



Introduction

Gambling is at the vanguard of innovative ways to mobilize money. Industry researchers look first to gambling to help them anticipate new forms of currency and new technologies. This book takes readers to a fresh gambling frontier, where the nature of wagering and the properties of currency are hotly contested on the floor each day. Not the hyper-controlled casino floors of metropolitan Macau or Las Vegas, where customers are daily served with new bells and whistles, innovations hatched in gaming labs, but on a tarp laid on the floor in Goroka, a not-so-sleepy town in the globally peripheral Highlands of Papua New Guinea (PNG). There, adaptability is everybody's business, and transaction skills are front and centre.

What unites today's gambling meccas, online betting platforms and Caribbean cruise ships with lotteries in Revolutionary France, Chicago under Prohibition and Goroka in the late 2000s is a frontier approach to space, time and rules that creates excitingly structured contexts. For all their variation and complexity, all gambling games centre on the quick transmission of wealth, disturbing ordinary assumptions about what wealth is worth.

Most of us think about £10 as in a stable relationship with £1 and £1,000. But when you gamble, you try to use your £10 as best you can to transform it into, say, £400. The workaday relationship between what you have and what you want are destabilized, decoupling money's value from hypothetical equations between labour and value, or investment and return. Gambling is the world's most accessible form of capital manipulation. The betting event itself is filled with an array of highly specific means of comprehension, like risk management, luck, fate, consumption, brinkmanship, psychic connectivity, or powers of attraction. These perceptions are played into games, and they affect the results. The forms of comprehension brought into gambling alter people's relationships to the currency they are putting into action, and because their ideas make a difference, then the nature of the money they use is likewise altered. It is reimaged.

This is a property of all gambling, but the effects are not even in all gambling contexts. With casino slot machines in the US, customers are bit-part players in an industry that actively attempts to channel players' perceptions towards gambling as escape so that losses inflicted by the 'house edge' lose

their bite (Schüll 2012). The house edge is the statistical advantage that casinos have over players and the way they make the bulk of their profits. In PNG the main games are illegal card games, invented locally and adapted constantly by anybody who cares to do so. The reimagining of money is democratized by competitors who have no intrinsic edge built into their games.

Gorokan gamblers are particularly inventive for other reasons too. For one, the town residents' parents or grandparents had once never seen cash and never heard of gambling. In Papua New Guinea, gambling was part of a repertoire of imports that included Christianity, money, wage labour, the state and a swathe of new technologies and commodities. Far from being a peculiarity of this corner of the world, in truth huge tracts of the planet just did not gamble. No cards, no dice, not even a coin flip; in some areas it is just fifty years since gambling arrived. A hundred and fifty years ago betting on contests was absent from the indigenous peoples of most of South America, almost all of Australia, most of the Pacific Islands including the vast islands comprising New Guinea and New Zealand, most Inuit and Siberian peoples and a great many peoples of southern Africa (Binde 2005). What makes Highland Papua New Guinea exceptional in this regard is that gambling was introduced in the 1950s (Pickles 2014a) – putting it within living memory. Melanesianist studies have provided unique on the ground descriptions of the experience of adopting gambling. So why didn't these people gamble?

We know that they were not isolated: there have been huge polities spanning the Amazon (Heckenberger 2005) and trade networks that bridged the Pacific well before Captain Cook (Weisler and Kirch 1996). How easy it would have been to pick up a pair of dice or make them when you got home. Neither were these people just isolated from Europeans and North Americans. In fact, contact with the 'West' and the presence of gambling shows no correlation (Pryor 1977). It does not seem to have anything to do with risk either; many of the peoples who did not gamble at all had a far riskier time of things than peoples who do (ibid).

If it was not isolation and it was not lack of risk, or lack of imagination, why have many peoples gambled so much while many others who did not at all have now taken it up so quickly? The simple answer given either implicitly or explicitly, and with more or less subtlety, is that gambling societies have money and marked stratification with a lot of economic inequality and non-gambling societies did not, but when they do, they start gambling.¹ But once we scratch the surface of what is meant by 'money' and 'economic inequality' in somewhere like Goroka, we find we are dealing in tangibles and concepts that imply both a measure of continuity and an enormous rupture. In a location that was once stateless but in which the state, money and gambling all appeared within the same decade, we must reckon with a turbulent transformation in the very ideas that legitimated wealth as wealth. The

simple answer that money and inequality beget gambling leads to deeper questions about the way valuables are conceived during times of unfathomable schism.

Inspired by such questions, in 2014 I edited a special issue of *Oceania* on gambling, which built upon a special issue of the same journal from 1987. The more recent special issue can be read as exploring how gambling might occupy a privileged position in contemporary debates over social change in Melanesia.² In particular, our concern with gambling as ‘analytic’ moved attention from the redistributive effects of gambling as people came to terms with money and economic inequality to the implications of the actual rules, microdynamics and practices at the heart of gambling itself and their relationship to thinking about, moralizing and managing relationships in Melanesia.

