

BOOK REVIEWS

Rebecca Cassidy, *Vicious games: capitalism and gambling*. London: Pluto Press 2020. 240 pp. ISBN: 9780745340395

In *Vicious games: capitalism and gambling*, Rebecca Cassidy debunks the myth of responsible gambling and the paradox of ‘self-responsibility’ in the gambling discourse. She delineates the relationship between the state and the gambling industry, exposing the ways in which the industry is always in need of the state’s support to thrive. Consequently, it is considered a manifestation of the omnipresent atmosphere of neoliberal economics in which the state has transitioned from being a welfare provider to becoming an advocate for free markets and privatized industries. The result is enabling the environment and maneuvering the regulations to create, advertise and sustain people’s desire to gamble. Rebecca Cassidy’s expertise on gambling is extensive and encompasses her fieldwork in different countries in the world, in addition to the UK, USA and Gibraltar. She has over twenty years of experience in conducting ethnographic and anthropological research on gambling, using different methods and approaches to gather her data. She has conducted participant observation and worked in betting shops, interviewed people who gamble, and participated in different policy and business conferences related to the industry.

In her book, Cassidy questions and explains the expansion of the commercial gambling industry in the past thirty years. She focuses on the people who produce gambling, or ‘the industry’, as they call themselves, explaining how they envisage their industry as a ‘secretive, litigious, and extremely well-funded one’, as one North American casino manager told her in 2012 (2). Her research participants are gambling industry’s stakeholders, people who gamble and staff from various sectors in the betting and gambling industry, in addition to regulators and politicians who create policies to regulate gambling. Cassidy shares her techniques on how to access the field of gambling research in the book, which is usually an unwelcoming arena for academic researchers, indicating that persistence, passion, and solid preparations did influence those involved and got them to talk to her.

The book is a solid analysis of how the gambling industry has been legitimized and regulated in the UK, describing the role of policy-makers, gambling corporations and researchers in ‘reframing gambling from a potential source of crime to a legitimate leisure activity’ (1). The

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book has eight chapters that shed light on the UK Gambling Act, while advocating the need to revise it, and it presents the history of the UK's betting shops and its bookmakers' laments.

Additionally, Cassidy traces the emergence and popularity of the slot machine and explores the use of raffles as a way of gambling for good purposes. In her ethnographic fieldwork, she gets closer to the people working in the gambling industry to unpack how they 'accommodate the apparent paradoxes in life, including being loving fathers and husbands with selling harmful products' (4). Cassidy unravels the roots of these paradoxes by explaining that people may perceive gambling as harmless fun and as an industry that creates jobs and contributes to national economies. She unpacks one of the most important arguments in the book, which is the myth of responsible gambling. She puts upfront the idea that people working in the industry invest in the mainstream belief that people are responsible only for themselves, rather than thinking that everyone and everything is connected. Cassidy constructs the argument that personal responsibility in gambling only helps the industry, not the individual. I agree with her logic and wish to invoke the work of the philosopher Brian Barry (2005), who argues that the notion of a personal responsibility for addiction, misery and meritocracy is a paradox, or a myth, that is used to push down the disadvantaged members of the society. Equality means access to the resources, opportunities and information to make informed choices, which would lead to a more just society. Pathologizing gambling and investing in the idea that the harms from gambling are solely the responsibility of the person play a critical role in maintaining the unequal status quo (Cassidy et al. 2013; Schüll 2012).

Cassidy presents the shift, a moral shift, in how commercial gambling is being used to extract money from the people, while ensuring that 'the house' is always the winner. In the UK, the responsibility for regulating the gambling industry is a 'poisoned chalice' (4), as Cassidy describes it, because regulators try to balance managing the business with the gambling corporations while at the same time responding to the public debate over problem gambling and its harms. Indeed, gambling is a contested topic: it is loaded with meanings and emotions that accompany easy wins and interferes with the morality of gaining wealth through hard work, not through play and luck.

In the final chapter, Cassidy describes her encounters with online gambling and her ethnographic fieldwork in Gibraltar. Generally, the online gambling sector emerged in the late 1990s, only to be banned by the state, thus creating a channel for an illegal online gambling

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industry offshore. The UK thus created regulations for online gambling that attracted companies to operate from the UK, making the UK a world leader in the online gambling sector and its largest regulated market. Cassidy argues that women became more involved in gambling because of the affordability of the online platforms, mainly because they are anonymous and use attractive advertising techniques that transcend the class politics and gender dynamics that are present in the UK's betting shops. Therefore, Cassidy explains, gambling regulations are interwoven with the neoliberal economics and politics of late capitalism, always finding ways to conjure up political decisions to increase national income.

