

## book review

### *Global Gambling: Cultural Perspectives on Gambling Organizations*

Edited by Sytze Kingma. (2010). New York: Taylor & Francis. Routledge Advances in Criminology, Vol. 8. Xi, 248 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-99677-8; U.S. \$125 (hardcover edition).

Reviewed by: Gerda Reith, Professor of Social Science, University of Glasgow, U.K.

---

This broad-ranging and ambitious volume covers new ground in the study of gambling organisations and, it is hoped, will go some way toward opening up the subject to a wider and more theoretically informed range of debates.

The individually authored chapters are characterised by a shift in focus away from partial accounts of gambling as pathology, and even gambling as consumption, toward a broader and more complex analysis of structure and organisation across a variety of international contexts. The volume thereby moves away from a focus on the micro-level analysis of the problem gambler, which defines much existing gambling research, toward a macro-level analysis of the social, cultural, political, and economic organisational arrangements that make gambling—and problem gamblers—possible in the first place.

In a scene-setting introduction, Kingma situates gambling in the postmodern tradition of Baudrillard and Ritzer, describing it as “the ultimate form of contemporary consumer culture” (p. 4) based on spectacle, rationalisation, and enchantment. This wide-ranging essay locates the socio-political legitimation of commercial gambling, as well as the social symbolic development of its language and norms, in recent developments in sociological theory—most notably, those dealing with postmodern consumer culture and globalisation. The “grand theory” that grounds this perspective is nevertheless rooted in actual, real-life conditions—no easy task to pull off, but one that is achieved gracefully. “Glocalisation”<sup>1</sup> and the local variation of gambling organisations and cultural forms serve as leitmotifs through the book.

The nine chapters in the collection are organised (with a nod to Goffman) into three sections: Gambling Backgrounds, Gambling Scenes, and Gambling Contexts; these divisions are considered to provide the graduated perspectives of microscope, binoculars, and radar, respectively. I am not entirely convinced the analogy works, as some of the selections seem rather arbitrary and thereby suggest groupings based on a desire for neat section breaks, rather than distinct and separate categorisations. Regardless of its structuring, the book is certainly successful in shedding light on a range of perspectives, with a focus that takes

readers from the “micro” to the “macro” issues of gambling organisations in the modern world.

Both geographically and theoretically, the range here is wide. Within the section entitled “Gambling Backgrounds,” contributions cover the role of the state, industry, civil society, and nongovernmental organizations in Finland, Australia, South Africa, and California. The section “Scenes” deals with the culture of casinos in North America, Macau, and the Netherlands, while “Contexts” has Swedish advertising, Norwegian household gambling, and the cultural economy of Australian gambling as its foci. These analyses are informed by an impressively wide range of theoretical perspectives, from symbolic interactionism to post-structuralism, by way of Goffman, Mauss, Bourdieu, Castoriadis, Lefebvre, Bakhtin, Foucault, and Sara Ahmed, amongst others.

The importance of social context is stressed throughout—both in terms of place, with a consistent focus on diverse regions and cultures, and in terms of history, with an ongoing sensitivity to the changing policy environments that influence and are influenced by gambling.

Although somewhat uneven in places, as most edited collections inevitably tend to be, the volume is stimulating and refreshing overall. Its greatest value, I think, lies in its reframing of some of the key issues around gambling and problem gambling, as it contextualises these issues within wider debates about consumerism, globalisation, and culture. In so doing, the book opens up the debate about gambling and problem gambling, highlighting their multidisciplinary relevance to a wider audience within the traditions of sociology, cultural studies, and politics.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Kingma, this concept refers to the “unbreakable unity of globalizing and localizing pressures” (p. 5).