In the 2014 issue, Mosko reconceptualized villagers’ engagements with Western commodities through the ritual-magical ideas that have extended to include them, in an island village context with a highly localized cosmological frame. On Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands, a commoner class had become the central players in the island’s engagement with capitalism; this was reflected in commoners’ proficiency at gambling, which added to their repertoires in an already richly textured Trobriand magico-ritual geography. Other articles took the urban-rural relation as their starting point to bring novel scales into view. Zimmer-Tamakoshi (the editor of the 1987 special issue) presented a history of the transformation of ‘exchange’ relationships and their negotiation through gambling within a Papua New Guinea mainland village and its urban outmigrants, who suffered dramatic reversals in their respective economic circumstances (2014). In her Gende context, gambling was at the frontier between subsistence and economic migration, but it then struggled to accommodate the latest extreme fluctuation in inequality. Horse race betting was analysed by Presterudstuen (2014) as an arena that manifested ethnic differences in Fiji by facilitating the self-estrangement of a whole cohort of young men, who gambled to express a different relation to the global on the one hand and the village on the other. Cox’s article shifted scales by following indigenous comparisons between gambling as a whole, on the one hand, and the get-rich-quick schemes that occupied the urban middle classes at a national and even regional level, on the other, and compared these themes to a global fashion for perceiving late modernity as an era of ‘casino capitalism’ (2014). My own contribution was about the way contrasting games modelled the purported mental capacities of different age groups. That material appears in this book in revised and elaborated form. Cassidy’s (2014) afterword demonstrated the importance of the Melanesian material for the study of gambling as a worldwide industry. The special issue demonstrated two more reasons why gambling can be so inventive in and

around Papua New Guinea: because gambling is a huge part of contemporary Pacific life and because the diversity of the region means gambling has been stretched and folded to fill a great breadth of roles.

This monograph aims to supplement and extend earlier analysis with a uniquely in-depth exploration of the local conceptual relevance of Pacific gambling, not as a proxy for something else but as a central trope of contemporary life; as a way that Papua New Guineans play the world and its economic orders. It will take a monograph to fully explicate, for the first time, the range of ideas bound up in gambling, the uses to which it is put and the effects that it has in a Pacific location where it once did not exist.

Goroka Is Gambling

Today Goroka is Papua New Guinea's self-confessed gambling capital: in 2010 73 per cent of over sixteens gambled; 45 per cent played cards in their local residential area, with 25 per cent going further afield; 11 per cent played in the vibrant but volatile betel nut markets; 5 per cent played when they were in residential areas other than their own; 3 per cent preferred local markets to the central betel nut markets, and 1 per cent admitted to playing secretly at work; 4 per cent confessed to regularly playing at the five high stakes slot machine joints that were dotted around the centre of town; 4 per cent frequented the horse racing bookies.³ Popular numbers games called *hi-lo* popped up time and time again, only to be shut down again by police. Goroka also has many visitors and a lot of through traffic, and while I had no way to quantify it, I know that many of these wayfarers gambled as part of the Goroka experience. There are a further four large-scale betting events per year that both ignite the imagination of residents and draw people from the rural surrounds: the three-game State of Origin rugby league series and the Melbourne Cup horse race; all happen in Australia but excite huge interest in Papua New Guinea. In 2010 about half the townsfolk had a bet on at least one of these occasions, and luxury cars and even wives were rumoured to have changed hands.

To study this vibrant gambling scene, from April 2009 to June 2010 I lived at the town's National Sports Institute, on land alienated from *Kama* people, interrupted by two months renting a room in *Kaunsil Kem* (lit. 'Council Camp') settlement (on *Faniufa* land) when my work there became more intense. I set out daily and/or nightly and got involved with all aspects of life but paid fullest attention to gambling and related activities. I returned in 2013, 2015 and 2017–18.

Gambling is an emotive issue, and so I have chosen not to give my personal opinions on the moral status of gambling in its various forms and to

report only how Gorokans thought about it. Wagering is illegal in Papua New Guinea outside of betting shops and slot machine joints, so I will keep to the rule of only relaying publicly available information on sites and people involved in gambling. I spent most time in *Banana Blok* (lit. 'Banana Block') settlement, a subdivision of *Kaunsil Kem*, but also attended four regular card gambling sites outside or underneath houses in the formal residential areas, three in West Goroka and one high stakes card site in a more central location. I spent an extended period of time following one body of colleagues who played cards in secret at their workplace. It is an open secret that gambling is rife in the two betel nut markets: Kakaruk (lit. 'Chicken', because it used to sell them) and Chuave (named after a district in Simbu Province whose inhabitants dominate sales). I was there often. A small amount of time was spent at or around the bookies, but the proprietors were hostile to my research so I respect their wishes and do not report on them directly. Other people were almost always happy to talk to me and found my topic readily understandable and interesting, treating my own gambling education as an imperative that would benefit them in the future.

