
Volume 30 *Special Volume*

*Keeping Chance in Its Place: The Socio-Legal
Regulation of Gambling*

Article 7

2018

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Citation Information

Nicoll, Fiona. "Beyond the Figure of the Problem Gambler: Locating Race and Sovereignty Struggles in Everyday Cultural Spaces of Gambling." *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 30. (2018): 127-149.
<https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/jlsp/vol30/iss1/7>

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Beyond the Figure of the Problem Gambler: Locating Race and Sovereignty Struggles in Everyday Cultural Spaces of Gambling

FIONA NICOLL*

Comme le jeu est devenu omniprésent dans bon nombre de sociétés capitalistes néolibérales, le joueur ou la joueuse à problèmes est devenu un personnage culturel courant invoqué dans la réglementation, la culture populaire et la vie au quotidien. Cet article rassemble les recherches critiques sur la gouvernementalité de Valverde et Dean, les études culturelles et les études critiques autochtones sur la blancheur, la race et la souveraineté pour comprendre les biopolitiques raciales du jeu au-delà du personnage qui a des problèmes de jeu. Selon moi, dans les états coloniaux, le jeu sert notamment à maintenir certains thèmes de représentation culturelle et à conserver le pouvoir juridique et politique au sein d'un système fondamental de droit fondé sur le fait d'appartenir à la race blanche. Une étude sur les espaces culturels et les dérivés du jeu en Australie, conjuguée à des lectures attentives d'œuvres de création autochtones, associe le personnage du joueur ou de la joueuse à problèmes aux processus plus vastes, que Goldberg appelait « néolibéralisme racial ». Je démontre comment ce personnage devient une métonymie du jeu compulsif au service de la réforme de l'aide sociale visant des groupes raciaux et est utilisé pour miner les droits des peuples autochtones, tant à titre de joueurs et de joueuses que de sujets politiques et juridiques souverains.

As gambling has become a ubiquitous feature of many neoliberal capitalist societies, the problem gambler has become a familiar cultural figure, invoked in regulation, popular culture and everyday life. This article brings critical research on governmentality¹ together with cultural studies and critical Indigenous scholarship on whiteness, race and sovereignty to understand the racial biopolitics of gambling beyond the individual subject of problem gambling. I argue that, for settler-colonial states, gambling plays a role in maintaining tropes of cultural representation and securing legal and political power within an overarching system of white racial entitlement. An investigation of cultural spaces and products of gambling in Australia, together with close readings of Indigenous creative works, ties the figure of the problem gambler to broader processes of what Goldberg calls 'racial neoliberalism'. I show how this figure becomes a metonym for dysfunctional consumption, is harnessed to racially targeted welfare reforms, and used to undermine the rights of Indigenous people, both as gamblers and as sovereign political and legal subjects.

GAMBLING HAS BECOME EMBEDDED within many neoliberal societies. Consider the massive popularity of online and celebrity poker, the growth of national and international lotteries, and opportunities to bet on the outcomes of a bewildering number of competitions

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¹ See Mariana Valverde, "Genealogies of European states: Foucauldian reflections" (2007) 36:1 *Economy and Society* at 159-178 and Mitchell Dean, *The Signature of Power: Sovereignty, Governmentality and Biopolitics* (London Sage, 2013).

and events, from horse-racing and stock market movements to video game tournaments and fantasy sports leagues. In spite of the normalisation, diversification and expansion of gambling, national and international gambling studies remain dominated by problem gambling research. It is with reference to this research that governments account for the social harms as well as the economic benefits of deregulation. Shifting the gaze away from problem gambling to reconsider the role of gambling in everyday life might seem a frivolous, if not irresponsible, thing for academic researchers to do. I hope this article will demonstrate the very opposite.

After explaining the broader context of research on problem gambling and the stigma that attaches to it, I will focus my enquiry on cultural spaces and representations of electronic gambling machines. The remainder of this article links the production and circulation of images of problem gambling in Australia to broader sovereignty struggles by enlisting theoretical frameworks from critical race and whiteness studies, and critical Indigenous studies. With reference to this literature I argue that the subjective ‘zones’ of addiction which spaces of gambling tend to produce and sustain are intimately related to the objective racial governance that they embody. I demonstrate how the problem gambler circulates as a cultural figure, marking a constitutive outside to the white social body from which powerful judgements about deviance issue.² And I use Indigenous creative works to show how Indigenous people are targeted by, and resist, racially discriminatory policies grounded in cultural judgments about their gambling behaviours. My aim in bringing different kinds of area studies, related theoretical frameworks, and creative works together is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of gambling in the everyday life of settler colonial states.

I. GAMBLING RESEARCH AND THE POLITICS OF ADDICTION

Research on gambling has been dominated by the psy-sciences since 1980 when “pathological gambling” was first included in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III).³ The accuracy of research on problem gambling is limited by several factors, including the quality of data provided by standardised psychological screening surveys and low rates of self-reporting and help-seeking by gamblers in trouble. Notwithstanding these limitations, such research provides an evidential basis for responsible gambling policies aimed at cultivating self-disciplined individuals capable of controlling their expenditure of time and money on gambling. Common interventions developed to promote responsible gambling include: provision of educational material about games in venues, contact details for helplines on products and marketing materials, as well as pop-up reminders within online gambling products. To date, these strategies have typically absolved gambling providers from legal responsibility for the compulsive gambling that some of their products are arguably designed to cause.⁴

However, the status quo has begun to shift. Recent research indicates that, while overall expenditure on pokies as a form of entertainment has fallen in Australia since the late 1990s, losses borne by those who continue to play them are relatively constant, averaging \$3,500 per

² See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (NY/London: Routledge, 1993) at 194.

³ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSMII* (Washington DC, 1980).

⁴ See N D Schull, *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

year.⁵ High profile legal cases have been mounted against casinos and gambling companies, alleging deceptive conduct leading to bankruptcy and suicide.⁶ Electronic gambling machines (known as pokies) have become a prominent issue in state and federal Australian election campaigns over the past decade; and political debates have shadowed the introduction of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (products with similar design mechanics to EGMs) in UK betting shops.⁷ There is now a growing body of international scholarship on gambling addressing ethical issues endemic to gambling research and policy, with a particular focus on conflicts of interest arising from industry self-regulation.⁸ A code of ethics specifically to guide gambling research has been developed and a new journal of *Critical Gambling Studies* is due to launch in 2019, showcasing critical research by scholars in humanities and social sciences, including historians, sociologists, legal theorists, political philosophers, anthropologists, and geographers.

Underpinning these developments are growing concerns that algorithmic, digital gambling products are potentially addictive to all players, not only individuals who are vulnerable due to impaired cognition, impulse control, co-morbid addictions or other psychological problems. In spite of the different political positions adopted by individual researchers on the need for more or less state regulation of commercial gambling industries, problem gamblers continue to appear in dichotomous terms: they are seen either as dysfunctional consumers who pose a threat to the legitimate enjoyment that gambling industries provide in capitalist societies or as victims of predatory corporate power who require greater protections.⁹ The problems inherent in such polarised debates may be familiar to readers acquainted with key arguments made by early theorists of cultural studies. Raymond Williams famously challenged the way working people were imagined by cultural elites as “masses”. For conservative and Marxist intellectuals alike, working class people were approached as a social problem requiring political and cultural intervention. In an essay titled “Culture is Ordinary” Williams famously wrote “there are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses.”¹⁰ My analysis builds on this critique, beginning with the claim that ‘there are no problem gamblers but only ways of seeing people as problem gamblers’.

Focussing on gambling as an ordinary aspect of culture in everyday life, rather than an activity that is more or less problematic, generates new questions for researchers: how do

⁵ M Young & F Markham “Three charts on: Australia’s addiction to pokies”. *The Conversation*. June 26, 2017. Online, <http://theconversation.com/three-charts-on-australias-addiction-to-poker-machines-78353> [perma.cc/R6TA-9U8R].

⁶ See *Stacy Stevens v. Mountaineer Gaming Group, Inc. and International Game Technology, Inc.* (Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, January 2016, No. 15-0821) on the death by suicide of Scott Stevens after years of gambling addiction; and *Guy v Crown* (Federal Court of Australia, No. VID 1274, 2016) in which an addicted player claimed an EGM manufacturer and the casino she gambled at engaged in ‘misleading or deceptive conduct’.

⁷ See Bookmakers' shares hit by tougher wager limit fears. BBC News (Online), 24 April 2018, online: <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-43877380>.

