

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

James F. Cosgrave and Thomas R. Klassen, eds., *Casino State: Legalized Gambling in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, 256 pp. \$50.00 hardcover (978-0-8020-9688-3)

Casino State: Legalized Gambling in Canada certainly succeeds in its intention of bringing a critical and holistic social science perspective to the most recent developments and debates on legalized gambling in Canada. The book is a collection of thoughtful and well informed essays that reflect on and analyze key cultural, social, and political issues associated with exponential gambling expansion in recent years through a range of theoretical lenses — even while the one chapter on the Australian situation provides a less balanced treatment of the subject matter. With eight sections of the book written about gambling in Canada, it may have been too ambitious to expect that a well-rounded comparison with Australia could be provided by just one account of legalized gambling, its author's solid experience as a gambling researcher, regulator, and government policy advisor notwithstanding. Nevertheless, a striking similarity between the Canadian and Australian situations is apparent in issues that have emerged with the "liberalization" of gambling (so named in the chapter on Australian gambling), even if the book does not offer a meaningful comparative framework to make more sense of that similarity.

Casino State specifically addresses key political, sociological, and ethical questions about the dominance of gambling industries on culture, social life, and contemporary governance. Not only has the rapid expansion of new gambling forms (particularly gaming machines, casinos, and racinos) occurred in an enabling political-economic historical context, it in turn affects (and corrupts) the nature of that context, challenging notions of the state and governance, the citizen and public life. Thus, the new gambling hegemony evidently has repercussions for society far beyond the gambling activity itself, a theme that is explored from various perspectives throughout the book.

Casino State makes an especially valuable contribution to the analysis of the place of gambling in contemporary society, given the general lack of similar critical perspectives in mainstream gambling research literature. Instead uncritical, positivist trends have dominated the field and

a multitude of government- and industry-commissioned studies often based on the conceptual dichotomy of a putative majority of “recreational” gamblers and a putative minority of pathological/morally weak problem gamblers, with “responsible gambling” policies ostensibly seeking to return “problem gamblers” to the first group. The dominance of such notions in mainstream gambling research is an integral part of the new gambling hegemony which forms the focus of several of the chapters.

Given the economic globalization of commercial gambling, this book is also eminently relevant to other jurisdictions where similar issues have arisen, for example insidious problem-generating capacities of new gambling technologies (such as high yield gaming machines), conflict of interest for governments between revenue generating imperatives and responsibility for upholding the public interest, ubiquitous discourses about “responsible” and implicitly “irresponsible” gambling and downward shifts of responsibility and risk to individual gamblers and their associates in the context of protection from risk for governments and industries.

The book is divided into four sections, which cover different and overlapping aspects of the evolution of legalized gambling in Canada and its implications for shaping public sensibilities, notions about gambling, the nature of citizenship, and the role of the state. The first part, “Morality, Markets and the State,” includes a chapter by Ramp and Badgley on the history of gambling in Canada through the lens of civic morality. This is a fresh and illuminating contribution to the current body of gambling scholarship. In previous times, personhood, selfhood, and agency have been defined by interpersonal reciprocity and its obligations to cooperate, to engage in fair exchange, and to grant recognition. With economic exchange, morality moved from reciprocity to the regularity and associated rationality of economic exchange. Consistent with this, economic immorality was associated with hoarding, speculating, and, importantly, gambling, all of which were seen as threats to a stable economy. However, as in other countries such as the US and Australia, consensus about the legal and moral status of gambling has been substantially transformed in Canada since the 1960s, with the rapid expansion of gambling industries and the widespread proliferation of their products.

This is followed by an interesting and thoughtful chapter by Cosgrave on implications of the new gambling regime for governance of the citizen, through the conceptual lens of risk. Gambling is analyzed as consumption of risk or, alternatively, as risky consumption (an example of the latter being interaction with gaming machines, given the high likelihood of acquiring a problem with regular use). As states look to gambling as an economic strategy and a form of risk management, gambling

is now conceptualized in the main as entertainment, while those who have problems are viewed largely in pathological terms.

In addition to a chapter on the Australian situation, Part Two, "Comparative Gambling Policy Frameworks," includes an interesting and informative historical account of gambling legislation in Canada by Campbell, specifically in relation to the Criminal Code and its various changes and interpretations over time. He concludes with broader questions about the propriety of governments using this legislation to expand gambling availability for revenue-raising purposes and its implications for a democratic society.

In Part Three, "Governments and Gambling Policy," Klassen and Cosgrave discuss "policies of gambling legitimation and expansion in Ontario." What is striking from an Australian standpoint are the deep similarities in the dynamic social processes that serve to underpin and sustain governments' stake in gambling industry revenues, with profound implications for the changing role of the state, citizens, and governance through a range of social institutions. This chapter is followed by a government insider perspective. MacNeil describes the various drivers of government policy, focussing on the electronic gaming machines which are identified as the most problematic and controversial form of gambling in Canada. Importantly, MacNeil reminds us that governments are not monolithic structures with single imperatives and sets of operations; these are diffused across different departments and personnel, with varying roles and responsibilities also shifting over time. This more nuanced view of how governments operate goes some way to explaining how governments may be vulnerable to co-option in furthering gambling industry interests over time.

Casino State finishes with an informative section on gambling and social issues, specifically gambling-related crime and youth gambling. The book may act as a valuable reminder to gambling researchers and academics of their own role in shaping the social, political, economic, and ethical landscape examined and explored in the book — especially given the scarcity of such critical perspectives, no doubt as these are less likely to be resourced by governments, gambling industries and other vested interests.

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