I gambled often and usually lost, but I played with intent to win (and a secret commitment to redistribute any winnings among those who lost). This form of pure participant observation gave me a thorough understanding of gameplay. I consumed many hours in night and daytime trips to various slot machine joints known locally as 'pokies', especially with my adopted father Tom Liam,⁴ a prominent leader and a personality associated with pokies. I covered one full three-game series of State of Origin gambling events in various locations around Goroka and a further two games of the following series. The Melbourne Cup horse race fell only once during my time. As a counterpoint I spent three months attending a Pentecostal church in West Goroka known as Sunrise Four-Square and conducted forty-eight in-depth interviews with a range of people around broad themes.

Gambling led me to explore different geographical areas and people of diverse linguistic origins. I felt it propitious therefore to relinquish the classic concern in Melanesian anthropology with the way people bound groups. Instead I embraced the elasticity of a practice that makes units of people all the time but never pretends they are final.⁵ Gambling as a contrived point of confluence is certainly newer than, say, the universal valuation of pigs, but it is telling precisely because it is current, recognized as recent and yet expected to endure.

Just as important as the gathering of people in gambling was the meeting of monies. At these times, more was at stake than the stake; the value of money itself was up for grabs. Essentially, whenever anything was handed over, its value was contested. All transactions, whether categorized by anthropologists as a gift, commodity, financial arrangement, or as gambling, were

in fact expressions of PNG pragmatics of value manipulation in which the goal was as much about transacting appropriately and innovatively as it was about accumulating capital. Gambling was a repetitive and above all playful forum that made these strategies starkly apparent. I will argue that in the light of these strategies, economics becomes an artefact of intersubjective value destabilization; an 'objective' economist's picture of the 'economy as a whole' becomes meaningless because the value of money can never be represented faithfully outside of each context. I offer a more effective way to understand this ludic economy by using indigenous calculative pragmatics to systematize these value transformations.

This is consequently a book that problematizes orthodox understandings of economics, but it is not a book that sits comfortably in the literature on Melanesian 'exchanges' (this for that, or this for the same, or this for that at some later point). It cannot, because gambling is not an exchange. Technically, gambling is an example of a one-way transfer of wealth because nothing of comparable value is given in exchange for a win. If everyone walked away with something of comparable value, it would not be gambling. I intend to get out ahead of this issue by defining the terms I have chosen to adopt straight away.

Terms

In my terminology, 'transaction' is used as the collective term for the totality of overlapping ways that 'valuables' are circulated within an economy. 'Valuables' include both tangibles and intangibles such as knowledge, but they must involve 'enumeration'— i.e. they must become units through valuation (see Ascher 1991, 2002). Anything might conceivably fall into this category at one time or another, or cease to be transactable, so the division I make is contingent on specific practices. Valuables in this book have to pass a simple test: could Gorokan people envisage gambling with them?

My characterization of 'economy' is human-centred and distinct from its dominant usage as the aggregate of goods and services bought and sold within a territory. I trace localized entanglements rather than attempt totalizations (cf. Appadurai 1986). The dominant definition of economy, institutionalized markets and the market value of a particular item play a significant part in the entanglement of a given valuable in a given context, but they are treated as factors in specific valuations rather than as an investigative goal.

The aim is to underline the influence of agents embedded within an economic context whose continual projects of growth, renewal and sustenance are to be understood as pragmatics that enliven and develop the economy surrounding them. Efforts to affect the value of the valuables that move

between agents are appraised in terms of the long-term effects they have on valuations within the 'economy' as centripetally defined. This requires an appreciation of intersubjective forms of reckoning that play out in space and time as a set of 'frontiers' representing conflicts and concordances in valuation. 'Value' is therefore emergent, a form of boundary-making constrained by the influence of the agents involved and the inertia of the medium's prevailing value. The 'economy' consists of a set of evolving dialectical frontiers that can be conceptualized at scales ranging from an individual transaction to an international treaty.

I conceptualize marginality as the result of an ongoing lived frontier defined by unequal control over the parameters of transactions (Li 1999; Tsing 2005: 33). Those who have less control are, progressively, marginal. In some areas, control is more diffuse; in others more centralized, and movement between these areas can itself be profitable and is an arena for yet more transaction. The meeting points of competing framings for how transactions may be conducted are their 'frontiers'.