⁸ See C Livingstone & PJ Adams, Clear Principles are Needed for Integrity in Gambling Research (2016) 111 (1) *Addiction* 5.

⁹ Key references in these debates include: P Delfabbro & D King “Gambling is not a capitalist conspiracy: a critical commentary of literature on the ‘industry state gambling complex’” (2017) 17:2 *International Gambling Studies* 317; L Hancock & G Smith “Critiquing the Reno Model, I-IV International Influence on Regulators and Governments (2004–2015) - the Distorted Reality of Responsible Gambling” (2017) 15 (6) *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 1151; C. Livingstone et al, “On gambling research, social science and the consequences of commercial gambling” (2017) 18:1 *International Gambling Studies* 56.

¹⁰ R Williams “Culture is Ordinary” in N McKenzie, ed, *Convictions* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958) at 83-84.

particular ways of seeing people as problem gamblers prevent certain questions from being asked about gambling? What does it mean to be more or less visible as a problem gambler? How does gambling make certain kinds of spaces and identities available for understanding and governing as more or less problematic? To address these questions, we need to interrogate the notion that entertainment, fun and recreation, are simple values that gambling industries deliver and consider how closely addiction shadows these values in neoliberal societies.

As Helen Keane argues "... addiction is not a universal feature of human existence, but a historically and culturally specific way of understanding, classifying and regulating problems of individual conduct".¹¹ Sytze Kingma notes how addiction establishes a cultural boundary within gambling organisations by "... exorcising gaming excess and at the same instant, enabling fancy, moderate gambling."¹² In other words, gambling does not simply exist in more or less pathological forms; it is a deeply social and institutionalised practice imbued with specific cultural meanings. Meanings attached to addiction, in turn, influence the orientations of gambling researchers and policy makers to degrees and types of regulation.

My case for attending to ordinary cultural spaces of gambling is not simply a call for new empirical research to fill the gaps left behind by problem gambling experts. Rather, it is to understand academic investigation as a performative practice. That is: we need to attend to what the absence of research on such spaces *does* both within and beyond the academy. I argue that research that abstracts problem gambling from social contexts that are more or less saturated by gambling produces certain ways of regulating gamblers. Moreover, as we will see, cultural judgements and political decisions about what and who requires regulation are inextricable from broader questions of race and sovereignty in societies shaped by historical and ongoing processes of colonization.

II. RACIAL NEOLIBERALISM, FINOPOWER, AND THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF STIGMA

The rise of neuroscientific paradigms within gambling research has exacerbated an existing tendency to study the bodies and brains of gamblers in isolation from specific environments in which they are enjoined to behave as responsible consumers. Researchers within this discipline often seek biochemical causes of, and pharmaceutical cures for, addiction in the individual organism rather than in the social networks of populations, places and products that create gambling profits and problems.¹³ This approach to addiction has provoked criticism of a more widespread failure within the gambling research community to address the role of social context and institutional relations of power in gambling behaviours.¹⁴ A common response to such critiques among problem gambling scholars has been to acknowledge the social stigma associated with addiction to gambling. This is a welcome development and recalls Erving Goffman's works on gambling and stigma completed decades prior to the field's almost

¹¹ Helen Keane, *What's Wrong with Addiction?* (Parkville: Melbourne University Press, 2002) at 6.

¹² Sytze F Kingma "Gaming is Play. It Should Remain Fun!" in ed, Pekka Sulkunen, *Constructing the New Consumer Society*, (NY: St Martin's Press, 1997) at 184.

¹³ See Scott Vrecco, "Capital ventures into biology: biosocial dynamics in the industry and science of gambling" (2008) 37:1, *Economy and Society* at 50-67.

¹⁴ See Rebecca Cassidy, "Fair game? Producing and publishing gambling research." (2014) 14:3 *International Gambling Studies* at 345-353.

exclusive turn to problem gambling.¹⁵ For Goffman, gambling was an embodied form of social performance in everyday life from which status could be derived, depending on individual orientations to risk and opportunities embedded in a given situation. His research on social institutions addressed stigma as a cultural process through which individual and collective identities are rendered ‘spoiled’ and subjected to surveillance and targeted social reforms.

However, a focus on stigma as an alienating social mechanism does not necessarily produce new insights about how different populations are impacted by commercial gambling’s diffusion. For example, an Australian study published in the *Journal of Gambling Studies* investigated how the stigma attached to problem gambling impacts on individuals’ help-seeking behaviours. Researchers gathered data to establish degrees of stigmatization attached to gambling addiction, compared to other kinds of addictions or disabilities, by presenting vignettes to participants who were asked to consider X as a problem gambler and “a man who lives in your community”.¹⁶ This methodology begs important questions about the relationship between subjects and sites of gambling: what if the problem gambler is already pre-figured by research participants as occupying a space outside of their community? What if stigma is inextricable from ordinary cultural processes of mapping we use to locate and distinguish our social identities from others in everyday life? These questions are arguably becoming more important as gambling disperses beyond the confines of regulated terrestrial spaces. In future, individuals may be more likely to be defined as problem gamblers through the online *spaces they visit* than through the spaces they *are imagined to inhabit* or become *associated with* in the popular imagination.

A typical example of the stigmatization of problem gamblers in popular culture can be seen in a story *Vice News* published in 2015 titled *The Strange and Disgusting Things People Do in Casinos*.¹⁷ I’ll leave to your imagination the specific contents of this story but one way we can understand the appeal of such reportage is with reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s critical sociology of cultural judgments of taste. *Distinction* draws together philosophical arguments and population surveys in France to explore hierarchies of cultural capital. His argument that everyday judgments of taste classify the classifier turns on a critique of a Kantian schema that locates disinterest at the heart of aesthetic judgement. He writes: “Intellectuals and artists are so situated in social space that they have a particular interest in disinterestedness and in all the values that are universal and universally recognized as highest”.¹⁸ Bourdieu did not include gambling among the leisure preferences he asked participants to rank. However, as a type of consumption that transparently takes material gain as its objective, it is not hard to extrapolate his argument to encompass gambling as the opposite pole of high culture.

¹⁵ See Erving Goffman, “Where the Action Is” (original 1967) excerpted in James F Cosgrave, ed *The Sociology of Risk and Gambling Reader*, (Routledge, NY/London, 2006) Chapter 12; Erving Goffman, *Sociology of Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

¹⁶ Nerilee Hing et al., “The public stigma of problem gambling: Its nature and relative intensity compared to other health conditions”, (2015) *Journal of Gambling Studies* 31. DOI: 10.1080/14459795.2015.1092566

¹⁷ Ionut Axinescu, “The Strange and Disgusting Things People Do in Casinos” *Vice* (2 October, 2015), online: <http://www.vice.com/read/the-reality-of-working-at-a-casino-876> (accessed 17 March 2016) [perma.cc/FX63-XEBX].

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, trans. Richard Nice, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (NY/London: Routledge, 1984) at 317.

Several decades after Bourdieu's study, his theoretical schema in *Distinction* provides a convincing interpretative framework¹⁹ for the results of social research into perceptions of gambling that I conducted with knowledge workers in a large government organisation.²⁰ Participants in my focus groups and interviews consistently saw those whose recreational choices centre on gambling — and on pokies, in particular — as the antithesis of the aesthete or the intellectual. Several participants expressed visceral distaste of gambling spaces as sites of everyday entertainment or recreation. One spoke of "... aversion to going to a place that is devoted to gambling. And casinos I find really tacky and filthy and grubby; I've never had an enjoyable experience in a casino."²¹ Another said "I find casinos awful places, clubs with pokie machines, ugh, it doesn't appeal"²². A third participant described pokies as "... the lowest form of gambling." The same participant felt that social stigma against pokie players was justified because:

... it's like the dumb man's game...poker machines have their own space and it's not a positive space. It's dark generally and you know crappy carpet, stinks like beer and there are just people kind of zombified sitting in front of these machines hitting a button over and over again.