Ultimately, although legalizing gambling is a source of income and a recession-proof industry, the dark side of gambling cannot be ignored in favor of its economic benefits to the state. Cassidy explains that the expansion of commercial gambling has high costs, manifested in the harms it does, negatively impacting on the lives of problem gamblers and their loved ones. It may lead to unemployment, divorce, suicide, substance abuse and addiction, and ultimately to negative impacts on national economies. Gambling is a vicious cycle that influences people and economies for the benefits of the gambling corporations. Cassidy puts it in numbers, showing that the UK has between 340,000 and 1.4 million people who are called problem gamblers. And for everyone who is considered a problem gambler, on average six other people are harmed.

Cassidy's book demonstrates the importance of revising gambling policies to include all the ways in which gambling is performed and made available. She emphasizes that individual gamblers have a responsibility to seek help and that not everyone who gambles develops an addiction. It is a matter, she insists, about striking a balance between individual and collective responsibility, encouraging conversations around gambling, and revising the UK's gambling legislation.

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Jennifer Erickson, *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*. Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press 2020. 223pp., USD26.95. ISBN 978 1 5017 5115 8.

The city of Fargo in North Dakota has long been known as an economically thriving location, boasting one of the lowest unemployment rates in the United States. However, today Fargo is much more than that: it is a place of cultural learning, interaction, conflict and understanding. With four hundred first-generation refugees making Fargo their new home every year, the city, which is one of the destinations of the nation's refugee resettlement scheme, is in a constant state of transformation. What in 1990 was a 97% white community of predominantly Scandinavian heritage by 2015 had come to consist of an 11% minority population of ethnically and racially mixed groups. Consequently, the original inhabitants now share their everyday lives, spaces and institutions with people speaking fifty different languages, and diversity has become key to every aspect of the city's life, even if not to everyone's approval.

In this engaging ethnographic narrative, Jennifer Erickson tells the story of Fargo's transformation by documenting the backstage processes of refugee resettlement from the 1980s to the present day. The book does an excellent job of exposing the lesser known aspects of newcomer integration by showing the important role support organisations play every step of the way. From the creation of living spaces through the design of preparatory courses to lobbying against cuts to the resettlement programme, these institutions are key drivers of change in the city. Moreover, by constantly zooming between the institutional and individual levels, the study also allows an insightful glimpse into the deeply personal sides of these processes by describing the support workers' dilemmas and frustrations, as well as their experience of solidarity fatigue.

Of all the refugee population, Erickson's comparative study puts Bosnians and South Sudanese in the limelight. She traces the two groups' journeys of integration from the reasons for their flight and their conditions in the home country through dreams of normality to potential issues of cultural adaptation and the long-term determination to stay. Although the focus on these two

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groups alone sometimes hinders the cross-cultural analysis of the bigger picture, the astute descriptions of both communities, facilitated by Erickson's long-term engagement with them, help evaluate the holes in relevant policies through concrete examples. By portraying individual experiences, the book demonstrates that a blanket approach to refugee resettlement is insufficient, as needs, previous experiences and skills differ greatly across the sending countries.

By embedding the study in a theoretical framework of 'assemblages' and 'the common', Erickson skilfully broadens out her scope of analysis to include more than just the key players involved in the process of creating New Americans: she emphasizes the need to consider all those who come to cohabit Fargo as a result. Through her detailed descriptions of everyday encounters between old and new residents, the book highlights the ways in which cross-cultural understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, religion and class have formed and continue to form experiences of identity, citizenship and belonging. Furthermore, it showcases how experiences of non-belonging can be reasons for non-productivity, withdrawal from social engagement and mental health issues, while affirming how instances of cultural comprehension can transform experiences of inhabiting the city together.

The book clearly calls for the inclusion of anthropologists in debates on refugee resettlement, cultural integration and the creation of inclusive public spaces. It exhibits the strengths of the discipline in eliciting the mismatches between service users' needs and the available services and identifies the areas where further engagement is necessary. Erickson does not shy away from pinpointing the practices of institutional and political economy that have characterized the United States for the past two and a half decades and that are collectively responsible for the racialization of places like Fargo. However, the closing chapter does send some hope the readers' way by suggesting feasible ways forward for the establishment of a more welcoming environment and by introducing a concrete architectural project tailored specifically to the needs of a highly diverse community.

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