Instead of proceeding from the level of transactions and economy into potentially messy subcategories such as gift exchange and commodity exchange,⁶ I envisage a term that operates at an intra-transactional level, which I call a 'transfer' (Pickles in press), building off the largely overlooked work of Pryor (1977) and later Hunt (2002, cf. Sneath 2006, 2012). Hunt provides a handy definition:

[A transfer is] the shift of a valued (X) from one social unit (A) to another social unit (B). The valued can be tangible, a service, or knowledge. The shift can refer to changes in possession, as well as to shifts in ownership ... The X being transferred has economic content. It contains the efforts of production (work, skill, and experience). (2002: 108)

The movement of a valuable from one person to another is a 'transfer'; it may be balanced with a return, in which case it becomes an 'exchange' of two (or more) transfers. If the return happens later, this would be a 'delayed exchange' of two transfers. A 'transfer' that is not accompanied by a return and has no prospect of generating one in the future is a 'one-way transfer'. The valuables in motion during a 'one-way transfer' do not have a counter-valuable against which their value can be directly compared, whereas an 'exchange of transfers' offers an opportunity for direct comparison.⁷

'Gambling' is the committing of value (a 'stake') to a circumscribed and definitive event (or series of events packaged together) that no one party is supposed to fully control; the objective state of the event(s) at certain junctures determines whether a return may be claimed for one's initial transfer. By staking money (i.e. by committing it to being part of a consolidated transfer),

gamblers attempt to gain valuables that have been divorced from reciprocal obligation and so cause a one-way transfer in their own direction. In so doing, the value of the stakes are compared as they are consolidated, rather than when they are exchanged. Gambling everywhere involves attempts to induce a one-way transfer that includes this form of valuation. That valuation is underdetermined when compared to an exchange of transfers because winning allows the victor to take home both the value of their stake as well as some (or all) of the other valuables staked by others. Gambling therefore privileges subjective assessments of the value of one's stakes as opposed to the market value of items that are exchanged.⁸ Subjective valuation is heightened by the repeated rounds of play, in which participants may choose to anchor their success against highpoints, low points, or the starting point of their bank. In staking their subjective assessments of value, gamblers explore and potentially master the flow of transfers that are the building blocks of economic life without reference to their market value. I will go on to argue that the fluidity of value in Goroka necessitates a model of economy that generalizes subjective valuation rather than subsuming it under a market model.

I will follow my informants in avoiding strict distinctions between exchanges and other kinds of transactions by focusing on a total pragmatic of transmission conceptualized through the term transfers, with each transactive form becoming a variation on the way transfers are formalized (cf. Graeber 2001: 217). In many respects, gambling resembled long-standing patterns of what has come to be known in the anthropological literature as 'exchange', differing mainly in the way gambling explicitly circumvents the obligation to return, opening up the possibility that active reciprocity need not be a foundational motivation in economic practice.

Finally, I use the term 'pragmatic' to refer to the points of conjunction between ideas and those actions that are transformed in relation to them. One only knows a concept or idea through the nature of the modifications it makes to its interactants, and those modifications are its definition for all intents and purposes. As such, the concept or idea is, to the extent we can know it at all, a pragmatic. This philosophy was developed by C.S. Peirce (1923), but I am using it in a very specific, historical sense (cf. Pedersen 2008). The pragmatics to do with transactions that I document have some history in Melanesia but have entered into interaction with novel activities like slot machines and money, and in that interaction, the concepts invoked by them were modified and continue to change. By documenting how pragmatics look today, and how they are seen to transform in activities like gambling, we can get a grip on the way people manipulate their worlds and the extent to which manipulation is possible.

The analysis of Gorokan gambling suggests five lessons. 1) The underdeterminism of the unregulated aspects of economy allows locally determined ways of reckoning to influence not just the movements of money but also the properties and capacities of currency. 2) Economics as we know it scripts people's activities; individuals who are acting aberrantly are prescribed a dose of abstract economic analysis. But locally informed ways of doing currency are not necessarily mistakes that 'distort' the way people should interact with the formal economy; they can instead enable original and profitable possibilities. Social reality at the capitalist periphery recycles currency and the economy as a continual frontier, necessitating locally inflected theorization. 3) What is required to understand economies at large is a framework that reckons the larger economy through local pragmatics conceived at the micro-level. 4) Gaining meaningful access to the ideas and therefore the economics in play where international capital meets local concepts requires a focus on obviously frontier activities such as gambling. 5) All transactions, everywhere, would be illuminated by reconceptualizing them as frontiers of various kinds and recasting people's efforts in terms of locally inflected pragmatics that centre on economic transfers.