In a more sympathetic register, he also described players as being "really addicted, their reward centres I don't think even go off when they [win] features and stuff like that."²³

You will note the coexistence of vernacular neuroscience with strong social judgements on cultural spaces of gambling and their inhabitants in this last comment. This tension persistently arose in my interviews with individuals who identified as recreational or moderate gamblers. On one hand, they were filled with compassion for lives ruined by cunningly designed gambling products. On the other hand, they seemed both disgusted and intrigued by scenes of financial devastation and documentary exposes of abject players who wear diapers or remain oblivious when someone playing beside them is having a heart attack. A vivid image of cultural spaces of gambling is evoked that resonates with nineteenth century social reformers' descriptions of gambling "hells"²⁴. While Bourdieu's research on the ways taste functions as cultural capital is useful to demonstrate how gambling is embedded in social relations of class, *Distinction* does not account for the way consumption is racially marked and racially marking in societies formed through processes of colonialism.²⁵

¹⁹ Tony Bennett et al also found the theoretical model elaborated in *Distinction*, *ibid*, useful for their 1999 study of consumption preferences in Australia: *Accounting for Taste: Australian Everyday Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁰ This research was conducted as part of a research project on 'Gambling in Everyday Life' at the University of Queensland between 2010 and 2015 in which the author conducted interviews and focus groups with 27 participants.

²¹ Gambling in Everyday Life project, original interview with gambler and hospitality worker.

²² *Ibid*, original focus group data, 2013.

²³ *Ibid*, original interview data, 2014.

²⁴ Unlicensed ale and coffee houses where gambling took place were referred to as 'hells' by social and political reformers in nineteenth century Britain. Bob Erens et al, eds, *Gambling and Problem Gambling in Britain*. (London: Routledge, 2003) at 12.

²⁵ Bourdieu does touch on gambling in everyday life a much later essay where he sees gambling as offering 'an escape from the negated time of a life without justification or possible investment' for sub-proletarian subjects rather than as part of everyday consumption. See Bourdieu, "Social being, time and the sense of existence" in P Bourdieu (trans. Richard Nice), *Pascalian Meditations* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000) at 222.

To make this connection between cultural capital, stigmatised forms of leisure, and gambling, and to better understand the political rationality that underpins newly-created spaces of gambling consumption, it is helpful to revisit Michel Foucault's account of liberalism. He described liberalism in a lecture on the birth of biopolitics as follows:

... [this] new type of rationality in the art of government, this new type of calculation ... consists in saying and telling government: I accept, wish, plan and calculate that all this should be left alone...²⁶

Today, this principle of frugal government – or state phobia – is often used to describe processes whereby risk is transferred from governmental to individual agencies. As Deborah Lupton explains, "...the acceptance of personal responsibility [becomes] a practice of freedom, relief from state intervention, an opportunity for the entrepreneurial subject to make choices about the conduct of his or her life."²⁷ While Lupton and other scholars account for neo-liberal governmentality at the level of everyday life, gambling research requires closer attention to expanding intersections between gambling, finance, work and play.²⁸

The most common way that gambling in everyday life is approached within the framework of governmentality studies is to focus on its transformation from a closely regulated and socially problematic activity to become an instrument of state purpose and profitable component of multinational entertainment industries. Distinctions between finance and gambling become progressively eroded and industrial era distinctions between practices and spaces of work and leisure are displaced by "presence bleed"²⁹ as digital platforms of communication disperse across time and space. Investment institutions and opportunities are democratised and gameified while subjects are exhorted to leverage their potential for wealth. While these processes are important, we need to understand more clearly how gambling specifically connects performed and represented social identities to broader sites of institutional power and relations of sovereignty in everyday life.

I have developed the concept of finopower to register a paradox that is not addressed by Foucault but is acutely evident when we give serious attention to gambling.³⁰ While gambling industries are sites where frugal government is represented and celebrated as affording opportunities to literally play out our individual powers of freedom,³¹ they remain intimately entangled with processes of state power and sovereignty. On one hand – expanding intersections between gambling, finance and play are the result of frugal government. On the other hand – these intersections are often the focus of intense investment and regulatory oversight by states. For the argument to follow, it is important to recognise that experiences and spaces of gambling can vary depending on the populations of which individuals are designated members. To rephrase Lupton above, some individuals are marked as more or less

²⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics" in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. (New York: Picador, 2004) at 20.

²⁷ Deborah Lupton, "Risk and Governmentality" in Cosgrave, ed, *supra* note 15 at 96.

²⁸ See for example Majia Holmer Nadesen, *Governmentality, Biopower and Everyday Life* (NY/London: Routledge, 2008), Patricia Ticineto Clough, "The Case of Sociology: Governmentality and Methodology" (2010) 36 *Critical Inquiry* 627.

²⁹ For an account of 'presence bleed', see Melissa Gregg, *Work's Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

³⁰ Fiona Nicoll, "Finopower: Governing Intersections between Gambling and Finance". (2013) 27 *September Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 1-21.

³¹ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

appropriate or ready to enjoy “... relief from state intervention’ and given greater or lesser opportunities ‘... to make choices about the conduct of [their lives].”³²

There is a significant body of research on the biopolitical construction and management of Indigenous and other racialized populations in and through white settler colonial states.³³ When we turn to gambling research, however, the literature linking governmentality and race is still thin on the ground. While there is a body of excellent scholarship linking gambling to the governance of addiction,³⁴ more work is needed to demonstrate the relationship between the prevalence of psy-scientific research on problem gambling and the racial states within which gamblers play and are regulated in everyday life. Some promising signposts exist to point the way, however. Jeffrey Sallaz’ global ethnography investigates how transnational casino brands are incorporated within racial struggles to redress economic injustice in South Africa.³⁵ More recently, Kate Bedford considers the political practice of “white listing” as a racial form of governance through which British law-makers attempted to hierarchically order offshore online gambling providers. Drawing on theories of affect, she argues that the project of compiling a white list was abandoned in part because it “...disrupted the racialized reputational hierarchies that were felt to underpin a good regulatory regime”.³⁶ It is relevant for arguments to come that she discusses how one of the oldest and most rigorously self-regulating providers, the Kahnawá:ke Gaming Commission (KGC), established by an Indigenous nation in Canada, was adversely impacted by a white-listing process that rendered them suspect.³⁷

³² Lupton, *supra* note 27 at 96.

³³ The literature on race and governmentality is substantial. The following texts are some key international reference points for the arguments to follow: Sherene Razack, “Simple Logic: Race, the Identity documents rule and the story of a nation besieged and betrayed” (2000) 15 *Journal of Law & Social Policy* 181; “Gendering Disposability” (2016), 28:2 *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 285; *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto: UTP, 2004); *Dying from improvement: Inquests and inquiries into Indigenous deaths in custody*. (Toronto: UTP, 2015); Suvendrini Perera, *Australia and the insular imagination: Beaches, borders, boats, and bodies* (US: Palgrave, 2009); Jaskiran Dhillon, *Indigenous Youth, Decolonization, and the Politics of Intervention* (Toronto: UTP, 2017); Aileen Moreton-Robinson, “Towards a new research agenda? Foucault, Whiteness and Indigenous sovereignty”, (2006) 42:4 *Journal of Sociology* 383; Robert Nichols, “Theft Is Property! The Recursive Logic of Dispossession” (2017) 2 April, *Political Theory* 1; Chris Anderson, *Métis: Race, recognition, and the struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red skin, white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Rauna Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the university: Responsibility, Indigenous epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Malinda Smith “Gender, whiteness and the ‘Other Others’ in the Academy” in Sherene Razack et al, eds *States of race: Critical race feminism for the 21st century*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2010) 37.

³⁴ See for example, Alan F Collins, “The Pathological Gambler and the Government of Gambling’, in Cosgrave ed, *supra* note 15; Gerda Reith, “Consumption and its discontents: Addiction, identity and the problems of freedom” (2004) 55:2 *The British Journal of Sociology* 283; Helen Keane, *What’s Wrong with Addiction?* (Parkville: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

³⁵ Jeffrey J Sallaz, *The Labour of Luck: Casino Capitalism in the United States and South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

³⁶ Kate Bedford, “Letting the Right Ones In: Whitelists, Jurisdictional Reputation, and the Racial Dynamics of Online Gambling Regulation”, (2016) 34 *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* at 31.

³⁷ It is interesting to consider Bedford’s analysis in relation to Australian business reporting in Australia on the early success of the KGC in 2001. The racialized affective investments she identifies are certainly in evidence. But instead of the suspicion she identifies in the process of ‘white-listing’, we see expressions of envy at an Indigenous community’s exploitation of an opportunity missed by white Australian gambling entrepreneurs. As Journalist Ben Hills wrote: “Roll the dice at Royal Vegas Casino, draw to your five-card stud at the Grand Opry, faites vos jeux (place your bets) at the Grand Casino Venice and, unbeknown to you, a little bit of your losses go to subsidise the enterprising Kahnawa:ke of Montreal, Canada.” Ben Hills, “Throwing our money away. Internet

Refracted through the lens of finopower, Bedford's study underscores the important relationship between police and policy in Foucault's genealogical account of power.³⁸ Drawing on archival sources to explain the formation of early modern discourses of government, he highlighted the importance of police in the production and securing of populations. However, his argument that policing preceded the rise of disciplinary policies and associated forms of self-government in liberal and neoliberal societies did not address ongoing relations of colonial rule. As we will see in the following section, policing remains an important mode in the racial governance of gambling in Australia.

