Town rules’, on the other hand, accentuate difference (‘the devil’s work’) (Zimmer, this volume). Trobriand card gambling, which implicates the personal (including magical) capacities of players illuminates the proto-rational explanations of gambling proffered by economics. Unlike ‘luck’ conceived of as chance in action, *laki* is not an impersonal force (Mosko, this volume). Pickles work in Goroka (this volume) draws our attention to the speed of the game. What kinds of relationships are formed by fast and slow games? Can the speed at which a game is played help us to understand social change and specifically the relationship between continuity and innovation? Cox’s essay provides suggestive ethnographic ground on which to explore a kind of possessive individualism in PNG, and how, under these conditions, gambling and investment are granted contrasting moral value (this volume).

Conflicts about Gende gambling reflect the wider challenge of maintaining an egalitarian ethos in the face of increasing inequality (Zimmer, this volume). The use of ‘bad money’ by men in Fiji to bet on horseracing can be seen as an act of resistance to the demands of village life, and an engagement with the elusive ‘modern’ (Presterudstuen, this volume). Tensions such as these are also pertinent in Euro-America, but are marginalised by the current emphasis on problems associated with the individual *consumption* of gambling. Researchers, and therefore policy makers, are not encouraged to interrogate the terms of engagement between the industry, the state, and academia. With a few important exceptions (Adams 2008; Hancock and O’Neil 2010; Livingstone and Adams 2010; Orford 2009), the political economy of gambling, including the role played by research, is currently moot. The role of anthropology in this case is to provide a critical perspective on ‘traditions in the making’ (Hirsch 2014) including regulation, as they travel and change and are adopted and adapted in various places. The value of comparison, and of showing how concepts travel, is that it enables us to explore the epistemological frameworks from which they derive their power. Tsing described this function recently: ‘The point of … comparison is thus to show the limits – and possibilities – of forms of knowledge making, even as it sheds light on the situations and objects forced awkwardly into comparison.’ (2014:223). Gambling needs more of this awkwardness.

1. **NOTES**

 This afterword is based on fieldwork conducted as part of a project funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007-2013) / ERC Grant Agreement n. 263443. Fieldwork included interviews with 109 stakeholders in Europe, Australasia, Asia and North America, including industry executives, policy makers, researchers, treatment providers and regulators undertaken between 2011 and 2013, by a team of anthropologists from Goldsmiths (Cassidy, Loussouarn, Pisac 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Casino gambling remains illegal in China, although various other forms are available through the two state lottery organisations. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. According to industry insiders in Macau, actual revenue could be up to twice that amount. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. ‘Integrated resorts’ are ‘casino based vacation resorts’ which may include convention centres. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The application fees have been used to restore depleted pension funds (IslandsBuiness 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. In 2013 casinos paid $13 billion in commissions to the junket operators who bring VIP players to Macau. Unlike the mass market of Las Vegas, VIP players are responsible for two thirds of revenue in Macau. The diversification by junket operators into casino ownership is related to the drive by casinos to attract and manage VIPs directly (Chan 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Governments previously opposed to gambling including Greece and Cyprus have sold off state monopolies and sought to regulate and tax gambling. France, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands have regulated online markets. Eurovegas burst into life in Spain in 2012, backed by Sheldon Adelson’s Las Vegas Sands. Comprising 12 hotels, six casinos, three golf courses, a shopping mall, convention centre, amphitheatre and nature reserve, the project foundered on the resistance of the Spanish government to exempt the properties from the national smoking ban. Portugal will regulate online gambling in 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The NCRG is a charity founded in 1996 and supported by voluntary contributions from operators. Its mission is, ‘to help individuals and families affected by gambling disorders by supporting the finest peer-reviewed, scientific research into pathological and youth gambling; encouraging the application of new research findings to improve prevention, diagnostic, intervention and treatment strategies; and advancing public education about gambling disorders and responsible gaming.’ (http://www.ncrg.org/about-ncrg) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The Responsible Gambling Trust describes itself as ‘an independent national charity funded by donations from the gambling industry’ which ‘funds education, prevention and treatment services and commissions research to broaden public understanding of gambling-related harm.’ (<http://www.responsiblegamblingtrust.org.uk/>)

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ZOLA, I. 1964. Observations on Gambling in a Lower-Class Setting. In H. Becker (ed.) *The Other Side*. New York: The Free Press. 247-60. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)