Pragmatics by their nature lack universal applicability; they are local conceptual regularities for only as long as they remain regular. Universal systematization is not possible within this method of modelling. The approach is heuristic. It is nevertheless possible to make comparisons of abstracted-out pragmatics and their relationship. There are analogies among Japanese securities traders and Salvadorian migrant workers, Chicago commodity traders and exotic mushroom pickers, West African slave traders and alternative currency enthusiasts (Guyer 2004; Maurer 2005; Miyazaki 2003; Pedersen 2008; Tsing 2009; Zaloom 2006). I will be attempting quite a few analogies in this book, in part because I think comparison illuminates the material and in part because I think anthropology should always aspire to comparison.⁹

I have kept to economic terms in this outline because my main aim will be situating gambling among other economic practices. What sets gambling apart from more prosaic transactions is its relationship with play. The very playfulness of play opens the toy chest (or the Pandora's box) of what it means to be human, throwing out loose ends and possible connections that cross all sorts of domains of experience. We all know already that an attitude of levity can lighten the load, and gambling takes that stance towards money. As I suggest in this book's title, to gamble is to play with money, rendering the game and its economics disorderly. For that reason, I probe important insights from the literature on play in general before continuing. The book is then structured so that the nature of play in Gorokan gambling comes to light before its economics, providing the backdrop for the play of values in gambling.

Gameplay

The significance of play underwrites all the claims in this book: every assertion about such and such game playing out local concepts, each argument about the effects of particular games upon the value of currencies, as well as all the comparisons with other places and times. Underneath all of these is the notion that play is a particularly meaningful activity within human existence. I must therefore persuade the reader that play is no trivial matter. In this section I argue that play is a primal frame for comprehending the wider human world and acting upon it. Play refines messy concepts, and it allows people to imagine alternate versions of the real. Gambling in particular demonstrates a willingness to change one's world, to play with not just your wealth and status but cosmopolitics itself.

What is called 'play' in English and '*pilai*' in Tok Pisin has been a subject of study across a range of disciplines spanning from evolutionary biology to classics. This means that fertile insights often emerged *sui generis*. The subject boasts a sizeable literature but no canon. In lieu of one, I describe one very late nineteenth-century forebear and four twentieth-century pillars in the study of play.

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen theorized an evolutionary development of leisure and excess (2007 [1899]). Leisure, he claimed, is a product of two interconnected processes. The first is people's strivings to elite status through the exploitation of others and, most importantly, advertising their freedom from toil by conspicuous consumption, including every sort of play (the more wasteful the better). The second process is emulation, keeping up with the Jones's by spending an increasing proportion of your resources on leisure activities (i.e. the symbols of exploitation). Waste's utility therefore actually becomes a function of its disutility. Together these processes propel leisure in ever more attenuated and recursive directions, from pigeon fancying to Iron Man competitions.

Veblen does not have anything to say about the forms of play or games in themselves except as manifestations of waste. That dressage is identified as play and a classical education as worthy but not playful is immaterial to the overall thesis. The wastefulness of play is a theme that runs through almost all of the literature that follows, but Veblen's work on play as leisure makes it obvious that what makes play playful cannot be found solely in its disutility.

Johan Huizinga's elegant theory in *Homo Ludens* (1970 [1949]) is the starting point for the contemporary study of play. Play is the antithesis of rationality. It occurs when mind 'breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos' (ibid.: 22). Because play is so profoundly disturbing to order, it must be bounded so as not to endanger our survival. Games create an ordered arena that is replicable across space and time. The heightened order required

to contain play has the seemingly paradoxical effect of capturing order from the confusion of a life that rarely seems as straightforward as a game. At the same time, bounding play in a game intensifies uncertainty within it, creating tension (ibid.: 29).

For Huizinga, play is not required to survive; it is voluntary and superfluous by definition. It is in that sense waste. Play is nevertheless enjoyed and consequently desired. Play must be free and indeed play *is* freedom for Huizinga. It is not the opposite of seriousness; instead playfulness breaks the boundaries of the antimony. It makes a game of usefulness and uselessness. Between Veblen and Huizinga there is a dialectical development: work leads to its opposite play, which then encompasses the opposition.

And yet play's exceptionality *is* in some way a requirement. Not a requirement for existence but necessary for a meaningful human life, play generates a kind of recursive amplification of existence that creates meaning (ibid.: 27). Huizinga derives from Plato that the more we participate in exalting play, the better we are as people (ibid.: 45) and the more cultured our society becomes (ibid.: 19; see also Hamayon 2016).

For Huizinga, the epitome of play is regulated competition between two parties. In all cases of play, the aim is to raise the victor to a higher power, progressing culture as a result. The form of the contest is unimportant, only the winning (Huizinga 1970 [1949]: 77).¹⁰ Our existing culture is also at its best when it is played.

Huizinga's position becomes unstuck, in my opinion, because he wants to advocate for the 'right' kind of play, and thus promotes it conceptually into the only kind of play worth its name. Gambling and cards, for instance, are seen as culturally sterile because they are not played in the true spirit of play – that is, amateur competition, which is clearly irrelevant to their playfulness. His notion that play breaks down the boundaries of rationality in a way that generates meaning remains insightful but only if we disregard the outmoded notion that culture is additive.