Social geographers, economists and gambling prevalence researchers have established that significant concentrations of gambling spaces and products often exist in the lowest socio-economic regions of states.³⁹ In spite of this pattern, as Volberg and Wray pointed out nearly ten years ago, there is a dearth of research on "... the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich ... facilitated, at least in part by ... the disproportionate labelling of certain minorities as 'problem gamblers'"⁴⁰. A cynical interpretation of this silence would be that harms caused by gambling are more easily overlooked when they are experienced within populations already disadvantaged by poverty, racism and other forms of structural discrimination. At the very least, it prompts us to ask a series of questions. How do researchers locate gamblers in relation to specific cultural histories and spaces of gambling? In what kinds of communities are problem gamblers imagined to be at home? How do cultural boundaries drawn between moderate, or enjoyable gambling and problematic or immoderate gambling privilege some ways of being human over others?

To pose such questions is to fundamentally reorient current paradigms of gambling research. At stake is the difference between understanding racism as one, among other factors, that make some people more vulnerable to problem gambling than others and understanding that, as Stuart Hall put it, "the whole social formation [is] racialised."⁴¹ This point can be difficult to grasp however, for the fantasies of political and moral progress to which white racial states proudly lay claim are often sustained by ex-nominating their racial contours of belonging.⁴² So before proceeding further it is necessary to understand the cultural politics of visibility⁴³ in societies that may appear to be postracial.

David Theo Goldberg's comparative, transnational, account of racial neoliberalism charts an important transformation over the past generation in the ways that race and racism

gambling. How a tribe of native Canadians got a jump on the world". *Sydney Morning Herald*. (May 12, 2001) online: <http://benhills.com/articles/scams-scoundrels/throwing-our-money-away/> [perma.cc//6RFG-EPUG].

³⁸ For an elaboration of Foucault's thoughts on the nexus of policing and policy, see Pasquale Pasquino, 'Theatrum Politicum: The Genealogy of Capital – Police and the State of Prosperity' in Graham Burchell et.al, eds, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: UCP, 1991).

³⁹ See Sophie D Vasiliadis et al. "Physical accessibility of gaming opportunity and its relationship to gaming involvement and problem gambling: A systematic review", (2013) 28 *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 1.

⁴⁰ Rachel A Volberg & Matt Wray, 'Legal gambling and problem gambling as mechanisms of social domination?' *Some considerations for future research* (2007) 51:1 *American Behavioural Scientist* 56.

⁴¹ Hall cited in C Alexander, "Stuart Hall and 'Race'" (2009) 23:4, *Cultural Studies* 469.

⁴² Also relevant here is Ghassan Hage's, argument about how white nationalism is sustained in Australia through everyday cultural practices of worrying about the degree and composition of immigration that is desirable. See Ghassan Hage, *White Nation White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998); Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2003).

⁴³ See D T Goldberg "In/Visibility and Super/Vision: Fanon and Racial Formation" in Gordon Sharpley et.al, eds *Fanon: A critical reader* (Oxford: Blackwell,1996) at 182.

are understood and represented. Observing how anti-racist politics has been displaced by “anti-racialism” or “raceless racism”, he writes:

As race is rendered irrelevant, racism – *conceptually* becomes stigmatized so that only the obviously bigoted – extreme individuals – get to qualify...here racism is reduced in its supposed singularity to *invoking* race, not to its debilitating structural effects or the legacy of its ongoing unfair impacts.⁴⁴

He argues, further, that the formal excision of race from the public sphere paradoxically enables it to flourish in the expanding proprietary domains within neo-liberal states. Goldberg’s account of racial neoliberalism is helpful in understanding how the problem gambler circulates as an abject figure in popular culture and everyday life while remaining disarticulated from broader debates about whiteness, race and Indigeneity.⁴⁵ As we will see in the following section, this process has been exacerbated by the increased involvement of corporate players in the area of Indigenous welfare reform.

III. THE RACIAL BIOPOLITICS OF GAMBLING IN AUSTRALIA

Postracial discourses take different forms in Australia but one of the most common involves the proposition that, while racism may have been part of the nation’s past, the formal equality achieved in civil rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, together with official policies of multiculturalism, have created an equal playing ground between individual citizens. Failures slated to Indigenous and other racialised populations (including poverty, poor health, incarceration) are then explained with reference to dysfunctional cultures. Demands or complaints that require racism’s structural causes and effects to be recognized are met with defensive postures by white power brokers. Strong claims are made in parliament and on talk show radio airwaves, such as the pendulum has swung too far towards minorities, as well as accusations against Indigenous and racialized subjects for playing the race card when white institutions or individuals are criticised. This political context determines how racialized populations appear or disappear from public view when specific social issues are at stake. Two sketch comedy examples help to illustrate how gambling, and relations of finance more broadly, are refracted in Australian popular culture in ways that make race and Indigeneity more or less visible.

The Wedge demonstrates how whiteness implicitly organises popular representations of gambling in Australian popular culture. A sketch comedy show made at a time when electronic gaming machine venues were reshaping the recreational landscape of many suburbs in Australia, it featured a regular segment on ‘the pokie girls’.⁴⁶ Addressed to viewers with more refined tastes in recreational pursuits, this segment extracted its laughs from the bad behaviour of two white women players in a venue who caress the machines as though they are idols and wait hopefully for the big jackpot. One of the pair embodies the gender stereotype of the bad mom, replete with references to forgotten birthdays and hungry children waiting in

⁴⁴ David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2009) at 360.

⁴⁵ For a more extensive account of how cultural figures produce and sustain racial domination in colonial societies, see Sara Ahmed’s phenomenological reflections on the stranger as a cultural figure that is known in advance of specific encounters. Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality* (NY/London: Routledge, 2000) at 3.

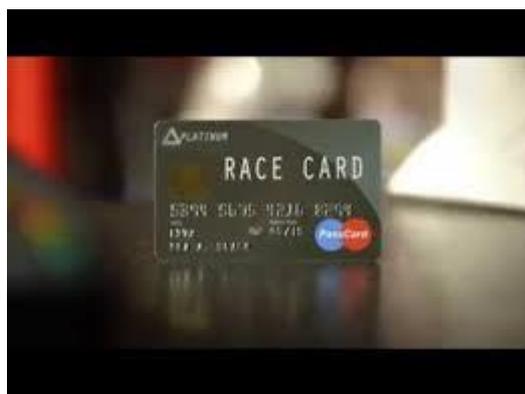
⁴⁶ Channel 10, *The Wedge*, 2006-2007. More information available at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0818895/>.

parked cars outside, while her friend aids and abets her irresponsible behaviour. In this example of politically incorrect comedy, intersections of gender and class identities displace focus from ways that gambling industries both reproduce and exacerbate racial inequality in Australia.



Figure 1: Problem gambling in the Australian suburbs: Sherrine and Leanne, *The Pokie Chicks* on Australian sketch comedy show *The Wedge* (portrayed by Kate Jenkinson & Rebel Wilson).⁴⁷

Racial neoliberalism’s structuring of everyday life is further conveyed in a sketch from *Black Comedy*, an Australian Broadcasting Corporation television production featuring some of the country’s most talented writers and performers. The sketch is a close parody of a successful MasterCard advertising campaign which promotes credit by illustrating how purchasing goods and services can lead to “priceless” experiences. The first scene depicts a young Indigenous woman drifting along the aisles of a supermarket. Prices attached to the kind of products itemized by the satirical blog *Stuff White People Like*.⁴⁸ The following voiceover, together with subtitles on screen announces: ‘Freshly baked organic spelt: \$10.95, Organic full cream milk: \$5.00, Fairtrade dark chocolate: \$7.00.’ The woman then plucks a grape from a punnet en-route to the checkout while the voiceover continues narration: “A cheeky grape? Free.” The woman then pushes past an elderly white woman who proclaims indignantly: “Excuse me! I was here first!” upon which the shopper flashes her platinum race card and says “No. I was here first!” The voice over returns to parody the original ad: “Priceless. Introducing the Race Card Platinum. Because everybody’s equal but some are more equal than others”.