Huizinga and Roger Caillois belong together because Caillois was writing largely in response to Huizinga (Caillois 1961: 3–5). Caillois' analysis is subtler; it took human diversity and divergent cultural history as the starting point for the development of a global typology of games. Like Huizinga, there is a unity of play and a diversity of games, but for Caillois all human play begins with 'spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct' and the 'elementary need for disturbance and tumult' (ibid.: 28), which is denoted by the Greek *paidia*. *Paidia* is, however, disciplined to various extents by a concept from Latin: *ludus*, the 'pleasure experienced in solving a problem arbitrarily designed' (ibid.: 29). The resultant game takes a form that lies within a matrix of four tropes: directed contest, chance, mimesis and disorientation, thereby incorporating many more kinds of game than Huizinga. Because the diversity

of game types is spread unevenly across social contexts, the various ‘civilizations’ can be characterized by the games their peoples enjoy.

Caillois was also at pains to point out that *ludus* is not the only conceivable metamorphosis of *paidia*, and he takes the closest Chinese language equivalent to *paidia*, *wan*, as his example. *Wan* is ‘oriented not toward process, calculation, or triumph over difficulties [as *ludus* is] but toward calm, patience and idle speculation’ (ibid.: 33). For Caillois, this was evidence of how China wisely worked out a contrasting philosophical destiny for itself and that cultures’ destinies could be read from their games.¹¹

The third pillar is unique even among these free thinkers. In 1978, Bernard Suits made his argument under the guise of a retelling of Aesop’s fable about the ant and the grasshopper. The grasshopper had refused to toil through the summer months despite observing an industrious ant’s example and tolerating its tedious warnings, and the grasshopper died in that year’s first cold snap. Suits’ conceit is that hidden under the false pretence of a bland morality tale about prudence and industry a revolutionary grasshopper and advocate of play sacrificed himself for our ludic salvation.

Suits reimagines the grasshopper as a sage. The prophet for play was willing to endure an early death for the utopian idea that we should never toil. Part fabled grasshopper, part Jesus Christ and part Socrates, Suits’ book follows the grasshopper and its devotees’ dialogue about the nature of playing games, beginning on the grasshopper’s deathbed and ending after a temporary resurrection. In the face of looming annihilation, the grasshopper defiantly indulged in riddles with his insect followers Skepticus and Prudence.

This original (not to mention brilliant and genuinely funny) conceit enables Suits both to convincingly define what it means to play a game and to follow that form in his writing. The book is a direct response to Wittgenstein’s assertion that there is no common thread that links games together; that they are indefinable. Not so, the grasshopper says:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity. (ibid.: 34)

Games operate by blocking off the most efficient means of achieving a goal. One of Suits’ illustrative examples is a chess player checkmating, as opposed to holding a pistol to their opponent’s head and declaring victory. Clearly only the former is observing the rules, or playing.

Suits allows for both goal-oriented and ‘closed’ games, such as chess, and games that have no ending, or ‘open’ games such as dressing up. The definition can accommodate ‘open’ games if the specific state of affairs that is to be achieved is the game’s continuation (e.g. a game of ‘Tigers’ with a three

year old may hinge solely on remembering not to stop being a tiger). This turns play scripts into the more efficient means that are prohibited. With this all-containing definition, Suits dissolves Huizinga's main problem, which was discerning which kind of play is the platonic ideal. Suits' definition, Caillois' openness to the different psychological readings of games, and Huizinga's original insight into the collapse of utility and disutility together reveal games' substantial analytical force. Games can require internal autotelism (being done for their own sake), and they can also be put to external instrumental ends (being played as a means to something else). Gambling then instrumentalizes the game by tying a change in one's wealth to the result, but it also makes a mockery of wealth by staking it on a 'trivial' event. The choice of motivation for gambling is between disregarding money on the one hand or playing for it on the other, and these reflect the autotelic and the instrumental structure of gambling games, the former locating the consciousness inside the game, the latter outside. Gamblers and professional game-players may prioritize the incentive of a win over the incentive of maintaining the integrity of the game.

Gregory Bateson, the one-time Melanesianist anthropologist, is the fourth mid twentieth-century pillar of play upon which this study rests (1973 [1955]). Bateson cuts to the heart of the conceptual mechanics that both Caillois and Huizinga rely upon but cannot account for. From observing monkeys playing, he derives that play is denoted by 'metacommunicative' signals. Metacommunication as a term covers signals that have as their subject the relationship between the communicating parties. The play signal is 'metacommunicative' in that it tells the recipient that '[t]hese actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote' (1973: 152, emphasis in original). For example, I would take you kicking a football directly at me as an affront unless we were both surrounded by people wearing the same jersey and shorts. The uniforms are metacommunicative play signals.

Play occurs in animals as well as humans, and therefore metacommunicative signals are evolutionarily prior to denotative language (i.e. saying 'we are playing'), and may in fact have been an important step towards language. We can therefore derive that play is fundamental to cognitive development. Metacommunicative signals offer the opportunity to bound off certain signals and thereby convey novel meanings for those signals.

That play is a primal example of metacommunication upon which complex communication can be scaffolded explains the universality of play and allows the possibility of its expression in myriad variations. It also rightly elevates the status of games from being simply the opposite of serious activity (against which they must always seem trivial) to instances of condensed reality in the sense that reality consists of embodied constructions of the real

and the unreal. Condensing reality into a game heightens the fictive element. Games offer us a glimpse into the aesthetics of the construction of reality through the interplay of fiction and consequence. Like picture frames for art, games are the reified form of the psychological demarcation of those practices or actions that are to be considered play. Though Bateson does not say as much, the demarcation of a game space means the play within it can be bet upon, which is an act of impudent cosmopolitics where the real and the fictive are encompassed by the willingness of the bettor to stake upon it.

Games are not simply reflections of the world that created them, but as both Bateson and Huizinga explore in their own ways, the open-ended contingency of games generates altered models for contingency in the unbounded world of not play (see also Hacking 1990; Reith 1999). Bateson and Suits also come to complementary conclusions. Bateson explains the evolutionary processes that fold play into human existence and which give play its transcendent quality, while Suits reveals the structural mechanisms by which the logic of games enacts metacommunicative signalling and the philosophical potency that is invoked in the process.

Play literally *imagines* a field upon which stakes can then be made, and thus gambling depends upon play. It depends upon play's metacommunicative ability to create curtailed domains in space and time that may be judged to have definitive win or lose outcomes. One must always consider, therefore, that defining gambling is a political move and that the forms of play that become the subject of gambling are themselves both subject to cosmopolitics and empowered to enact cosmopolitics (for a review of the anthropology of gambling, see Pickles 2016). In this spirit I will interrogate the nature of Gorokan games and gambling with maximum seriousness in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Outlines

Many claims are made in this introduction, and I am well aware that I bought the big picture on hire purchase. I found this necessary to explicate the scope of the study. Subsequent chapters are instalments to repay the debt of suspended disbelief and to generate interest for the patient reader via various calculations and accounts.

Chapter one is historical. Taking a snapshot from my ethnographic fieldwork as its point of departure, it traces some lines of temporality that met in Goroka in 2009. These include the history of the town itself, the history of gambling in Papua New Guinea and its relationship to a regional literature obsessed instead with gifts, and the historical development of Papua New Guinea gambling into a transactional space in which men and women

participated together. I then return to the ethnographic moment with which I began, revealing how gambling connects all these histories in a self-consciously bounded set of rules and materials.

Chapter two takes the reader straight into the heart of the most prevalent forms of gambling in contemporary Goroka, working through the rules and social settings of the two card games that dominate the scene. Looking at the idioms of gameplay and how to win, I aim to dissolve the division between game and life and to postulate a model of thought about situations of effective action that do not rely on the dichotomy of chance and skill, replaced instead by the indigenous categories 'thought' and 'speed'. Notions associated with effective play like to control their 'corner', and having effective 'ideas' is brought into dialogue with two other famous Melanesian arenas for tactics: *kula* and *moka*. I bring out a common model for causality, and for change, with implications for Melanesianist anthropology.

I begin chapter three by looking at one way the existing literature on gambling in anthropology falls short. By over-relying on probability, anthropologists who look at gambling in the Pacific have helped to set up a false paradox between gambling and gifting when in fact shades of cooperation and overt acquisition can be seen within what would otherwise be understood as competitive gameplay without obligation. By way of contrast, I then explore how betting practices in Goroka support a complex language made through money by utilizing the conceptual divisibility and material indivisibility inherent in denominations (see Pickles 2017). This leads into a discussion of theories of money and the contradiction that emerges from my material between money as a mode of immanent calculation and the assumption that money is by default abstract in character. By unpacking the giving of free games during low-stakes gambling, I argue that while calculations with money are everywhere in Goroka this does not make all transactions impersonal but quite the opposite. I suggest that the proper idiom to explore the use of money in Gorokan gambling is the contingent way that Gorokan people manipulate *valyu* ('value') (cf. Gregory 1997; Munn 1986).

From this base understanding of efficacy and gaming, chapter four explores the relationship between street selling (*maketim*) and gambling, by looking at the more exceptional, archetypal antagonistic fast game known as *Chalinj* (lit. 'challenge'). As the apotheosis of fast games, located in the place of fastest and most impersonal bargains, the market, *Chalinj* is understood as a reproduction of Goroka's most extreme market pragmatics. The subtext to the chapter is the attribute of speed given to money across Goroka and how this impacts upon the value of money. More overtly, the chapter explores the minutiae of three different types of exchange in the marketing sphere in order to counter the 'barter model of value' that results from economic models (M. Strathern 1992), instead investigating the structural relations between

the three types through ethnographic accounts. Comparative material from Nigerian market traders and market gamblers allows for a broader correlation between transactional forms that incorporate negotiation into the way units are defined and the existence of aggressive and speedy forms of gambling. The chapter engages with Gorokan conceptions of what constitutes work and what does not, which is based upon an opposition between production (in Gorokan terms 'work') and finance (which covers many other types of transaction). That in turn sets the foundations for the discussion of leadership in the following chapter.