⁴⁷ Still from AgeCool, *The Wedge* on Ten, July 11, 2009 online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5psItr_kjjo.

⁴⁸ Popular in the early 2000s, this blog playfully explores how whiteness functions as a class identity through the consumption choices of individuals. See Christian Landers, “Stuff White People Like”, <<https://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/>> (accessed 17 September 2017) [perma.cc/5D4P-R8VP].

Figure 2: Still from ABC Indigenous ABC Black Comedy, Race Card Platinum (Season 1 Sneak Preview).⁴⁹

Here the *Black Comedy* team playfully satirizes elite white tastes and the often-unspoken precedence of white people in everyday situations. Without explicit reference to colonization, the sketch evokes Indigenous sovereignty, and without explicit reference to the racially discriminatory policies we will examine in the next section, it returns the problem of stigma to the sender. It also mocks postracial claims of “Aboriginal privilege”⁵⁰ evoked by some white Australian politicians and journalists. Racial neoliberalism in Australia is epitomized in the voiceover that concludes the sketch: “Because everybody’s equal but some are more equal than others”. The humorous delivery of this line should not obscure its identification of an intractable problem for liberal and neoliberal political philosophy. Individual freedom for European men was purchased at a huge cost for the Indigenous people whose lands gave it the space to flourish. Racial concepts of civilization that continue to inform policy development and administration are constitutionally incapable of recognizing the priceless value of country to those whose law and culture preceded colonization and the ‘commonwealth’ of Australia.

To clarify how this analysis of racial neoliberalism can inform critical debate on the figure of the problem gambler, it is necessary to explain some unique aspects of gambling’s governance in Australia. Political decisions to allow electronic gaming machines in casinos, clubs and hotels in almost every jurisdiction in the 1990s, and the explosion of sports betting products and platforms in subsequent decades, are part of broader neoliberal processes of economic reform in Australia. These processes saw gambling embedded in political and corporate institutions to an unprecedented extent, giving rise to what some scholars have described as “Big Gambling”.⁵¹ Varying in scale, from small, dedicated areas in bars to hundreds of machines in multi-levelled clubs resembling casinos, everyday gambling spaces are a source of taxation on which most state and territory governments have become reliant.

Moreover, gambling – together with war – is a celebrated component of national identity⁵². Australia is a country where journalists announce each year that a horse race, the Melbourne Cup, stops the nation, a claim that is reinforced by the dedication of a public holiday in the large city where it is run. The remote possibility of winning a life-changing amount of money provides the narrative structure and affective force of much popular culture. For example, an advertisement for a state lottery in Queensland features staged photographs of white parents handing possession of a new home, replete with a white picket fence, to lucky children.⁵³ Such imagery resonates in an economic situation where home ownership has become more than a symbol of domesticity and security; it has become a powerful financial vehicle that is increasingly out of reach for younger people whose employment is often part-time and precarious.

⁴⁹ Still from ABC Indigenous, ABC Black Comedy: Race Card Platinum. 10 November 2014. Online: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KfHlwQ7frY>>.

⁵⁰ See S Mickler, *The Myth of Privilege: Aboriginal Status, Media Visions, Public Ideas* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press 1998).

⁵¹ Francis Markham and Martin Young, “‘Big gambling’: the rise of the global industry-state gambling complex” (2015) 23:1, *Addiction Research & Theory* 1 at 1-4.

⁵² See Fiona Nicoll, *From Diggers to Drag Queens: Configurations of Australian National Identity* (Sydney: Pluto Press 2001).

⁵³ nalagola6 (Youtube), Golden Casket Gold Lotto 2010 Ad. *YouTube*. 8 August 2014. Online: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSuamtI6iR8>>.

Australia is also a country with over 200,000 electronic gaming machines (colloquially known and marketed as pokies) and the highest level of average annual expenditure in the world, with estimates that up to 40 percent of revenue comes from those who can least afford to lose.⁵⁴ Two national productivity commissions found pokies to be the form of gambling most strongly associated with harm to individuals and communities in Australia.⁵⁵ Apart from Western Australia where they are contained within a large casino resort, pokies have penetrated many parts of the nation through state and territory licensing regimes that allow them to be placed in hotels and clubs. As a consequence, problem gambling has become closely tied to specific urban, suburban and regional areas in which pokies are most concentrated. These are often low socio-economic areas with comparatively high Indigenous populations. 2016 Census data shows Indigenous people in Australia are half as likely to report income of over \$1,000 per week than their non-Indigenous counterparts.⁵⁶ Greater Western Sydney has the largest Indigenous community in Australia⁵⁷ and also boasts the highest gambling losses, with \$8 billion dollars spent on pokies in one local council alone during 2015-16.⁵⁸ Digital spaces of gambling are increasingly connected to physical venues through player loyalty schemes. These loyalty schemes promote special offers and rewards to members via email and social media platforms accessed on digital devices.

The extent to which individuals are surrounded by gambling venues in their immediate neighbourhoods and/or targeted for gambling advertisements online is one factor that determines how easy it is to engage in excessive consumption.⁵⁹ When it comes to the distribution of gambling spaces in Australia, there is also a strong NIMBY politics at play.⁶⁰ The role of pokies in subsidising the activities of sporting clubs, returned service leagues and other community groups in disadvantaged areas has made it difficult for social and recreational spaces to flourish independently of gambling interests. Conversely, affluent areas where gambling spaces do not yet exist are more difficult for gambling products to penetrate. Successful campaigns against pokie licenses have been mounted in several rural and regional communities, citing not only risks of gambling addiction but also the adverse impacts on cultural heritage values and tourism. One rural shire even used the absence of pokies to promote its gold-rush architecture to tourists through a poster featuring a photograph of a streetscape with nineteenth century buildings above the text: “Beechworth ... a rich and vibrant community without pokies”:

⁵⁴ Charles Livingstone, Angela Rintoul & Louise Francis, What is the evidence for harm minimisation measures in gambling venues? 2014 Evidence Base Journal 2.

⁵⁵ See Productivity Commission. *Australia's Gambling Industries*. (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1999). Productivity Commission. *Gambling: Inquiry Report*. (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

⁵⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population: 2016 Census Data Summary. *Australian Bureau of Statistics*. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Population%20Data%20Summary~10> (accessed 7 May, 2018).

⁵⁷ ‘About Greater Western Sydney’, *Western Sydney University*. https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/rcegws/rcegws/About/about_greater_western_sydney (accessed 7 May, 2018).

⁵⁸ Nicholls, Sean, ‘Fairfield Council calls for poker machine freeze in high risk areas’, *Sydney Morning Herald*. June 10, 2017. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/fairfield-council-calls-for-poker-machine-freeze-in-high-risk-areas-20170710-gx85el.html> (accessed May 7, 2018).

⁵⁹ See D Marshall, Gambling as a public health issue: The critical role of the local environment. (2009) 23 *Journal of Gambling Issues* 66-80.

⁶⁰ This is an acronym for Not in My Backyard and is often used to criticize community activists who seek to prevent polluting or undesirable industries from taking root in their residential zones.

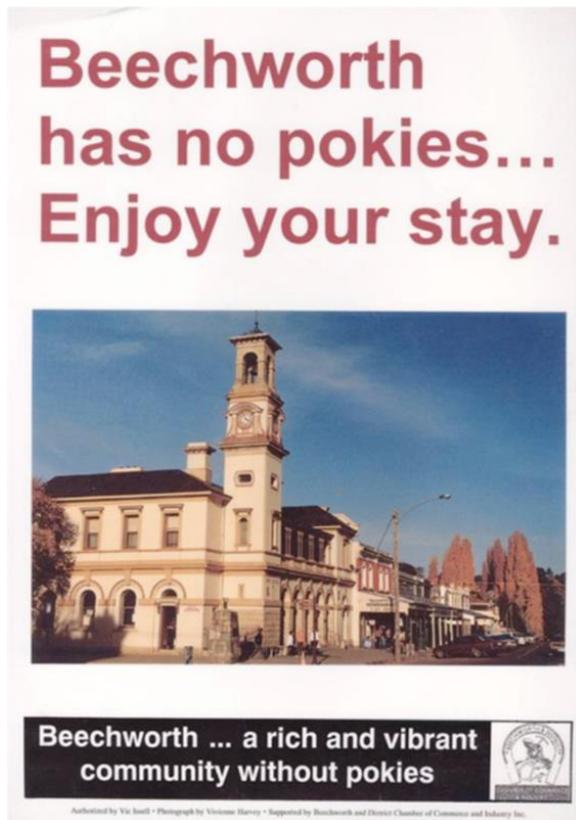


Figure 3. Advertisement for Beechworth, Australia.⁶¹

While neoliberalism provides a common economic and political framework with other white settler-colonial nations, in contrast to Canada and the United States,⁶² gambling has not been part of rights or treaty-based settlements for Indigenous people in Australia. Instead it is most often cited as a contributing factor to pathological conditions within Indigenous communities. The only context in which Indigenous gambling is framed positively is as a means of ameliorating these conditions through employment within gambling industries. Crown Casino, owned by Australian born global gambling tycoon and local celebrity, James Packer, provides several examples of this framing.