Having concentrated up to this point on card gambling (which is the most widespread and reproducible form of gambling), I open the analysis up to high stakes machine gaming in chapter five, which has a starkly dissimilar character. The discussion centres on the actions of local 'big-men', who display vast sums compared to that available to card gamblers or the followers who help them travel through the precarious and drunken town centre at night. Contrasting to the fields of efficacy at play during card games, the lack of control players have over slot machines is a crucial factor in their popularity and contributes to the marked destruction of the value of money in these places. The chapter is concerned with the multiple sources of money available to big-men who play pokies, their mutual gifting and the smaller donations they make to followers. I argue that while 'finance' and 'production' may have been limiting factors in the control that big-men exerted across the Highlands (A. Strathern 1969), today all over the Highlands big-men have access to novel forms of finance that allow them to transcend their local particularities and play the part of 'Highlands-wide big-man'. Finance is therefore another example of a pragmatic that has taken new forms, and I expand this analysis by comparison to the computerization of financial trading in Chicago and London, where the technology of on-screen tactical manoeuvring has likewise displaced face-to-face encounters, with alarmingly similar effects.

I begin chapter six with a current manifestation of a classic topic in the anthropology of Melanesia—bridewealth payments, focusing narrowly on how pooling wealth is organized prior to payment. I spend the rest of the chapter inflecting this material through the collective bets that happened during the annual State of Origin series of rugby league games. The festival atmosphere of State of Origin gives people the opportunity to collect together and oppose one another on spurious grounds (supporting Blues or Maroons), crossing kin and affinal relations. The aim is to reveal the common aesthetic of large agglomerations of money, reimagining exchanges from the perspective of pooling rather than the necessities of reciprocity. I argue that the value of money is higher when it contains the efforts of many people to bring it together, exposing the simple joy of collective exchanges and the value they

generated. Through comparison with Native American Pawnee collective betting practices before 1890, I show that the way bets are consolidated reflect socially privileged ways of conceptualizing how wealth is attained. In the Pawnee case, this means collective gambling looks like individual exploits and individual spoils gained through warfare, and in the Goroka case, collective bets take the image of women-as-wealth (created through their juxtaposition to valuables during bridewealth payments).

I conclude by summing up how money and value are manipulated through Gorokan gambling and how this informs our understanding of change. I reflect back on material from the foregoing chapters and examine how other forms of gambling can be seen as variations on the theme of pooling. Finally, I argue that the inventiveness of Gorokan transaction skills is contained within the narrow rails of a global economic hegemony that sequesters transactional creativity and the dividends of it to its elite classes.

Notes

1. While there is nothing innate about gambling that simply must bubble to the surface, this does not mean gambling addiction is not real or serious either. Many regions where people once did not gamble now have a very high level of problem gambling (Papineau 2010). It is one thing to say gambling is not in our genes and quite another to say that some people are not predisposed to develop a dependency on gambling when it is around them.
2. Together with two intervening articles, Mimica (2006) and Mosko (2012).
3. All statistics here are from a survey of households and employees. Given gambling's morally ambiguous status, these figures likely underplay the reality.
4. Tom Liam is a pseudonym, as are all names in the book that could lead to a person's identification. Except my friend and later field assistant Loui, who was excited to be named.
5. In this I take my cue from Roy Wagner's (1974) ethnographically informed foregrounding of groups as a contingent product of relations.
6. Davis, for example, makes a partial repertoire of British exchanges, listing forty-two possible kinds of exchange (1992: 29).
7. The value of the valuable can still be compared to other valuables in the abstract, but the lack of a direct comparison loosens its hold.
8. It is only when a player loses money at a proprietary gambling establishment that they could be said to have exchanged money for pleasure, so this is largely a post-hoc justification.
9. Certainly the inclination to draw systematicity out of these innovative goings on was governed by the kinds of transactional formalization I am familiar with from my home country, and this will also affect how analogous what I produce must seem.
10. Huizinga thinks gambling in particular is unproductive towards the development of culture, arguing that while the desire to win is strong in the bettors (which is

culturally productive), that interest is lost to the audience, who lack investment in the game, so the cultural gain is lost. Card games, to the extent that they rely on chance, fall more or less under the category of gambling and are therefore culturally sterile (ibid.: 225).

11. Caillois took Huizinga to task for excluding gambling from proper play by virtue of the fact it has stakes, rather than theorizing the close relationship between games and economic interest, which Caillois notes is a relationship based on 'pure waste' in which nothing of value is created, making it futile but of potential analytical insight (1961: 5–6).