Crown's new Barangaroo casino resort development in Sydney is a former dock site, named after a Cammeraygal woman who was a companion to Bennelong, a political and cultural broker from the Eora nations in the years following the establishment of a British penal colony in 1788. With Barangaroo Point directly facing Bennelong Point, the names of these landmarks evoke early colonial histories of the casino site. As part of his unsolicited and ultimately successful bid to develop the city's second casino, Packer committed to establishing a hospitality college with a training scheme for 200 Indigenous employees.⁶³

⁶¹ This poster is from the author's personal collection of gambling memorabilia and has been reproduced in: Fiona Nicoll 'On Blowing Up the Pokies: The Pokie Lounge as a Cultural Site of Neoliberal Governmentality in Australia'. (2011) *Cultural Studies Review*. 17.2 at 219-256.

⁶² There is a significant literature on this. For an overview, see Steven A Light and Kathryn R L Rand. *Indian gaming and tribal sovereignty: The casino compromise*. (Kansas: KUP, 2005); Yale Belanger, *Gambling with the Future: The Evolution of Aboriginal Gaming in Canada* (Saskatoon: Purich, Publishing, 2006); and "Toward an Innovative Understanding of North American Indigenous Gaming in Historical Perspective", *First Nations Gaming in Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011).

⁶³ John Lehmann, "James Packer Reveals \$60 Million Arts Gift for Sydney as Barry O'Farrell gives Crown's Barangaroo Casino the Final Nod", *Daily Telegraph* (11 November, 2013). <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/james-packer-reveals-60-million-arts-gift-for-sydney-as-barry->

One of the opening pages of Crown Resort’s Reconciliation Action Plan booklet depicts a young Aboriginal man with a broad smile. He is dealing blackjack cards and looking up to a woman who is also smiling and has what appears to be a guiding hand gently placed on his back. The far left-hand side of the picture panel features an Aboriginal design, while a facing page includes a flattering photograph of James Packer within a circular design, together with a brief note. In his note, Packer congratulates Crown on its hard work ‘to create a culture of change both within our organisation and the broader community’ and he celebrates success in ‘building enduring relationships of trust and respect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.’ The remainder of the booklet underlines the role played by Crown to equip Indigenous Australians to work in an emerging, casino-driven, tourist economy. In subsequent pages, smiling trainees and employees share hopes and dreams of using their experience at Crown as a launching pad for enterprise in different areas of this new economy.⁶⁴



Figure 4. Crown Resorts Elevate Reconciliation Action Plan 2015-2017 at 4-5.⁶⁵

It may not be necessary to point out that when an Australian global gambling entrepreneur creates an employment plan for Indigenous Australians in his casinos under the rubric of reconciliation, he is not simply exercising soft political influence as an entrepreneur. He is also staging a performance as the beneficiary of considerable intergenerational wealth extracted from the invasion and settlement of pre-possessed Indigenous countries. His program of reconciliation through Indigenous employment schemes is irreducible to one more example of neo-liberal governmentality; it reinscribes racial hierarchies in Australia established through frontier wars, which continued in some parts of Australia into the early twentieth century. These hierarchies position white people as philanthropic helpers of Aboriginal people who are ultimately destined for assimilation into a nation built on their dispossession.

[ofarrell-gives-crowns-barangaroo-casino-the-final-nod/news-story/36546311f329aeb180e6530cd1fef9ef](https://www.crownperth.com.au/getmedia/62a2f00b-d63d-47cf-8570-84654cfefbc08/150730-CrownResorts-General-Media-Release-RAP-Booklet.pdf.aspx) (accessed 7 May)

⁶⁴ *Crown Resorts Elevate Reconciliation Action Plan 2015-2017*. Australia: Crown Resorts. [www.crownperth.com.au](https://www.crownperth.com.au/getmedia/62a2f00b-d63d-47cf-8570-84654cfefbc08/150730-CrownResorts-General-Media-Release-RAP-Booklet.pdf.aspx) <https://www.crownperth.com.au/getmedia/62a2f00b-d63d-47cf-8570-84654cfefbc08/150730-CrownResorts-General-Media-Release-RAP-Booklet.pdf.aspx> (accessed 16 August, 2018)

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 4-5.

This is perhaps most starkly illustrated in cases where there are clear conflicts of interest between the white helpers and those designated as recipients. Andrew Forrest is a mining entrepreneur who was invited to draft welfare policy for Indigenous Australians on the strength of his intergenerational connections with Aboriginal lands and people in the Pilbara region. He promotes a brand of hard reconciliation based on the quarantining of welfare and royalty payments to Indigenous people. He has also been in battle with native title holders over permissions to expand his mining business and how royalties should be shared.⁶⁶ His determination not to provide landowners with cash transfers is encapsulated in disparagingly references to these as “sit down money”.⁶⁷ Instead, Indigenous community development seems to be equated with supplying local people with entry level positions within mining and service industries.

Forrest’s private Minderoo Foundation sponsored two regional trials of a cashless welfare card, an extension of the Basics Card applied to residents of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. This card pre-commits 80 percent of all government payments to expenses regarded as healthy, partly by virtue of excluding alcohol and gambling. Notably, the scheme’s application does not distinguish between individuals who have had problems with gambling and alcohol products, on one hand, and abstainers or light users, on the other. The Minderoo foundation recently defended the welfare trials, creating a disturbing video with footage of violence in Aboriginal communities and testimonies from local leaders as evidence for a policy that Forrest claims will restore social order among Indigenous people. This welfare entrepreneurialism exemplifies what Goldberg describes as “born again racism, racism without race, racism gone private, racism without the categories to name it as such.”⁶⁸

Debates surrounding Forrest’s cashless welfare card reveal how Indigenous economic participation in Australia is rendered through media spectacle in two related modes.⁶⁹ In the first mode, which I have called elsewhere a “theatre of pathology”, Indigenous citizens are made visible as the site of welfare experiments designed to distinguish between worthy and unworthy recipients.⁷⁰ In the second mode, the success of individual Indigenous people within the marketplace is mobilised for national self-congratulations about the progress of reconciliation. Gambling plays a key role in this spectacle as a metonym for irresponsible expenditure that confirms the failure of Indigenous subjects to achieve a standard of civility

⁶⁶ See Michael Sainsbury and Russell Skelton, “Twiggy’s big giveaway: Andrew “Twiggy” Forrest is a champion of indigenous causes, yet is in dispute with traditional owners”, *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 March, 2013). <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/twiggys-big-giveaway-20130324-2gopp.html>

and Jamie Smyth, “Fortescue loses landmark case on indigenous land rights. Australian miners now exposed to hundreds of millions of dollars in claims”, *Financial Times* (20 July, 2017) <https://www.ft.com/content/0a1406fa-6d21-11e7-bfeb-33fe0c5b7eaa>

⁶⁷ Alex McKinnon ‘Andrew Forrest’s Good Intentions’. *The Saturday Paper*. Edition No. 177 October 7 – 13, 2017, n.p. <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/health/2017/10/07/andrew-forrests-good-intentions/15072948005313> [perma.cc/ no page number.

⁶⁸ Goldberg, *supra* note 44 at 23.

⁶⁹ Melissa Davey, ‘Andrew Forrest accused of lack of transparency over ad for cashless welfare card: Minderoo Foundation disseminates ad promoting cashless welfare card without disclosing Forrest’s role as its chairman’ *The Guardian Online* ((24 April, 2017) online: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/24/andrew-forrest-accused-of-lack-of-transparency-over-ad-for-cashless-welfare-card>.

⁷⁰ See Fiona Nicoll, “Consuming Pathologies: The Australian against Indigenous Sovereignty”, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Maryrose Casey and Fiona Nicoll, eds, *Transnational Whiteness Matters*, Lexington Books, 2008) at 57-80.

against an imaginary white norm⁷¹. This alleged failure, in turn, becomes a pretext for government intervention via racially targeted policies.

There is a significant interdisciplinary literature on the Northern Territory Emergency Response Act (NTERA or commonly referred to as The Intervention) formulated by the conservative Howard government in 2007, which suspended the federal Racial Discrimination Act (1975).⁷² The NTERA quarantined Indigenous welfare payments, enabled army personnel to enter remote Indigenous communities for the purpose of conducting sexual health checks on children, and established federal government oversight on outstations. These outstations were originally built as part of a shift back from reserves to country when policies of Aboriginal self-determination displaced policies of assimilation from the 1980s; by the mid-2000s their opacity had become a problem for energy resource speculators and governments at all levels.

With some notable exceptions,⁷³ there is little research to illuminate how experiences and spaces of gambling have been affected by these political developments. To move beyond a critique of problem gambling discourses, a richer understanding of how gambling features in the everyday lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is required. In this context, we will recall Raymond William's insistence on the importance of ordinary culture, together with Stuart Hall's call to recognize, "the whole social formation [as] racialised."⁷⁴ As a scholar working within a critical cultural studies tradition, I have found Indigenous creative production more useful for understanding gambling as an aspect of everyday life than ethnographic accounts of Indigenous gambling in specific communities. With Hall, my approach to understanding cultural spaces of gambling is attentive to the role of "artistic work [as an] exploratory space in which ideas work themselves out."⁷⁵ Below I examine two creative works which disrupt the figure of problem gambler and register the ubiquitous workings of race in specific cultural spaces: a suburban pokie lounge and a remote Aboriginal community with a nearby casino. In different ways, both of these examples highlight commercial gambling's production of spaces of Indigenous community and belonging even as it extracts money from those least able to afford to participate in addictive games.⁷⁶

A. POKIE LOVE

I have shown how Indigenous people have been made objects of racial policy experimentations that are rationalized by government and corporate stakeholders, in part, through references to gambling addiction. Promoted as a "... sketch comedy show by Blackfellas ... For everyone", *Black Comedy* registers but does not reproduce white audience expectations structured by

⁷¹ See Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Imagining the Good Indigenous Citizen: Race War and the Pathology of Patriarchal White Sovereignty" (2009) 15:2 *Cultural Studies Review* at 61–79.

⁷² See Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson, *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia* (Melbourne: Arena Publications, 2007) and Alissa McCoun, "Aboriginality and the Northern Territory intervention" (2011) 46:3 *Journal of Political Science* at 517–532.

⁷³ See for example, Martin Young et.al, "Gambling spaces and the racial dialectics of social inclusion: a case study of a remote Australian casino", (2013) 51:2, *Geographic Research* at 192–203; Nerilee Hing et.al, "The Gambling Behavior of Indigenous Australians" (2013) Jan 22, *Journal of Gambling Studies* at 369–386, doi: 10.1007/s10899-013-9358-9

⁷⁴ Stuart Hall cited in Alexander, *supra* note 42 at 469.

⁷⁵ Stuart Hall cited in *ibid* at 468.

⁷⁶ For an Indigenous academic reflection on the significance of this television production, see Chelsea Bond, 'Black comedy: the ABC makes bold foray into race relations.' *The Conversation* (5 November, 2014). <https://theconversation.com/black-comedy-the-abc-makes-a-bold-foray-into-race-relations-33744> (accessed 19 June, 2016) [perma.cc/ https://perma.cc/HXU2-6JW6].

worrying about problem gambling and Indigenous people.⁷⁷ Instead, it makes evident what Metis scholar Chris Andersen has described as the density of contemporary Indigeneity to displace settler-colonial fixations on the cultural difference of Indigenous peoples.⁷⁸ Before proceeding to analyze a sketch titled *Pokie Love*, a few comments about some of its creators and its broader media context are required.

Black Comedy does not just address a primetime mass audience of ABC citizen-viewers. It is present at other times and places through interactive paratexts, including journalism and social media platforms, such as YouTube and facebook. *Pokie Love*'s lead actor and co-writer, Steven Oliver, emerged as a local celebrity during the first season of *Black Comedy*. An accomplished dancer, poet and playwright based in Queensland, Oliver used his facebook page as a forum for serious and carefully crafted reflections on a range of political matters ranging from homophobia in sport to reconciliation and the closure of remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. His co-star in this sketch is Nakkiah Lui, an Aboriginal playwright, actor and director from Western Sydney. Like Oliver, she has taken on broader public intellectual roles, speaking and writing on different social issues, from youth suicide and body image to the recent emergence of an Aboriginal middle-class in Australia.⁷⁹ The labour of these creative workers – as with many of their Indigenous counterparts who are hailed as role-models and recruited as spokespeople on all matters Indigenous – spans creative disciplines, genres and media platforms. Below we will see how their disciplines of writing, performance and dance work together to make the pokie venue, as an everyday cultural space of gambling, appear to viewers in a new way.



Figure 5: Website of the television show *Black Comedy*.⁸⁰

The promotion for a *Black Comedy* sketch titled ‘*Pokie Love*’ describes it as shining “... a light on one of the great love stories of the ages, the love of a blackfella for his favourite

⁷⁷ *Black Comedy*. ABC Television. Directors: Craig Anderson and Beck Cole. Writers: John Bell, Nakkiah Lui, Steven Oliver, Elizabeth Wymarra, Bjorn Stewart, Moses Nelliman and Michael Passi.

⁷⁸ Chris Andersen, “Critical Indigenous Studies: From Difference to Density” (2009) 15:2 *Cultural Studies Review* at 80-100.

⁷⁹ See Steve Dow, “Playwright Nakkiah Lui on radicalism and family”, *The Saturday Paper*. October 29-November 4, 2016. <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2016/10/29/playwright-nakkiah-lui-radicalism-and-family/14776596003904> (accessed May 7 2018).

⁸⁰ ABC, *Black Comedy* (website), online, <https://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/black-comedy/> [perma.cc/8AZL-86HQ].

poker machine.”⁸¹ At its heart is the story of a man (played by Oliver) whose unrequited love for attached to Running Bear, a pokie with a Native American theme, gets him into trouble. In the first part of the clip, the protagonist’s excessive enjoyment of the machine prompts a stern command to leave the venue from the Indigenous security guard. His competitor for the love of this machine is another Indigenous player, ‘Margaret’ (played by Lui); she taunts him with stories of “free games within the free games” and of major jackpots she won in his absence. Sometime later he returns. In a shot, from the point of view of the Running Bear pokie, our protagonist explains that he has established an intimate relationship with a new game. Alas, he proves incapable of resisting the urge to have one more play “for old times’ sake”, cuing pornographic music as he caresses and thrusts against the machine. He is asked to leave the venue once again and runs out tearfully with a final message for the Running Bear pokie “I’ll always love you!” The final scene is a full frontal shot of the machine; the screen seems to pulsate as sinister extra-diegetic music plays in the background.

Generic play and camp performance are used in this clip to reconfigure familiar representations of the pokie venue, pokie machines, problem gambling and Aboriginality. The first thing to note is that the pokie venue doesn’t appear as a hellish space inhabited by problem gamblers so familiar to us from media representations and registered in the social research discussed earlier. Instead, the venue becomes a stage for the unfolding of a melodramatic narrative of unreciprocated love. The second and related point to note is the humorous excess of Oliver’s camp performance of jilted lover. The subject of problem gambling is thoroughly queered by Oliver and co-star Nakkiah Lui. This makes a contrast to prevalent discourses structured by worry about what Schull terms the “machine lives” of addicts, humans whose capacity for autonomous choice is tragically corroded.⁸² The sketch switches between generic conventions of romance, melodrama, soap and soft porn. And gamblers are, perhaps uniquely, represented from the point of view of an electronic gambling machine. These elements rearticulate the pokie as a trans-human artefact with which dirty dancing somehow makes sense — however inappropriate in practice. The constitution of Indigenous identities through gambling products is reflected in Oliver’s excessive attachment to and Margaret’s dastardly appropriation of the ‘Native American’ themed machine, Running Bear.

Native American themed EGMs are ubiquitous in Australian pokie venues and this is related in part to the transnational popularity of animated sitcoms from the 1990s. *Family Guy*, *The Simpsons* and *Southpark* all feature politically incorrect story lines about ‘Indian casinos’ which elaborate notions of reverse racism.⁸³ *Black Comedy* raises more questions than answers about why a form of entertainment that is so blatantly Aboriginalist would become an object of fatal attraction for Indigenous Australian players.⁸⁴ It raises these questions not to engender debates about positive and negative representations but to generate humour through irony. In

⁸¹ ABC Indigenous, “ABC Black Comedy: Pokie Love (Season 1, Episode 6)”, 10 December, 2014. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qce1Qv0RvZ4>.

⁸² N.D. Schull, *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁸³ See Fiona Nicoll, “What’s So Funny about Indian Casinos?” Eds. Katrina Schlunke & Nicole Anderson, *Cultural Theory in Everyday Practice* (Oxford University Press 2008), 87-196; Fiona Nicoll “Indian Dreaming: Iconography of the Zone/Zones of Iconography” (2014) August.1-15 Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies. doi:10.1080/10304312.2014.941336.

⁸⁴ For an explanation of the term ‘Aboriginalism’ as adapted from Edward Said’s framework of ‘Orientalism’, see Bain Attwood “Introduction.” In Bain Attwood & John Arnold, eds, *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines* (Melbourne: La Trobe University Press, 1992) at xvi

the hands of this team of Indigenous comedy writers and performers, “self-Aboriginalism”⁸⁵ — so clumsily handled in US animated sit-coms — becomes more transgressive and funny than the marketing term “politically incorrect” can possibly capture.



Figure 6: Scenes from ‘Pokie Love’ sketch from *Black Comedy* featuring Steven Oliver and Nakkiah Lui.⁸⁶

Pokie Love reminds us that gambling spaces can be generative of enjoyment and belonging, even as they cause damage to individuals and communities. I am prompted by *Black Comedy* to pay more attention to the intersubjective ecology of gambling venues and to produce critical cultural research that reaches beyond the agonistic struggle between vulnerable individuals and calculating machines.⁸⁷ Instead of the scene of a risky encounter between human and algorithm, the pokie venue appears as a theatre of social drama and competition, as well as a site of everyday multiculturalism. Interventions by security are figured as a threat to the continuation of the everyday dramas the venue engenders. That the personification of the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is an Indigenous security guard highlights the postracial context of *Black Comedy’s* cultural intervention⁸⁸. But if the sketch poses the question: who could possibly find racism in this picture of self-policing Indigenous people, it does so in a clearly hyperbolic register.

B. INTERVENTION PAYBACK

I have used *Black Comedy* to highlight the racially marked and marking work involved in the neoliberal governance of gambling spaces. Ali Coby Eckermann’s poem *Intervention Payback* is a scathing critique of unintended consequences of the NTERA welfare reforms which had the explicit objective of addressing and preventing domestic violence against women and children. Ten years after the emergency measures were implemented, an Indigenous senator from the Northern Territory described it as “an act of war against Aboriginal people”⁸⁹ and policy scholars are calling for redress of the economic damage caused by displacing community

⁸⁵ Academic analysis of ‘self-Aboriginalism’ can be similarly un-nuanced. See for example, David Cullier and Susan Dente Ross, “Gambling with Identity: Self-Representation of American Indians on Official Tribal Websites.” (2007) 18 *The Howard Journal of Communication* at 197–219.

⁸⁶ ABC Indigenous, “ABC Black Comedy: Pokie Love (Season 1, Episode 6)”, 10 December, 2014. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qce1Qv0RvZ4>.

⁸⁷ Rebecca Cassidy makes a similar argument about the overstatement of agonism in arguments about the difference between traditional gambling forms such as horse wagering and machine gambling based on ethnographic research in betting shops where both co-exist. See ‘Horse Versus Machine: Battles in the Betting Shop. (2012) *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 18 at 266-284.

⁸⁸ See Goldberg *supra* note 44.

⁸⁹ Australian Associated Press, “NT intervention seen as ‘act of war’ on Aboriginal people, Nova Peris says” *The Guardian* (26 June 2017), online <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jun/26/nt-intervention-seen-as-act-of-war-on-aboriginal-people-nova-peris-says>>.[perma.cc/8SH7-JJEN].

based work-for-welfare schemes with punitive and stigmatising welfare quarantining.⁹⁰ Aboriginal men were particularly impacted by this process, through sensationalist media commentary that framed the Intervention as saving women and children from sexual and physical abuse.

Intervention Payback is structured as a first-person narrative told from the perspective of an Aboriginal husband and father living on a community near a town where a casino is supported by the patronage of a large Indigenous population. The style of writing is deliberately challenging, incorporating Aboriginal-English to tell a story about the impact of government policies on four generations of one family. There is no punctuation; spaces are used to convey the rhythm of oral storytelling and the phrase “there come” is repeated to signal transition to each new narrative development. These techniques alienate readers from familiar colonial tropes of representing Aboriginal cultural difference, humanizing the narrator through an invitation to share an unfamiliar way of being in the world.

The poem begins with the line “I love my wife”. The narrator then proceeds to describe a happy household with children laughing, and chickens running around in a well-tended garden. He is the center of this universe; he builds and maintains houses in the community and enjoys hunting for traditional foods.

*... And in the house we teach the kids don't make mess go to
school learn good so you can work round here later good job
good life and the government will leave you alone*

He shares stories of the assimilation era passed down from his grandparents with his children:

*when the government was worse rations government make up all the rules but
don't know culture can't sit in the sand*

The family laughs about these times past until:

*there come intervention John Howard [Australian Prime Minister] he
make new rules he never even come to see us how good we was doing
already Mal Brough [Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Affairs] he come with the army we got real frightened true
thought he was gonna take the kids away just like tjamu and nana
[grandparents] bin tell us*

Not much changes for the narrator in the period directly after the government announcement and meetings:

*but then my wife she come home crying says the money in quarantine but I
didn't know why they do that we was happy not drinking and fighting*

The narrator cannot understand why he has been targeted for intervention in the absence of problems with alcohol or child abuse:

⁹⁰ See Eva Cox, “Evidence-Free Policy Making? The Case of Income Management” (2011) 12 *Journal of Indigenous Policy* at 1-98 and Melinda Hinkson, “10 years after the intervention, it’s time to admit it has destroyed Aboriginal communities”, *The Guardian*, (21 June 2007). Online <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/21/10-year-after-the-intervention-its-time-to-admit-it-has-destroyed-aboriginal-communities> [perma.cc/644C-QX42].

why they do that we ask the council to stop the drinking and protect the children hey you know me ya bloody mongrel I don't drink and I look after my kids

The narrator is overwhelmed by a sense of racial disempowerment he previously believed was confined to his grandparents' generation:

Mal Brough saying that don't you watch the television he making the rules for all the mobs every place Northern Territory he real cheeky whitefella but he's the boss we gotta do it.

He describes the cessation of the community-based work for welfare scheme and its replacement with a system that leaves the family without capacity for discretionary expenditure:

and from there the government told us our job was finish the government bin give us the sack we couldn't believe it we been working CDEP for years...

and from there the politician man says I give you real job tells me to work again but different only half time sixteen hours but I couldn't understand it was the same job as before but more little less pay and my kids can't understand when they come home from school why I cant buy the lolly for them like I used to before I didn't want to tell them I get less money for us now

He is deeply affected by the disorientation caused by compulsory income management among older people in the community:

and from there I drive round to see tjamu [grandfather] he says his money in the store too poor bloke he can't even walk that far and I don't smile I look at the old man he lost his smile too but nana she cook the damper and roo tail she trying to smile she always like that

The narrator's relationship with his wife begins to deteriorate.

and from there when I get home my wife gone to town with the sister in law she gone look for my brother he might be stupid on the grog he not used to it she gotta find him might catch him with another woman make him bleed drag him home

and from there my wife she come back real quiet tells me she went to casino them others took her taught her the machines she lost all the money she lost her laughing

With his wife now the sole breadwinner, the cultural space of the casino appears as a threat to the good life in the time before the Intervention.

and from there my wife she sorry she back working hard save the money kids gonna get new clothes I gonna get my tobacco and them bullets but she gone change again getting her pay forgetting her family forget yesterday only thinking for town with the sister in law

and my wife she got real smart now drive for miles all dressed up going to the casino with them other kungkas [women] for the Wednesday night draw

